

Peace, Malmö, 3 October, 10:15-12:15

Train the trainers

We will discuss three themes: youth political and civic engagement; European citizenship education; social inclusion, diversity, non-discrimination. The main moderator (Paul Blokker) will introduce each topic separately (10 minutes ca.), articulate a number of reflections on the theme, and provide a key thesis or discussion statement.

The participants will then – in the form of small groups or roundtables – first discuss the main thesis, and then the sub questions. A list of action items is provided that might be used by the table facilitator to aid the discussion. The discussion will last ca. 20 minutes.

The key objectives of the training are:

- Give people a short background and deeper knowledge with regard to civic and political themes in international mobility/Erasmus+ (*knowledge*).
- Help to raise awareness of the multiple civic and political dimensions of the Erasmus+ programme (*awareness*).
- Help develop a critical-constructive view, where participants (alumni, staff, ambassadors) reflect on how they could (also collectively) contribute to further strengthening the civic and political learning effects of international mobility (*critical-reflexive mindset*).
- Help to think how participation and collaboration are about finding harmony and consensus but equally involve agreeing to disagree and dealing with ambiguity (*learning to participate*).



General themes

Theme 1. Civic and political engagement of youth

a. General facts: youth participation

Young people generally participate less in domestic and European politics. For instance, abstention of the youngest voters in European parliamentary elections is particularly high (over 70%). Young people seem less and less inclined in interacting with institutional politics, and the gap between the younger and older generation is widening. With the upcoming European parliamentary elections in May 2024, this is a major concern. The less young people participate, the less they are represented in politics, and the less governments and European institutions have incentives to create policies that explicitly address the youth's concerns. One "fun fact" is that only around 2 % of parliaments have members that are younger than 30 years old.

Important questions emerge: are public spheres and the media sufficiently attuned to young people's needs and interests? Can young people sufficiently contribute to public debate? Are young people developing different, novel relations to politics and the public good, and are they socialized politically in a different way? Are young people exposed sufficiently to education that helps them learning to participate, develop a civic and political consciousness, and transmit core civic and political skills?

b. Reflections:

- International mobility could play a more important role in stimulating the interest of youth in politics as well as in make evident the importance of their civic and political engagement.
- International mobility brings youth into contact with other societies and their problems and may raise awareness of the relevance of the European dimension to democratic politics.
- Experience with international mobility also brings out the difficulties of international collaboration and integration, in terms of different norms and cultural understandings, bureaucratic obstacles, difficulties in intercultural communication etc.



c. Thesis/discussion topic:

The Erasmus+ programme is focussed on improving educational and employment opportunities. In addition, it should strengthen dimensions of promotion of European values, skills of democratic engagement and civic participation.

d. Subquestions (facilitator)

- What are your personal experiences with regard to political topics and skills in the context of the Erasmus+ programme? Could you name positive as well as negative experiences?
- How much do institutions (schools, universities, organizations) pay attention to the civic and political dimensions of international mobility? If they do, how do they do this?
- How are political skills enhanced/trained (e.g. debating skills, dealing with conflict, *audi alteram partem*/learn-to-listen) in international programmes?
- Do experiences in international mobility have sufficient room for civic and political issues to be discussed? In other words, are there key moments in which politics and problems with political dimensions are discussed (very straightforward issues such as housing come to mind, but we can also think of how much voice do participants have in how the curricula are shaped or how much freedom do they have in choosing topics/subjects)?
- Erasmus+ is clearly about promoting the European integration project and a European awareness. Should such an awareness not also include engagement with difficult topics, such as war, economic crisis, or the migration crisis (as key problems the EU needs to deal with)?
- Erasmus+ engages a lot of young people. To what extent is it a vehicle for making young people aware of their concerns and helping them to deal with these concerns?
- When is politics important? Did you ever experience there are major (political) tensions or disputes between groups of students or between participants?



e. Actions (potential) (facilitator)

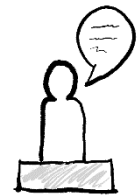
- Strengthening students' and other participants pan-European networks.

- Create digital platforms that allow Erasmus participants to continue interaction over time.
- Create moments/events in international mobility to collectively reflect on the future of Europe.
- Create moments/events to collectively reflect on difficulties of mobility and European citizenship
- Actively reflect on exclusionary dimensions with international mobility as such
- How can those with a mobility experience help to mobilize young people back home?
- To what extent are civil society organisations with civic and political missions collaborating?
- Young people can be brought closer to politics by discussing themes of their main interests: environment (the EU's Green Deal), youth employment and social mobility, migration, artificial intelligence.

Theme 2. European citizenship education

a. General facts

The knowledge of EU institutions of young people (Under30) is uneven across the EU. An EP Youth Survey found that in some countries (e.g. Croatia), only 25 % of the respondents thought to understand a great deal or fair amount about the EU. In others, such as the Netherlands or Belgium, this increases to 31/2 %, while in Portugal 63 % claimed to have fair knowledge. Also, there are differences in male and female responses, the former more confident in their knowledge. A majority of respondents thought not to have influence over important decisions, laws, and policies affecting the EU as a whole.



Beyond factual knowledge about European integration as such, it remains unclear how European core values and policy objectives (such as inclusion, recognition of cultural diversity, minority rights, tolerance, respect for the rule of law) are actually promoted through European policies. This includes the Erasmus+ Programme. A robust form of European citizenship education would need to go beyond a type of “banal cosmopolitanism” that consists in a general, rather superficial intercultural exchange about for instance culturally diverse food, drinks, typical habits and musical taste. European citizenship education needs to involve the development of civic and political skills, which includes as significant subjective dimension. Thus, citizenship education needs to expand factual knowledge, but also to develop skills in terms of “learning to participate”, dealing with ambiguity, change, and conflict, debating sensitive matters in public, engaging somehow with “taboos”, and discussing dimensions of European integration that do not seem to work. At the same time, this means that European citizenship education ought not to be political in ideological terms, but rather construct a platform and relationships that allow for open debate.

b. Reflections:

- European citizenship and European civic education are not sufficiently developed, remain scattered and fragmented between member states.
- Young people have insufficient knowledge of the EU.
- Internationally mobile students would be expected to be more knowledgeable about the EU, but they are hardly so.
- International mobility does not in and by itself strengthen European citizenship.

- Interthematic teaching of citizenship through other courses does not work
- EU citizenship education should not be just “celebratory”, but should facilitate critical reflection, also on the EU’s past, making EU citizenship an open, inclusionary concept and create competencies in dealing with conflict and difficult legacies from the past (e.g. colonialism).

c. Thesis:

The lack of youth participation in European politics calls for a comprehensive development of a *European citizenship education* as a core and obligatory part of the Erasmus+ programme.

d. Subquestions (facilitator)

- How are European citizenship, skills and knowledge currently being addressed in the programme/by your institution? Are there sufficient moments for critical reflection and debate? How are European citizenship skills and training being evaluated?
- How can the Erasmus experience stimulate sentiments of civic responsibility? To what extent are exchange programmes making participants aware of existing societal problems in the host country? To what extent does international mobility help developing awareness of the importance of common, European solutions?
- To what extent are the trends of democracy and rule of law erosion object of debate in study programmes?
- Is (or should) all Erasmus+ participants engage in (short) courses on European integration?
- Is their comprehensive attention in international mobility (including in lifelong learning) for developing core skills of digital citizenship and in relation to the impact of Artificial Intelligence on democracy and society at large?
- How much attention is there in programmes for civic capacities to identify fake news and disinformation, select trustworthy information, and use such information in argumentation?
- How aware are participants of current processes of reform of the EU Treaties, the EU’s Green Deal, upcoming European Parliament elections, or new ways of participating in EU politics (e.g. European Citizens’ Panels)?



- How much collaboration is there between partner institutions with regard to European citizenship education? Could you mention positive (and negative) experiences in this regard?

- To what extent are current programmes and institutions stimulating critical thinking, media literacy, and generally fostering “thinking out of the box”? What do these dimensions mean in practice, do you think (e.g. how can one stimulate critical thinking)?

e. Actions (potential) (facilitator)

- EU education must become a mandatory topic, in order to emphasize the importance of integration as well as of international mobility, and to reduce prejudices.

- Allocating a specific budget to develop educational programmes on the functioning of the EU and its values that it could propose to the Member States that wish, so that they can integrate them into their curricula (primary, secondary schools, and universities) (proposal 22.4 Conference on the Future of Europe).

- Introduce short information events on the upcoming European Parliament elections, helping (young) people to orient in voting.

- Citizenship education is often contested due ideological conflicts and forms of polarization. We need to think of a citizenship education that is stimulating participation but does not impose ideological standpoints.

- European citizenship education should contain an important environmental dimension, which helps raising environmental awareness. How can this be achieved in practical terms? Are there recommendations regarding international mobility that incentive travel by train for instance?

- Specific “democracy ambassadors” could be created to incentivize interest in the civic and political dimensions of the Erasmus+ programme.

Theme 3. Social inclusion, diversity, non-discrimination

a. General facts:

The Erasmus+ programme pays attention to two types of inclusion: 1) making the mobility programme itself more inclusive by targeting “people with fewer opportunities” and 2) by stressing the importance for inclusion in society at large. “Fewer opportunities” involve among others *social obstacles or barriers* due to discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability. This may also refer to limited social competences or skills, high-risk behaviour or forms of social marginalisation. Barriers may involve *economic barriers*, or *educational barriers*, and *cultural differences*. A further barrier may be *geographical barriers*. The various barriers, when coming together, may form intersectional disadvantages, that is, people suffer from various, accumulative obstacles to participate in mobility.



Such barriers are difficult to study and gathering information is in part ethically sensitive. We hence know relatively little about both the inclusiveness of international mobility, nor about how it may contribute to broader social inclusion.

The recent SiEM project of the ESN (2021) has conducted a very valuable survey on inclusion, which found, among the ca. 12.000 students surveyed, that 24% of the participants experienced some form of discrimination while abroad on a mobility programme. Also, almost a third of the respondents from an ethnic minority background reported experiencing discrimination, while only 3% percent of while respondents reported discrimination in relation to race, ethnicity or nationality.

b. Reflections:

- We currently know little of the diversity of Erasmus participants in terms of ethnic/migrant background.
- We know relatively little about specific “less advantaged groups” in international mobility.
- The notion of “fewer opportunities” remains rather vague; what does this mean on the ground?
- How can we deal better with the phenomenon of intersectionality?

- A core focus on barriers – rightly so - is the dimension of financial concerns as a major barrier for people to become internationally mobile. How does this barrier relate to other barriers?

- Are there major differences across Europe (East-West; North – South) in terms of how institutions deal with diversity, gender, ethnicity/nationality, and lesser opportunities?

- The Erasmus+ programme might be counter-productive with regard to reaching the most difficult groups (those that live in peripheral areas, have socio-economic problems, come from poorer backgrounds). In other words, the “high achievers” are specifically incentivized, while the less mobile are left further behind.

c. *Thesis:*

The Erasmus+ programme does not pay sufficient attention to structural forms of exclusion, particularly in the form of intersectional exclusion (different obstacles/barriers experienced by the same person).

d. *Subquestions*

- How can we best define “fewer opportunities”, that is, what do such barriers consist of in the Erasmus+ programme ?

- Do Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other institutions help to create “safe spaces” for participants? How do they do this?

- How can the wide range of “fewer opportunities” be dealt with on the ground?

- Are there major differences across Europe (East-West; North – South) in terms of how institutions deal with diversity, gender, ethnicity/nationality, and lesser opportunities?

- Is there specific attention for religious identity in international mobility programmes?

- Is there specific attention for disability in international mobility programmes?

- Is there specific attention for gender identity in international mobility programmes?

- Is there specific attention for ethno-cultural identity in international mobility programmes?



- How can we deal better with the phenomenon of intersectionality (that is, people suffering from various barriers at the same time)?
- Is the absence of specifically targeted policies for people with lesser opportunities an important reason for people not engaging in mobility?
- To what extent is the curriculum at HEIs paying attention to lack of opportunities and forms of potential discrimination?

e. Actions (potential)

- Host institutions need to develop their own targeted policy – a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy - for more vulnerable and underrepresented groups that require additional support.
- National Agencies have to develop specific inclusion strategies for underrepresented groups.
- Specific mobility programmes need to be developed for target groups.
- Institutional strategies need to become much more informed about forms of discrimination in and barriers to mobility.
- A structural “reach out” programme for groups with “least opportunities” need to be developed and financed.
- Student organisations need to develop specific strategies for support for underrepresented/vulnerable groups.