



SocialErasmus+ Academic Framework 1.1

**SocialErasmus
as a core element in
Higher Education**

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Introduction

SocialErasmus+ aims at building bridges in society by bringing international students closer to local schools.

By doing so, the project aims to ensure a better integration of exchange students in local societies, spread intercultural awareness and acceptance to students from a younger age and increase the recognition of voluntary activities in Higher Education.

This publication will explain why it is important for Higher Education Institutions to organise and support international students to do voluntary activities during their exchange. It tackles the Social Impact of a Higher Education Institutions, highlighting internationalisation in education and the impact of non-formal learning methods.

Furthermore it addresses possible methods on how to implement voluntary activities in curricula or how to recognise students' efforts if the activities are introduced extra-curricular. Two case studies of Universities taking part in the project are introduced as examples of implementation.



SocialErasmus as a core element in Higher Education

The reasons why Higher Education Institutions should encourage international students to volunteer during an exchange, the impact the learning experience can have on the students and the local community and how it links to the Third Mission of the Universities; Social Impact.

Universities' Third Mission and Social Responsibility

The Council of the European Union recognizes the increasing importance of the social dimension of education, when it identifies “the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship as one of its four strategic objectives” in this sector (Council of the European Union, 2013, p.1). Being educational institutions with a public responsibility, universities need to consider their social relevance in contemporary complex societies (GUNi, 2017, p. 42): since the end of the twentieth century, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are more and more requested to abandon their former ivory tower status and to establish relevant interactions with society.

By stimulating and guiding the utilization of knowledge for the practical concerns of everyday life, they should take a visible role in facing some of the main challenges of our time: social inequality, environmental issues, immigration and global citizenship (GUNi, 2017, p.53). In the context of globalisation, particularly, universities must be engaged with their region and contribute to the well-being of the local society as part of their so-called Third Mission.

Third mission activities, as complement to universities' first and second mission, teaching and scientific research, comprise themselves three dimensions: knowledge & technology transfer, continuing education and social engagement (E3M, 2010). SocialErasmus situates itself within the latter of these, proposing activities that combine (experiential) education, volunteering and/or community service.

Apart from connecting education more directly to our contemporary world and from simply belonging to their duties as a public institution, social activities like these can also be highly beneficial for the universities themselves: not only will they showcase their academic expertise vis-à-vis the regional community; a closer collaboration with local stakeholders may even enhance the development of new research projects based on the field, and thus strengthen the university's value for the region it is based in.

The following chapter, however, examines the benefits of SocialErasmus rather from the perspective of the schools and the international students.

The argumentation starts at the institutional level, predicting positive effects on the involved educational organisations, and goes on to the individual level of the international students, who not only get the possibility of gaining insight to their host country's cultural and educational practices, but will also be able to develop specific skills and know-how during their voluntary work.

Internationalisation of the Classroom; towards a European identity

Cultural diversity in societies has become a reality that still calls for appropriate translation into education systems and curricula. The principle of internationalisation, being defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension” into educational practice (Knight, 2004, p.11), is increasingly becoming a fundamental challenge for schools and universities. SocialErasmus contributes to the international orientation of educational institutions in various ways.

Benefits for the host countries

1. Encounters with international students at school are likely to enhance positive attitudes among pupils not only towards different countries and languages, but also towards the idea of going abroad themselves.
2. These experiences might, furthermore, foster intercultural learning at an early age, as they help pupils, on the one hand, to create personal sensitivity for their own cultural background and values (Otten, 2000, p.18), and on the other hand, to get in touch with those of a (young) person coming from another country.
3. With regards to the European context, SocialErasmus can also give impetus for teachers to follow up on activities that raise pupils' Europe competence (see European Elos Network, 2010), stimulate a sense of European identity, or allow them to form a critical opinion on the European Integration. This aspect is of increased importance given the series of crises that the European Union has been going through during the past ten years and the rise of Eurosceptic parties in Northern and Eastern Europe (Börzel & Risse, 2018).

Integration and transcultural competence

Benefits for the sending country

1. By becoming acquainted with the internal procedures of a foreign schooling system, including most probably different teaching methods and a different perception of education in general, a reflection process may be initiated that results in further diversification or internationalisation of the educational culture in their home country.
2. Consequently, the outgoing student can become a multiplier at home, since he/she may, upon return, encourage local stakeholders (like schools, youth organizations, academic staff, etc.) to implement SocialErasmus in their region as well, or simply by promoting the idea of European identity.
3. Furthermore, the links established between the students and their SocialErasmus host schools can serve as a springboard towards long term partnerships between educational institutions, teachers, or language learners.

Integration of international students in the local community is still a challenge. Sigalas (2010) reveals that studying abroad doesn't necessarily lead to direct interpersonal contact to host country students, which can be put down to the following (p.252-3): On the one hand, local young people tend to have already established social networks and may not see the use of engaging with Erasmus students who will depart after a few months. On the other hand, as the ESNsurvey of 2016 (Josek et al., 2017) confirms, Erasmus students are more likely to develop friendships with other internationals since they are introduced to each other at orientation events during their first weeks abroad or often live together in the same accommodation. The study conducted by ESN shows furthermore that in many cases, this constitutes a disappointment of expectations: a great majority of the respondents had indeed planned to create more local friendships than they ultimately could (Josek et al., 2017, p. 53).

SocialErasmus however offers the possibility to gain deeper insight not only into the operating processes of the host society through an institution, but also into local values and customs.

The greater immersion in everyday life and the wider range of interaction with locals will allow the students to learn the local language more efficiently and to achieve higher cross-cultural awareness and proficiency during their exchange.

As they find themselves exposed more intensively to individuals from a distinct cultural and linguistic background, constantly dealing across communicative competences, they are challenged to learn how to use different 'cultural lenses': something you could call a 'transcultural communicative competence' (Takkula, Kangaslahti, & Banks, 2008, p. 89). This is a skill that requires a wide and complex range of knowledge but is nonetheless vital for citizens and workers in an ever more globalized and multicultural society, as it helps to promote tolerance and social cohesion across ethno-cultural boundaries.

Finally, participating in a social activity outside University may totally change the students' perception of their Erasmus time: as they take direct part in the shaping of this experience, they will feel more actively involved in their exchange instead of, so to speak, 'passively undergoing' it.

TRANSCULTURAL vs. INTERCULTURAL

While the concept of interculturality centrally focuses on differences, similarities, conflicts and exchange between cultural entities perceived as distinct, the term "transcultural" is, on the contrary, based on a more constructivist conception of culture that goes beyond the "own" and the "other": as the prefix "trans" stresses an understanding of mutual penetration and overlapping, this notion underlines the **hybrid character** of today's globalized societies and the haziness of socio-cultural boundaries, on the macro-level of a community as well as on the micro-level of the individual.

„Cultures today are extremely **interconnected** and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures. For most of us, multiple cultural connexions are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids.“ (Welsch, 1999, para. III)



Bringing Non-Formal Learning to HEI's

Since globalization and a knowledge-based economy have become key factors shaping our contemporary world, individuals are required to manage complexity and diversity in their everyday professional, social, and private lives. Education plays thus a crucial role in this type of society. However, the demands on contemporary education systems have shifted.

A study on graduate employability conducted in four European countries (Andrews & Higson, 2008) makes clear that a gap has opened up between the competencies that graduates acquire through formal education and the actual demands of the labour market.

Instead of 'know-what', there is now increasing requirement of 'know-how', 'know-why', and 'know-who' kinds of knowledge (Robertson, 2005). For the education field, this means amongst others that hence, "students need to learn how to learn and how to manage their own learning" (OECD, 2000, p.37).

Besides the economic values of these skills, it is important for young people to get prepared to face this world of utmost complexity as responsible, aware, active citizens,

especially in times when power and dominance have taken rather opaque and subtle forms of operating. Overmore, as careers are becoming more irregular and individuals have to cope with frequent alterations throughout their lives, educational institutions must strive to develop global citizens that are adaptable to change and capable of measuring up to the complex reality that surrounds them.

A learning method that seems particularly apt to meet those new challenges, is experiential learning. This is a form of non-formal learning that puts the learner and his or her very own experiences at the core of any learning process.

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), as it was described by Alice and David Kolb (Kolb & Kolb 2013, 2009), defines learning as "a holistic process of adaptation" that involves the individual as a whole and "results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment" (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p.4).

From a constructivist perspective, they consider knowledge being created by grasping and transforming experience, which can be done in various ways.



Individuals are required to manage complexity and diversity in their everyday lives.

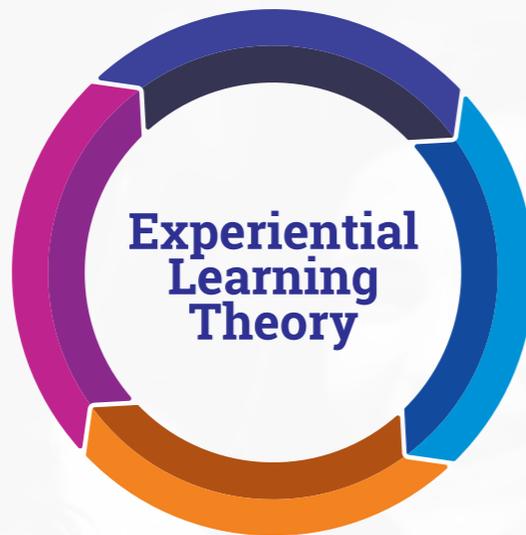
Education plays a crucial role in this society, demands on contemporary education systems have shifted.

Interacting with the local community by taking part in an Erasmus in Schools activity.

01 Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation 04

The knowledge learned through the SocialErasmus activities helps to be better interact with locals



02 Reflective Observation

Reflecting about the SocialErasmus Experience during a debriefing

Concluding the learning experience; what did the activity teach you about the local culture?

03 Abstract Conceptualisation

The two modes of grasping experience that the ELT model portrays are Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC). On the other hand, the transformation of experiences into knowledge can be operated through Reflective Observation (RO) or Active Experimentation (AE).

Together, they form the so called experiential learning cycle, a kind of ideal learning curve, that is meant to involve a creative tension between all four learning modes.

“Immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences.” (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p.5)

Experiential learning offers a number of advantages over traditional, formal types of learning; most of them apply equally to what we propose with SocialErasmus.

First of all, the learning process begins with the learner’s experiences and is therefore closely related to his or her perceived reality, which is assumed to add up considerably to motivation.

Accordingly, learners are encouraged to express themselves and to apprehend the world around them in a way that suits their personal learning styles. Whereas in formal education, thinking and reflecting are dominant learning modes, experiential learning with its more holistic approach also enables learners with other preferred learning styles to use their potential.

Finally, the experiential learning cycle values to creativity and equally includes managerial processes such as strategy formulation, problem solving and decision making.

This type of learning responds thus to the nowadays increasing demand of non-cognitive skills and know-how.

The power of non-cognitive skills

One experiential learning method that turns out to be particularly efficient in promoting social skills, civic engagement, as well as positive attitudes towards oneself and towards school, is Service Learning (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009). This notion refers to a type of social activities in which, very similar to SocialErasmus, local communities become the classroom for an education that is grounded in experience.

There is a growing body of literature that supports the view that today’s socio-economic climate requires individuals to develop not only cognitive but also social and emotional skills, the so-called transversal or soft skills (Davia, Janiak, & Wasmer 2010; Brunello & Schlotter 2011; Iversen & Farber 1996).

In contrast to cognitive skills, meaning mental abilities that are used in thinking activities and easily measurable through IQ tests and achievement scores,



the term of non-cognitive skills refers to personal attributes such as attitudes, behaviours, motivations, patterns of thought, etc.: things that could as well go by the name of “character traits”. In fact, the discussion on non-cognitive skills is continuous and controversial, starting at the terminology itself (Gutman & Schoon, 2013, p.7): whereas the word “traits” suggests some sort of immutability, talking about “skills”, on the other hand, implies that these attributes can change or be learned.

A relatively well-accepted taxonomy of socio-emotional skills is called the Big Five. They include: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional stability (Kautz et al., 2014, p.14). Gutman & Schoon, for their part, have identified eight factors that they assume to be key non-cognitive skills:

Self-Perceptions, Motivation, Perseverance, Self-Control, Metacognitive Strategies, Social Competencies, Resilience, and Creativity.

A longitudinal study conducted in eleven OECD countries suggests that raising social and emotional skills improves health-related outcomes, reduces anti-social behaviour and helps protect individuals from being victims of aggressive behaviours (OECD, 2015, p.53). Additionally, non-cognitive skills are believed to help ‘activate’ certain cognitive skills, like for example an increased self-esteem can lead to better learning outcomes.

“Many of the 21st century skills”, the OECD states, “such as creativity and critical thinking, have both cognitive and socio-emotional elements” (OECD, 2015, p.36).

Conclusion

SocialErasmus proposes a context of experiential learning that benefits both the students (on a personal, but also on a professional level) as well as the institutions involved.

For universities, the program offers incentives to develop further connections with the region they are based in. As they collaborate with local schools, they contribute, as part of their Third Mission, to one of the most crucial causes of our time: educating young people to find their way in a world marked by constant change and multifold societal challenges.

The schools, on the other hand, are offered a way to integrate an international dimension into their educational practice, in order to promote social cohesion across borders and to develop global citizens with a certain understanding of the interconnectedness with the rest of the world.

As for the students, SocialErasmus copes first of all with the problem of integration of exchange students: through frequent interactions with different audiences (local teachers and pupils), the students will achieve deeper understanding of the host society, improve their foreign language skills and develop cross-cultural communicative competences.

Overmore, the program trains a number of so-called transversal skills, social and emotional, but also managerial skills, that are highly demanded in today's working environment and can have positive effects on students' employability. Besides, as it offers the possibility to learn from concrete experience, to initiate reflective processes and to actively test concepts, SocialErasmus can be a way to complement the formal education that students receive at university, while making their Erasmus experience more lively, more relevant, more real, at the same time.

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**Education is the
most powerful
weapon which you
can use to change
the world.”**

*Nelson
Mandela*

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