



Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged Impact Tracer Study 2019-2020

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Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged

Impact Tracer Study 2019-2020

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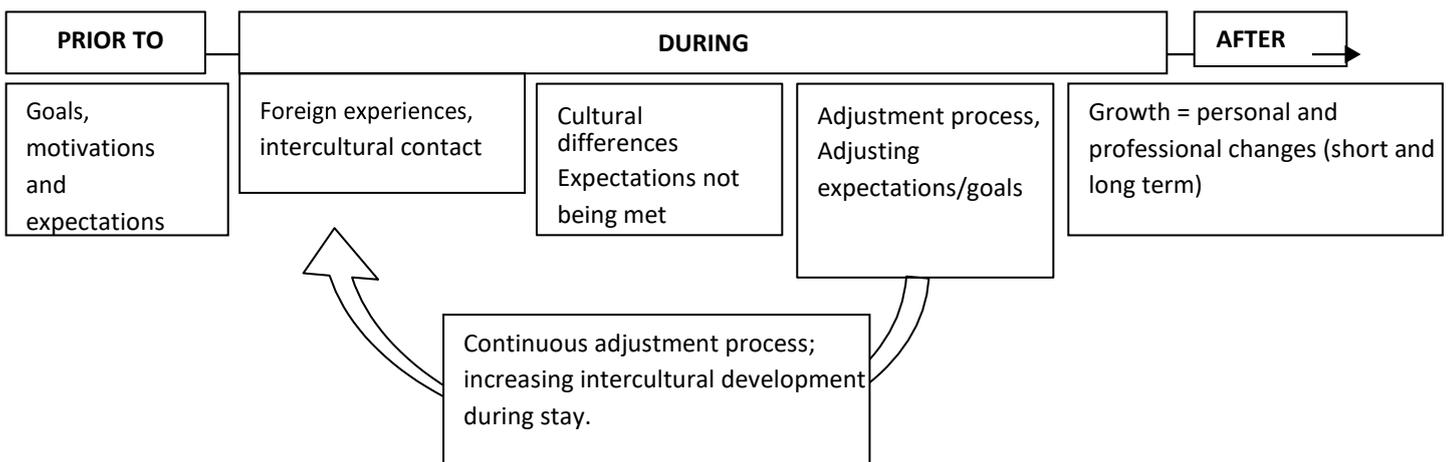
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Summary

The European subsidy programme Erasmus+ enables students and educational staff to go abroad and thus facilitates the collaboration between institutions in various countries. In order to assess the impact of this subsidy programme, the National Agency Erasmus + Education & Training (NA) commissioned Oberon – in collaboration with Qrius and production company Saus! – to carry out a qualitative study into the experiences of students and educational staff while abroad. The experiences of students and educational staff included in this study provide greater insight into the quantitative results of the ongoing multi-annual study (MAS)¹. The focus of this study is on the experiences during the stay abroad, and the participants were interviewed several times during their stay about their experiences, state of mind and development.

What is known on the subject from scientific research?

Prior to their stay abroad, both students and educational staff have expectations about their host country, they are motivated and have set goals. Once in actual contact with another culture, however, they are confronted with reality. Their expectations are not always met and goals have to be adjusted. They experience what is known as a culture shock, in which the visitor becomes actively aware of the other culture and may experience stress as a result. Intercultural studies show that due to the process of testing and adjusting expectations during a visit lasting multiple months, the visiting party becomes increasingly proficient at interpreting the new culture and is able to develop the appropriate intercultural skills that allow them to cope. For the purposes of this study, the Pitts² model was adjusted to fit the context of Erasmus+ students and educational staff.



The model represents a cyclical process in which the Erasmus+ participants undergo a continuous development throughout their stay and the experience thus gained allows them to increasingly progress in the acculturation process. In short, the more the visitor comes into contact with the other culture and learns to cope with the cultural differences, the stronger the development of their intercultural skills.

The study explores the felt impact of experiences on the development and state of mind of students and educational staff during their stay abroad. Various research tools were employed to conduct interviews at multiple moments during the participants' stay. The longer their stay abroad, the more often they could share their experiences via the tools. In addition, five Erasmus+ participants shared their experiences with the researchers through vlogs. In these vlogs, they talk about their experiences and activities, offering the viewer a window into their world. Through the various methods, many different

¹ The MAS comprises two intertwined sub-studies" a cross-sectional study primarily measuring the programme's inclusiveness and a longitudinal study intended to establish the impact of Erasmus+ on students' intercultural skills. Erasmus+'s impact on intercultural skills will be examined in the MAS at a later stage. (Kurver, Nas, de Korte, & Warps, 2019 & Kurver, Nas, de Korte, Brukx, & Khodaie, 2019)

² Pitts, M. (2009). Identity and the role of expectations, stress, and talk in short-term student sojourner adjustment: An application of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. . *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33, 450-462.

experiences were recorded and linked to the experienced impact of their stay abroad, followed by a brief summary of the report's conclusions per phase. In the actual report, the conclusions are substantiated with quotes from participants' experiences.

Prior to the stay abroad

Students are primarily motivated by their desire to discover the new culture, gain study or work experience, develop on a personal level, and to improve their English or foreign language skills. These motivations are a recurring theme in the general goals that students set for their stay abroad. As regards their personal goals, we see that the personal development is defined in more detail as self-development, self-reliance, and social skills. Educational staff set professional goals focussing on gaining new insights as well as networking and collaboration at the international level. On a personal level, they also want to become acquainted with the new culture and meet international people. Educational staff are more frequently in contact with foreign partners about their goals and more likely to put them down in writing compared to students.

During the stay abroad

For the majority of the students in this study, their stay abroad was limited to between three and six months. The experiences of those students who took part in the study multiple times showed that they go through multiple phases during their stay. Most of them feel good to very good during the initial phase. They are enthusiastic about new experiences, meet new people and engage in enjoyable activities. Despite their positive state of mind, however, they are also a little nervous. Will they easily meet new people? Has everything been arranged properly? Will they feel homesick? These are concerns that can cause stress during this phase.

In the interim phase, after a few weeks have passed, some participants will experience a dip or stress. This can, for instance, be the result of the intensity of their study or internship programme, expectations that have to be adjusted or personal issues. During the interim phase, they continue, however, to engage in enjoyable activities. They meet new people, explore the other culture and their new environment. The students say that they primarily socialize with other international students. They are living, as it were, in an *Erasmus cocoon* with people in the same situation and equally motivated to gain new experiences.

"You come here, of course, as an international group and you all socialize with each other. Making contact is easy because you're all in the same boat and everybody wants to make new friends. The local students don't feel the need because they already know everybody around here."

These activities will continue like this until the final phase, in which many of the participants told us they didn't feel like going home and found it difficult to say goodbye to their new friends and the culture they'd grown so accustomed to. During their stay abroad, the students participating in the study hardly formulated any new goals. Some, however, did slightly adjust their original goals, others not at all. To some participants it proved difficult in practice to realize all their goals because they also wanted to spend time engaging in enjoyable activities or associated with different people than they had anticipated.

The educational staff in this study stayed abroad for one week less. As a result, their state of mind was more positive and more stable because their stay comprised a fixed and surveyable period of time and they mostly took part in a fixed programme. The staff said their enjoyable contacts with other people and the activities they engaged in contributed to their positive experience.

After the stay abroad

Looking back on their stay, a small group of respondents shared some of their experiences abroad in the backpack questionnaire. They primarily shared positive memories of the activities they had engaged in and of the country, the culture, and the people. For most of them saying goodbye was hard and, upon their return, the impact of their stay abroad proved greater than they had expected beforehand. Consistent with the goals and motivations they had set prior to their visit, the participants said after their stay abroad that they had undergone a major personal development.

“I’m much more open than I used to be. And living alone has made me more self-reliant. I think that at this moment I already know more about who I am and what I want. And about my social and professional abilities.” - student

Are the findings from this study consistent with what we know from scientific studies?

The experiences from the initial phase of the foreign stay match the so-called *honeymoon* phase from the U-curve theory³. The state of mind of the participants is on the whole positive to very positive; they are looking forward to the new adventure, pleasant outings and meeting new people. Of course, they are also a little tense at first. The questionnaire, however, shows that these tensions do not negatively affect their state of mind during the initial phase.

In line with the culture shock phase from the U-curve theory, we do observe after some time a slight dip in the state of mind of some of the participants, primarily the result of *stressful moments* caused by study-related issues, workload, and personal problems (e.g., social, health), as well as by *expectations that are not being met*, regarding, for instance, the climate, the extent of their contact with the local culture and their living conditions. The participants in this study stated they were consciously working on these issues and dealing with their stress factors. Some students characterized these moments as learning moments, which are indicative of them yet again having learned something about the other culture or how to solve a problem by themselves.

During the last phase of their stay, these are also factors that make them express a reluctance to go home again rather than the opposite. In the U-curve theory, this is called the recovery and adjustment phase. They have built a new social environment and gotten used to their new hometown. They recognise the positive impact of this experience on their personal development and are able to consciously reflect on it. During this phase, the participant has become familiar with the new culture, however, this does not mean that new, unfamiliar aspects will stop presenting themselves. Nevertheless, the experience gained means the participant will be better equipped to cope with these new aspects compared to the initial phase of their stay abroad. We can conclude from the experiences of the Erasmus+ students that they are primarily inclined towards partial *integration*⁴. That is to say, the participant is protective of their own culture because their stay is limited to just a few months but is definitely open to a partial adjustment to the other culture through their daily contacts with its representatives. In the case of Erasmus+ students, however, the ‘other culture’ is twofold; on the one side you have the local culture of the host country, on the other the dynamic *Erasmus cocoon/culture* in which the students live. The students are often in a ‘familiar environment’ together with other foreign students while discovering the host culture.

The impact of the stay abroad on educational staff

Educational staff who spend a few days or weeks abroad do not go through the same process as students who go abroad for several months. Their stay is surveyable, and, in the majority of cases, they are familiar with their programme. This group can, however, experience certain elements from the process that students go through. An example of which is the dip or culture shock they may experience during their short stay. The dip experienced by the participants is primarily related to the local programme they are taking part in; the programme may be too full, which prevents them from undertaking their own activities, or the course material does not meet their expectations. The educational staff say they have gained inspiring examples from the foreign practice that they will share with their colleagues at home. They have also had valuable encounters with international colleagues. Several educational staff stated their intention to maintain these contacts with the purpose of exploring new possibilities for exchange. One educational staff member said that his intercultural skills have noticeably improved after several Erasmus+ experiences abroad. Even though the impact of educational staff programmes is not comparable to that of a student exchange programme lasting a number of months, this international meeting also contributes to the further development of intercultural skills. People are introduced to other cultures, become acquainted with the local situation and exchange information.

³ Oberg, 1954; Lysgaard, 1955; Berry, 1985.

⁴ Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010.

Consequences of Covid-19 for Erasmus+ participants

A few students participating in this study who were still abroad when the Covid-19 crisis began shared their experiences with us. To many international students the crisis meant they had to return home. For some students, this meant an end to meeting new people. Where students at first could enjoy the local night life, visit museums, and go out to dinner, their social activities are now limited to walks in the park or a quick shopping trip for groceries. Due to the Coronavirus, physical classes at schools and universities are no longer possible and everything must be done on-line. The crisis has meant that the exchange the affected students experienced was really quite different from the one they initially expected. Some regard the current situation as a challenge to survive in a different environment under difficult conditions. Included in the report are two vlog excerpts, one of them recorded by a student who decided to stay abroad and continue her study online, the other by a student who had to break off her internship and returned to the Netherlands.

Vlogging with Erasmus+

In this study, five vloggers created a total of 34 vlogs comprising 240 minutes of footage. The students' vlogs give insight into everyday life abroad. The vloggers start off with a tour of their housing conditions and show all the different facilities available to them. They talk about the activities that they engage in, the people they meet, and about their study programme. The educational staff member shares information on his study trip and primarily talks about the exchange between cultures and the possibilities this experience creates for the future. Saus! has created a useful vlogging training course⁵ for the NA that Erasmus+ participants in future can easily attend online in order to even better record their experiences.

⁵ <https://www.erasmusplus.nl/online-cursus-vloggen-modules>

1 Introduction

1.1 Tracer Study Impact Erasmus+

Every year, the European subsidy programme Erasmus+ enables many students and educational staff to go abroad (KA1: student and staff mobilities) as well as collaboration between institutions in various countries (KA2: strategic partnerships).

In order to make the most assessment possible of the programme's impact, the National Agency Erasmus+ Education & Training (NA) commissioned, among other things, a multi-annual study (MAS). The MAS consists of two interwoven sub-studies: a cross-sectional study primarily measuring the inclusivity of the programme, and a longitudinal study intended to assess the impact Erasmus+ has on student intercultural skills. The impact of Erasmus+ on intercultural skills will be assessed at a later stage of the MAS (Kurver, Nas, de Korte, & Warps, Foreign experience for all? Baseline measurement of the impact and inclusivity of the Erasmus+-mobility programme, 2019).

In addition to this MAS, the NA wants to assess the impact of the European subsidy programme Erasmus+ (2014-2020). The MAS provides insight into the level of development that results from the foreign experience but does not yet accurately show how this development takes place and how this period is experienced by students and teaching staff. What activities do students and teachers engage in during this period? To what extent do these experiences meet their initial expectations? And what aspects of their stay do they experience as enjoyable or rather as challenging?

To gain insight into this matter, the NA had Oberon conduct a tracer study into the impact of the European subsidy programme Erasmus+ on students and staff. This study formed part of the 2019 research agenda. The main objective of the tracer study is to create a clear overview of the entire course that students and teachers have to complete: from the preparatory phase to a period after the mobility has taken place.

For the purpose of this study, Oberon entered into a collaboration with Qrius and the Saus! Production company. Qrius has extensive experience in the field of developing modern research methods for children, teenagers, and young adults. Saus! Has expertise in the field of translating content into powerful imagery by means of digital products such as videos, animations, infographics, visuals, house styles, websites and Prezis. Saus! Has developed an online vlogging course⁶ for the research target groups. By combining our joint expertise in different research methods, we can follow the participants during their stay abroad and optimally record their experiences: followed and vlogged.

In this report, we give an account of the participation of students and educational staff in the various research tools. This is a qualitative report on the development process of Erasmus+ participants during their stay abroad, wherever possible substantiated with quantitative results.

⁶ <https://www.erasmusplus.nl/online-cursus-vloggen-modules>

1.2 Literature Study: The Intercultural Development Process of Erasmus Students

During their stay abroad, the participants develop, among other things, their language skills, their personal and professional abilities, and also enhance their intercultural skill set which enables them to interact with different cultures. Various studies have shown that people engaged in intercultural contacts, for instance, between people with different nationalities, find themselves in a sort of *interculture* (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010). Research has shown that there are different ways for people to react when they are in an intercultural setting. (Berry, Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation, 1997):

- i. Assimilation: the individual actively endeavours to make contact with the local population and distances themselves from their own culture.
- ii. Separation: the individual clings to their own culture and avoids contact with the other culture as much as possible.
- iii. Integration: the individual protects their own culture, but also allows a partial adjustment through daily contacts with the other culture.
- iv. Marginalisation: this concerns an exceptional situation that only rarely is actively sought by the individual (as opposed to point ii. Separation), but rather is imposed on them by the local population. The individual rejects the other culture due to external reasons such as social exclusion or discrimination.

In this tracer study we take a closer look at students and educational staff who spend a period of time abroad and come into contact with another culture during their stay. They may adjust the expectations they had prior to their departure and adapt their attitude to the situation in one of the ways described above. Intercultural studies shows that they continuously test their expectations during their contact with the other culture and – whenever necessary – adjust them. The visitors experience ‘stress’ during this process; in other studies, this is sometimes called ‘disillusionment’ or ‘culture shock’⁷. These terms refer to the moment at which the pattern of expectations is disrupted, or rather the moment at which the difference between their own culture and the foreign one becomes apparent. Through increased exposure to the other culture, the students and staff will receive information that allows them to adjust their expectations and progress in their intercultural adjustment process. The intercultural studies are based on the premise that the visiting party over time will increasingly adopt the cultural and social characteristics of the other group. Generally speaking, both groups will influence the other and adopt elements of each other’s culture, but it is primarily the non-dominant group that changes the most. This process is called ‘acculturation’.

Most studies focus on a period of at least three months to several years. The longer the stay in the other culture, the greater the deepening of the intercultural adjustment process. In this deepening, Kim distinguishes roughly three levels that the individual can possibly achieve during their stay in another culture (2001, p. 31):

- Functional fitness: being able to affect an intercultural interaction with a representative of the other culture.
- Psychological health: no longer experience emotional problems due to stress moments in the acculturation.
- Intercultural identity: gradually develop a hybrid identity.

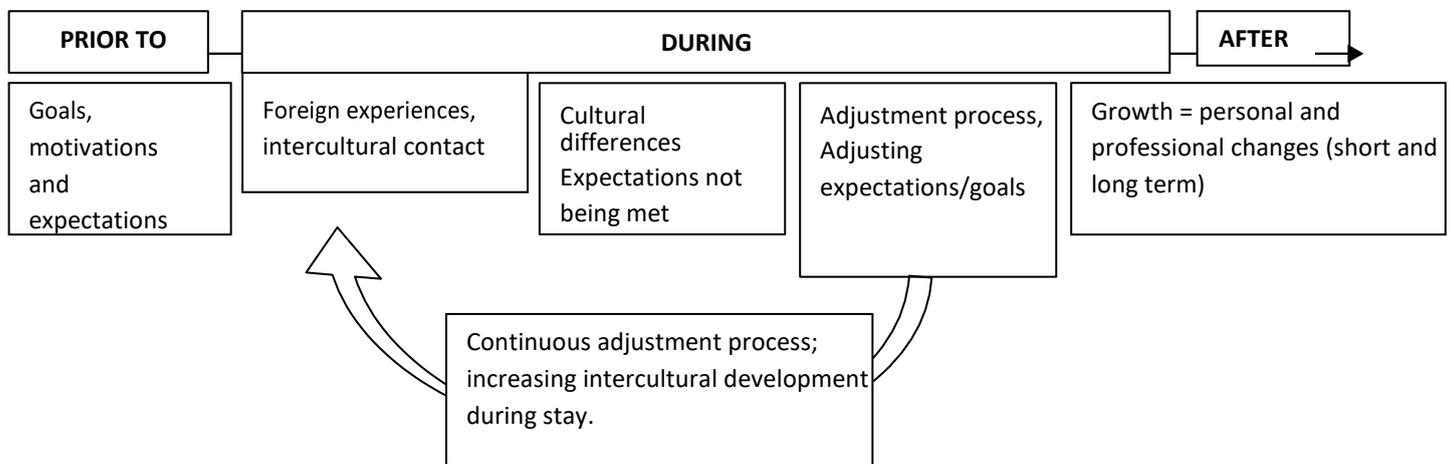
The focus in Kim’s theory is on the way in which people deal with the stress moments that occur during the process, in which the individual moves back and forth between preserving their own culture and integrating elements from the new one. Kim’s categories do not represent a linear process, but rather form part of a dynamic process in which progress and regression continuously take turns and – in the positive case – lead to a growing intercultural posture/identity of the individual in a foreign culture.

People who's stay abroad is limited to three months or less, also experience culture shocks and intercultural learning moments. Studies, however, show that the impact of a shorter stay differs from a longer one. Longitudinal studies therefore often employ a three-month minimum to fully analyse the process of a group of people. This is why in the tracer study we take the various groups into consideration and the length of their stay abroad; students participating in this study generally spend several months abroad, while the stay of educational staff is often limited to a shorter period of just a few days or weeks.

Adjustment process

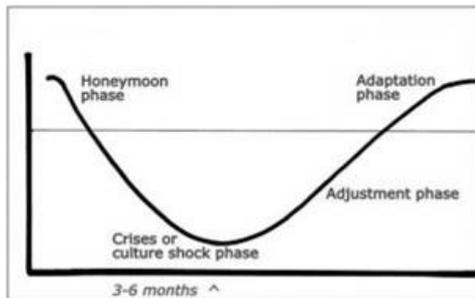
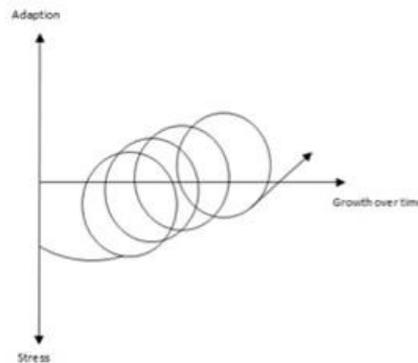
Pitts (2009) has created an extensive model for this adjustment process in which she shows that during their stay the expectations of the visitors gradually grow closer to reality. We adjusted Pitts' model to create a broad outline of the process experienced by Erasmus+ participants (Figure 1). It represents a cyclical process in which participants continue to develop during their stay and the experience gained allows them to progress further and further in the acculturation process. In short, the more a visitor comes into contact with the other culture and learns to cope with the cultural differences, the stronger the development of their intercultural skills.

Figure 1. Process Erasmus+- participants, based on the Pitts model (2009)



U-curve

Taking into consideration the length of the participants' stays abroad in this study, it is also interesting to include the U-curve theory. Several studies (e.g., Oberg, 1954; Lysgaard, 1955; Berry, 1985) into the experiences of people who spend from a number of weeks to several months abroad discuss the U-curve theory to describe the adjustment process (see model A in Figure 2). This theory posits that the target group at the start of their stay abroad are in a so-called *honeymoon phase*; the individual has certain expectations and undergoes new experiences but has not yet come across any problems. Next is the *crisis/culture shock phase*, in which the individual can experience stress for a number of different reasons. For instance, because of miscommunication, their expectations having to be adjusted to reality, or because they experience a kind of fatigue as the result of constantly having to adapt to the new environment. This is followed by the *recovery and adjustment* phases in which they are better able to cope with the negative aspects because they have a better understanding of the other culture and have gained more experience providing them with the correct intercultural skills. Model B in Figure 2, however, shows that the U-curve is a continuous process in which the culture shocks have a limited impact on the foreign experience and the intercultural skills required to adjust to the other culture increase.

Figure 2. U-Curve theory and the intercultural adjustment process (Rebeca, 2017)⁸**Model A****Model B****Erasmus cocoon**

Specifically as regards the situation of Erasmus+ participants abroad, it is important to mention that international studies discussing their situation do exist. Some studies mention a so-named *Erasmus cocoon* or *Erasmus bubble* (Papabitsiba, 2006). The Erasmus cocoon represents the Erasmus culture in which participants of different nationalities socialize and have one strong factor in common, namely being a member of an international group that finds itself in a similar situation in a foreign culture for a specific period of time.

In this study, we use the various theories from this literature study to interpret the foreign experiences of the students and educational staff. We look at the development of the students during their stay based on their state of mind and their experiences (3). In addition, we also pay attention to the extent to which they have to adjust their expectations and the experiences that prompt these adjustments.

⁸ Source: <https://eindhovennews.com/features/2017/07/cultural-shock-cross-cultural-adaptation/>

1.3 Research Questions

In its quotation request, the NA formulated the following research questions. Oberon's complementary questions are presented next to them in italics.

Focus adjustment of the research questions

Please note that after the commission had been awarded, it was decided in consultation with the client to focus on the preparations made prior to, and the experiences gained during the stay abroad. The information pertaining to the period following the stay abroad is extensively covered in other research, including the MAS. The freed-up space in the planning was eventually used to conduct in-depth conversations with eight Erasmus+ participants at various moments during their stay abroad.

Prior to the foreign stay:

- What are the intended goals of participants in Erasmus+ travels? *To what extent are participants purposefully setting their goals?* [2.1/2.3] *What is the personal motivation of the participants?* [2.2/2.4]
- Who determines these goals and are they always recorded? *How are these goals recorded?* [2.1/2.3]
- Is the foreign partner consulted about the goals? *If so, in what way and how often does this consultation take place?* [2.1/2.3]

During the stay abroad:

- What experiences do participants have during their stay abroad? [3.3] *For instance, in the field of language, culture, organisation, environment, people, etc. Who do the participants socialize with during their stay?* [3.3]
- What do participants find agreeable during their stay abroad? [3.4]
- What do participants experience as problematic during their stay abroad? [3.5]
- Do experiences match intended goals? *What expectations did participants have beforehand?* [3.6]
- Are goals adjusted, and if so, how? [3.6]
- What are concrete examples of positive and negative experiences during the period abroad? And how do they contribute to the personal and professional development? [3.4/3.5]

After the foreign visit:

- Is there contact between the participants and the organisation or organisations prior to, during and/or afterward about the experiences? If so, in what way, *how often* and about what? [2.3/4.5]
- What are the concrete results of the mobilities/changes for participants, fellow students/colleagues, and the organisation as a result of the mobilities? [4.1/4.2/4.3]
- Are the participants satisfied with the immediate results and are they in line with the intended goals? [4.4]
- What feedback is there afterwards regarding the intended targets of the participants and foreign institution? [4.4]
- Are experiences shared with others afterwards and if so, how? *Are participants aware of any changes in the personal and/or professional sphere?* [4.5]
- How do participants reflect on the results several months after their foreign experience? [4.3]

1.4 Study Design

In the period between September 2019 till March 2020, Oberon used a variety of tools to collect the experiences of Erasmus+ students and educational staff. To this end, it employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The focus of the study was on the qualitative methods that provide insight in the experiences of students and educational staff. The objective of this study is therefore not to present a scientifically valid image regarding the situation of all Erasmus+ students and educational staff. The data from this study are used to better interpret the quantitative study results from, among others, the Multi-Annual Study. For the purpose of this research, three different tools were used to chart the process of the students and educational staff. The participants registered for the tools best suited to their situation. The questions from the quotation requests for the tracer study (1.3) were distributed across the different research tools (Appendix 1). We provide a brief description of these tools below.

Baseline Questionnaire: prior to the stay abroad

An online tool was developed in collaboration with Qrius, allowing the participants to quickly and easily fill in the questionnaire. The Baseline Questionnaire was sent to all participants prior to their departure abroad. In this baseline questionnaire, we asked the participants about their motivations, goals, and expectations prior to the stay abroad.

Update Questionnaire: during the stay abroad

Every two to three weeks during their stay abroad, the participants received the Update Questionnaire, in which we asked the participants about their state of mind and the experiences that caused it. The Update was a very brief questionnaire that could easily and quickly be filled in by the participants.

This Update comprised both open and closed questions:

- What was the participant's state of mind?
- What did the participant experience as agreeable during their period abroad?
- What did the participant experience as problematic during their stay abroad?
- What activities did the participant engage in in the past week?
- What social contacts did the participant engage in abroad (with other Dutch people, internationals, or local people)?

Backpack Questionnaire: during and after the stay abroad

The Backpack was developed in order to chart the experiences of the participants during and after their stay abroad. The Backpack is an extended version of the Update Questionnaire, in which the participants can share more information about specific experiences and reflect on them by means of in-depth questions about these experiences.

The Backpack included the following questions:

- Activities during the stay abroad that greatly impressed the participant.
- Did the participant succeed in realising their intended goals?
- Did the participant adjust their goals during their stay?
- Does the participant feel that they have changed as a result of their stay abroad?

Online vlogging course 'Vlogging with Erasmus+'

An innovative method of recording student experiences during their stay abroad is vlogging. Participants could choose to vlog about their experiences abroad. SAUS! Digital productions developed an online vlogging course⁹ specifically for Erasmus+ participants. Via the vlogging course, the participants receive information about both the technical aspects of vlogging (light, sound, recording) and the creative aspects (what can you tell and how do you keep the viewer interested). In addition, Saus! Created a vlogging manual including all the required information from the vlogging course (Appendix 3). The hand-out discusses all the technical aspects of vlogging and also provides inspiring subjects for the participants to vlog about. The vlogging course is also a suitable tool for both students and educational staff to further develop their digital competences.

A few of the possible subjects that were included in the vlogs of Erasmus+ participants were:

- intercultural activities,
- positive experiences (making new friends, getting to know a new culture, entertainment),
- negative experiences (language barrier, missing people back home, saying goodbye).

Via a personal link, participants in the vlogging course were invited to upload their vlogs to their own folder on Dropbox. The content of the vlogs was reviewed by the researchers and incorporated in this report. We briefly discuss our findings in paragraph 3.7. In addition, Saus! created a compilation video including all submissions for Erasmus+ and the vlogs were presented to the client. In chapter 5, we make a number of recommendations on how the NA in future can use the vlogging course to greater effect.

In-depth interviews

A number of participants in the vlogging course eventually decided not to make a vlog. For some of the interested participants the threshold eventually proved too high, among other reasons, because: it is very personal to appear on camera in a vlog, it takes time to record and edit a video, and the threshold is even higher when you have to record your first vlog all by yourself without any support present. For this reason, we Skyped a number of times with eight of the participants so we could still create a visual record of their stay abroad. Appendix 4 includes the guidelines used for the interviews. The experiences and statements from the in-depth interviews were incorporated in the report as a supplement to the findings from the questionnaires.

1.5 Recruitment and Participation

The recruitment of respondents took place via NA contacts at the educational institutions who received a KA1 subsidy in the 2019-2020 academic year; in the autumn of 2019 they numbered around 205 institutions. Out of these 205, 54 contacts indicated on behalf of 47 institutions their willingness to distribute the study among their students and educational staff who were already abroad or would go abroad during the course of the study. We chose this approach because the NA only maintains the contact information of the primary contacts of these educational institutions and not those of students and educational staff who are going abroad. The participating institutions were approached at two separate moments (in November 2019 and January 2020) with the request to invite their staff and students who were staying abroad at the time to take part in the study. In addition, Oberon repeatedly disseminated the invitation via various social media in order to reach the Erasmus+ target group and the international offices of the educational institutions involved. During the study, reminder e-mails were sent to the participants, but only a limited number so as to avoid overburdening them. In addition, the participants could use the included link at a moment of their choosing, giving them control over the moment and the frequency of their participation. Table 1 includes an overview per week of the various recruitment drives, invitations, and reminders during the course of the project.

⁹ <https://www.erasmusplus.nl/online-cursus-vloggen-modules>

Table 1. Respondent Recruitment

Week		Recruitment and sending questionnaires
2019	2020	
42		First recruitment round via emails addressed to the co-ordinators of the participating educational institutions. In addition, a call via social media and the Oberon and NA websites.
45		Study disseminated via the Oberon network (e-mail, website, social media) and via an email to the international office of Tilburg University and the communications office of the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (private network). The Baseline Questionnaire was sent to the first group of participants (afterwards weekly to the new participants).
51		Repeated call via Oberon and NA websites. Backpack and Update Questionnaire 1 sent.
52	1	Christmas holidays
	2	Update Questionnaire 2 sent. Reminder e-mail to registered vloggers.
	3	Direct recruitment addressed to registered institutions. Direct reminder e-mail from Oberon to registered institutions. Backpack 2 Questionnaire sent.
	4	Update Questionnaire 3 sent.
	5	Spring holidays
	6	Reminder email to respondents regarding their participation in the vlogging component and recruitment e-mail regarding interviews. Update Questionnaire 4 sent.
	7	Call regarding vlogging competition via Oberon and NA social media. Research highlighted on website and Oberon social media. Backpack Questionnaire 3 sent.
	8	Update Questionnaire 5 sent.
	12	Reminder to registered vloggers.
	16	Dutch Erasmus+ students approached via YouTube regarding participation in the vlogging study.

As at the start of the study the participants were either already abroad or had not yet left, it was decided to let them choose which research tool they wanted to take part in and how often. Most of the Erasmus+ participants were abroad for a stay of between three and six months (Figure 12, p. 22) during the last two quarters of 2019 or the first two quarters of 2020. In this way, we ensured that their stay abroad did not pose a problem to the duration of the research. This freedom of choice also allowed the participants to make the number of questionnaires they received match the amount of time they were willing to spend on the study. Table 2 shows the distribution of the number of participants per target group across the different research tools.

Table 2. Number of participants per research tool and target group

Target Group	Total number registrations	Baseline Questionnaire	Update Questionnaire	Backpack Questionnaire	Vloggers	In-depth Interviews
Students	119	66	61	16	4	6
Educational Staff	21	11	8	2	1	2

The Baseline Questionnaire was sent just once to each participant who had registered for the study. Subsequently, the participants during their stay abroad received multiple e-mails including a link to the Update and/or Backpack Questionnaire. They could use the link at any time of their choosing and also use it more often. Every few weeks, we would send them a reminder. In this way, we gained insight in the development process of the participants. They could unsubscribe from the questionnaires via a button in the e-mail. As a rule, most of the participants would take part in at least two rounds and then unsubscribe or no longer respond. Table 3 shows the number of participations per tool.

Table 3. Number of participants per research tool

Number of participations	Baseline Questionnaire	Update Questionnaire	Backpack Questionnaire	Vloggers	In-depth interviews
1	77 (100%)	24 (35%)	11 (61%)	1 (20%)	2 (25%)
2		25 (36%)	7 (39%)		3 (38%)
3		12 (17%)		1 (20%)	3 (38%)
4		3 (4%)			
5		5 (7%)		1 (20%)	
6				1 (20%)	
7				1 (20%)	

The Update was filled in the most times because it took less time to fill in than the other tools. Also, in the case of the Update, however, did we see a substantial drop in the number of participants after the second round. Prior to the research, we had expected that more people would participate in one of the research tools. From the participants and the educational institutions, we received a number of reactions that could explain the low number of participants. Three of the reasons given were: the educational institutions also conduct their own evaluations among the participants, the participants felt the time burden increased with the number of participation invitations they received, and the full programme abroad meant they had less time for the research.

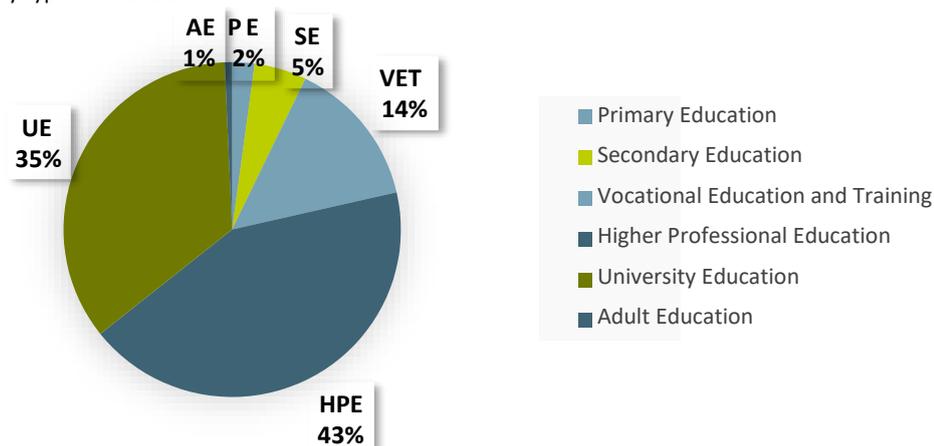
1.6 Respondents Group

Educational institutions

The eventual 140 participants in the study are from 39 different educational institutions. Most of the respondents were in Higher Professional Education (HPE, 43%) and University education (35%). To a lesser degree, we received registrations from participants in Vocational Education and Training (VET, 14%), Secondary Education (5%), Primary Education (2%) and Adult Education (1%) (Figure 3).

This is only a small group within the total number of Dutch participants going abroad via Erasmus+. By way of illustration, in 2018, around 20,000 Dutch participants went abroad via the 'student mobility Intermediate and Higher Professional Education' (National Agency Erasmus+, 2019).

Figure 3 Respondents by type of education

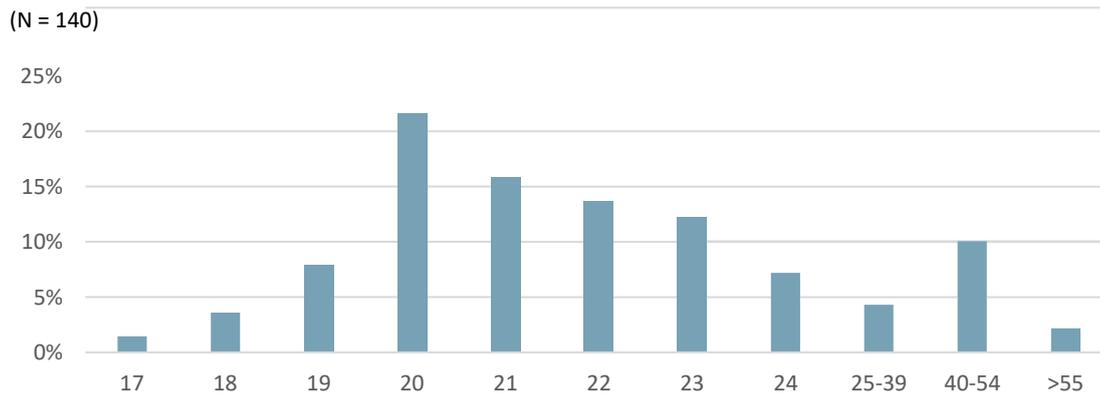


Respondent background

To paint a picture of the participants in this research, we here provide information on their gender, cultural background, and age. Due to the size of the group of respondents these data are not representative of the entire Erasmus+ population.

Three quarters of the respondents are women and one quarter men. Nine out of ten respondents are Dutch, one out of ten state they have a bi- or multicultural background. The ages of the respondents showed great variation (figure 4) the majority (78%) are between 19 and 24 years old. Those over 25 were primarily educational staff. For 85% of the respondents this was their Erasmus+-sponsored stay abroad.

Figure 4. Respondent age

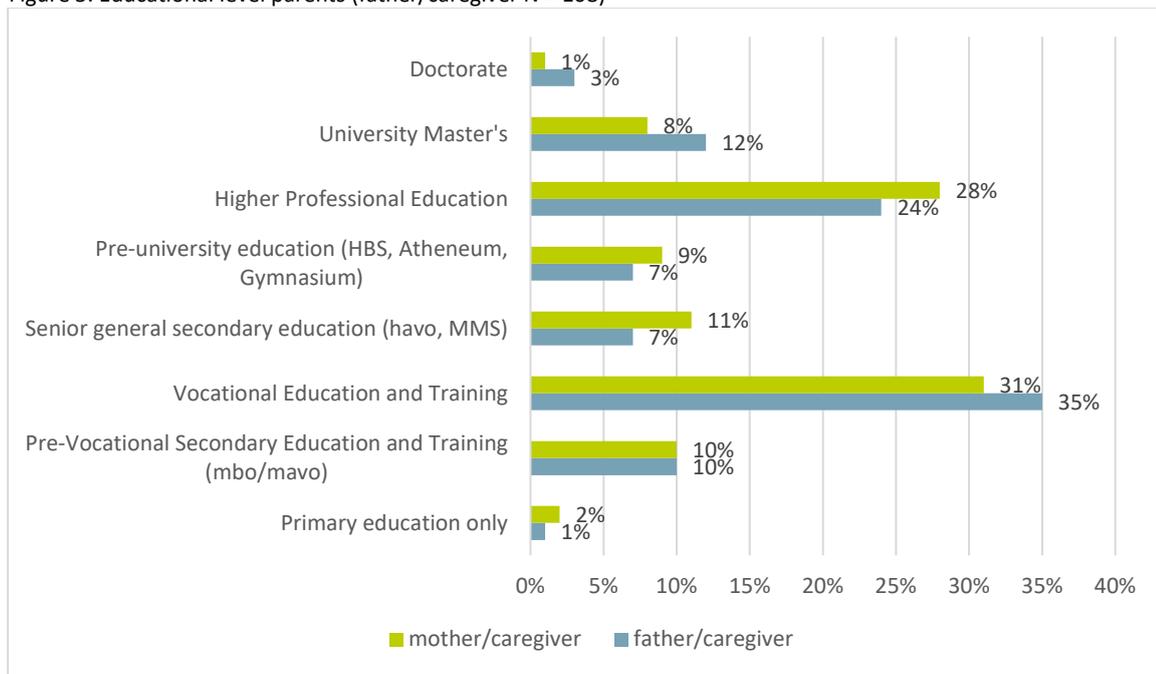


We also asked the respondents about their family background. These were non-compulsory questions. About half this group said they were from well-off (42%) to very well-off (10%) families. 40% said they were from average-income families and 6% said their families were not doing so well. The others declined to make a statement on the subject.

Looking at the parents' educational levels, we see that from both the mother's and the father's side about three quarters of the respondents' parents had completed an education at the VET level (Figure 5). More than two-thirds of the fathers and mothers completed an education at the HPE level or higher.

We are unable to draw any conclusions on the basis of these figures. The MAS does, however, include some tentative conclusions on this subject. The 2019 MAS (p. 19) does tentatively find that students in higher education whose parents are well-educated are more likely to go abroad as a participant in an Erasmus+ programme compared to students whose parents are not.

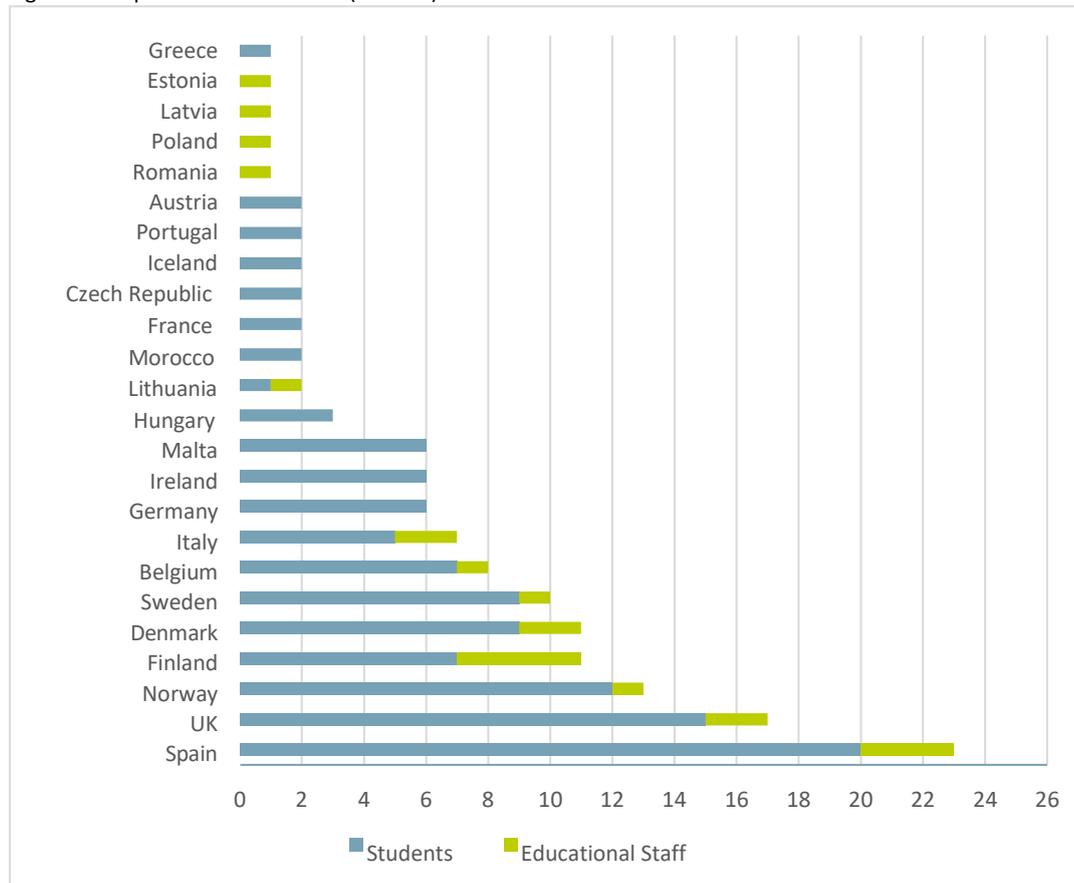
Figure 5. Educational level parents (father/caregiver N = 108)



Destinations

The participants went to a total of 24 countries, among which Spain (16%) and the United Kingdom (12%) were the most popular. (Figure 6). Other oft-chosen countries included the Scandinavian nations: Norway (9%), Finland (8%), Denmark (8%) and Sweden (7%).

Figure 6. Respondent destinations (N = 140)



1.7 Literature Guide

In chapter 2 we start off by discussing the phase preceding the stay abroad. In this chapter we share information about the goals, motivations, and expectations of the respondents. Chapter 3 focusses on the foreign experience based on the experiences participants shared with us during their stay. We discuss, among other things, the things that participants experienced as enjoyable or rather as difficult and what kind of impact this had on their stay. In chapter 4 we briefly discuss the period after their stay abroad, based on the experiences of some participants. In conclusion, chapter 5 includes the discussion in which we make, among other things, a number of recommendations regarding the execution of similar research in the future and the use of the vlogging method.

NB: All figures include the number of respondents for that component (N = sample size) as the number of participations varies per tool.

2 Prior to the Stay Abroad

In chapters 2 to 4 we discuss the respondents' experiences per phase: before, during and after the stay abroad. The study focus is on the experiences during the stay abroad (3) and will therefore be discussed at greater length than the other phases, which will be extensively addressed in the Multi-Annual Study (MAS) but are also discussed in this report as they form part of the full development process of the Erasmus+ participants.

In the Literature Guide (1.2), we discussed this process on the basis of the Erasmus+ model, which states that the participants experience a continuous development during their stay and as a result of the acquired experience progress further and further in the so-called acculturation process. The more the visitor is exposed to the other culture and learns to cope with the cultural differences, the stronger their intercultural skills become. These experiences also impact the motivations, goals, and expectations that the participants had prior to their visit. These are either being confirmed, or reality demands an adjustment thereof. The ex-post evaluation prompts a new moment of reflection on the gained experiences in contrast with the home environment. For these reasons, we also include the before and after phase in this study.

Students and educational staff to a certain extent prepare for their Erasmus+ participation; in some cases their educational institutions expect them to set their preparations down in a document. Goals are set for, for instance, the study, internship, or course abroad. They also have expectations about the country they are going to and plans for what they are going to do there. In this paragraph we will discuss the following questions:

- What are the participants' intended goals for the Erasmus+ travels? How deliberate are the participants in setting down their goals?
- Who determines these goals and are they always set down in writing? In what ways are the goals set down?
- Is the foreign partner consulted about the goals? If so, in what way and how often do these consultations take place?

2.1 Student Goals

In the Baseline Questionnaire, we asked the students to what extent they had achieved goals related to work/internship, study, or personal matters during their stay abroad. We coded and divided these goals (question 14, 15 and 16) into five main themes. Figure 7 gives an overview of the five themes that were most named by part of the students in connection with their internship and/or studies. Students could list from one to three goals related to their internship and/or study.

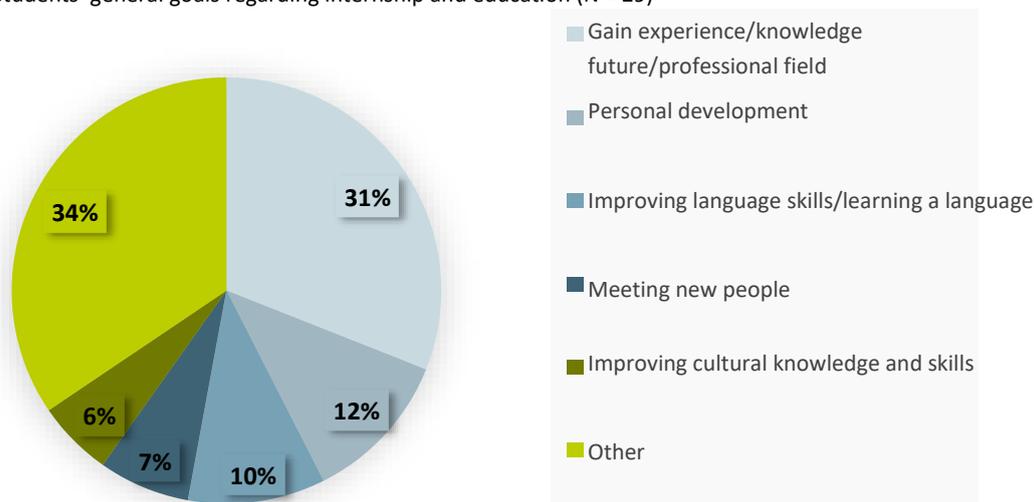
Students want to gain valuable experiences in the fields of work and education. They want to acquire knowledge pertaining to their future sphere of activity (31%) and develop as a person (12%). Some students set specific goals; they want to increase their knowledge about their field of study or discover whether in future they would want to live and work abroad. These students fall into the category 'other' (34%).

- "Get out of my comfort zone by discovering new cultures." – HPE student in Scotland
- "Lay a solid foundation for an academic career." – HPE student in Sweden
- "Broaden my knowledge for my study." – university student in Norway
- "Take classes that are not available in the Netherlands." – university student in Norway
- "It is highly instructive for my study, and for my work I primarily look to the future." – HPE student in Austria
- "Becoming acquainted with the working method/educational style and testing of professors and students in France."
- University student in France

One in ten students specifically mentions learning a language or improving language skills as their goal. This concerns both an international language like English or the foreign language spoken in the host country, such as Spanish and Italian. In addition, students want to meet new people (7%) and improve their cultural knowledge and skills (6%).

- "Improve my cultural knowledge and learn Italian." – university student in Italy
- "Improve my English and Spanish language skills." – VET student in Spain

Figure 7. Students' general goals regarding internship and education (N = 29)¹⁰



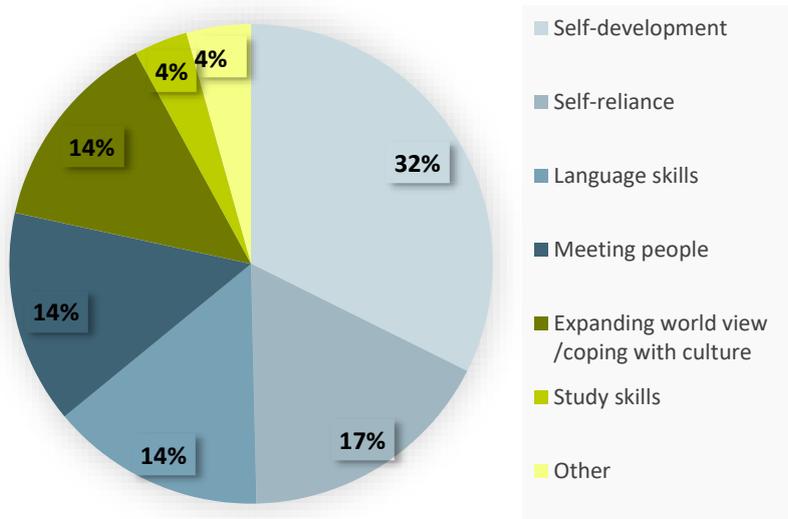
Most of the students told us they set personal goals for their stay abroad (Figure 8). The students could list from one to three goals concerning personal matters. A third set goals in the field of self-development, some examples that were given include: developing social skills, improving self-assuredness, becoming more open minded, working on self-discipline, and exploring personal interests.

In addition, self-reliance is also an oft-stated goal (17%). Students want to use this experience to learn how to be more independent, self-supporting, and how to be by themselves and take their own decisions. Improving language skills is also seen as an important personal goal (14%); This matches students' general goals and primarily concerns English language skills (as the lingua franca) and in some cases a different foreign language (Figure 8). In addition, the participants want to meet new, foreign people (14%) and broaden their world view (14%). Other examples involve learning a new sport (hiking, skiing, snowboarding) and forms of entertainment that have no connection with the exchange itself.

- "To stand on my own two feet. As up till now I've always lived with my parents, I now have to cook my own meals, manage my finances and do my laundry." – university student in Sweden
- "Gain personal experience of life outside of the home environment. Learning how to handle the culture shock, etc." – university student in Spain
- "Expand my world view. Learn to interpret information not just from a Dutch/West European perspective but also from a different one (in my case a Spanish South European perspective)." – university student in Spain
- "Being self-reliant and handling things on my own even in difficult moments. Being forced to make social contact and get out of my comfort zone." – university student in the UK

¹⁰The low response for figure 7 compared to figure 8 is due to the fact that most students said they had no goals regarding their internships and/or study. As a result, there was less response to the open question asking students about their goals regarding internship and/or study compared to the questions about personal goals.

Figure 8. Student personal goals (N = 60)



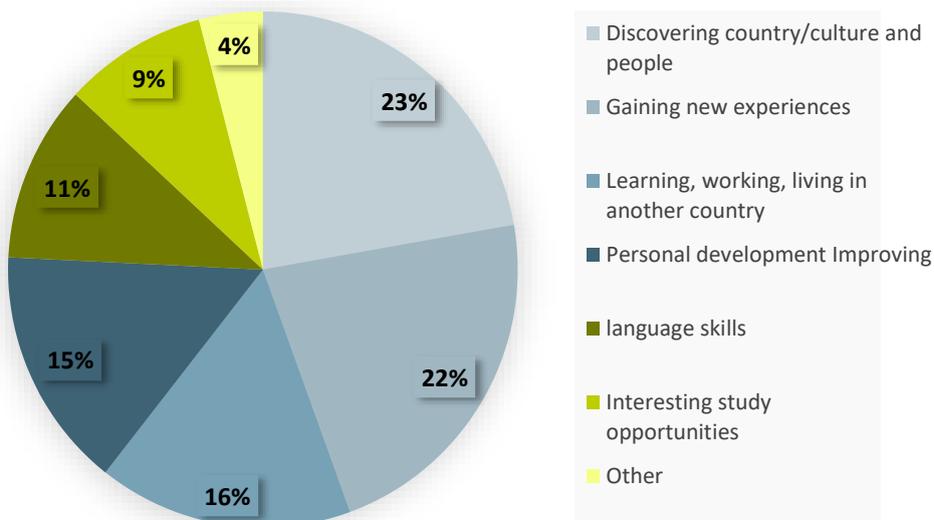
"I hope to better develop myself." – HPE student in Finland

Both students and educational staff were asked whether they had written down their goals prior to their stay abroad. One-fifth of the students said they had set their goals down in writing ahead of their trip abroad, the other students either did not set their goals down in advance or memorised them (82%). Most of the students (82%) did not consult the foreign institutions about their goals.

2.2 Student Motivations

Students were asked about their main motivation to go abroad. Just like the goals, these motivations were coded and examined for similar themes among the motivations. Figure 9 shows the most-mentioned themes among the student motivations.

Figure 9. Student Motivations (N = 61)



The greater part of the students had discovering a country and culture and meeting new people during their stay abroad as their motivation (23%), as well as gaining new experiences in general (22%).

Some express a need to get out of their comfort zone and have this experience now that the opportunity presents itself. In addition, learning/working/living in another country (16%), personal development (15%) and improving language skills were also mentioned (11%). One in ten students set out on their journey to explore interesting study opportunities, for instance, taking classes in a special subject or gain experience at a university highly recommended in its field of study. The category 'Other' includes specific motivations such as learning and working in a foreign zoo and highly developed health care.

"Meeting people from various cultures and improving my English." – VET student in Greece

"Experiencing what it's like to live in another country, gain new experiences. Basically, my attitude was 'I'll just see what happens' and also, okay, if I really don't like it I'll just go home, I'll simply repay the Erasmus money and just quit." – university student in Czech Republic

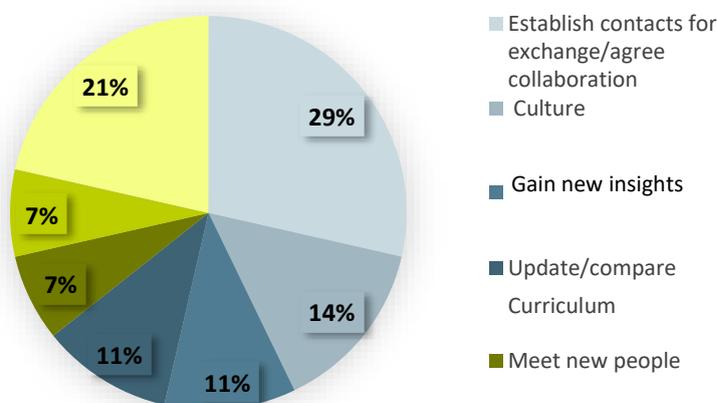
The in-depth interviews with the students show that they are not necessarily going abroad because this is either necessary or compulsory for their study. Some do it to fill a long break in their studies while others state they want to dive in at the deep end. According to one student:

"The reason I went on an exchange is because I really had nothing to do in the second term. And I always thought it would be cool to go abroad." – university student in Scotland.

2.3 Educational Staff Goals

More than half the educational staff say they have only work-related goals (55%). Another third of the educational staff have goals concerning both work and personal matters and a small group have set goals related to work and education (11%). In the Baseline Questionnaire, educational staff could list from one to three goals. Figure 10 shows the six most common themes in the goals pertaining to work and/or education.

Figure 10. Goals Educational Staff (N = 10)



One third of the educational staff set the goal of making new contacts for future collaboration regarding exchanges or internships (29%). Just like the students, the educational staff want to discover a new culture (14%) and meet new people (7%). In addition, they have the goal of gaining new work-related insights (11%) and comparing the curriculum to international examples (11%). According to the educational staff, the exchange also includes sharing Dutch examples with their foreign colleagues during their visit.

The category 'Other' comprises goals linked to a specific activity, such as teaching classes on Dutch educational methods and creating a basic set-up for an Erasmus+ KA2 project.

- “Familiarize Swiss students with Dutch methodologies. I look forward most to how our Swiss colleagues are going to experience our knowledge and possibly to some degree include in their curriculum. And what we can take back to the Netherlands.” – HPE staff member in Switzerland
- “Establish contacts for student and educational staff exchanges.” – HPE staff member in Norway
- “Gain new insights in the theme: internationalisation and social inclusion.” – VET staff in England
- “Arrange long term collaboration, creating a set-up for KA2 projects and gain knowledge about the Danish educational system.” – VET staff in Denmark
- “Come into contact with the educational culture of other countries (Italy, Croatia, Germany and Slovenia).”
 - adult education staff in Italy

Educational staff, personal goals

The goals listed above primarily pertain to the education staff their professional environment. In addition, we also asked the educational staff about their personal goals. Learning about other cultures (43%) and learning about new educational concepts (29%) were mentioned most. They also looked forward to the whole experience of the exchange, the atmosphere, and the people.

- “Being engaged with intercultural competences and learning more on that subject. Teaching and getting acquainted with the other culture (networking).” – HPE staff in Spain
- “Take a look under the hood of a school abroad.” – VET staff in the United Kingdom

Most of the educational staff set down the goals of their foreign stay in a document (80%). The others say they have their goals in view, but only stored in their memories. In most cases (78%), the foreign institutions have been consulted about the goals. Compared to students, educational staff are more often in contact with their foreign partners about their goals and are more likely to set them down on paper.

The findings from the questionnaires are confirmed by the in-depth interviews with two educational staff members. They say that the specific exchange programme ensures that proper thought is given to the professional and personal goals prior to the stay abroad and in many cases are also set down. The educational staff say they can understand why students do this to a lesser extent in advance, as they are going abroad for a longer period and in most cases have to keep a reflective report/log during their stay. Educational staff also mention that prior to their stay they are not concerned about culture shocks or other obstacles. Theirs is after all only a limited stay that often involves a specific programme. Some of the educational staff, however, are slightly nervous about how the programme will go. The course content might not live up to expectations or the programme be too full.

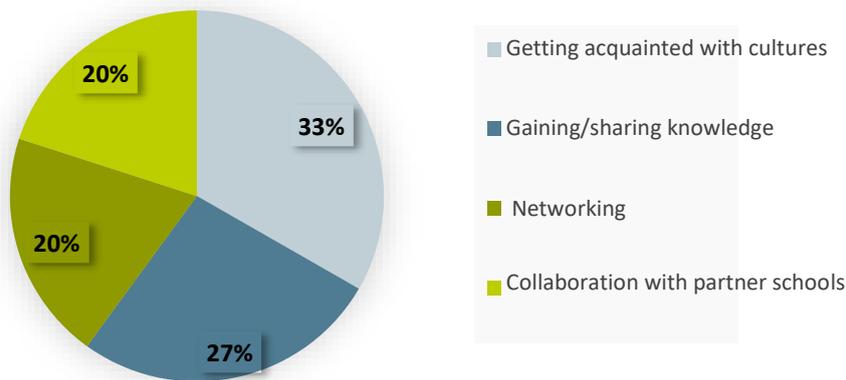
“The exchange always takes more time and energy than facilitated for. It’s often underestimated.”

– HPE staff in Morocco

2.4 Educational Staff Motivations

Becoming acquainted with a new culture (33%) and gaining new knowledge, learning from partner schools, and sharing their own knowledge (27%) are the prime motivations for educational staff to go abroad. Networking at the international level (20%) and entering into collaborations with partner schools abroad (20%) are also mentioned as motivations (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Educational Staff Motivations (N = 111)



“Learning more about the culture and gaining knowledge I can pass on to my students.” – Adult education staff in Spain

2.5 Conclusion ‘H2 – Prior to the Stay Abroad’

Students are primarily motivated by their desire to discover new cultures, gain new study, or work experiences, develop on a personal level, and improve their language skills in English or a foreign language. These motivations are repeated in the general goals students drew up for their stay abroad. As regards the personal goals, we see that the personal development is further specified in skills such as self-development, self-reliance, and social skills. Educational staff draw up professional goals aimed at gaining new insights, networking, and international collaboration. On a personal level, they also want to get acquainted with the new culture and their foreign colleagues. Compared to the students, educational staff are more often in contact with their foreign partners about their goals and are more likely to set them down on paper.

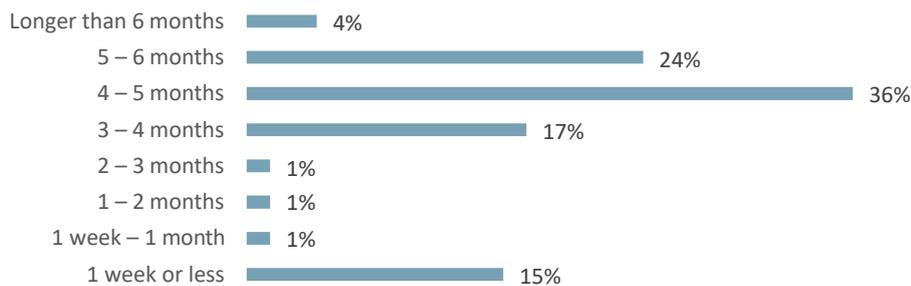
3 During the Foreign Stay

In this chapter, we discuss the experiences of students and educational staff during their stay abroad. Here, we report our findings based on the Update and Backpack questionnaires, the vlogs and the interviews, and provide an answer to the following research questions:

- What experiences do the participants have during their foreign stay? For instance, in the fields of language, culture, organisation, environment, people, etc. With whom did they socialize during their stay?
- What did the participants find enjoyable/difficult during their period abroad?
- Do experiences correspond with the intended goals? Which expectations did the participants have beforehand?
- Are goals adjusted, and if so, how?
- What are concrete examples of positive and negative experiences during the period abroad? And how do they contribute to the personal and professional development?

The participants' length of stay varies greatly; from a few days to more than six months (Figure 12). All educational staff who participated in the study stayed abroad for a week or less. Most of the students spent between three and six months abroad (76%). This is comparable to the average length of stay according to the international Erasmus statistics. According to the European Commission, participants spend an average of 6.2 months abroad for their study and 4.4 for their foreign internship (2015).

Figure 12 Length of foreign stay (N = 61)



Three quarters of the participants stayed at a block of student flats or student house (74%), the others stayed in a hotel (14%), an appartement (7%) or with a host family (3%). Two-thirds of the participants went abroad for their studies, one fifth on an internship and the other 14% on an international exchange project (e.g., teaching, networking, setting up a project).

3.1 Student State of Mind

To visualize the state of mind, we used the responses to the Update Questionnaire, in which the participants could state per update how they felt and provide clarification in an open answer. Students, generally speaking, feel good during their foreign stay. Figure 13 represents the development of the students' state of mind over time based on the responses of students who took part in multiple Updates.

Figure 13. Student state of mind over time (N ≤ 38)

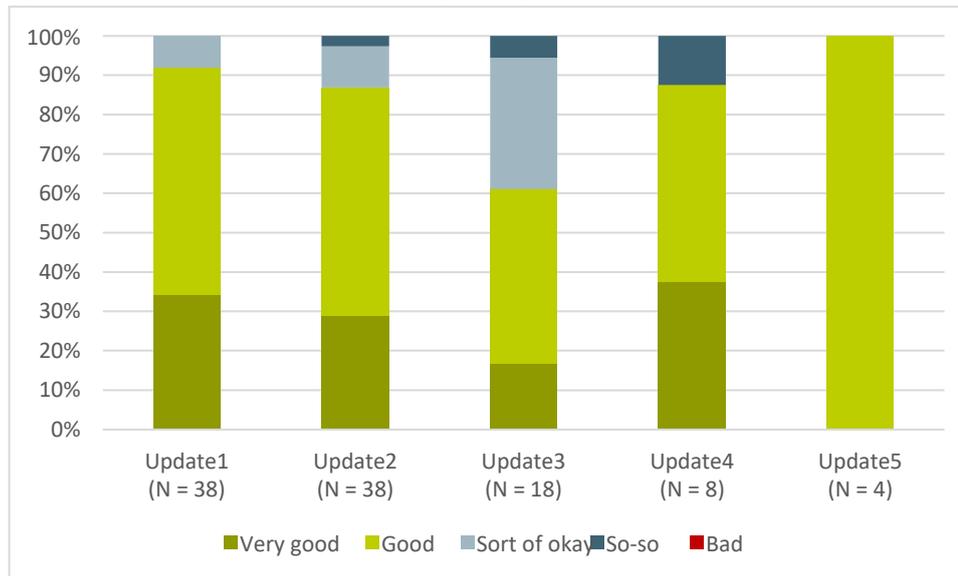


Figure 13 pertains to the students who filled in the Update multiple times. The Update was sent out every two to three weeks, but the students could fill it in whenever convenient. For this reason, the time between the Updates for students varies by a few days. The first and second update was filled in by 38 students. From the second Update there is a drop-off, with fewer and fewer respondents. The third, fourth and fifth Update were filled in by 18, 8 and 4 students respectively.

The graph shows that a number of students experience a mental 'dip' during their stay abroad. In this study this occurred around the time of the third update, when there is a rise in the number of students who answered the question about their state of mind with either 'sort of okay' or 'so-so' and the number of students who feel 'very good' or 'good' decreases. This picture matches the U-curve theory as discussed in the Literature Study (1.2). This theory concerns the various phases of the adjustment process that a person goes through during their stay abroad. In the U-curve, the foreign visitors are off to a good start, but experience a dip after a few weeks. They eventually recover from the dip as they gain more experience with the other culture. Naturally, this process varies per person, some people experience multiple dips during their foreign stay. Intercultural studies show that the more experience a person gains with the foreign culture, the greater their ability to deal with a set-back/dip/stress moment. The responses from students participating in this study show that they go through a similar process. Below you will find per phase a number of statements from students that explain their state of mind at that point in time (3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3). At the end of this paragraph, we compare these experiences with information from the Literature Study (3.1.4).

3.1.1 Initial Phase: An Exciting Start

During the initial phase most of the students say they feel good to very good. They are enthusiastic about new experiences, meet new people and engage in fun activities. Most of the statements concern acquiring social contacts and engaging in activities (e.g., parties, eating out, sports, nature, culture, city trips). The students state that their study or internship has only limited impact on their positive state of mind. These factors primarily come to the fore when describing a less positive state of mind.

- “Meeting housemates, they’re great.”
- “Exploring the city and cooking with new friends.”
- “Lots of meetings with international friends and had them taste Dutch food.”
- “Went to the museum with a group of unknown Erasmus students and met two new people who are hilarious.”
- “Lunch with an Erasmus student who I’ve become very close to very quickly in the past week.”
- “A weekend trip with the international students’ association.”
- “Went on a trip across Scotland with an international student and met new people.”
- “I am meeting with someone from the commission for a pleasant cup of coffee.”
- “I have no problems meeting new people, it comes natural to me. I’m more worried about practical things, such as cooking and doing laundry.”

Even though the students say they have a positive to very positive state of mind, they also say that during the initial phase they are sometimes nervous about:

- Meeting new people: “At first I was afraid I wouldn’t meet anybody for the whole period”,
- If all arrangements have been made: “Insecurity about housing and roommates”,
- Acting independently: “Over there, I’m completely left to my own devices”,
- And more in general about the new, the unknown.

It is clear from the questionnaires that these tensions during the initial phase do not immediately cause a more negative state of mind. We asked the students from the in-depth interviews about their first day abroad. These students said that they had experienced their first day as difficult and sometimes lonely. One of the students says:

“I obviously felt tense and was nervous. It was a really difficult day; I didn’t have any roommates yet and didn’t know anybody over there. I felt really lonely and thought, ‘what have I gotten myself into?’. It was quite dramatic, I also called my mother and cried, that was pretty intense” – university student in Iceland

3.1.2 Intermediate Phase: A Minor Dip

The students in this study indicated they experienced a more negative or tolerable state of mind at various points during their foreign stay. So, there is no discernible fixed pattern. For one person this will happen after two weeks, for another after a month; it varies per individual and situation. A few reasons for this phenomenon are stress over practical matters involving points registration by the educational institution and housing conditions, stress caused by the study load or workload at the internship, personal issues (e.g., social, health), the climate, and misunderstandings concerning the local culture/organisation. In line with the theory on the adjustment process, we find that students can experience a dip at various moments during their stay. At the same time, however, they say that during these moments they keep engaging in enjoyable social activities or sometimes had a concrete plan to overcome the dip, for instance, by taking more time for themselves or getting in touch with someone from the educational institution.

- “Huge amounts of stress and a thousand health issues as the result.”
- “My current house is one huge scam and I have no idea how I’m going to recover my 1200-euro deposit.”
- “Deadline being changed, which means having to hand in your project the next day and pull an all-nighter.”
- “The school is not very open to international students. There is much more study material being offered (such as PowerPoints and study guides) but only in Catalan, not in Spanish or English.”

- “Exam chaos due to overlapping exams and exams being moved because of national strikes and demonstrations.”
- “I’m quite busy with my study right now, and there have also been some problems (mainly with group work), which has meant having to take care of a lot of additional matters (moving presentations, planning for exams, etc.).”
- “The weather. Once again a whole week without sunshine here in Stockholm”
- “Saying goodbye to people who are already returning home.”
- “I sometimes felt lonely and missed home.”
- “Uncertainty about activities.”
- “My family and partner on several occasions said they missed me a lot. That is hard. I slept badly for two nights in a row due to homesickness.”

Also notable is that students said they experienced a minor dip because of having to return home and the last study-related issues that have to be taken care of during the final phase. On the other hand, however, they have gained beautiful experiences and valued their life abroad and will miss it.

3.1.3 Final Phase: More Experienced

The response reflects that students continue to gain enjoyable experiences spread out across the entire period abroad, that in the meantime they have built a circle of friends and have more confidence in their foreign stay. They indicate that it’s easy to meet people and are increasingly able to find their way. At the end of their visit, most of the participants are loath to say goodbye to their new friends and to the host country and find they have gained more intercultural skills.

- “I’ve had informative meetings with external graphic designers, the videographer and technical manager of the music studio. All meetings were related to the Corporate video.”
- “The final exams and deadlines are behind me now, so school holidays again.”
- “I got a very positive final assessment from my internship co-ordinator and good additions, feedback and offers from the CEO, VP-Sales, CFO and all external and internal colleagues.”
- “How easy it is to meet people and do things with them.”
- “Enjoyable evening having drinks with other international students I’d already met before, nice people.”
- “Met a new girl from the Netherlands who is also on an internship here, went out for drinks, and booked a tour for next week.”

3.1.4 Comparison State of Mind Students with Literature Guide

The experience in the initial phase of the foreign stay matches the so-called *honeymoon phase* from the U-curve theory¹¹. The participants’ state of mind is, generally speaking, positive to very positive; They are looking forward to the new adventure, going on nice outings and meeting new people.

Of course, they’re also slightly nervous at first. They wonder whether they will quickly meet nice people they can hang out with or whether they will be very homesick. However, the questionnaire shows that these tensions have little to no impact on their state of mind in the initial phase. They are, so to speak, seeing things through rose-coloured glasses.

In line with the culture shock phase from the U-curve theory we observe after some time a dip in some of the participants’ state of mind. The reasons for this dip include *stress moments* caused by study-related matters, workload, and personal problems (e.g., social, health), and *unmet expectations* such as the climate, contact with the local culture and housing conditions. The participants in this study said they consciously dealt with these issues and addressed their stress factors. Participation in this study certainly contributed to students reflecting on this issue during their stay. Some students characterized these moments as learning moments, saying that they had yet again learned something about the other culture or how to solve a problem by themselves.

¹¹ Oberg, 1954; Lysgaard, 1955; Berry, 1985.

This leads to an increased understanding of the other culture and greater confidence in their ability to cope in this environment.

During the final phase of their stay, these factors contribute to a reluctance to return home again. This is defined in the U-curve theory as the *recovery and adjustment phase*. They have built a new social environment and grown accustomed to their hometown. They recognise the positive influence of this experience on their personal development and are able to consciously reflect thereon.

3.2 Educational Staff State of Mind

Compared to the students, the educational staff in this study more often say that their state of mind is good to very good. In general, their stay abroad is short and most of them follow a fixed programme. The short duration of their stay and the programme they follow contribute to theirs generally being a more stable state of mind. The educational staff say that the pleasant contacts with other people and the activities they engage in contribute to their positive experience. Below are a number of quotes from educational staff about their experience:

- “Teaching Swiss students who participate in the classes from a very different cultural background.”
- “Creating presentations on Dutch business culture to Finnish students.”
- “Personal contact with international partners.”
- “Enthusiastic students with great stories.”
- “Getting acquainted with other cultures.”
- “Getting to know and admire a different school system.”
- “Participating in our host’s Valentine event.”
- “The informal contact with the teachers.”
- “In Spain I had good housing and nice people participating in the programme. I learned the most from other Europeans in the group. How often do you see such a diverse group from all age groups come together and be able to learn from each other?”
- “When you are in a foreign country you also become more aware of your own culture. You learn new things, are inspired by the way things are done abroad and learn to better appreciate your own culture.”
- “It is very instructive to get to know people who grew up in another country, a different culture and a different era. You can learn a lot from them.”

A few educational staff shared less-positive experiences in this study. These experiences concerned their housing, the programme, and other international participants in the activities:

- “We stayed in a small village, in some sort of ecological hotel and slept in dorms that were not properly heated.”
- “It was a full programme lasting a whole week, each day followed by social activities including other participants. This meant we had very few moments of rest in between times. That is very intense.”

3.2.1 Comparison State of Mind Educational Staff with Literature Study

It is clear that the educational staff whose foreign stay is limited to just a few days or weeks do not go through the same process as students who go abroad for multiple months. Their stay is surveyable and, in most cases they know what their programme looks like. Their adjustment process is less radical because, among other things, there is no need for them to invest in a new social network for a longer period or for a substantial adjustment to the other culture. This is why intercultural studies into the adjustment process abroad often use a minimum three-month period to accurately describe this process; the longer the stay in a foreign culture, the more intensive the adjustment process can/will be. As a result, the phases as discussed in paragraph 3.1 are not applicable to the situation of educational staff. This group may, however, encounter elements of the process. An example thereof is, for instance, the dip or culture shock they may experience during their short stay abroad.

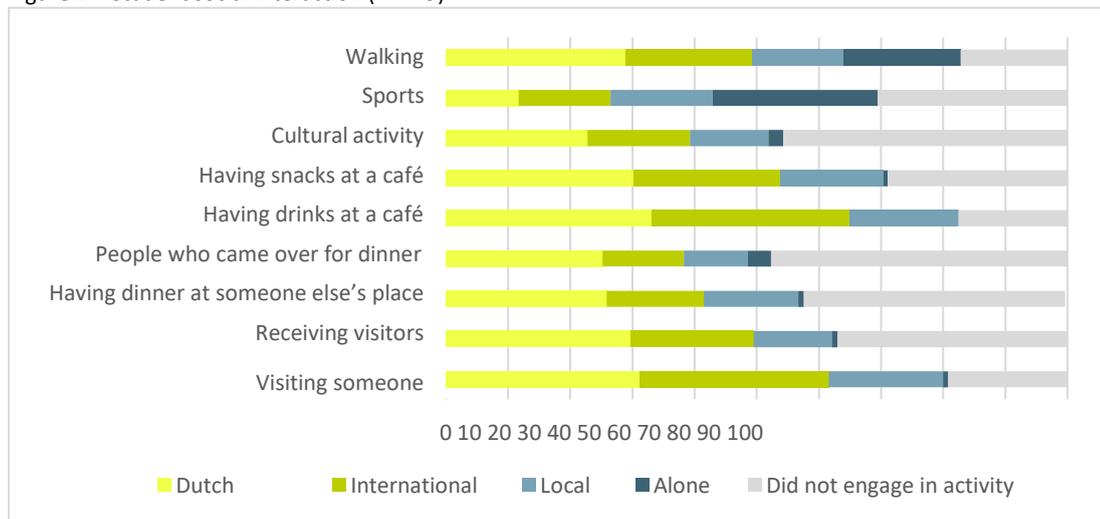
The dip experienced by the educational staff in this study is primarily linked to the local programme in which they participate: The programme is too full, leaving little time to engage in personal activities, or the course content did not meet their expectations. The participants in this study did not make any specific statements on cultural differences that impacted their state of mind.

3.3 Contacts Abroad

3.3.1 Student Contacts

Figure 14 shows who the students engage in activities with during their foreign stay: compatriots, international or local people. Please take note that the students could fill in the questionnaire multiple times, which is why the total number of submitted Updates is higher than the number of respondents. Cultural activities, walking, having dinner at someone's house, or someone coming over for dinner are usually engaged in with other Dutch people. Other activities, such as visiting someone at their house or receiving visitors are primarily engaged in with other Dutch and international people. It holds true for all these activities that students engaged the least with local people.

Figure 14. Student social interaction (N = 49)¹²



In the interviews, the students explain why they socialized more with either Dutch or international people. Because international students are often housed in the same building, Dutch students more easily make contact with them than local people.

“It’s really only exchange students, maybe there are a few Czech people living there, but that would be an exception. I don’t know them personally.” – university student in Czech Republic

Students say that there is a sense of community spirit in the buildings because all the international students are in the same boat. According to the respondents, this is also one of the reasons that international students initially seek each other's company and thus to a lesser degree engage in structural contacts with local people who do not form part of this exchange setting. This corresponds with the *Erasmus cocoon* theory (1.2). In addition, the respondents say it's easier for them to socialize with other Dutch students because they speak the same language.

¹²The number of Updates filled in by students for this part is 97.

“Obviously, you come here as an international group and you all hang out with each other. It is easy to make contact because you’re all in the same boat and you all want to make new friends. This is not the case for Icelandic students because they already know everybody around here.” – university student in Iceland

“They responded with such a strong Dutch accent, that we were immediately like ‘hey Dutch?’, ‘yes Dutch’. And that immediately makes it really easy to become friends, because it kind of feels like you already have so much in common, that it just feels natural.” – university student in Scotland

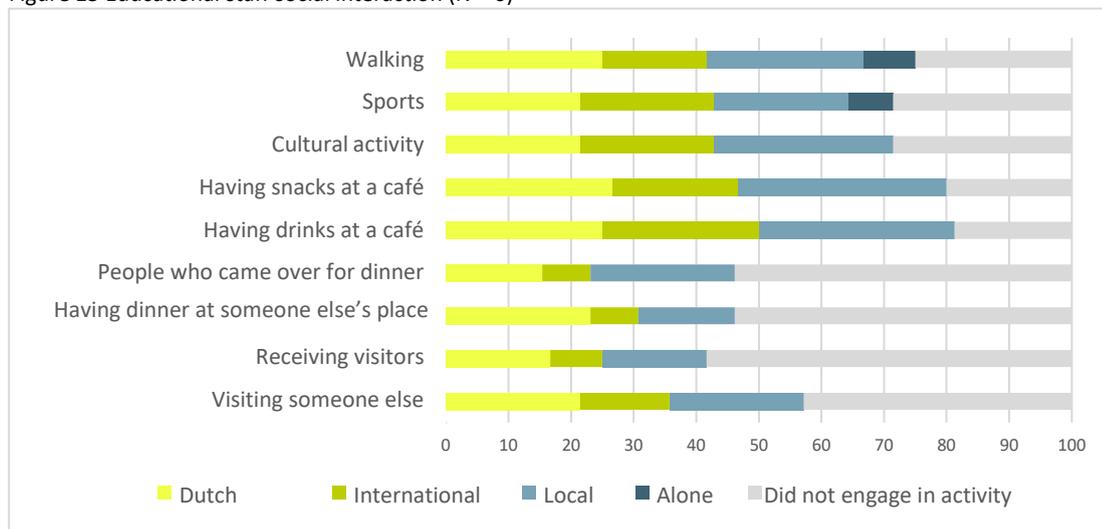
Erasmus cocoon¹³

The Erasmus cocoon represents the Erasmus culture within which participants from different nationalities socialize with each other and share one strong common factor, namely that they form an international group that finds itself in a similar situation in a different culture for a specific period of time. The findings from this study agree with this theory. International students more often socialize with each other because: they are in a similar situation in a foreign country, they live in an international environment (e.g., dorms, student apartments, campuses) and/or participate in an international study. All these factors contribute to a reduced level of building relationships with local students. In addition, some of the participants conclude that it is less of a necessity for local students to invest in bonding with international students, they are, after all, in their own social environment.

3.3.2 Educational Staff Contacts

In contrast with the students, the educational staff in this study more often associate with local people (Figure 15). Here as well, educational staff could fill in the Update questionnaire multiple times: this is why the number of filled in updates is higher than the number of respondents. They, for instance, indicate that they are going abroad to enter into new collaborations with local institutions or to take a course. This explains why they socialize more with local people during their foreign stay compared to the students. In addition, they feel less of an urgency to look for people in a similar situation because they are abroad for a limited period.

Figure 15 Educational staff social interaction (N = 6)¹⁴



“I spent a whole week in a small Lithuanian village and every day we had a very full programme from 10 in the morning till 7 at night. Afterwards we would engage in social activities with the group. So, there was little opportunity to go out on your own or be by yourself.” – university educational staff member in Lithuania

¹³ Papabitsiba, 2006

¹⁴ The number of Updates filled in by educational staff for this part is 10.

Even though building a new social environment during their stay is of lesser importance for educational staff, most of the participants do say that they hope to make international contacts they can maintain in future. Their approach is primarily professional and aimed at exploring exchange possibilities.

3.4 Positive experiences

We asked the participants to list the positive and negative experiences that influenced their experiences and development during their foreign stay. Much has already been discussed in the previous paragraphs. Below, we briefly discuss per target group the experiences that were highlighted the most in this part of the study.

3.4.1 Student Positive experiences

Students primarily enjoy meeting new people and exploring the country and its culture. For the most part, this is done with other international students and organised by, for instance, the educational institution of international student associations.

“Visiting a museum with a group of unfamiliar Erasmus students, where I met two new people I can really laugh with.” – university student in Ireland

It is clear from the interviews with students that they are positively surprised about their own abilities and self-reliance. Making contact with others and making new friends is easier than they thought it would be beforehand. They also experienced much support from primarily other international students, which they greatly appreciate. They are namely in the same boat, which automatically creates a sense of familiarity and understanding. It is also easier to discuss the problems they run into in the host country with each other than a local person.

“It is a tight-knit community, which creates a sense of trust. Everybody is friendly when they meet in the corridor and that is really great. I knew right away that the people would make it fun.”
– University student in Czech Republic

3.4.2 Positive Experiences Educational Staff

For educational staff, positive experiences are related to their pupils/students and the work they do abroad. They enjoy teaching children from a different culture and background and find it interesting to see how schools in different countries are run. In addition, they find making the acquaintance of international colleagues fascinating and highly enjoyable.

“Teaching Swiss students who participate in the lessons from a different cultural background.” HPE staff member in Denmark

“Becoming acquainted with and admiring other school systems.” – AE staff member in Spain

3.4.3 Experienced Problems, Students

Students indicate they experience extensive stress about studying and the exams and preliminary exams. A contributing factor is that in some cases the transition from the Dutch school to the foreign school is less than smooth. Student grades are not passed on to the foreign school in a timely fashion or students still have to complete tasks for their school in the Netherlands. Other practical problems encountered by students are exams and resits planned in after they went abroad and the limited supply of English language study material suitable for international students.

“The school is not very open to international students. Classes are primarily taught in Catalan, not in Spanish and English.” – university student in Spain.

Students find it difficult to say goodbye to their new friends and environment. In addition, they have trouble accepting that their foreign stay is about to end and they have to return to the Netherlands. They are going to miss all the fun activities, the by now familiar environment and their new international friends.

"I don't like having to move from my room in Stockholm, because I regret that I'll never return there." – university student in Sweden

In the interviews, students talk about their experiences during they stay abroad. A few exceptional situations were a student who was nearly mugged and another who had an unpleasant experience in the Czech underground:

"I was on the subway with a reduced-price ticket, but these are only for children and the elderly. Then a ticket collector came along who didn't speak any English and I don't speak any Czech, so that was really inconvenient. He got really angry, so I then received a fine; I did get the impression that he pocketed the money."
– university student in Czech Republic

3.4.4 Experienced Problems, Educational Staff

The educational staff have few negative experiences while abroad. They only experienced problems relating to the planning and organisation of their foreign stay. Sometimes when part of the programme is cancelled due to circumstances no alternative is provided. Also, programmes are sometimes too full, which leaves them less time to engage in their own activities.

"The programme could have done with a little more structure. Two days were very well planned and one day not so much"
– HPE educational staff member in Denmark

3.5 The Consequences of Covid-19 for Erasmus+ Students

Students report that with the arrival of Covid-19 a large number of the international students are forced to return home, which for some students has meant an end to meeting new people even though they can still socialize with their housemates in their building. Where at first students could enjoy the night life, visit museums, and go out to dinner, their social activities are now limited to walks in the park or a quick trip to the supermarket for groceries.

Due to Covid-19, schools and universities can no longer facilitate physical classes and all teaching has been moved online. Students understand this but do regret having received only a few weeks of face-to-face teaching. The Covid-19 pandemic has also meant that family and friends from the Netherlands can no longer come visit the students. They really regret this and indicate that they are now experiencing their exchange in quite a different manner than they expected beforehand.

Below are two fragments from vlogs that paint an accurate picture of the consequences of the crisis for Erasmus+ students abroad and how they are handling the situation:

Fragment 1 by a university student in Denmark

"But then Covid-19 presented itself. And that was really strange. I already knew it was an issue, but Denmark was one of the first countries to go into full lockdown when even in the Netherlands everybody was still quite sober-minded, and nothing was happening. Over here, many people immediately packed their bags and fled home, and I felt absolutely no need to do that. Denmark was doing such a good job that it was actually quite safe, and to my mind the best thing to do is to stay where you are instead of immediately flying home. Be that as it may, my university disagreed, but after I talked to them, they were okay with my staying here. I do think that as many as 40% or more of the exchange students have left and that makes it weird because here on this floor, we form a closed group and can therefore continue to see each other, but meeting new people is out of the question. The university is closed for the remainder of the year, so I've really only had six weeks of university and that's that. All I can do is walk past it but I can no longer get in, so, this is in effect the end of my exchange and everything will now continue online. I'm really disappointed. The fact that my floor now is the group of people I will be on the

exchange with is super fun, but I really would have liked to discover more. No more small restaurants, no more nights out, no more visits to museums and palaces. Strictly regulated walks in the park are about it for now, which is also cool, yet different because you're interacting differently.

My parents and friends were to visit me, but that's all been cancelled because of Covid-19. That's also really strange, because I will now not see anyone from my home environment for six months. But maybe that will make the challenge even bigger.

I hope that life here will return a little bit back to normal before I leave. I would really like to travel across Denmark by train to experience not just Copenhagen but also the rest of the country. That is really my last goal here. Otherwise, I'm fine and I hope that when you go on exchange it will be without Covid-19, because that would obviously be a lot more fun."

Fragment 2 by a student in HPE on an internship in Austria

"I was supposed to work today, but my shift was cancelled due to that virus. They are having a meeting today to decide what is going to happen with the hotel. I was supposed to work Saturday and Sunday, but they gave me two days off. They are entitled by law to designate half of my days off in case of an emergency. Well, this is an emergency, so I really don't have to work anymore, which is kind of annoying. It's a city hotel, and they can decide for themselves whether they close or not. Also, I have informed my school about the situation and they said that I should not return to the Netherlands in any case because the situation in Brabant is much worse than here. So, if the hotel closes, I'll be here for another two or three weeks."

"Update: the hotel is closed, and Austria is closing its borders. I talked to my school and my mother, and they said that I should go to the embassy. There, they said that they had not discussed yet how they should handle the situation because the decision is up to Austria, not the Netherlands. But because I'm 17 they said that it would be best if I returned to the Netherlands, so I've booked a flight to the Netherlands. If it's safe, I intend to return if the hotel opens again in April. If not, my internship unfortunately now comes to an end. It is a pain, because right now it's difficult to say goodbye to everybody. Many people have now left the staff house."

"I'm back in the Netherlands. I hope I'll be able to go back in April if the hotel opens again, because I do want to continue my internship there until the end of May. But if there no flights, it's probably going to be difficult. Also, it's been great to see my friends and family again, and to sleep in my own bed. I really missed that so much. Really wonderful having everything again and not having to cook myself. I can continue working on my assignments and my OLS¹⁵. And I do want to continue working on my German. Of course, schools over here are closed as well. I hope there will be another vlog with the good news that I can pack my bags and go back, because I really liked it over there. I love being home, but I really do miss being over there!"

Included in the in-depth interviews was a respondent who is in South Korea. He indicated that due to Covid-19 it was difficult to make the first social contacts and meet new people. An introduction week was to be organised by the university, but it was cancelled. We do see, however, that the university is coming up with alternative, creative ways for students to make contact. This student describes a match-making process in which he was linked to other students in a WhatsApp group based on personality traits.

"They forwarded a questionnaire with questions about your interests and why you came here. Are you more interested in cultural things or do you primarily want to party and are you more of an introvert or

¹⁵The Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) programme.

an extravert? These were the sorts of questions that were asked, and you were sorted based on these questions.”
– university student in South Korea

3.6 Realisation of goals

Half of the students say that they realized their goals for the foreign stay. The other half say they realised some of their goals but not all. The students say they still have time to realise their intended goals:

“I had many goals and realized part of them. But I still have six months to go, so I can still realize the other goals during my stay here” – University student in Norway

During their foreign stay, the students formulated almost no new goals (14%). Goals are slightly adjusted (43%) or not at all (43%).

In practice, it proved difficult for some participants to realize all of their goals because they also wanted to spend time on enjoyable activities or because they were socializing with different people than they expected beforehand. Some students set goals that were unrealistic right from the start, such as learning the local language.

“I wanted to socialize less with Dutch people and more with internationals, but eventually I almost exclusive socialized with Dutch people.” – university student in Finland

“Some goals I could not realize in this short period of time. Like learning Norwegian.” – university student in Norway

There also were several participants who adjusted their goals during their stay. A number of these adjustments involved goals pertaining to the ratio between maintaining social contacts and fulfilling the obligations of the foreign stay; in actual practice, students had to deal with this issue much more consciously than they had thought they would. Others become more motivated during their stay to reflect on what they want to do in the future or seize the opportunity to learn a skill. Some of the newly formulated goals were:

- “Don’t become overly focussed on building a social life, but make sure that you do enjoy the time that you have.”
- “Learning skiing/snowboarding became cross-country skiing.”
- “Trying to discover what I do really want in the future after this internship.”
- “Decided that this internship is not going to be what I want to do in the future, so, complete it successfully but also think about what you can do and want.”
- “Socialize more with my American friend to improve my English.”

3.7 Vloggers’ Experiences

A total of 34 vlogs by 5 different vloggers were watched, these vlogs vary in length and content. All in all, we received 240 minutes worth of footage. Table 4 gives an overview of the number of vlogs and the number of minutes of footage. There are substantial differences between the vloggers, as a number of them had already started vlogging before they registered for the study. These vloggers had already planned to vlog regularly and later share their experiences with the home front via YouTube. Those who only started vlogging within the framework of this study did so noticeably less than the other, intrinsically motivated group.

Table 4 Overview vloggers

Vlogger	Student/ Educational staff	Number of vlogs	Manner of vlogging	Total number of minutes
Vlogger1	Primary education staff member	5	Vlogger 1 produces short and succinct vlogs about his experiences during the study trip. Subjects include culture, local cuisine, exchange possibilities, activities, contacts, and information on his experiences with Erasmus KA1 Mobility.	7
Vlogger2	student	3	Vlogger 2 gives a tour of her living space and of the university. Subjects include study, study planning, study subjects guide, fellow students, student association, activities, sports, nature, making friends, environment, lift adventure. She missed people at home but is having a great time.	23
Vlogger3	student	18	Vlogger 3 mainly talks about her internship and shares footage of her room and internship placement. She vlogs regularly and covers subjects such as: internship, climate, activities, communicating in German, setbacks, emotions, food, ski outing, touristic activities, travelling and the consequences of COVID-19.	102
Vlogger4	student	1	Vlogger 4 tells us about where she lives, what she does there and what the consequences are of COVID-19 for her and her environment. She also gives tips to future Erasmus+ participants.	8
Vlogger5	student	7	Vlogger 5 talks about where she lives and her daily activities there. Subjects include campus life, activities, making friends, household chores, room decorating, food, study, cultural outings, and parties.	100

3.7.1 Students' Vlogs

The student vlogs give an insight into the daily life abroad. The vloggers start with a tour of their room/building, a brief report on their journey there and they show what facilities are at their disposal. The vloggers say that their housing arrangements are satisfactory and that they greatly enjoy the classes they are taking abroad. The students say they have friends who chose to rent a studio just for themselves and that these friends regretted their decision. They expressed their appreciation of having international housemates they can share their foreign experience with. One vlogger said she wanted to experience what it's like to live abroad and be away from home for a long time. In addition, she also wants to meet new people and discover Denmark.

"We are all from different countries, people from Sweden, China, Spain, New Caledonia and me. It's very easy to walk over to each other. We also share a roof terrace, so that's really great."

– university student in Denmark.

The international office organises trips for the international students. The vloggers talk about what fun it is to meet other international students this way. They emphasize the importance of talking to people and coming out of your shell. They say that it's easier to make international friends because everybody is in the same boat.

During the day, the students are mostly occupied with their study or internship; working days of 8.30 till 18.00 are the norm. But on days off they also make time for fun activities such as theme parks and cultural attractions. At night, students often go to parties, out to dinner or go visit their friends.

Students miss the home front but also say they have a fabulous time abroad. They play games with their house mates and sometimes do things with a group of Dutch people who study there or are on an internship.

All in all, they paint a primarily positive picture of their experiences abroad. The vlogs, however, also include negative experiences. For the most part, these involve problems related to their study, housing, or the climate. In most cases, they also discuss in the vlogs how they dealt with the situation in question, which often leads to a positive spin on the event in the vlog.

3.7.2 Educational Staff Vlogs

The PE headmaster who took part in the vlogging component, addressed his vlogs to everybody back home (colleagues, students, and parents). In the videos, he reported on the activities, the contacts with participants from other countries and the introduction to each other's cultures. In addition, he also paid attention to local Norwegian customs (e.g., Christmas activities, food and drink). For this reason, his reporting remained quite general and did not delve deeper into the personal experiences of this vlogger. Paragraph 4.5 includes a fragment from one of the educational worker's vlogs as an illustration of his experiences with the study trip.

3.8 Comparison Student Adjustment Process and Literature Study

In 3.1.4 and 3.2.1, we compared the state of mind of the participants to the literature study. In this paragraph we examine the extent to which the adjustment process corresponds with the information from the literature study.

The last phase of the U-curve theory is *adjustment*; the participants have become acquainted with all kinds of new elements from the other culture and is now able to recognise and interpret them from their own cultural perspective. In this phase, the participant has more experienced with the new set of cultural values, however, this does not mean that there will be no more new, unknown elements presenting themselves. Nevertheless, the experience gained means that the participant is better equipped to cope with them compared to the initial phase of the stay abroad.¹⁶

In this area, the results from this study do not enable us to draw any hard conclusions, as this would require intensively following a fixed group across the whole period. In this study, we collected the participants' experiences from different phases. We can conclude that the Erasmus+ students in this study are primarily inclined towards partial *integration*¹⁷. That is, the participant protects their own culture because the duration or the stay is just a few months, but they are also quite open to a partial adjustment to the other culture through daily contact with the representatives thereof. In the case of Erasmus+ students, however, the 'other culture' is twofold; on the one hand there is the local culture of the host country, on the other the dynamic *Erasmus cocoon/culture* in which the students find themselves. The students are often in a 'trusted environment' with their peers while they're gaining experience with the host culture. This means that there is no complete assimilation or separation in the adjustment process within this group.

When we look at Kim's processes (2001) we observe a positive result in all areas for the Erasmus+ participants:

¹⁶ Oberg, 1954; Lysgaard, 1955; Berry, 1985.

¹⁷ Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010.

- Functionally suited: the participants are capable of initiating a cultural interaction with a representative of both the culture of the host country and other cultures in the Erasmus cocoon.
- Psychologically healthy: the participants to a lesser degree experience emotional problems brought on by stressful moments during the acculturation. The Erasmus cocoon is a contributing factor therein, because the participants are in a group of their peers. In addition, the stress moments and culture shock are present to a lesser extent as they are taking part in an international programme and their stay is limited to a surveyable period.
- Intercultural identity: the participants gradually develop a hybrid identity, i.e., they are developing their intercultural competences in a positive sense by means of the experiences gained abroad and the contact with various cultures during their stay.

Of course, this conclusion only applies to the findings with regard to the group of Erasmus+ students in this study, even though other studies conducted into international students abroad have yielded similar results. The length of stay plays an important role in the intercultural adjustment process: the longer the length of stay, the more advanced the development of this process will be. This also holds true for Erasmus+ participants; students who spend longer than three to six months abroad may undergo different processes than the participants in this study.

3.9 Conclusion 'H3 – During the Foreign Stay'

The majority of the students in this study stayed abroad for between three and six months. The experiences of the students who took part in this study multiple times show that they go through multiple phases during their stay. During the initial phase most of them felt good to very good. They are enthusiastic about new experiences, meet new people and engage in enjoyable activities. However, despite their positive state of mind, they are also nervous. Will they easily make new friends? Has everything been properly arranged? Won't they feel homesick? These are the kinds of thoughts that can cause tensions in this phase.

In the intermediate phase, after a few weeks, some of the participants will experience a dip or stress. This may be brought on by an intensive study or internship programme, expectations that have to be adjusted or personal problems. During this intermediate phase they will continue to engage in enjoyable activities. They meet new people, explore the other culture, and go out and about. The students say they primarily socialize with other international students. They find themselves in an Erasmus cocoon, as it were, with people who are in the same situation and are also motivated to gain new experiences. These activities will continue in this fashion up to and including the final phase, in which many participants tell us they don't feel like going home and find it difficult to say goodbye to their new friends and the culture they have grown so familiar with.

During their foreign stay, the students in the study hardly formulate any new goals. They do, however, adjust their goals slightly or not at all. In practice, it proved difficult for some participants to realise all of their goals because they also wanted to spend time on enjoyable activities or socialised with different people than they had expected beforehand.

The educational staff in this study went abroad for one week or less. Their state of mind was therefore more positive and more stable since theirs was a surveyable period of time and they primarily participated in a fixed programme. The staff in this study say that the enjoyable contacts and the activities contribute to their positive experience.

4 After the Foreign Stay

In the period following the foreign stay, eight students by means of the Backpack Questionnaire submitted a specific report about the experiences that made a *deep impression* on them, and they took home to the Netherlands 'in their backpacks'. They also told us whether their foreign stay had changed them, and if so, in what regard.

In the course of this study, its focus shifted from this ex-post evaluation to following the foreign stay. The group of eight students is quite small and thus not representative of the broad target group of Erasmus+ participants. However, the eight participants together submitted more than 30 highly memorable experiences. It is worth while to share their experiences via this report as an illustration of their reflection on their foreign experiences after returning home.

4.1 Positive Experiences in Hindsight

The experiences reported by the students are generally very positive. They can be divided into a number of categories.

Some of the students had special experiences in nature during their foreign stay. With some of them, this was the first thing that came to mind:

"I was in North Norway and booked a six-hour dogsled ride. The ride back was particularly impressive because it was almost completely dark, the full moon lit the fjord, and the Northern Lights were visible dancing above our heads." – university student in Norway

"I went on vacation with two friends to the mountains of Morocco where we slept and hiked for two days. Nature was very special there." – university student in Morocco

It was also very special to **learn** additional skills during the stay, such as a language:

"I took a Finnish language course. I really enjoyed it." – HPE student in Finland

Many social activities were also reported in which the contacts with other young people and colleagues take centre stage. For instance, **housing arrangements**:

"The first experience I would like to mention is living in a MRU Student House (in Lithuania). I will always carry this experience with me because it was very, very different from arrangements at home in the Netherlands. There was, for instance, no kitchenware whatsoever when we arrived. The building looked suspiciously like a big camp site where you live with a roof over your head." – university student in Lithuania

The special **meetings** that took place:

"A friend of mine made a vlog of each month. From time to time, we would meet with a whole group, where people would bring national dishes that we'd eat together while watching the vlog. In this way we learned a lot about each others' national dishes." – university student in Lithuania

"Each exchange, the local student association would organise 'Erasmus Got Talent', which had the same concept as the tv shows. If you want you can perform with an act, and the best act wins, selected by a jury and the audience." – university student in Lithuania

The trips they went on:

“We and a bunch of Erasmus students went on a cruise to Stockholm. These weren’t just Erasmus students from Finland but also from the Baltic states and that was big fun!” – HPE student in Finland

“We went from Lithuania to Kiev with a group of 14 people. The group included people from all kinds of different countries: Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Lithuania and Portugal.” – university student in Lithuania

And the work experiences they gained:

“I and some other employees took a plane to visit the client and explain what my job would be.” – University student in Norway

“At the end of my internship, I received permission to give a presentation about my results to employees who had worked with me.” – university student in Norway

4.2 Less Positive Experiences in Hindsight

The students also report less-positive experiences, but they are far outnumbered by the positive ones. They include experiences related to things that have to be arranged locally but prove to be complicated:

“Finding a good gym was very difficult, because I had to get a special certificate to be able to register, and there was a long queue.” – HPE student in Italy

“It was a big hassle to rent a car and driving in a country you don’t know isn’t always enjoyable either.” – HPE student in Italy

Saying goodbye was often hard as well:

“My parents had been over to visit for a few days and I was saying goodbye to them because they were going back home the next day. It was a highly emotional farewell because I found it really difficult that they were leaving.”

– University student in Morocco

“At some point of course, you have to say goodbye to the great friends you made during the exchange. In our group, we all went to the airport together to see each other off. That resulted in quite a large number of very emotional moments.” – university student in Lithuania

4.3 What did the Students take away from their Stay Abroad?

The students got acquainted with **different cultures** and learned much from it:

- “Spoke English a lot and got better acquainted with the Finnish culture.”
- “I discovered how different each country’s culture can be.”

They also learned practical things:

- “That it is more practical to just travel on the trains in this country, even when it might take longer.”
- “It was good to see that my presentation was found interesting.”

They come back to nature and the climate:

- “Nature was very special.”
- “It really affected me being able to see humpbacks and marine mammals from up close.”

- “To see the lightly snowed summits of the Sierra Nevada and hear stories from locals about the increasing heat in Spain, it makes you that much more aware of the effects of climate change.”
- “During my course, a Portuguese participant told me she was collaborating in a sustainability project to collect plastic waste from the sea. They use the plastic to build paths on Madeira.”

And they bring forward certain **insights** (life lessons) they gained:

- “It is important to be open and quickly introduce new people to each other. It makes everybody feel at home that much quicker”
- “That I don’t need a lot of luxury to be able to live somewhere.”
- “That it makes no difference where you, as long as the people around you are nice.”
- “People will always appreciate it when you get out of your comfort zone, no matter how scary it may seem.”

One of the students says that the impact of the foreign experience only made itself truly felt upon their return home. The contrast between the newly experienced culture and the familiar culture proved to be bigger than anticipated beforehand. In scientific research, this phenomenon is known as the *re-entry shock*. I.e., the culture shock someone experiences after being immersed in another culture for a long period of time. Among other things, they find that as the result of their experiences they have developed further than their familiar social environment, and that it is difficult to fully share the experience with those who stayed at home (Presbitero, 2016).

“Before I left, I didn’t expect that upon my return I would be confronted with my own development to such a degree. It felt like time had stood still at home while I had taken a huge leap. I hadn’t prepared myself at all for this, because you think that going home is different from the other way around.”

– University student in Spain

4.4 Reflecting on Goals

All students set themselves goals before they set out on their foreign trip. Half of these eight students achieved their goals, the others partly realized theirs. They gave the following reasons:

- “I had many goals and I certainly realized part of them.”
- “I wanted to go on multiple trips, but eventually only made two.”
- “I was unable to realize some goals in this short period of time. Such as learning Norwegian.”

These students slightly overestimated what they would be able to do during their foreign stay. This matches the experiences shared by students during their foreign stay (3.6).

4.5 Changes

Nearly all students report being changed by their foreign stay. They underwent a major personal development:

- “Socializing has become much easier for me. It’s become really easy to cope with different cultures, languages and personalities. Generally speaking, I believe that an exchange allows you to discover who you would really like to be. I want to live my life on the basis of that ideal.”
- “I’ve become much more self-reliant and better able to cope with difficult situations.”
- “I’ve become much more open. And I’ve become more self-reliant as a result of living on my own. I think that now I already know more about who I am and what I want. And the extent of my social skills.
- “I’ve become a better judge of character.”

Students also report experiencing professional growth. They have primarily become more self-assured.

- “I’m more aware of what I want and have become more self-assured about my professional skills”.
- “I have grown in my talents and have become more self-assured”.

One educational worker tells us in an in-depth interview that after multiple Erasmus+ experiences abroad, his intercultural skills are noticeably improving. Even though educational staff programmes are not comparable with the impact of a student exchange lasting several months, this form of international acquaintance contributes to the further development of intercultural skills. People come into contact with other cultures, become familiar with the local situation and exchange information.

“I studied in the US and Sweden via Erasmus+, and later went to Lithuania and Spain as an educational worker. I find that the more you come into contact with people, the more open your attitude becomes and the more your intercultural communication skills keep developing. Foreign countries continue to attract me and adjusting is no problem for me. During my study trips I learned the most by far from the other Europeans in the group.”

During the programmes, educational staff also meet people they stay in touch with in the long term. There is enough room for socializing outside of the programme, which in some cases leads to a friendship.

“I met a Spaniard from Sevilla during a programme in Lithuania. It was a highly intensive programme in which you spent whole days with an international group. So, plenty of opportunity to get to know each other well. I had a good click with that Spaniard and later visited him in the south of Spain when I was in the area.”

In the interviews and the vlogs, the educational staff in this study talk about how they shared inspiring examples from the foreign educational practice with their colleagues at home. In addition, they have also made valuable contacts among international colleagues from the host country as well as among international participants from other countries. A number of educational staff stated their intention to maintain these contacts for the purpose of exploring further possibilities for exchanges and new projects. One of the vloggers immediately went to work on the idea when still abroad, using his vlog to address his fellow directors. The excerpt is presented below by way of illustration.

Excerpt from the vlog of a primary school director filmed during his study trip to Norway

“This is a special vlog for my director colleagues. My request to them is to seriously consider joining a trip abroad. This could be with teaching staff, students, or both – for instance, via eTwinning¹⁸. But you could also simply join a course for teaching staff, for example, an IT training course abroad. I’m interested in two possibilities that we sort of developed here. The first possibility entails you submitting an application, that’s called KA1. You then go abroad to attend a training course intended for a number of education staff. Everything will be taken care of, for instance IT and digitalisation in other countries, to learn and later pass on to your children. That is one project. The other project is a little more complicated. It involves multiple student exchanges per year and making contacts in other countries. My question is whether there are schools abroad and within our foundation who are willing to join me. I will organise the exchange, and you can benefit from that. Don’t worry about the obstacles, everything will be taken care of financially, and in terms of content we will have to see what we want to do.”

¹⁸ eTwinning is an online community for schools in over 40 European countries.

4.6 Conclusion 'H4 – After the Foreign Stay'

Looking back on their stay after their return from abroad, a small group of respondents shared some of their experiences in the Backpack Questionnaire. They primarily share positive memories of the activities, the country, the culture, and the people. Most of them found it quite difficult to say goodbye and, upon their return home, the impact of the foreign stay proved greater than they had expected beforehand. Consistent with their goals and motivations they had come up with prior to their foreign stay, the participants afterward reported to have undergone a major personal development. The educational staff in this study further extended their international network and took home with them inspiring examples from abroad, and in some cases are motivated by their foreign experience to further explore the possibilities for exchanges and international projects.

5 Discussion

For the purpose of this study, we approached the participants from the last quarter of 2019 via the institutions that were willing to cooperate. As a result, we were able to include the students and staff who were abroad during the autumn of 2019, as well as a group that went abroad in the first quarter of 2020. The participants were completely at liberty to choose which of the research tools they wanted to participate in and how much time they wanted to spend on it, according to the amount of time they had available for their participation. The focus of the study was on gathering respondent experiences at multiple moments during their stay to gain insight into their activities, state of mind and development. We were quite successful with the different tools we employed.

We had hoped that more participants in this study would share their experiences through vlogs. We received a total of 15 applications, out of which only a third would eventually actively vlog. The five of them made 34 vlogs during their stay abroad. The online training course, the remote counselling by the Saus! Vlogging experts, and the contacts with the researchers all failed to persuade the other interested people. It is, of course, quite daunting to record your personal experiences on film and subsequently share them with strangers. Vlogging of course also takes time. Shots are not always immediately successful and not need to be edited afterward. One of the vloggers, who made seven vlogs of between 10 and 21 minutes each, talks in the vlogs about how much time often goes into editing and uploading. These are the reasons why for some people the threshold for vlogging proved to be too high.

Recommendation approach vlogging course

A great online vlogging course is now available that the NA can continue to offer its participants in future. Our recommendation is to *start the vlogging course even before the participants have left the Netherlands*. Unfortunately, this was not possible within the timeframe of this study, but for an effective use of the vlogging course created by Saus! Digital Productions we readily share this approach with the NA.

Over the past years, Saus! has organised workshops for a variety of organisations in which the participants were prepared for, and coached in, making their own videos. The educational institutions of the Erasmus+ participants can opt to offer their participants a vlogging workshop prior to their foreign experience. The advantage being that the vloggers get to know each other beforehand as well as the presence of experienced trainers. Firstly, the participants are offered an opportunity to take their first steps in the presence of experts who can lend assistance when required and keep a watchful eye. They learn the techniques, but also receive tips on storytelling. For instance, you don't always have to be cheerful and hyper in a vlog, an occasional moment of frustration is quite acceptable. Secondly, the vlogging participants get to meet each other before going abroad, creating a sense of community among the participants who, just like you, are going to record their experiences. A contact from the educational institution may also be present; they are following a train-the-trainer course so they can in future provide quality coaching to the vloggers from their institution (and possibly become vloggers themselves). While abroad, the community can be sustained by sharing the vlogs with each other in a safe online environment. Also enjoyable is to bring the group back together after their return in conclusion of their foreign experience and have them show each other their best vlogs and share their experiences. The vlogs present a visual record of the valuable experiences that can be shared with future Erasmus+ participants and provide insight into the world of Erasmus+.¹⁹

Recommendations

"I think it's really fantastic that Erasmus+ has made it possible for me to be here. If it weren't for Erasmus+, I would not be here now."

A great set-up was developed for the study as well, with three complementary tools (questionnaires), an accompanying diary, and an online dashboard for sending out the tools (including invitations and reminders), keeping a record of the responses and participants' data up to date.

¹⁹ For more information on this approach, please contact the vlogging experts at Saus! Digital Productions.

This time we sent the invitations manually, but it is also possible to fully automate the process (in case the study were to be repeated), so as to allow a sizeable group of students and staff to easily participate in the research.

Research panel

An important sticking point in the execution of the study was the *multi-stage selection*. We could approach the students and staff only through their educational institutions. This took time and was not conducive to the response. In order to ensure a greater reach in future, it is important to generate a list of participants through the educational institutions, which would allow the researchers to approach the participants directly to act as a research panel. It is surprising that the 50 educational institutions who were willing to participate in the study eventually generated a mere 140 registrations.

We recommend that in future we take a close look at the agreements and conditions as set down in the subsidy agreements of the participating educational institutions. In this regard, it could be helpful to combine forces and enable the institutions to also use the information from the evaluative part of the research. In many cases, the educational institutions themselves conduct evaluations among their participants as well. In this way, the Erasmus+ participants will not be overburdened by the various parties.

Research tools

From our experience, we can state that the research tools were effective. Automation of the process would certainly be helpful but is mainly applicable if the research is to take place more often. We formulated an effective mix of closed and open questions that gave us the desired information and were easy to answer for the participants. The only area of concern is that we may have somewhat overburdened the participants, despite their being able to choose which tool they wanted to participate in, which is why we recommend to:

- Have the duration of the study properly match the period of the participants' foreign stay. Ideally, the first group would receive the first part of the study in August and the last part in January at the latest (depending on the length of stay). The second group starts in December and ends in July at the latest.
- Have all participants fill in the Baseline Questionnaire prior to the foreign stay.
- In case of students who are abroad for a longer period of time:
 - Have them fill in the Update Questionnaire multiple times during their foreign stay. This places only a minor burden on the respondents.
 - Have them fill in the Backpack Questionnaire only once, after their foreign stay. Filling in this questionnaire seems to be too great a burden and often leads to many duplications in the answers. The ideal moment for this questionnaire would seem to be when the students are back in the Netherlands. So, we would have to take into account any plans they might have for additional travel after the end of their official foreign stay.
- In case of staff who are on a short foreign stay:
 - After their foreign stay has ended, have them fill in just the Backpack Questionnaire and only once.

Backpack

The Backpack Questionnaire has now come under some pressure, even though it has resulted in highly interesting information about the students who filled it in. We were much pleased with the option that allowed participants to download their answers and digitally save them for their own perusal, but very few students availed themselves thereof. Perhaps, we should bring it to their attention more emphatically so as to make participants aware of the option to use this tool for keeping a reflective report they can also use for their studies.

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Appendix 1 Baseline, Update & Backpack questionnaires

Baseline Questionnaire

Question 1. Are you student or staff?

1. Student
2. Staff
3. Other, namely: <fill in>

Question 2. Has your foreign stay already started?

1. Yes
2. No

Question 3. What is the length of foreign stay?

1. One week or less
2. 1 week – 1 month
3. 1 – 2 months
4. 2 – 3 months
5. 3 – 4 months
6. 4 – 5 months
7. 5 – 6 months
8. Longer than 6 months

Question 4. Which country will you stay in? Name of country:
<fill in>

Question 5.

Which town will you stay in?
Name of town: <fill in>

Question 6. Will you be there alone or with other students/staff you know?

1. Alone
2. With other students/staff I already know
3. Don't know yet
4. Other, namely: <fill in>

Question 7. How will you be housed?

1. In a student apartment or student residence
2. Lodging with local people
3. In a hotel, boarding house, or B&B
4. Don't know yet
5. Other, namely: <fill in>

Question 8. Is this your first foreign trip via Erasmus+?

1. Yes
2. No

Question 9. <Only to be asked when question 8 = 2, if not continue with question 10.>

How often have you been on a foreign stay via Erasmus+?

Number of times:

Question 10. What exactly are you going to do during your foreign stay? What will be your main activity? Answer as specifically as possible.

My main activity will be: <fill in>

Question 11. And what is your main motivation to go abroad?

(- open question -)

Question 12. We will now go a little deeper into your motives and goals for your journey. Did you set down any goals in writing ahead of your foreign stay?

1. Yes, I wrote them down
2. They're not on paper, but in my head
3. No, I didn't

Question 13. <Only to be asked when the answer to question 12 = 1 or 2, if not, continue with question 16.>

What do these goals pertain to?

You can fill in more than one answer.

1. My study
2. My job
3. My personal development
4. Other, namely: <fill in>

Question 14. < Only to be asked when the answer to question 13 = 1 or 2, if not, continue with question 16.>
We are curious about the goals you formulated with regard to your study or job.

Please briefly describe them below.

If you have more than three goals, fill in the three most important ones.

1. Goal 1: <fill in>
2. Goal 2: <fill in>
3. Goal 3: <fill in>

Question 15. Did you consult with the institution abroad where you will be studying or going on an internship?

1. Yes
2. No

Question 16. < Only to be asked when the answer to question 12 = 3 OR the answer to question 13 = 3, if not continue with question 17.>

On a personal level, what do you hope to learn or achieve during your foreign stay?

1. Personal goal 1: <fill in>
2. Personal goal 2: <fill in>
3. Personal goal 3: <fill in>

Question 17. <Not compulsory.>

Do you want to clarify your goals or what you want to learn? (- open question -)

Question 18. What do you look forward to the most now that you are going or have just gone abroad? (- open question -)

Question 19. Are there things that make you feel insecure and/or nervous?

1. No, nothing!

2. I'm apprehensive/nervous about: <fill in>

Question 20. < Only to be asked when the answer to question 1 = 1, if not, continue with question 23.>

What are you going to miss the most about your life in the Netherlands while abroad?

1. Nothing!
2. I'm going to miss the most: <fill in>

Question 21. How often do you expect to return home while abroad?

1. I won't go back
2. Once
3. Twice
4. Three times or more often

Question 22. How often do you think acquaintances (family, friends) will visit you abroad?

1. Not at all
2. Once
3. Twice
4. Three times or more often

Question 23. <Not compulsory.>

These were the questions. Is there anything else you would like to share with the researchers about your Erasmus+ foreign stay?

(- open question -)

Thank you so much for filling out the questionnaire!

Update Questionnaire

Great that you're once again taking the time to

fill in this questionnaire!

Question 1. How did you feel in the past week?

Choose one of the following five smileys: very good (green)/good (green)/sort of okay (yellow)/so-so(red)/ bad (red).

Question 2. What did you enjoy or enjoy very much in the past week?

1. Activity/experience 1:
2. Activity/experience 2:
3. Activity/experience 3:
4. Nothing enjoyable or very enjoyable happened.

<They don't necessarily have to fill in three things, one or two is okay too.>

Question 3. What, if anything, was not so enjoyable or not at all enjoyable in the past week?

1. Activity/experience 1:
2. Activity/experience 2:
3. Activity/experience 3:
4. There was nothing really that was less enjoyable

Question 4. <Only to be asked if a red smiley is filled in, if not continue with question five.>

You felt so-so or bad in the past week. Do you intend to do anything to address the situation?

1. Yes, namely:
2. No

Question 5. Optional. Which of the following activities did you engage in in the past week?

Short list of activities: contact with your coach, contact with your parent/parents, contact with your steady boyfriend or girlfriend, contact with friends in the Netherlands, with someone from the country you are staying in where you went to dinner, et cetera.

Question 6. Not compulsory. These were the questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (- open question -)

Thank you very much for filling in the questionnaire!

Backpack Questionnaire

In advance: The 'Backpack' has been elaborated as a questionnaire that is administered one or multiple times (among part of the students and staff; upon signing up).

Introduction

You obviously experience a lot during a foreign stay. A lot of enjoyable things (we hope), but maybe also some things not all that enjoyable. Maybe many things that you will soon forget, but most likely also a lot of things that make a big impression and that you will remember for a long, long time. This Backpack Questionnaire is all about the things that have made an indelible impression on you. Things that you will take home in your backpack when you return to the Netherlands. Think of activities or experiences in your free time that were really special or confrontational, that taught you something ... Students who go abroad for a longer period of time are approached several times during their stay about filling in the questionnaire (during and/or after their stay). Staff who go abroad on a short stay are approached just the once to fill in the questionnaire. (basically, after the trip).

Question 1. Are you a student or staff?

1. Student
2. Staff
3. Other, namely: <fill in>

Question 2. Which of the following applies to you?

1. I'm on a short foreign stay (one week or less) and have already returned
2. I'm on a short foreign stay (one week or less) and am still abroad
3. I'm on a long foreign stay (longer than a week and have already returned)
4. I'm on a long foreign stay (longer than a week) and am still abroad
5. I have yet to leave -> end of questionnaire

Explanatory question 3.

Describe below five activities or experiences that made a big impression on you during your foreign stay. IF they are more than five, choose the five most important ones. You can also describe fewer than five. If you are still abroad, describe your activities and/or experiences thus far. If you've already returned, describe activities and experiences during the whole stay.

Question 3a. the first activity or experience I want to mention is: Short description: <fill in>

Question 3b. can you describe the activity or experience in more detail? What did you do, what did actually happen? (- open question -)

Question 3c. Why was this so special to you? Reflection/what did you take from it? (- open question -)

Question 3d. Was this something that was enjoyable/very enjoyable for you or difficult/very difficult?

1. Very enjoyable
2. Enjoyable
3. Difficult
4. Very difficult
5. Other, namely: <fill in>

<Below follow the identical questions 4 till 7. You can skip them if you want>

Question 8. When you started your foreign stay you probably formulated a number of goals for yourself, is this correct?

1. Yes
2. No

Question 9. <Only to be asked if the answer to question 2 = 1 or 3 AND the answer to question 8 = 1, if not continue with question 11>

Did you realize these goals?

1. Yes
2. Partly yes, partly no
3. No

Question 10. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 9 = 2 or 3, if not continue with question 11>

Why did you fail to realise your goals either partly or completely?

Can you give a brief explanation? (- open question -)

Question. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 2 = 4 AND the answer to question 8 = 1, if not continue with question 13>

How successful have you been so far in realising these goals?

1. Yes, I'm doing fine (I'm on schedule)
2. Partly yes, partly no
3. No, it's not going according to plan

Question 12. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 11 = 2 or 3, if not continue with question 13.>

Why haven't you been successful or partly successful (so far) in realising your goals?

Can you give a brief explanation? (-open question -)

Question 13. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 2 = 4, if not continue with question 17.>

Did you, now that you are abroad, formulate any new goals for yourself? Did you adjust any of your goals?

1. Yes, I have formulated new goals
2. Yes, I have adjusted goals
3. No, neither

Question 14. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 13 = 1 or 2, if not continue with question 15.>

Can you give some examples of new and/or adjusted goals?

1. Example 1: <fill in>
2. Example 2: <fill in>
3. Example 3: <fill in>
4. No, I have no example

Question 15. <What are your most important plans for the coming weeks in light of your personal goals?>

1. Plan 1: <fill in>
2. Plan 2: <fill in>
3. Plan 3: <fill in>
4. I have no particular plans

Question 16. <Only to be answered if the answer to question 2 = 3 or 4, if not continue with question 17.>

This maybe a difficult question: but do you find you've changed during your foreign stay?

If so, can you try and describe how you've changed?

1. No, I haven't really changed
2. Yes, I have changed: <fill in>

Question 17. <Only to be asked if the answer to question 2 = 1 or 3, if not, continue with question 19.>

Which of the following activities did you engage in during your foreign stay? And whom with? Was this an activity with: one or two people from the Netherlands/one or more local people/I was alone/Did not engage in activity.

Activities: I visited somebody at home / people came over to my place/I went to dinner at someone's house/I went for drinks in a bar or restaurant/I did something cultural (went to a theatre, museum, concert, film, festival, lecture ...)/I did sports/I went for walks in the city and/or nature/I did something else, namely: <fill in>

Question 18. And during your foreign stay, did you have:

1. Contact with relatives in the Netherlands
2. Contact with friends and/or acquaintances from the Netherlands
3. Contact with your counsellor in the Netherlands
4. Dutch relatives come visit you
5. Dutch friends and/or acquaintances come visit you
6. No, none of the above

Question 19. <Not compulsory. These were the questions.>

Is there anything else that you would like to share with the researchers regarding your Erasmus+ foreign stay? Or about another subject? (-open question -)

Thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire!

Appendix 2 Action Plan Saus! Vlogging Course

By Saus! digital productions

Why vlog?

In addition to the weekly group discussions and the Backpack Questionnaire, vlogs are employed to complete this research. Vlogging has as an added value that we can quite literally take a look at the life of the participants. This why we ask them to take the viewer along on *interesting activities, for instance intercultural ones* and to make sure they grab their camera *whenever they feel friction, either positive or negative*. This could, for instance, be just before or after a first day of work or study. The participants are given a lot of latitude in creating their own content to make the vlogs as personal as possible. We provide the necessary structure in the workshop and handouts.

Frequency and duration

- Make frequent recordings so you can post the stories and experiences as 'fresh' as possible; This makes for a routine.
- Each vlog lasts between one and five minutes
- The duration of the course is three months, this amounts to around 12 recordings.
- At the end of the period, we ask the student to edit the 12 vlogs into one 15 to 25-minute vlog per person. This means we ask them to select the most notable footage from the 12-week period.

Workshop

We prepare the participants by means of a workshop that is later made available online for the participants who could not be there at the start. In the workshop, we discuss the following points:

1. What makes a vlog a good vlog?
2. Technique: recording
3. Technique: editing
4. Practical matters
5. Content
6. Practice

We create a vlog ourselves in which we explain everything on the basis of examples. We present this vlog during the workshop, but it can also later be watched online. During the workshop, we distribute handouts comprising a summary of everything discussed. The handouts can also be found online.

Coaching

Once the students start vlogging, we ask all of them to send in a vlog after the second week. On the one hand to see if they are succeeding and provide feedback whenever necessary, but also to keep tabs on the process. The most interesting vlogs can possibly be shared at a later moment with the other participants (with the vloggers' permission), so as to enthuse and inspire all participants.

Appendix 3 Hand-out Online Course ‘Vlogging with Erasmus+’

The best way to approach vlogging is explained in this online course. The course consists of five modules of about two to eight minutes each. You can quite easily take all five modules at once, but they can also be used as a reference work.

Module 1 | Inspiration

- What is a vlog?
- Examples of vlogs

Module 2 | Content: What are you going to vlog about?

- The content of your vlogs
- Preparation

Module 3 | Practical Matters

- Consent
- Equipment
- Prepare yourself properly!

Module 4 | Recording Techniques

- Audio
- Light
- Camera
- Position
- Length

Module 5 | Editing Technique

- Step-by-step editing
- Free editing software
- Cutting

Background Information Study Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged

Module 1 | Inspiration

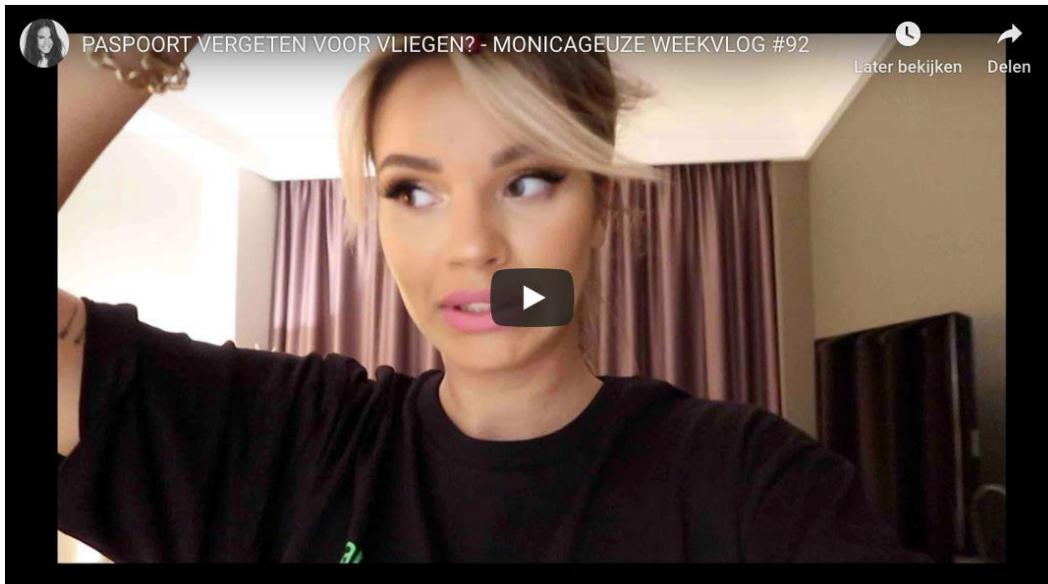
What is a vlog?

What is a vlog?

Vlog is the abbreviation of video web log. It quite simply means creating an online diary with a video camera. You have undoubtedly seen a vlog at one time or another, but we have collected a number of good vlogs for your inspiration.

Below, we list the elements that make a vlog interesting to watch:

- 🔗 [Nienke Plas](#) shows us her private life and uses much humour.
- 🔗 [Monica Geuzen](#) talks openly and honestly about her personal life.
- 🔗 [Anna Nooshin](#) often interviews other celebrities for her vlog.
- 🔗 [Politievlogger Jan-Willem](#) allows us a peek into his exciting professional life.



Module 2 | Content: What are you going to vlog about?

In this module, you learn more about the subjects you can discuss in your vlogs.

Subjects of your vlogs

The Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged study explores how you develop both on a personal and professional level as a result of the programme's foreign experience. We therefore ask you specifically to record on camera:

Introduction

Who are you, where are you staying abroad and what is the goal of your foreign stay? We would like to see where you're staying, your host family, block of student flats or apartments, etc. Don't forget to include shots of your friends, your internship or university, unpacking your suitcase or the first time you use public transport to go to your internship or university class. Be creative!

Activities (intercultural, etc.)

How about, for instance, ...

- Having dinner at your fellow students' houses, people you've met, or, for instance, street food (something you've never had before).
- Before or after a social activity (national holiday)
- Before or after your class or workday
- Going out in your new city!
- Positive or negative experiences you have during your stay. For instance:
 - Not knowing anybody yet
 - Evenings on which you happen to have nothing to do
 - New people whom you meet
 - Working/learning in a different work/educational culture
 - Language barrier
 - Other norms and values/customs
 - Homesickness
 - Social contacts/ relationships

You can vlog before or after an event. Tip: Always discuss one topic per recording.

Questions you should answer in your vlog

As this element is the most important for the study, we ask you to always answer the following questions on camera in these videos:

- Situation: what is/was the situation?
- Task: what is/was expected of you, what is/was your role?
- Action: what specifically are you doing or have you done and what are you saying or have you said?
- Result: what is/was the result?
- Reflection: what does this experience mean to you, both personally and professionally?

Preparation

Regardless of whether you want to show an interesting activity or an experience after it happened, it is always important to think in advance about what you want to tell and show to your audience:

Keep your video's message at the forefront of your mind so you do not digress.

If the activity involves other people, it is always advisable to let them know you are going to vlog about it (On this subject also see Module 3 | Practical Matters below).

Module 3 | Practical Matters

Consent

Respect the privacy of the people around you into consideration. You can only record them with their express permission. It's easiest to film strangers from behind from a distance.

Equipment

You can vlog using a mobile phone, tablet, or a photo or film camera. As long as you can be clearly seen and heard and you can store your material without a water mark, you're okay.

Prepare yourself well!

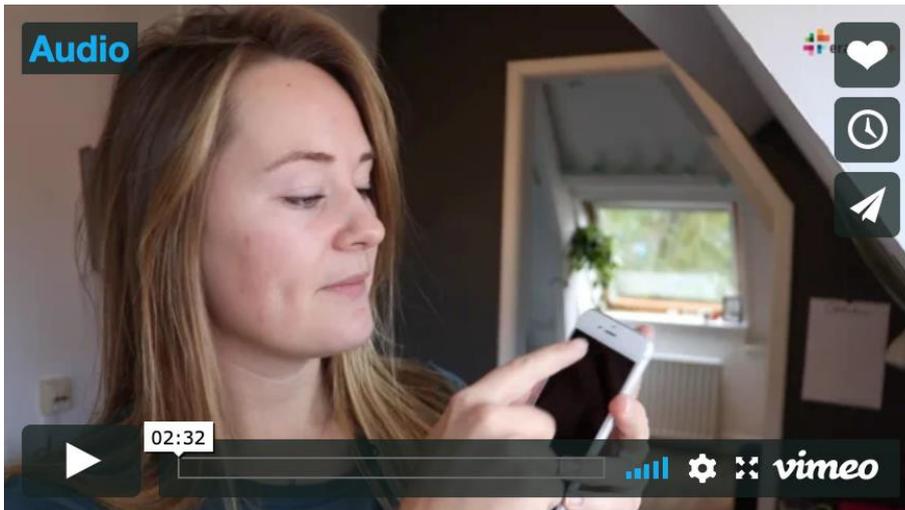
Make sure your camera is fully charged and you have plenty of storage capacity to avoid having to stop halfway through your story.

Module 4 | Recording Techniques

Audio

Watch the [instructional video](#).

- Speak Just a little louder than you would normally do.
- Make sure that the ambient noise (traffic, people talking, music, wind) does not interfere too much.
- Speak into the microphone.
- Make a test recording to make sure you can be heard.
- Audio is difficult to fix afterwards!



Light

Watch the [instructional video](#).

- Make sure your head is not over or underexposed.
- Use daylight if at all possible, but make sure no shadows fall on your face.
- Make sure that the light source is behind the camera, instead of behind you.
- With a smart phone, you can tap on your head so as to adjust the lighting to it.



Camera

Watch the [instructional video](#).

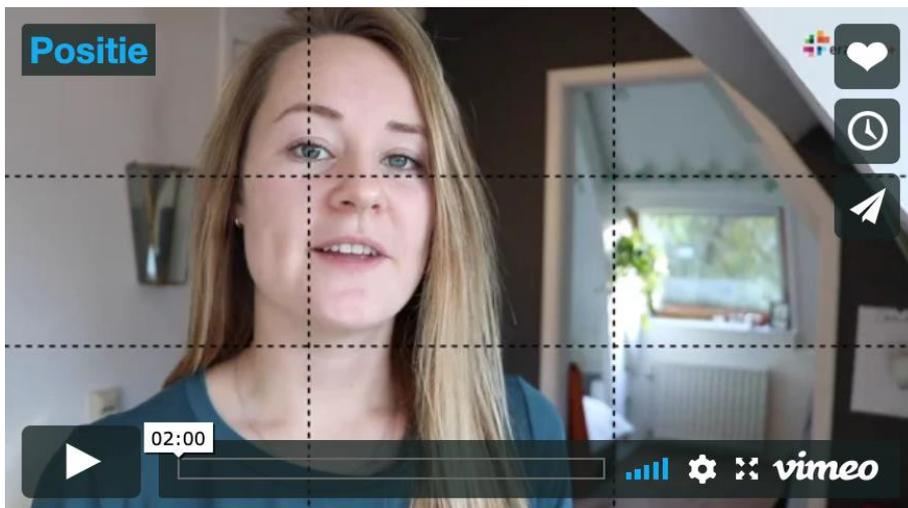
- Always film horizontally.
- Use the best camera on your smart phone, this usually the hindmost one, so you won't see yourself on the screen (handy, because this means you're looking straight into the camera).
- Place the camera at eye level.
- Keep the image stable by using a tripod, home-made holder, selfie stick or a supported arm.
- You can also ask someone else to film you!
- Don't walk or move when you're saying something important.
- Make sure you are in focus.



Position

Watch the [instructional video](#).

- Don't stand in the exact middle of the frame, but a little to the side.
- Don't completely fill the frame with your face, but don't stand too far away either.
- Leave some space open in the frame.
- Look at the camera, not at your screen (except to occasionally check whether the recording is still going well).



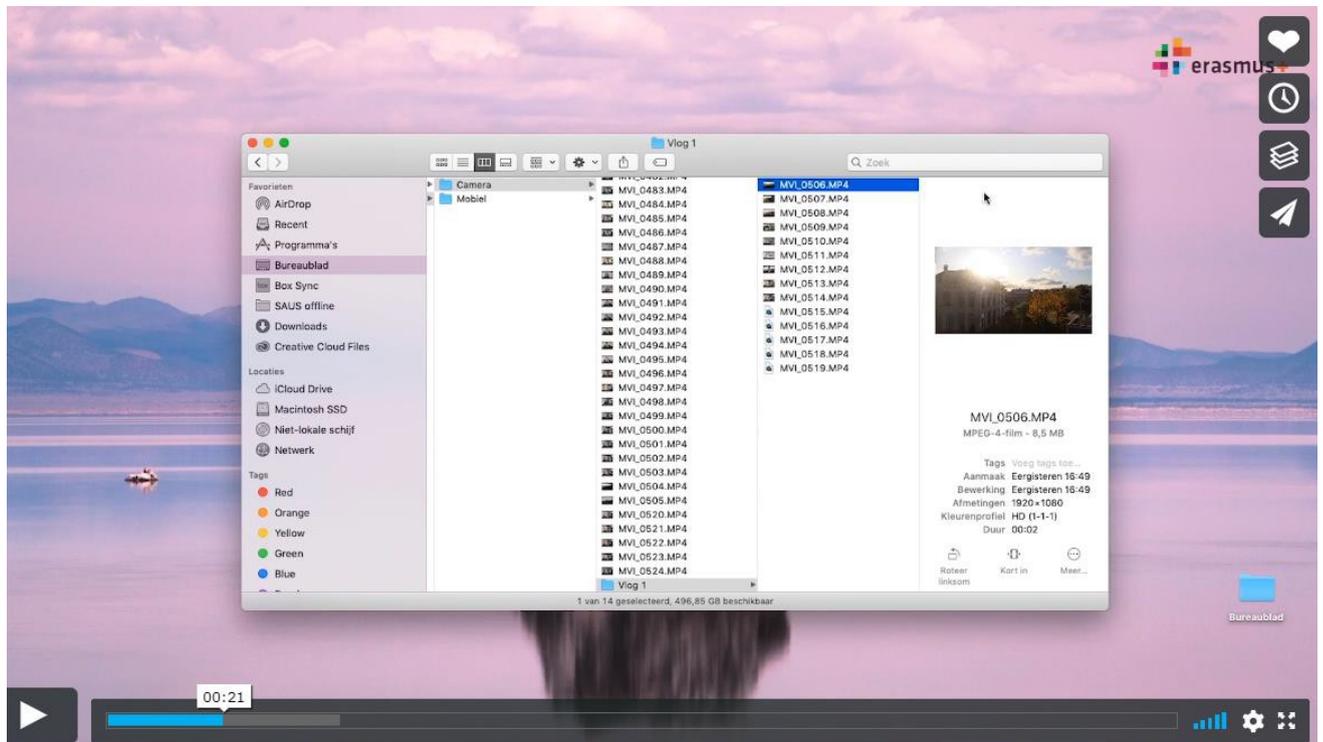
Length

- Don't exceed a maximum of 5 minutes per vlog.
- Record a sufficient number of images so you can tell a whole story.

Module 5 | Editing Technique

Step-by-step editing

Watch the [instruction video](#).



1. Saving

Save all videos in a folder on your mobile or desktop. Make things easy on yourself and give the videos a fitting name and sort them by week.

2. Importing files

It is important to first import the correct video files. If necessary, connect your smart phone, tablet, video camera, SD card, flash drive or external hard disk containing the video files to your computer.

In the menu, click on *Files/Import files*. Next, browse the explorer to the correct location to find the video files.

Bear in mind that it is quite often not possible to import video files directly from an iPhone or iPad. First store the media files locally and then add them after all.

In addition to video files, you can also import music and images.

3. Timeline

In the folder *Project files* click on a video file and keep the mouse button depressed to move the segment to the timeline. Next, release the mouse button. You have now added a video file to the video editor.

In this way, you can quite easily put video segments in sequence and determine the order of the eventual film.

Do you want to remove a video file from the timeline? Select the right segment on the timeline and click on *Delete*.

In addition to video files, you also add audio files, for instance music, to the timeline. You use a different track for audio. Is the timeline growing too long, causing part of it to disappear off screen? You then click on the minus sign on the righthand side above the timeline to zoom out. This gives you more overview of which segments are in the provisional edit.

4. Trimming Video clips

You can trim video clips on the timeline to leave out boring footage. There is an alternative way of trimming a video clip, i.e., by splitting a segment. You do this by setting a starting point and an endpoint.

Different editing programmes use different tools to do this. YouTube can be helpful here.

5. Changeovers

When you string a number of video clips together, the result will be rather abrupt changeovers. It is better to have the segments merge seamlessly into each other. Click on a changeover and keep the mouse button depressed to select the desired position on the timeline. This is possible 'on top of' existing video segments. With most templates, you add the changeover right at the start of a video clip. Another way of creating a seamless changeover between two segments is by slightly fading the images. When a clip ends, the image slowly disappears from the video. The reverse applies at the start of a segment. With the righthand mouse button click on a clip and go to *Fade/Whole clip*. Here you have to choose between either *fade in and out* (quick) or *fade in and out* (slow).

6. Effects

You use *Brightness* if you think the images are a little too dark. The *Colour saturation* effect is also interesting because you can use it to create brighter colours. You can apply an effect by positioning it above a video clip on the timeline. The values of these effects can often be adjusted to suit your taste. That, by the way, is not always all that simple, but it's certainly worth giving it a try.

7. Free editing software

Mac: [Movavi](#)

iPhone: [Splice](#)

Windows: [Photos](#)

Android: [Kinemaster](#)

If you want to take your editing to a higher level, do consider the paid software. There are plenty of lists to be found on the internet with the best apps for your phone or laptop!

Depending on the editing programme of your choice, there are many tutorial videos to be found on YouTube. Search for instance for the name of the software + tutorial.

8. Cutting

Cut all the 'boring' segments from your vlog. Changeovers are important in a vlog, so feel free to remove any long pauses for thought. In principle, every video consists of two main elements: you as the *talking head*, which involves you looking into the camera, and cover-shots that visually support your story. Here as well, you can make it as fun as you like. Below are a number of suggestions to help you tell your story:

- Tour of your new house
- View from your room/office
- The shop where you always go for groceries
- The restaurant where you like to go for dinner
- The place where you go out
- People you have met
- The form of transport/public transport you often use

In conclusion

In principle, you don't have to edit your vlogs for the study (see the background information). However, it is great fun for you to edit every video to a single end product!

We wish you lots of fun vlogging!

Background Information Erasmus+ Followed & Vlogged Study

This online course is offered as part of the [‘Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged’](#) study.

An important element of this study are the vlogs made by Erasmus+ students abroad. These vlogs afford depth to the study, in addition to the frequent questionnaires, group discussion and the ‘Backpack study’.

Vlogging has as an added value that we can quite literally take a look in your life as an Erasmus+ participant. Your vlogs are analysed and used for the eventual study result. Your data will be fully anonymized.

Should the National Agency Erasmus+ Education & Training wish to use your footage for other purposes, your permission will be sought in advance.

Look [here](#) for more information on data processing and protection within the framework of this study.

Focus points vlogging panel:

- The length of the foreign stay differs per Erasmus+ participant. We ask you to vlog about once a week.
- We ask you to choose a fixed moment of the week for your vlogging.
- Vlogs should last between 1 and 5 minutes.
- After every recording, you can upload your vlog via Dropbox using the personal upload link that you will receive at your email address.
- You don’t have to edit your vlogs. So, in principle, Module 5 of this online course is not essential to this study, but it can, of course, be enjoyable and educational for you to edit the material into one end product.
- When you upload your videos, give them a name according to the following format: *Your name, video number, date of upload*. For instance: *MariekevanHeeswijk_video1_04-11-19*.

Let’s get to work!

We know like nobody else that making your first vlog can be something of a challenge. The best thing to do is to just dive right in.

Any questions about making vlogs? Send a message to [Sausmakers](#).

In case of any questions regarding the Erasmus+ Followed and Vlogged study, please don’t hesitate to contact the National Agency Erasmus+ Education & Training.

Appendix 4 Interview Guidelines

Interview 1

1. Can you briefly tell us where you are, and who you are living with (host family, international, local people, or other Dutch students), single room, studio/apartment. Are there any shared rooms, such as the kitchen, or do you have those to yourself?
 - a. How did you select your housing and based on what criteria?
 - b. What are you studying?
 - c. Do you have any specific goals or expectations about your foreign experience? Did you set them down in advance?
 - d. To what extent did you prepare yourself? (for instance, looked up information about the country, etc.)
2. What have you been doing in the past few weeks? (for instance, parties, study dates, intercultural activities)?
 - a. Do you cook together with house mates, study together/go to parties together?
 - b. Whom with (internationals, local people, other Dutch people)?
Who else do you socialize with and how did meet them (did you meet them at school/uni or already knew them back home)?
 - c. Are there any activities that you engage in primarily with internationals, Dutch people, or locals?
 - d. Why those people (is it easier to socialize with Dutch or with local people?/why do you think this is? I've noticed that you primarily socialize with X, is there a reason for this?
 - e. Do you also socialize with local/international/Dutch people? Why or why not?
3. Can you describe one negative experience of the past two weeks that stands out (think of loneliness, language barrier, problems making contact, missing your family etc.)
4. Can you describe one positive experience of the past two weeks that stands out? (making new friends, discovering other culture)
5. Could you give me a grade between 1 and 10 to describe the extent to which you feel at home there?

Interview 2

1. Can you tell me something about what you've been doing in the past two weeks (parties, things you've experienced, other activities).
 - a. Whom have you been doing this with (locals, Dutch people, internationals)?
2. Have you met any new people since we last spoke?
 - a. In what setting?
 - b. Are they Dutch, locals or internationals?
3. How often are you in touch with home?
 - a. For example, every day, every week, or every other week?
 - b. Maybe ask about the reason, do you miss them? Do you want to stay up to date about what's happening there? Or an emotional need to touch base with your friends and family?

*check in advance to what extent this subject has already been discussed.

4. I would like to look back on your first day in X.
 - a. Can you tell how you felt when you first arrived in X. Why was that?
 - b. When did it get better?
5. Have you had any other experiences, either positive or negative, that you would like to tell me about (can be about absolutely anything)?
6. Last time you gave this grade, is it the same now, higher/lower?

Interview 3

1. In our first talk you said that you mainly socialized with X (and X) is that still the case now?
 - a. Same group of friends?
 - b. Changes in contacts?
2. To what extent were your parents involved in your decision to go abroad? Did they help you (how)?
3. Did you experience anything else, either positive or negative, that you would like to tell me about (can really be about anything)?
4. What do you think you have learned from this experience so far?
5. What would you like to tell other students going abroad?
6. Last time you graded your stay with an X, is this grade now higher, lower or the same? *Only to be asked if the student is still abroad at the time of the interview.

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