A Review of Target Groups' Needs in Student Mobility

A Comprehensive Report on the WP2 Activities

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Through its flagship programme Erasmus, and now Erasmus+, the EU confirms and reinforces its long tradition of promoting and supporting young learner mobility as a means for young people to develop the personal, academic, professional and intercultural skills and competences required in a knowledge-based global economy. However, the underlying assumption that immersion in diversity automatically opens up opportunities for intercultural learning goes counter to the findings of studies on the development of intercultural skills and competences, which have shown that first-hand experience of 'otherness' and even sojourns in a foreign country are not sufficient conditions to foster interculturality (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1999; Byram & Zarate, 1995: 9; Dervin, 2008; Anquetil, 2006, 2008). Both study abroad and intercultural education literature state that, in addition to experience, intercultural learning requires reflection and analysis, and that immersion in a different culture does not in itself reduce prejudice and stereotypical perceptions of others (Coleman, 1998; Shaules, 2007; Strong, 2011). Indeed, considering mobility as a value in itself may distract from focusing on the *quality* of the experience abroad, in other words on the factors which can influence and foster the development of intercultural attitudes and skills. In addition, by putting emphasis simply on increasing the numbers of students who spend a period abroad, higher education institutions may undermine the core principles of intercultural education, whereby mobility can be an opportunity for reflecting on one's own and others' identities, for developing critical thinking, and for promoting the principles of social justice and anti-discrimination.

The IEREST Project aims to develop a set of teaching modules (here called an *Intercultural Path*) which Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can offer to Erasmus students before, during, and after their experience abroad, in order to encourage learning mobility and to support students in benefiting as much as possible from their international experiences in terms of personal growth and intercultural competencies. Additional objectives are those of fostering the adoption of these Intercultural Paths as by HEIs in Europe and beyond, and of making the materials openly available on the web, so that they can be readily used both in teacher-mediated and self-learning contexts.

In order to provide a sound base for the design of the intercultural path and the development of the teaching activities within it, a series of interconnected actions were undertaken. These are the focus of the present report. The initial sections will provide the background to the report, presenting the principal reasons why this work package was needed in the IEREST project (1.1), and defining the specific aims of the work package (1.2). In order to realize these aims as effectively as possible, it was decided to reorganize the research actions within the work package. The resulting research design, along with its conceptual and methodological

implications, will be explained in section 1.3. The introduction will conclude by presenting a brief overview of what the reader can expect in the remainder of the report (1.4).

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT REPORT

The need for the above mentioned actions reported here, and which were included in the project proposal, originated from three main reasons. First, the literature on student mobility provides limited information on the needs of mobile students, in particular from an intercultural point of view; on the offering of HEIs in order to prepare students for study abroad and create opportunities for intercultural development; on the opinions of teachers on the best ways to prepare Erasmus students for an international study experience. While there is great interest on study abroad (Teichler, 1997, 2002; Byram & Feng, 2006; Murphy-Lejeune, 2000), the topic is often linked to language learning and use (Freed, 1995; Coleman 1996, 1997, 2007; Dufon & Churchill, 2006; Kinginger, 2009, 2013), and more rarely to the intercultural (Anquetil, 2006, 2008). In short, there was a lack of a systematic review of the existing intercultural offerings to mobile students, as many initiatives are experimental, unrelated and not well disseminated.

Second, there are various theoretical paradigms concerning intercultural learning, communication, and pedagogy, and the 'intercultural' is a polysemic term which may entail very different approaches to cultural matters in education, including the context of student mobility. Most programmes aim to prepare specific groups of mobile students (e.g. American students) to be communicatively effective in the host country on the basis of generalisations made about cultural groups and assume the "national dimension" to be the most important one for conceptualising cultural diversity (e.g., Cohen et al. 2005; Hug, 2011). On the contrary, IEREST is based on a non-essentialist paradigm, according to which the concept of 'interculturality' does not imply comparing two or more countries, nor learning to adapt to a specific 'national culture'. Rather, it implies, for example, understanding how different types of identities (e.g. gender, age, racial, ethnic, national, geographical, historical, linguistic) impact on communication with others; interpreting what people say about their own culture as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves, rather than as the 'truth' about a particular culture; exploring the role of power in dominant discourses (media, political, institutional) and reflecting on how these discourses affect the way we perceive people from other backgrounds. Having established the theoretical standpoint for the development of the intercultural paths, there was a need to explore the students', teachers' and HEI's views on intercultural preparation for mobility from this particular stance.

Third, as mentioned above, the IEREST project contains a dissemination and exploitation plan, namely fostering the adoption of the intercultural paths by HEIs and providing open resources for intercultural learning which can be used after the end of the project both in teacher-mediated and self-learning contexts. In order to carry out these actions, it was

necessary to have first-hand data about (and from) our target groups, which should also be the final users of the IEREST outputs.

For all these three reasons, it was considered essential to collect and analyse students, teachers, and HEI's practices, opinions and attitudes towards study abroad and its potential for intercultural learning. Such review, discussed in the present report, was felt by the consortium to be a necessary pre-condition for increasing the impact and promoting the delivery of intercultural modules to Erasmus students at a systemic level.

1.2 A REVIEW OF TARGET GROUPS' NEEDS: GENERAL AIMS

The general aim of the research outlined in the present report was to provide a clear and multi-faceted overview of the needs of Erasmus students, higher education institutions, and intercultural education teachers/trainers, in order to fully address them in the implementation, evaluation and dissemination of the IEREST intercultural paths. More specifically, it helped the members of the consortium to develop the IEREST teaching resources bearing in mind the points of view of these three target groups. Some general questions taken into consideration during the design phase were as follows.

How do *students* imagine and prepare for their study abroad experience? According to what criteria do they consider the study abroad successful/unsuccessful? What main constraints/satisfactions do they experience before/during/after their sojourn abroad?

What do *teachers* consider to be powerful principles and practices for effective intercultural learning? What intercultural learning objectives are pursuable/reachable in teaching and how?

What are Erasmus/international *officers* interested in when it comes to preparing students for their sojourn abroad? What role might intercultural education have within existing offerings to outgoing and incoming Erasmus students?

The general aims of this study can therefore be summarised as follows:

(1) Identifying Erasmus students' cultural and intercultural needs, before, during and after their sojourn abroad.

(2) Collecting and recording existing HEI offerings (regular courses, Erasmus-oriented special modules, orienteering services, etc.) which foster and facilitate incoming and outgoing Erasmus students' experiences.

(3) Identifying and comparing existing teaching attitudes and practices to foster intercultural learning, especially in contexts of student mobility.

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AMENDMENTS

In order to actively involve the IEREST target groups in the process of defining their respective needs, and to more easily translate such needs into suggestions for the development of the intercultural path, the consortium agreed on some amendments to the overall research design

during the kick-off meeting (25th and 26th October 2012). The original research design included three separate reviews, one per target group. As shown in Table 1.1, such reviews were to be carried out separately and produce three distinct deliverables. In other words, the results of the three research strands were to be compared only during the final phase of writing the report.

Table 1.1. Review of target groups: original plan

	D2.1 - Students	D2.2 HEIs officers	D2.3 Teachers
Literature review	X	X	
Questionnaire	X	X	
Focus group			X
Interviews	X		

In the original plan, the different deliverables would have been the result of separate multi-method studies (e.g. students' needs would have been collected by means of literature readings, a questionnaire and a set of interviews). In fact, this procedure risked being time consuming for what concerns the literature review, as the same readings could be relevant for more than one single study strand. Moreover, the partners realised that keeping the strands separate as originally foreseen also risked undervaluing significant insights on how teachers and officers view the needs, expectations and beliefs of students with respect to mobility. Consequently, the research design was revised, in an attempt to integrate the three research strands. The result is shown in *Table 1.2*.

Table 1.2. Review of target groups: revised plan

	Students	HEIs	Teachers
D2.1 - Literature review	X	X	X
D2.2 - Questionnaire	X		
D2.3 - Focus groups	X	X	X

Differently to the original plan, here the actions - which correspond to as many deliverables - are conceived on the basis of the diverse data collection methods adopted rather than on the

specific target group they were meant for. Moreover, such actions were conducted sequentially so that the results of earlier actions to constitute the input for the following ones.

The relations among the three actions can be summarized as follows.
- *Phase 1 (Deliverable 2.1)*: *Literature review*. The consortium as a whole reviewed the literature on intercultural aspects of student mobility, and conducted web searches meant to identify and review what is usually offered to mobile students by HEIs from the intercultural point of view..
- *Phase 2 (Deliverable 2.2)*: *Student questionnaire*. The results of phase 1 were taken into account when designing a student questionnaire, which was delivered online in four languages (English, French, Italian, and Slovenian) using *SurveyMonkey*.
- Phase 3 (*Deliverable 2.3*): *Focus groups.* Several preliminary results from the student questionnaire were used as inputs for discussion during three focus groups, respectively with teachers, officers, and students from different HEIs in Europe.

Besides the above-mentioned reasons, additional theoretical and methodological reflections contributed to the Consortium's decision to revise the original research design. On the conceptual level, the consortium felt the need to spend more time than initially planned to reach a common understanding of what "interculturality" meant within the IEREST project. This implied going beyond most of the scientific literature on study abroad (which is mostly concerned with preparing students to be interculturally competent in targeted national cultures) and engage in intense and cyclical discussion sessions only partially inspired by the studies and reports identified during the literature review. This decision was further supported by the willingness of giving attention not only to the intercultural needs that students might be aware of, but to define an analysis of their "aspirational needs". This meant including in the analysis students' aspirations linked to the sojourn abroad in terms of its imagined impact on their future lives and realisation of their ideal selves; this also means avoiding a mere analysis of potential dysfunctions related to the mobility cycle and better focus on the meanings attributed to it.

Three methodological considerations played a role in the revision of the research design; first of all, an increased Interest in more qualitative (rather than quantitative) research on the needs of the three target groups. For this reason, it was decided to extend the use of focus groups also to students and officers, which made the individual interviews to students redundant. Moreover, the members of the consortium had reservations regarding the impersonal nature of the HEI questionnaire, which might encourage "official" answers from the respondents, rather than more personal reflections. It was thus decided to substitute the questionnaire with a focus group. Finally it was decided that the original proposal could benefit from a simplification which makes it more effective in yielding important data and practical devices (particularly in phase 3) for the design of the IEREST teaching activities.

1.4 HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The present report contains the results of the multi-faced study conducted during the first year of the IEREST project under the supervision of the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). It addresses academics involved in reinforcing strategies to foster student mobility in their institutions, as well as administrators at different levels involved in the management of the Erasmus and other student mobility programmes.

Besides the present introduction, this report contains six sections; sections 2-4, which can also be considered as separate outcomes or deliverables, are at its core.
- *Section 2* includes the description of the methodology and the main results of the literature review aimed at describing the state-of-the-art of research on student mobility and the existing higher education offerings containing intercultural educational value;
- *Section 3* presents the student questionnaire design, administration and analysis, as well as its main finding;
- *Section 4* describes methods and results of the three focus groups conducted respectively with some representatives of teachers of intercultural communication/education in higher education, officers engaged in academic mobility, and former Erasmus students.
- In the conclusions (*Section 5*), the reader will find an overview of the main implications of the multi-faceted study presented in this report for the IEREST intercultural path and the project at large;
- *Section 6* contains a list of the bibliographic references quoted in this report;

While the previous sections are enriched with graphs that allow the presentation and discussion of data, all the relevant annexes can be found at the end of the report in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of this report and the underlying study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reports on the first of the three major actions within this work package, namely the review of the literature regarding Erasmus students' cultural and intercultural needs, before, during and after their sojourn abroad. After defining the specific actions that the literature review comprised (2.1), the section will explain the methodology that was followed (2.2) and present the resulting findings (2.3).

2.1. AIMS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The goals of the literature review phase have to be contextualised with respect to the overall aims of WP2 and the more specific aims of the later work package phases that constitute *Deliverable 2.2* and *Deliverable 2.3*.

Thus, on the one hand, in exploring the literature available on intercultural aspects of student mobility, the literature review phase pursued three goals with respect to the wider aims of WP2. The first was to identify literature and relevant research on Erasmus students' cultural and intercultural needs, before, during and after their sojourn abroad. The second was to collect and analyse existing offerings at higher education institutes (henceforth, HEIs) - regular courses, Erasmus-oriented special modules, orienteering services, etc. - which foster and facilitate incoming and outgoing Erasmus students' experiences, with an eye toward the modules that IEREST would develop, pilot, institutionalise and make available for HEIs. A third goal was an examination of the most salient approaches to 'the intercultural' in order to identify and compare existing teaching attitudes and practices to foster intercultural learning, such as to identify the directions in which the development of IEREST modules on the intercultural could be taken.

On the other hand, the goals of the literature review phase were pursued in function of providing inputs for the IEREST questionnaire, whose results, in turn, constituted inputs for the IEREST focus groups. This is in contrast with the initial vision of the literature review phase, where its results were to be obtained separately in order to be cross-matched with other research activities only at the end of WP2.

2.2. METHODOLOGY IN DATA COLLECTION

Data for the literature review was collected in three distinct areas. A first area was current student mobility studies (research literature, previous projects and surveys, etc.) regarding Erasmus students' needs, institutional visions and goals regarding Erasmus stays abroad. A second data pool was existing HEI offerings that prepare students for study stays abroad. A third area of research was prominent contemporary theoretical approaches to the intercultural

and successful intercultural dealing, especially in relation to the context of student mobility at HEIs.

Data was collected through conjointly organised tasks shared by all the IEREST consortium members, where each member was responsible for collecting and analysing data, as well as reporting findings back to the consortium.

2.2.1. STUDENT MOBILITY STUDIES

The objective of this aspect of the literature review and needs analysis was to arrive at an IEREST-specific overview of current student mobility studies (research literature, previous projects and surveys, etc.) that are concerned with Erasmus students' needs, institutional visions and goals for Erasmus stays abroad.

In terms of data collection regarding student mobility studies, each consortium member was asked to do the following; first, to collect bibliographic references and websites, including languages other than English, about intercultural needs as experienced by international students, particularly in Europe; second, to provide an executive summary of the most relevant data points. Consortium members were also asked to pay attention to what they could hypothesise to be lacking in or left out of such studies, which could then provide WP2 with further lines of questioning. A further request was to include, where possible, references to studies concerning students who refuse or have refused to do the Erasmus Programme.

2.2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE OFFERINGS

For the HEI focus of the literature review and needs analysis, the objectives were as follows: first, to gain a deeper insight into current practices in intercultural education in student mobility contexts in higher education by collecting examples of intercultural courses and trajectories that are currently offered to incoming and outgoing students; second, to define more clearly what the IEREST intercultural paths could contribute to current practices by identifying inspiring and effective as well as inadequate and ineffective aspects of some existing offerings.

In terms of data collection regarding HEI offerings, two consecutive sets of tasks were undertaken by the consortium. In the first set, consortium members were asked to collect references for two existing offerings (courses, modules, trajectories, and the like) in intercultural communication and/or education, including those offerings within the consortium members' own institutions. Each consortium was likewise asked to provide an executive summary of the most relevant data points for the IEREST goals, including any areas left open or untreated by current HEI offerings that IEREST could address.

In the second set of tasks, consortium members were asked to identify and describe at least two additional existing intercultural courses, modules, or trajectories with particular attention to those offered to incoming and/or outgoing students in higher education. The scope of this

search in this second set of tasks was not to be limited to mobility within the Erasmus program or to European HEIs.

Additionally, consortium members were asked to select two or more offerings that were well-known to them, for instance, through first-hand experience as a teacher, researcher, student, or administrator with them. Consortium members were then to explain what they found to be inspiring, hopeful, effective, and the like in those offerings, or otherwise what might seem inadequate, ineffective, missing from them.

2.2.3. THE INTERCULTURAL

The objective of the 'intercultural inquiry' aspect of the literature review was to arrive as closely as possible at a consensus-based understanding, through and with all the consortium members, of the most salient and relevant approaches to 'the intercultural,' as discussed in academic circles and as implemented among the consortium members and at comparable institutions. This consensus-based understanding of the intercultural would then serve as a key touchstone in the further activities of both WP2 and IEREST as a whole.

In terms of data collection regarding salient approaches to the intercultural, each consortium member was asked to do the following; first, to collect references for the meaning of 'intercultural' in (or relevant to) the context of student mobility in HEIs; second, to provide an executive summary in English of the most relevant key points for WP2 and the IEREST project.

2.3. FINDINGS

2.3.1. STUDENT MOBILITY STUDIES

From the data collected from student mobility studies, it can be shown that student mobility can be understood in two distinct senses: first, as a "vertical" movement from, for instance, a higher education system with less resources to one with more; second, as a "horizontal" movement across two more or less commensurate higher education systems. Focusing for the purposes of IEREST on this second form of student mobility, a preliminary review of existing literature (both academic and non-academic in character) exhibits three separate, non-congruous levels of investigation into the intercultural needs of students in those circumstances.

At a first level, that of intercultural needs from a short term perspective, in the literature on student mobility there is recognition of intercultural needs of students in terms of factors that will enable them to function on a day to day basis in their host country. The most salient of these as specifically intercultural needs have to do with abilities to find housing (Van Mol, 2012; Kirsch and Beernaert, 2009), to receive adequate information and support from university administration officials abroad (Joint Steering Group on UK Outward Student

Mobility, 2012; Kirsch and Beernaert, 2009; Timmerman, 2012), to interact successfully with professors and instructors at the host university (Guirca, 2012), to interact with other students in their host country (Lahti, 2012), and to gain a basic knowledge of the cultural heritage of their host country (Van Mol, 2012).

While this set of intercultural needs seems to be self-evident as a concern to be dealt with prior to and during a student's academic stay abroad, there nonetheless seems to be disagreement on the extent to which it is already being successfully managed (comparing for instance the findings in Kirsch and Beernaert, 2009 with Endrezzi, 2010). Also, at this level of analysis of students' intercultural needs, very little consideration seems to be given to what needs students might have once they return to their home country; in other words, this functional level of understanding students' needs seems focused almost exclusively on the initiatory or preparatory aspects of students' intercultural experience.

A second level of analysis in the literature on intercultural needs for student mobility is concerned with intercultural needs from a longer-term, occupational and communal perspective. Here, the focus is more oriented toward wider-reaching aims of (European) student mobility experiences. That is, it is much more a question of how students' intercultural competences contribute to the success of such longer-term aims, rather than the ability of students to cope in their host countries. Within this framework, three sorts of such intercultural needs appear to dominate the literature. First, there is the need to increase students' intercultural competence so as to encourage them into further academic mobility after their Erasmus experience (Van Bouwel and Veugelers, 2009). Second, proper intercultural competence seems linked with heightening exchange students' own awareness of their attractiveness on the job market, i.e. their future employability, as a result of their international experience (Bracht et al, 2006). Third, a considerable segment of the literature on student mobility concerns the link between intercultural competence and a heightened sense of European citizenship or communality as a result of Erasmus experiences (Streitweiser, 2011; AEGEE, 2012).

The import of intercultural experiences and competences for these sorts of needs cannot be underestimated (Docherty, 2011). However, it is also clear that at this level the specific definition of 'intercultural needs' become much harder to pin down. In the literature, there are few concrete suggestions for how students ought to parlay their intercultural experience into such longer-terms aims of mobility.

A third level, which does not necessarily run parallel to the previous two, concerns intercultural needs from the mobility students' perspective(s). At this level, there is a growing body of qualitative research looking at what Erasmus and international students are saying about their student mobility experiences. This level of research lends itself to a quite different set of analyses, in which issues of sociality and identity (Udrea 2012; Dervin, 2008), as well cognitive and emotional responses to their Erasmus experiences (Dervin, 2008), are much more salient.

Here, the intercultural needs of, for instance, Erasmus students come down to personal assessment and coping strategies within both their home and host countries as a result of their academic mobility experience. These are in other words needs for more nuanced and robust concepts of identification, socialization, and culture so as to be able to come to terms with their exposure to different sorts of social difference and social commonality experienced throughout and after the exchange program.

This last level of analyses suggests a program of research for IEREST and its deliverables distinct from the previous two, in being both wider-reaching in ambition and yet more concrete in terms of its bearing on the day to day lives of Erasmus students. Thus, while not being opposed to either of the first two levels of needs, this third set of intercultural needs seems to offer promise as a further focus in the needs analysis of WP2.

2.3.2. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OFFERINGS

in the terms of the data collection and analysis tasks regarding current HEI offerings for mobility students, the following trends became noticeable.

- There are several different perspectives in the existing offering, with a prevalence of practical and everyday life information delivered to students. A great deal of current offerings are oriented toward mere 'survival' in the target culture. It appeared to the consortium that too little is currently being done at HEIs that goes beyond this.
- Where offerings go beyond mere 'survival skills,' the following features of such offerings (already) seem prominent.
    - o First, it seems there is a trend is to encourage students more and more to think of themselves as 'ethnographers' during their intercultural sojourn. From this perspective, preparing for the intercultural sojourn requires learning how to become an ethnographer, not to mention going along with the norms of 'good ethnographic practice.
    - o Second, there seems to be a leaning toward so-called critical and non-essentialist approaches to the intercultural in HEI offerings, when in fact they do anything more than stress survival skills in the host community. However, there is still strong evidence of more cross-cultural and essentialist perspectives on mobility stays and host/ home communities being adopted in HEI offerings.
    - o Third, in terms of best practices and stimulating examples of preparing students for their intercultural mobility experiences, the consortium was less sanguine about the current state of offerings at HEIs, making the collection of such data difficult in certain cases. However, consortium members were able to collect data and cite useful practices along the lines of the following:
        - ▪ HEI offerings that home in on the impact of globalisation, internationalisation and related movements on education policy and practice in a range of countries and contexts;

- HEI offerings that encourage students to explore their own identities and attitudes towards others and reflect on their own experiences of intercultural and international education, and on their intercultural competence, especially with an eye toward how and why people are "otherised" and how they have engaged and will engage with people from other horizons;
- HEI offerings that make room for the key academic literature on intercultural and international education and the key theories, frameworks and practices for intercultural and international education in a range of countries and contexts;
- HEI offerings dealing with the relationship between education, intercultural issues and key concepts such as identity, citizenship, human rights and social justice;
- HEI offerings that critically explore the impact of transnational/transcultural mobility and its implications for intercultural communication (e.g., in learners, educators, administrators in educational contexts);
- HEI offerings that bring students to conduct research to investigate their own intercultural communication experience and competence in intercultural encounters.

2.3.3. THE INTERCULTURAL

On the whole, the consortium reached a consensus that three different ways of looking at "the intercultural" have been identified through the research activities of this phase of WP2. In the data, this concretely came down to the following approaches: a critical and anti-essentialist idea of the intercultural; a self-awareness oriented approach to the intercultural, with emphasis laid upon the intercultural as the individual's awareness of themselves and others; and an interactive and participatory approach to the intercultural, with the intercultural envisaged as an engagement with others in communication. It is important moreover to note that none of them excludes any of the others, and as such all may be earmarked for further exploration and incorporation in both WP2 needs analysis activities as well as the development of the IEREST modules proper.

The proposed integration, for IEREST, of the above-mentioned current approaches to the intercultural is grounded in the recognition that in intercultural encounters, any initial standpoints (stereotypes, prejudices, ethnocentricities) soon become challenged and negotiated and/or contested. The key in those encounters, and for IEREST's project aims of preparing students for the intercultural, is to understand that what happens then and there in the intercultural encounter is as important as whatever people bring to those encounters, in terms of prior knowledge, pre-conceived notions, and the like. The question to be attentive to is whether individuals (re)construct and/or (re)negotiate their identity in the encounter, through

(intercultural) communication, or whether they resist to some extent, which may even lead to some sort of interpersonal conflict. Thus, IEREST's goal with respect to the intercultural was found to be one of helping Erasmus students to become aware of these processes (pre, during, and post encounter) and gain insights into how they can grow from them. In this sense, IEREST would reinforce a robust notion of how developing intercultural competence remains a lifelong learning journey.

A more in-depth discussion of current approaches to the intercultural has been included in this report as *Appendix A*.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

2.4.1. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE OBJECTIVES

As a result of the literature review and needs analysis phase of WP2, the finding that there are three primary dimensions of 'intercultural' needs involved in the Erasmus student sojourn experience proved to be a crucial touchstone for the elaboration and analysis of the student questionnaires in the ensuing phases of WP2. One of the most important goals of the questionnaire was thus to corroborate those findings with students' own experiences and expectations of the Erasmus sojourn experience, namely by gathering data on the constitution and the development of students' perceptions of 'intercultural needs' as compared to the results of the literature review and needs analysis.

Concretely, this finding from the literature review and needs analysis translated into a three pronged line of inquiry in the IEREST questionnaire, coming down to the following areas of questioning:

- To what extent do these different dimensions of intercultural needs seem indissoluble – that is, binding, all-important, dominating – to students at different points in their student sojourn experience? That is, is there agreement across students' perceptions of certain needs as being all important in their student sojourn experience? By the same token, is there agreement across students' perceptions, in seeing certain other needs as being entirely ephemeral – (invisible, abstract, insubstantial) at different points in their student sojourn experience?

- How complex are students' perceptions of these needs at different points? If one type of need indeed seems indissoluble to students at a given point in their student sojourn experience, does this come at the cost of (i.e. exclude) students' perceptions of other sorts of needs? To what extent, in other words, are students' perceptions of intercultural needs internally varied or heterogeneous?

- Where there is evidence of an evolution in students' perceptions of these needs (for instance, a diminishing importance of one sort of need), is it correct to observe a

necessary relationality between these different sorts of needs? That is, if one dimension of needs seems in time to decrease in import in students' perceptions, is it necessarily replaced by an increasing perception of another dimension of needs? Or are perceptions of each sort of need relatively independent from each other?

By creating as sophisticated a picture as possible of Erasmus students at the outset of IEREST, the aim in later phases of WP2 was, on the basis of these literature review and needs analysis findings, to avoid in IEREST research just the same sort of error that Erasmus students themselves will apprised of through IEREST course modules.

2.4.2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO IEREST COURSE MODULES AND WP3 OBJECTIVES

Through the research activities of WP2, the synthesis of the three approaches to the intercultural, described above (2.3.3) was crucial not only for developing the identity of IEREST with respect to concurrent and competing research on preparing mobility students for intercultural encounters. Over and above that, the exploration of salient approaches to the intercultural in WP2 has proved instrumental to the further formulation of the modules and activities which are being developed and piloted through IEREST, and thus far in the project the synthetic approach to the intercultural in and through those modules has proved one of the most solid contributions of WP2 to ensuing parts of the project.

3. STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

After stating the goals of the questionnaire (3.1), this section will briefly discuss the way in which the questionnaire was developed (3.2.1) and distributed (3.2.2), and how the data were analyzed (3.2.3). Next, the population that responded to the questionnaire will described (3.3.1), followed by a presentation of the most salient findings (3.3.3) and the principal conclusions that can be drawn from the questionnaire results (3.4).

3.1. GOALS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of the questionnaire was to investigate students' perceptions of the constitution and development of intercultural needs and aspirations in the context of an Erasmus stay abroad. Specifically, through both closed and open-ended questions, the questionnaire set out to gather data on students' awareness and evaluation of functional and formative dimensions of needs during a sojourn abroad. The questionnaire was distributed among students at each of the three phases of the stay abroad experience: during preparation, during the stay, and upon return. Along with the conclusions of the literature review and the contributions of the focus groups, the results of the questionnaire assisted in taking student perceptions of needs and aspirations into account in defining the learning objectives and learning outcomes of the

modules of the intercultural learning paths in WP3. For instance, if it appears that students show a lack of awareness of certain crucial needs at a particular stage of their study abroad experience, the corresponding IEREST module could set as one of its objectives to make students more aware of these needs. Conversely, if it appears that students perceive certain needs as highly important at a particular stage, the IEREST activities could exploit this information as a motivational factor.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCESS

3.2.1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In the development of the questionnaire the following two principles were kept in mind. First, in accordance with the overall approach within IEREST, we tried to refrain from asking questions that could promote an 'essentialist' analysis. For instance, we did not ask for the respondents' social class, ethnicity, (dis)ability or sex. (We asked for their gender, though, allowing for an opt-out). Likewise, no questions were included inquiring after the respondents' nationality; they were asked to name their home university instead, nor after the respondents' native language; instead they were asked to indicate their proficiency level in various languages. Second, in order to anticipate queries that might fall beyond the scope of this project, we included a number of filters, such as the student's program of study, purpose of stay abroad, total length of stay abroad, prior experience in studying or living, level satisfaction with the experience on the personal and on the academic level, extent and nature of preparation for studying abroad, home institution / host institution, gender, etcetera. This information enables more advanced analyses which do not necessarily fall within the scope of the IEREST project. Finally, in order to find a good balance between rich data and limited analysis time, we opted for a combination of closed and open questions.

The process of developing the questionnaire comprised the following steps from January to April 2013.

- The WP leader presented an initial draft of the questionnaire in English. This draft was based on the findings of the literature review on student mobility studies, as summarized in that section of the report.
- All consortium partners, including the associate partners, provided feedback. Joint decisions were taken about the use of open and closed questions and filters, and about how the questionnaire would reveal what students consider as needs.
- The WP leader integrated this feedback and tested the tool in its written form with 7 students and as a verbal protocol (i.e., while thinking aloud) with 2 students, all of whom had recently returned to Leuven from an Erasmus stay.
- After further revision on the basis of the results from this pilot, the WP leader delivered the final version of the questionnaire in English.
- With the help of consortium partners, the questionnaire was then translated into Italian, French, and Slovenian.

- Finally, the project leader inserted the data into SurveyMonkey, designing the necessary skip logic paths.

A consent clause for the use of the collected data for research purposes was put on top of the questionnaire. Depending on the stage that the student is at (before, during, or after stay abroad), the respondent is guided through the questionnaire along one of three paths, with the necessary adjustments made to phrasing and contents of the questions. A variety of question types have been asked: closed multiple choice questions (one answer allowed; multiple answers allowed), as single questions or in a matrix form, and open questions of varying length (single textbox; multiple textbox; 'essay' box). The full version of the questionnaire also shows which of the questions were obligatory (asterisked) and which were optional for the students to answer. Once the respondent has chosen the language of choice, a series of questions are presented under the following categories.

1. Personal data: year of birth, gender, language proficiency, home academic institution, area of study, degree level, main language(s) used at home academic institution.

2. General information on the stay abroad: primary purpose (study / work), nature of program (Erasmus / other), length of stay, distance in time at moment of writing, mainly used language(s) at host institute; overall level of satisfaction from a personal and an academic point of view.

3. Prior experience: length and destination of previous study stays and other long sojourns abroad; courses and experiences considered meaningful in preparing for stay abroad; personal and institutional preparation for the study stay abroad.

4. Needs in stay abroad experiences: needs as defined before, during, and after the experience; recommendations to home and host institutions, and to other outgoing and incoming students; criteria for considering a stay abroad experience successful; (lack of) contact with local students; aspirations following the stay abroad.

3.2.2. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was distributed online (SurveyMonkey) in April 2013 through the international offices and other coordinators at the universities of Bologna, Chambéry, Durham (enlisting the collaboration of also Nottingham, Surry, and Queen Margaret), Koper, Leuven, and Thomas More Kempen. The addressees were all participants in an exchange program (Erasmus or other) for study and/or work experience. More specifically, the questionnaire was sent out to the following groups:

(1) Students from the partner university

- who had indicated they would be leaving for a stay abroad in the current or next academic year;

- who were currently on an exchange program;

- who had returned from a stay abroad in the current academic year.

(2) Students from other universities who were currently at the partner university for a stay abroad.

Students were asked to identify both their home and their host academic institution but responded anonymously as no names or other forms of identification were collected.

In total the questionnaire, along with an accompanying email, included as *Appendix B*, that introduced the IEREST project and the purpose of the questionnaire, was sent to 12.403 students. *Appendix C* presents an overview per partner of the total numbers of addressees to whom the questionnaire was sent. With 3557 respondents, the response ratio for the questionnaire is 29%. Of that number there were 2760 usable responses, with 2010 respondents, or 57% of the total number of participants, completing all the sections of the questionnaire.

3.2.3. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In order to develop a concrete analysis plan, the WP leader organized a workshop for the project partners at the partner meeting in Chambéry (April 11, 2013), taking into account the three-pronged line of inquiry that had been defined on the basis of the literature review (see the 'conclusions' of that section). During the workshop in Chambéry the participants identified a set of priority themes for analysis and addressed several methodological issues relating to quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the data.

Consequently, at the partner flashmeeting of May 24, 2013, the partners agreed on the proposed data analysis plan, consisting of the following issues and actions:
1. What are the most important criteria, as perceived by the students, in making their stay abroad experience into a success or not? Do factors like the stage of the experience that students are situated at (before departure vs. while abroad vs. after return) and their area of study (sciences, engineering and technology vs. biomedical sciences vs. social sciences and humanities) have an effect on student perceptions on what matters in making their stay a success? In order to answer this question, more specific queries were defined in relation to questions 5.1, 6.1 and 6.2, and 1.5. In the course of the analysis, also gender (1.2) was added as a variable.
2. Is student satisfaction with their stay abroad related to the instruction and support that students receive before, during and after the experience? In order to answer this question, more specific queries were defined in relation to questions 3.1 and 3.2, and 3.7.
3. Do students on stay abroad report a lack of contact with the local students; do they mind this lack of contact if it occurs; and what do they ascribe this lack of contact to? In order to answer this question, more specific queries were defined in relation to questions 6.3 and 6.4, 1.4 and 2.7.

A mixed methods analysis was needed for dealing with the variety of question types. For the quantitative analysis descriptive findings will be reported; for the qualitative analysis the

answers were coded manually for the categories that were implied in the research questions. In the analysis of the answers to question 6.4, for example, the categories refer to the different parties to whom students attribute the presence or absence of contact with the local students.

In order to check our initial interpretation, intermediate results were presented to and discussed with internal stakeholders in a more formal setting on a couple of occasions. This was for instance the case in Bologna (*Alma Mater per l'intercultura: dialogo tra tre progetti europei*, June 19, 2013, an event organized by the university's International Relations Office for faculty members and administrators, and attended by the Vice-Rector of International Affairs) and in Leuven (*Meetings of the Working Group on Internationalisation of the Curriculum*, June 5, 2013, a working group installed by the Vice-Rector of International Affairs and chaired by the Student Council). In order to provide additional support for the interpretation the questionnaire results, selected data were offered for discussion to the focus groups with teachers, students, and international officers (see the section on the focus groups).

3.3. FINDINGS

3.3.1. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Table 3.1 lists how many usable responses were received for each of the four language versions of the questionnaire. It also sketches the following profile of the typical respondent as a *female* student (69%) who is *abroad* at the time when she fills in the questionnaire (52%, compared to 16% pre-departure and 32% after return) with the *Erasmus* program (82%), more particularly a *study* stay (80%), for an expected duration of *4 to 6 months* (52%) or longer (41%). This typical student is enrolled in a *bachelor* program (59%, compared to 40% master students) in the area of *social sciences and humanities* (67%, compared to 27% sciences & engineering and 6% biomedical sciences). She chose to respond the *English* version of the questionnaire (51%, compared to 29% in Italian, 14% in French, and 6% in Slovenian).

Table 3.1. Profile of the questionnaire respondents

	English	French	Italian	Slovenian	total
N=	1409	394	789	168	2760
pre-departure	270	88	10	84	452
during stay	634	199	575	17	1425
after return	505	107	204	67	883
Female	959	272	539	134	1904
Male	447	121	238	33	839
no answer					17
Humanities	980	226	512	126	1844
Sciences	353	161	215	29	758
Biomed	76	7	62	13	158
Bachelor's	838	239	412	137	1626
Master's	553	150	374	23	1100
Phd.	25	2		8	35
Erasmus Yes	966	308	767	144	2185
Erasmus No	377	77	12	12	478
Study	1064	330	650	106	2150
Work	116	8	15	34	173
Study/work	173	47	114	15	349
Less than 1 month	3	1	1	1	6
1-3 months	140	10	14	34	198
4-6 months	712	159	385	97	1353
7-9 months	174	108	174	10	466

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More than 9	312	107	205	13	637

Further, it appeared that 73% (n=1618) of the students who were abroad or had returned indicated they were (very) satisfied with the experience from an academic point of view, while 16% (n=348) indicated they were (very) dissatisfied. From a personal point of view, satisfaction rates were even higher with 82% (n=1853) stating they were (very) satisfied - with 68% (n=1522) respondents choosing the top category of "very satisfied", while 14% (n=312) indicated they were (very) dissatisfied.

3.3.2. OVERVIEW OF SALIENT FINDINGS

In this section we present in turn the most salient results for the questions that were included in the data analysis plan.

Questions 3.1-3.2

In this open question students are asked to name one or two courses (3.1) and one or two other experiences (3.2) they once had that they consider meaningful in preparing for their stay abroad. The findings below reflect the responses to the English version of the questionnaire (n=745), which were obtained through manual coding.

As for question 3.1, two out of three students (65%) name a language course. A second category, named by 38%, consists of subject courses (eg. microbiology) that appear to have been singled out due to the relevance of their academic content to the courses abroad. Courses focusing on intercultural or international relations make up the third group (12%). Such courses are named three times more often after returning from a stay abroad than they are before departure (14% versus 5%).

With respect to question 3.2, more than half of the students (53%) name a prior experience of traveling as meaningful in preparing for their stay abroad. This is followed by responses that mention gaining independence from other people (14%), usually family. Experiences focusing on intercultural or international relations other than traveling make up a third group (9%), tying with speaking to people who had previously been on a study stay abroad (9%).

Question 3.7

In this question students are asked about the ways in which they prepare(d) for their stay abroad. They are asked to tick all of the listed options that apply to them, and are given the opportunity to add other ways of preparation that they resort(ed) to. This question was answered by 2488 respondents. Our findings show that two out of three students declare that they have taken various personal initiatives to explore their host cultures (64%) and have seeked information from other exchange students (71%). Only a small group of students prepare for their study abroad by taking part in academic courses on culture (14%) or other activities organized by their home university (22%), with the exception of language courses

(40%). There appears to be no consistent relationship between participation in preparation activities and satisfaction with the study abroad experience.

Question 5.1

In this open question students are asked to name and rank three things that they find essential for making their stay abroad experience successful. Students answer this question before they see the next question (6.1) in which they are provided with 31 pre-defined criteria for success to choose from. The answers to question 5.1 were coded for all four language versions of the questionnaire.

- Before departure '*Having friends*' is the most frequently named top criterion, followed by '*Language proficiency*' and '*University support*'. At a more general level, criteria related to social interests (such as 'having friends') outweigh those related to personal qualities (eg. 'openness') and to academic concerns (eg. 'interesting courses').
- During their stay abroad '*Language proficiency*' supercedes '*Having friends*', and '*Openness*' is now the third mostly named item as the top criterion. At a more general level, students now cite criteria related to personal qualities more than they cite those related to social interests and academic concerns.
- After their return students confirm that in retrospect '*Language proficiency*' was the most important criterion. '*Openness*' has risen to second place before '*Getting to know people*'. Again, at a more general level, personal qualities are named more frequently than social interests and academic concerns.

When students are asked to name what they think is essential for a successful stay abroad experience, their responses vary with the stage they are in. Before they depart students believe more strongly that success will heavily depend on social ('having friends') and academic ('interesting courses', 'academic success') criteria than students who have already returned. The latter group has come to realize the impact of personal qualities ('openness'; 'independence / courage'). There is also a relative shift within the functional category: before departure 'housing' and 'university support' are believed to be more essential for success than 'money'. After return this order has been reversed.

Questions 6.1-6.2

In these closed questions students were asked to select the five most (6.1) and least important (6.2) criteria for considering a stay abroad experience successful out of a list of 31 options. We shall present the most noteworthy results from three perspectives: differences related to the stage of the experience that the student is in, to the study programme (s)he follows, and to the student's gender.

- Differences related to the stage of the experience
  - There are some notable differences in the criteria that students consider important as they proceed in their experience from the preparatory stage to the stay abroad itself and their views after returning. Through all stages of the experience '*Becoming (more) independent*' is considered the most important

criterion for considering a stay abroad successful. Before departure, the top three is completed by ''*Improving my communication skills in the local language'* and *'Having fun'*, two criteria that somewhat decrease in importance once the students have arrived at their host university. They are replaced with '*Becoming (more) self-confident',* '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'*, and with '*Interacting with people from different origins'*, which ranks as the second most important criterion upon return.

- o Before departure students consider '*Feeling European'* the least important criterion for calling their study abroad experience a success. Once they have arrived, the top spot is taken by '*Getting good grades'*. '*Contributing to making the world a better place'* completes the top three of least important criteria, followed by '*Learning to behave like the local people at my host institution'* and '*Building a network for my career'*.

- o Among the criteria that significantly increase in importance once students are abroad there are three criteria that eventually end up in the top ten of most important criteria: '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'*, '*Making friends among the international students',* and *'Improving my communication skills regardless of the language'*.

- o Among the criteria that significantly decrease in importance once that students are abroad, we find two that eventually end up in the top ten of least important criteria: '*Getting good grades'* and '*Building a network for my career'*. The most outspoken downward trend can be noted for the criterion '*Making friends among the local students'*.

- Differences related to the study programme
  - o There are some notable differences between students who study 'sciences, engineering and technology' (STEM) and students who study 'humanities and social sciences' (HUSS). There were too few students of biomedical sciences who participated to draw meaningful conclusions about this group's responses. For both groups '*Becoming (more) independent*' is the most important criterion in considering their study abroad stay a success or not. The rest of the top three is different, though. For the STEM-students, '*Interacting with people from different origins'* comes second, followed by '*Becoming (more) self-confident'*. For the HUSS-students, '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'* comes in second, followed by '*Improving my communication skills in the local language'*. Both groups agree that the following three criteria are least important in considering their stay abroad a success or not: '*Feeling European', 'Getting good grades',* and *'Contributing to making the world a better place'*. Interestingly, there is one criterion that divides both the STEM- and the HUSS-students. In each case there is a sizeable subgroup who consider '*Building a*

network for my career' among the most important as well as a subgroup who check the criterion as one of the least important.

- o STEM-students appear to attach significantly more importance to criteria like '*Becoming (more independent)*' and '*Building a network for my career*' when considering whether they find their stay abroad experience successful or not. HUSS-students, by contrast, attach significantly more importance to '*Improving my communication skills in the local language*' while they are abroad. And although this is a less important criterion for either group, '*Understanding who I am*' matters more to HUSS-students.

- Differences related to gender
  - o Gender appears to be an equally distinctive factor as study major in determining which criteria play a role in considering one's study abroad experience successful or not.
  - o With respect to question 6.1, both male and female respondents consider '*Becoming (more) independent'* the most important criterion although it is included by considerably more male than female students (54% males vs 46% females). For male students this is followed by '*Having fun'* and '*Interacting with people from different origins'*; for female students by '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'* and '*Becoming (more) self-confident'*. Besides for '*Becoming (more) independent'* there are proportionally more males than females who include '*Having fun'* (36% vs 26%) and '*Building a network for my career'* (25% versus 18%). Conversely, there are proportionally more female than male students who include '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'* (40% versus 31%), '*Improving my communication skills in the local language'* (37% versus 29%), and to some extent also '*Becoming (more) self-confident'* (37% versus 32%).
  - o With respect to 6.2, there are fewer gender differences. The least important criterion for male students is '*Getting good grades'* followed by *'Feeling European'* whereas the order is the reverse for the female students. Regardless of gender, *'Contributing to making the world a better place'* is the third least important criterion. Proportionally more male students include '*Traveling widely'* (25% versus 19%) and '*Understanding who I am'* (25% versus 18%) among the least important criteria. Female students select *'Learning to behave like the local people at my host institution'* relatively more frequently (34% versus 28%).
  - o On the whole, male students appear to attach significantly more importance to the criteria '*Becoming (more) independent', 'Having fun',* and also '*Building a network for my career'*. Female students, by contrast, attach significantly more importance to '*Becoming (more) self-confident'*, '*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home'*, and *'Improving communication skills in the local language'*. For both male and female students there are two criteria that feature

among the most important as well as among the least important ones, namely '*Building a network for my career'* and *'Traveling widely'.*

Question 6.3-6.4
Question 6.3 is a yes-no question, asking the students whether their experience is in line with an earlier research finding that students experience a lack of contact with the local students at their host institution during their studies abroad. On the whole, almost two thirds (63%) of the students answered that they indeed experienced such a lack of contact while 37% denied that this was the case. In the remainder of this section we summarize our findings for two cross-analyses that we performed. In the first we coded the open answers to question 6.4 in which students were asked to explain why they did or did not experience a lack of contact with local students. The answers were coded according to the party that students attributed this presence or absence of contact to: oneself, the local students and population, the host institution, or a combination of these parties. In the second we investigated whether there was any relation between reported contact with local students and global (dis)satisfaction with the stay abroad experience.

Attribution of (lack of) local contacts. An cross-analysis of the responses of incoming students at the universities of Bologna and Leuven on questions 6.3 and 6.4 demonstrates that responsibility of lack of contacts is attributed first to the host institution and second to the local students and population. One out of five students attribute lack of contact to a responsibility that is shared by the other and oneself. Full self-attributions in the case of lack of contact are rare. On the other hand, those students who report success in contacts with local students overwhelmingly attribute this to personal action or personality. Attribution to the host institution or the local population occurs but is less significant as is shared attribution. A cross-analysis of the responses of the incoming students at the university of Bologna on questions 6.3 and 1.4 also showed that linguistic affinity and distance with Italian was not an influential factor in the reported presence or absence of local contacts.

Contact with locals and satisfaction. A cross-analysis of the responses of all incoming and returned students on questions 6.3 and 2.7 shows that there is only a slight positive relation between reported contact and satisfaction on a personal and an academic level. Among the students who indicate that they are (very) satisfied with the stay abroad experience there are proportionally more students who reported they had contacts with the local population. This effect was more outspoken for satisfaction at the academic level: 78% of the students who reported contact with the local population indicated they were (very) satisfied, whereas only 69% of the students who reported a lack of contact did so. At the personal level the effect was hardly discernible, though (87% versus 84%). There appears to be no consistent relation between reported contact and dissatisfaction, neither on the academic nor on the personal level.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that a number of results from the questionnaire merited closer inspection before conclusions could be drawn. At the same time, we found that some results presented highly interesting avenues for further discussion with the stakeholder groups. The most salient of those, as listed below, were consequently offered for interpretation to the focus groups.

- Only a small group of students today prepare by taking part in courses (with the exception of language courses) or other institutional activities. At the same time, two out of three respondents declare that they take various personal initiatives to explore their host culture and seek information from other exchange students. Does this mean that students can themselves take on the responsibility for their intercultural preparation?
- Students selected the criteria that they consider as the most crucial ones for considering a stay abroad successful. To what extent does this student list correspond to the priorities of teachers and international officers? And what could criteria like 'Becoming more independent' mean to different students?
- Students who claim success in contacts with local students at the host institution attribute this to themselves. Students who report a lack of contact with local students attribute that to external factors: the institution, the local students, the local population. At the same time we observe that before students go abroad, they attach as much importance to making friends with local as with international students but that by the time they have returned making friends with international students has far surpassed making friends with local students as a criterion for success. Do the different stakeholder groups agree that contact with local students is nevertheless a desirable and feasible goal of study abroad? And if so, what can each party do in order to encourage interaction and work on the issue of personal versus external attribution?
- Some returning students mentioned the need to reflect on the intercultural experience; sometimes they also linked it to their willingness to act for change, generally by helping future mobile students or advising home institutions for better guide Erasmus students. What are some of the ways in which teachers, institutions, or student associations can act on these needs and aspirations?

4. FOCUS GROUPS

Following a brief literature review on focus-group methodology (Grudens-Schuck et al. 2004; Liamputtong 2011; Smithson 2008; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009), guidelines were drawn up for the focus-group facilitators, to ensure a similar approach in the three groups. Each group had two facilitators from two partner institutions. The focus-groups took place using Adobe Connect, for which user guidelines (*Appendix D*) were also provided. All the participants were required to sign a specific consent form (*Appendix E*).

4.1. TEACHERS' FOCUS GROUP

4.1.1. INPUTS, PLANNING, METHODOLOGY

The first focus group took place on 6 September 2013, and involved 9 teachers of intercultural communication/education in different HE institutions in Europe. The aim was to discuss some of the findings from the questionnaire from the teachers' point of view. For this purpose, a number of slides were prepared (see *Appendix F*) for the entire set of slides.

Figure 4.1. Example of input for teacher focus group

4.1.2. FINDINGS

The main findings deriving from the teachers' focus group concerned the specific objectives of intercultural preparation for mobile students. These were:

- Increasing awareness and gaining a critical attitude
    - o of one's own culture(s);
    - o of the cultures in the concentric circle model: academic culture in the classroom; university academic structure; university administrative support systems; university life and culture; the culture(s) of the wider society;
    - o noticing and processing differences.
- Preparing for culture shock(s)
    - o general culture shock, academic culture shock, and language shock by providing practical advice (usefulness of ethnography training).
- Promoting willingness to engage with others.
- Bringing together foreign students and local student.
- Becoming more independent

- o This was important, although it was not clear how this can become a teaching goal.
- Adjusting/responding to students' expectations
  - o For example, with regard to making contact with local people, the host university can develop opportunities for contact, (e.g., via tandem learning, volunteering, joining organisations, shared interests). In some contexts, the language of communication may not be the language of the country (so for example Flemish students may speak English with Spanish Erasmus students, etc). In addition, it is also important to understand and account for the needs of the local students.
- Considering whether the materials developed can be used across multiple disciplines
  - o Need to make the materials suitable for students from different fields of studies (engineering, humanities, languages, social sciences).
- On return, creating space where students can talk about their experiences (to deal with "reverse culture shock")
  - o Provide debriefing sessions to encourage students to consider how they may have changed, to make sense of their experiences while away.
  - o Encourage students to reflect on the skills they have developed and how they can use them once back home.

In addition to these objectives, individual participants also mentioned:
- Providing simulations that allow students to *experience* relevant processes and situations and give them an opportunity to reflect on their own reactions in terms of thought, feeling and behaviour. Of particular significance could be those that address the pervasiveness and power of stereotyping and being stereotyped based on the groups that everyone belongs to; usually people are very aware of stereotypes and there is a lot of moral discourse about this, but people cannot grasp the full extent to which generalizations are part and parcel of everyday encounters (and necessarily so) and how to take an active role in handling these.
- Need for more culture-general materials that are not too removed from the experiences of (mobile and non-mobile) university students
- Provide models/illustrations of culture that help the students to access and expand their concept of culture beyond the "iceberg" or "onion" models, which have worked quite well but still convey a strong image of cultures as separate entities. Need to move beyond the "national" culture.
- Need for materials that make use of pragmatics in order to illustrate how patterns of discourse may reinforce stereotypical views/ mentalities.

4.2. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTE OFFICERS' FOCUS GROUP

4.2.1. INPUTS, PLANNING, METHODOLOGY

The second focus group took place on 13 June 2013 and involved six officers from international relations and Erasmus support offices in six different HE institutions in Europe (GB, Belgium, Finland, Italy, Slovenia). Like the previous one, it was facilitated by two members of the IEREST consortium, who prepared input in the form of slides based on the results from the questionnaire. See *Appendix G* for the entire set of slides. The main aim here was to explore how those responsible for organising and supporting mobile students viewed the usefulness of preparing both incoming and outgoing students, what aspect of preparation they considered important, and finally how they envisaged the possibility of adopting the IEREST intercultural paths in their own institutions.

4.2.2. FINDINGS

The discussion yielded some interesting insights on the views of Internationalisation/Erasmus programme offices regarding student preparation for study abroad. The views that emerged were:

- Mobility is one of the most important strategies for improving the experience of students, developing general academic skills, language skills, transferable skills and employability. In fact, most universities write about the importance of study abroad and developing IC in their missions statements, but without clear (and shared) definitions of IC, and without clear learning objectives, it is difficult to measure success (or failure).

- Most offices provide students with practical information regarding their destination country and host institution. This, of course, is important, but it is just as crucial to provide students with intercultural preparation, because mobility is a life experience. This would become essential if institutions had to monitor learning objectives and outcomes of study abroad rather than just participation rates.

- Returning students often remark on their difficulties to establish meaningful relationships with local students. It would therefore seem important to enable students to find strategies for foreign students to integrate with local students.

- Sometimes, disappointment is the result of unrealistic expectations, so it is important to help students reframe their expectations to make them more realistic.

- Although language specialist students tend to be interested also in intercultural matters, it is essential to make other students who are traditionally less interested in these issues (hard sciences, engineering, etc) aware that understanding these topics and acquiring intercultural skills can be significant for them too, particularly in terms of employability.

- While it is true that the students need preparation before they leave, it is also crucial that the home institution offers opportunities for debriefing, so that the students can reflect on what they have learned. This can also be an opportunity for future students to understand better what to expect, and what they will go through while abroad.

- Finally, to the question concerning the implementation of the IEREST Intercultural Paths in other HEIs, the officers pointed out that there would be a need to involve departments in order to implement the programme. Without the interest of the

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academic side, the administrative offices would not be able to make such a decision. In any case, the decision would have to be taken centrally by the university.

4.3. STUDENTS' FOCUS GROUP

The third focus group involved four students from two different HE institutions. Although a larger number of potential participants were contacted, and many had adhered, only four of them joined the focus group on the specific morning (20th September 2013).

4.3.1. INPUTS, PLANNING, METHODOLOGY

The FG objectives were to help interpret the questionnaire data and ask for suggestions to be implemented within the intercultural paths. Before the FG, the students were sent the following prompts, to encourage them to start thinking about the issues to be discussed:

Topics

1. What are the main factors which contribute to the success of a study abroad experience? Respondents to our questionnaire had quite clear ideas about this issue; **we will ask you to comment on their responses on the basis of your experience**.

2. How do students prepare for their study stay abroad at their respective HEI's? How (much) should they prepare for such experiences? After showing you what respondents to the questionnaire answered, **we will ask your for possible suggestions about what kind of preparation the intercultural path should give to students**.

3. Before departure, respondents attach about as much importance to making friends with the local students as with other international students during their stay abroad. From our analysis, it results that this changes in the course of the experience abroad and after return. **We will ask how you might interpret this phenomenon**.

4. Respondents show to have several (sometimes contrasting) ideas on how host and home institutions might better support Erasmus students before, during, and after their experience abroad. **We will ask you to think back of your experience and help us in making choices for the IEREST intercultural path**.

In addition, slides were prepared containing further prompts for discussion. See *Appendix H* for the entire set of slides.

4.3.2. FINDINGS

Topic 1 - A successful study abroad experience?

- The participants agreed that independence is the top criterion for success. The concept implies: not living with parents; having not help (e.g., family, network of friends); practical aspects of the experience (e.g., paying bills, buying food and cooking); time

management. "Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home", on the other hand, was not considered crucial.

- All the participants highlighted the importance of the issue of "academic culture" and the skills/knowledge necessary for participating successfully in the new academic environment (which may involve differences in contact with teachers; study load; seminars and collaborative work vs traditional lecturing; technological support, etc).
- Another issue mentioned was language difficulties: (1) the fact of knowing the language very well does not increase the chance of having contact with local students; (2) most classes for Erasmus students are in English with no contacts with locals at the host university (3) Local students may not speak English well so they may not be able to participate in the Erasmus community.

Topic 2 - How students prepare for their study abroad

- Contact with others is crucial. The suggestions given by the participants for the Intercultural Path were: (1) Contact with previous Erasmus students before departure; (2) A seminar with a teacher of the host institution before departure (note: both suggestions imply a cultural-specific approach). Personal explorations are also important.

Topic 3 - Making friends with local and other international students

- The participants reported having fewer "contacts" with locals than with international students. They attributed this to the following factors: The host universities offered separate courses for international students; locals already have their own circles of friends, habits, socialisation patterns etc. so are willing to build meaningful friendships with new people (the term "contact" is misleading: they all were in contact with locals on a daily base (e.g. students accommodation), but this does not imply establishing friendships).
- Erasmus students associations play a significant role in helping international students to come closer to each other.
- It was difficult to get the participants to reflect and give their views on their interpretations of the input contained in the slide: Are students in group C satisfied when they affirm that contact with internationals is more important than contact with locals or are they just reporting the fact that they did not have much contact with locals? In other words, did they discover and value the Erasmus communities they ended up being part of or are they disappointed not to have succeeded in establishing relationships with locals and, in turn, are led by circumstances to reevaluate the importance of the company of other Erasmus students?

Topic 4(1) - What home and host universities should provide

- None of the participants understood the reasons behind the respondents' open answers about not needing any help from the host institution: an Erasmus student always needs some form of support, at least for accomplishing the paper work. One

participant suggested that the answers quoted were provided by mature students or students with previous international experience.

Topic 4(2) - What the host university should provide

- One of the participants suggested that group B and C might ask the host institution to help them reach the local students more than group A after having experienced that establishing contact with locals is more difficult than expected.
- The ones who had the chance to have a buddy affirmed it was very important (for receiving information on practical issues and starting to establish a network of acquaintances).

Topic 4(3) - What the home university should provide to students upon return

- The participants agreed on the fact the Erasmus students are keen to be involved in actions which might help future Erasmus students. One of them expressed the idea of peer-to-peer seminars where former Erasmus students (N.B. any destination) discuss some crucial issues and their experiences with future Erasmus students.

4.4. CONCLUSION

The aim of the focus groups was to gather qualitative data on the views and experiences of students, teachers and internationalisation officers with regard to the intercultural needs of mobile students and the necessary conditions for an intercultural path such as the one offered by IEREST to be adopted by higher education institutions in Europe.

The findings reported above, together with the results from the questionnaire, informed some of the learning objectives and outcomes of Module 1 – and will inform those of Module 2 and 3. For example, the increase of students' awareness and the development of a critical attitude towards their own culture(s) and those of others (including academic cultures and the cultures of the wider society) is an important objective in Module 1. Similarly, the problem of unrealistic expectations or of the difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships with local students, often reported in feedback questionnaires from international offices, are addressed in Module 2. Finally, the findings relating to the officers' focus group were crucial in helping define implementation plans for IEREST, and identify the necessary requirements for HEI to consider the adoption of such paths for their outgoing and incoming students. An awareness that quality, and not only quantity, should be the focus of internationalisation policies within European universities is, for example, a foundation concept for IEREST. The fact that a number of officers were also conscious of this is certainly promising in view of implementation plans.

5. CONCLUSION

This report summarised the actions that were undertaken as part of the review of target groups' needs, which constitutes WP2 of the IEREST project. It discussed how these actions contributed to the overall objectives of the project through the development of three deliverables: a review of the literature on student mobility, the administration and analysis of a student questionnaire, and the organisation of focus groups with the principal stakeholders: the students, their teachers, and the international officers at higher education institutes. Thanks to a reorganisation of the original research design, intermediate results from the earlier phases of WP2 could be used as input for the later to inform the later phases of the work package. This improvement has allowed the consortium to act on results as they emerged instead of having to wait until the results of each stakeholder group became available at the end of WP2, as in the original project proposal.

For each of these deliverables, conclusions were drawn in view of the consecutive steps in the project, as summarized in the final sections of each deliverable. There is no need to repeat these conclusions here. Taken together, they demonstrate this WP has indeed enabled "identification of the different problems and necessities, and possible solutions, practices within the European context, thus strengthening knowledge transfer and experience within the project and, consequently, improving generalisation of the project's results" (*IEREST project proposal: description of WP2*). Regarding knowledge transfer within the project, we would like to point out that although the WP2 actions have been formally concluded, the work can (and is being) continued. The IEREST project partners have continued exchanging views on what constitutes the intercultural (*deliverable 2.1*) in the context of developing the intercultural paths in WP3 as well as in professional gatherings with other parties. The student questionnaire (*deliverable 2.2*) has yielded a hoard of data that have no direct implications for this project but will gradually be analysed and made available to the wider professional community in the coming years. And the exercises of conducting focus groups (*deliverable 2.3*) has released a positive energy that has encouraged several participants to offer their services as external evaluator or as trainer as teaching modules are being implemented in WP4. These and similar examples show how the work undertaken in WP2 is having beneficial effects on the ongoing project dynamics that go beyond the formal requirements of the deliverables.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The intercultural in the literature on mobility

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The intercultural is discussed in relation to several concepts—intercultural competence, the intercultural speaker, and intercultural engagement—which I briefly outline below.

An important concept within understanding of intercultural communication and engagement is the concept of intercultural competence. Byram (2008) summarises the limits of intercultural competence as "a potential for taking action, for mediating and reflecting the values, beliefs and behaviours of one language group to another—and the opportunities for reflexivity, i.e., to critically analyse one's own values, beliefs and behaviours" (p. 228). Acknowledging essentialist critiques in his work (e.g., from Risager), he expands the concept into the domain of "intercultural citizenship," a concept underpinned by the idea of "engagement in action" (p. 288) at the transnational level. He summarises the components of intercultural citizenship in a framework of five orientations (cognitive, evaluative, comparative, action, and communicative orientations (pp. 238-239)) which expand upon his model of intercultural competence. These components are yet to be systematically explored in research in intercultural encounters, or incorporated into curricula, but may have the potential for international student sojourn experiences in terms of developing critical intercultural (global) citizens, an oft cited objective of internationalisation. Yet, what happens when people in *engage in action* in an intercultural encounter is little understood. An intercultural pathway needs to examine what is entailed in this process, and consider how to prepare students/sojourners for this engagement.

While Byram's theory has been influential in the European context, US approaches have also gained currency, namely in Deardorff's handbook (2009). Deardorff (2011) concludes that a key criticism of existing definitions is that they are either too general or provide a disjointed list of attributes, a criticism she attributes to the lack of specificity on the part of the intercultural experts. She settles for a generic definition, and one that is widely cited in the intercultural communication literature as "behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situation"(p. 38) The influence of quantitative psychology models in this understanding are evident in the use of the terms "effective" and "appropriate", which Deardorff takes from Spitzberg's work (1989), where appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules and effectiveness is the achievement of valued objective. Yet, what these terms really mean, or their usefulness in any study of intercultural communication, is unclear.

In Deardorff's handbook, Sptizberg and Changnon (2009) offer several pages of lists of the components of intercultural competence derived from a multitude of models of intercultural competence. While these components describe many of the aspects of what might be deemed "intercultural competence," as lists of discrete points they do not provide insights into how student sojourners might manage such skills, knowledge and attitudes in intercultural engagement. Similarly, the models are frequently underpinned by essentialist and positivist understandings of culture as values, beliefs and norms held by a group of people, which shape how individuals communicate with others. These understandings fail to capture the contingent, fluid, and socially constructed nature of social engagement. Further, the US-centric and quantitative bias that permeates much of the research on intercultural competence and study abroad needs to be carefully critiqued in understanding the complexity of intercultural engagement in people's lives in contemporary societies more generally, and especially within the European context.

One important concept underpinning interculturality is the notion of the intercultural speaker (Byram, 2008), that is, "someone who is aware of cultural similarities and differences, and is able to act as mediator between two or more cultures, two or more sets of beliefs, values and behaviours…and [who] can decentre in order to help others to act together—or indeed to act oneself with others—in ways that overcome obstacles of difference" (p. 76). Again, there is the risk of essentialist notions of a "bounded" culture, and this train of thought is further exemplified in Wilkinson's (2012) recent treatment of the intercultural speaker as the person who is aware of his/her language and culture and sensitive to other cultures and languages without preconceptions and prejudices. Presumably, Erasmus students/sojourners would want and need to have these skills to manage intercultural encounters when abroad. Therefore, a more fluid conceptualisation of the term might be a useful development vis-à-vis the Erasmus student experience. The concept is also embedded in notions of intercultural competence, and Byram's "intercultural citizen."

One attempt to explore interculturality as socially constructed in intercultural engagement and within the context of an intercultural encounter is in Holmes and O'Neill's (2010; 2012) work on the PEER model of intercultural engagement. The acronym represents the processes of preparing, engaging, evaluating and reflecting, important in building intercultural awareness, dialogue and engagement for action. For example, participants spoke of experience that addressed themes such as acknowledging reluctance and fear, foregrounding and moving beyond stereotypes, monitoring feelings and emotions, working through confusions, moving from fear to complexity, acknowledging limitations to (intercultural) competence. The research foundations and accompanying teaching materials supplied to students to research their intercultural encounters, and from which the model began to emerge, are described in Holmes and O'Neill (2010).

This initial exploration shed meaning through experience on these emergent theoretical concepts; however, deeper research is required concerning these concepts. The researchers noted the need for more research on the complexity of emotion in intercultural communication and competence, richer understandings of identifications and (re)presentations of self and other, how individuals might develop intercultural citizenship skills of communication, mediation, and conflict resolution (important in educating individuals to deal with the complexity of the social and political conditions individuals face daily in their communities. Interculturality involves understanding the nature of intercultural dialogue in terms of practices of ethical communication, appreciation of and tolerance for the world-views of others, and intercultural responsibility (a concept which needs further exploration and understanding).

Intercultural training materials need to provide learners with opportunities for engagement and for reflection and learning on that experience. More needs to be done to understand processes of intercultural engagement and how individuals understand this experience, and their implications of those experiences for identity (re)construction and (re)negotiation and for re-entry to one's previous milieu after an intercultural sojourn. These processes need to be understood as part of Erasmus students' sojourning experiences.

While student ethnographies have been widely used in making sense of the student sojourn experience (e.g., Jordan, Roberts, Jackson), a more recent example (Brown, 2011) illustrates the narrow conceptual stance on the terminology. Brown's ethnographic study of sojourners' intercultural experience uses a sample of 13 international students in a UK university. Drawing on Bochner 1981; Gudykunst 1998; Kim 2001, Brown describes people who are interculturally competent as being able to "adopt a multicultural interaction strategy: this implies a willingness to both embrace other cultures and retain one's own ethnic identity; it therefore has the capability to produce mediating personalities, with positive implications for world peace and understanding" (p. 503). The language carries a bounded and positivist stance in that it does not acknowledge the dynamic, complex nature (outside of a "culturalist" paradigm) of intercultural engagement, or identity (re)construction and (re)negotiation, or the transformative power of an international sojourn on which her study is predicated. This stance is evident in her reference to Hofstede (1991), where she notes that "culture clearly has a defining impact on an individual's makeup" (p. 506). While her model of

the sojourner experience captures what she describes as "transformative change" in individuals, her approach to understanding the sojourner experience and its outcomes are described in essentialist vocabulary. Furthermore, she focuses on difference without acknowledging similarities.

In conclusion, critical understandings of intercultural communication point to the need to avoid essentialising people as belonging to cultures, nations etc., and to understand identity as contingent, fluid/dynamic, social and contextually (re)constructed and (re)negotiated through intercultural experience (Holliday, 2011). For example, Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2005) outline this complexity and the ways in which people are represented by others and how they present themselves, that is, the multifaceted nature of identity in their first chapter on identity (p. 8). Collier (1998) uses the terms "avowal" and "ascription" from psychology to point out that the identity individuals perceive they are enacting (avowed) may or may not be the one that others give to them (ascribed). How individuals (impression) manage such identities is an important part of understanding the complexity of identity in intercultural encounters.

Interpretive and ethnographic research frameworks are useful in enabling the emergence of people's experiences of intercultural engagement and provide ways of building theory on what constitutes interculturality in intercultural encounters. For example, interculturality needs to include understandings of the nature of intercultural communication, dialogue, competence, responsibility. Piller (2011) encapsulates this problem in her mantra of who speaks for whom, for what purposes, and in what context. Training materials need to speak to these themes of interculturality.

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Appendix B: accompanying email to the ierest questionnaire

Dear student,

Your experience of life abroad is of tremendous value to us at IEREST. Indeed, by sharing your experiences with us and filling out the questionnaire, you can make a significant contribution to the future of intercultural learning before, during, and after international study stays.

IEREST (ierest-project.eu) is a new project that focuses on helping students get the most out of their study abroad experience. Universities, student organizations, and teacher associations from across Europe are all collaborating in developing innovative modules for intercultural learning by 2015.

You can help us to do our best to support students like yourselves by completing the questionnaire at [*insert url*]. Your responses will help us make the right choices in preparing students for and enriching their Erasmus experience.

So if you are currently on a stay abroad, or if you have recently returned from such a stay, or if you are at home preparing for your departure, please go to [*insert url*] before [*insert date*] and share your findings and feelings.

Do it today – for tomorrow's students.

Thank you very much,

The [*your university*] IEREST team

Appendix C: Overview of distribution of the IEREST questionnaire

Partner	Outgoing	Incoming	Submission	Reminder	TOT
Bologna	**1649** Erasmus (2012-2013)	**1610** Erasmus (2012-2013)	3/4/13 (in)) 5/4/13 (out)	17/4/13 (in) 15/4/13 (out)	**3259**
Durham	**291** Erasmus (2012-2013) **22** Overseas (2012-2013) **41** Overseas (2013-2014)	**231** Erasmus (2012-2013) **53** Overseas (2012-2013)	2/4/13	16/4/13	**638**
Nottingham	**321** Overseas (2012/13) **333** Overseas (2013/4)		24 April		**654**
Surry	**19** Overseas (2012/13) **27** Overseas (2013/14) **52** Erasmus (2012/13)		23 April		**98**
Queen Margaret	**3** Erasmus (2012/13) **9** Overseas (2012/13) **5** Erasmus (2013/14) **21** Overseas (2013/14)	**17** Erasmus (2012/13) **18** Overseas (2012/13)	18 April		**73**
Chambery					1600[1]
Koper	**477** Erasmus (last 5 years) **73** Overseas (2012-2013) **171** Overseas (2013-2014	**378** Erasmus & CEEPUS (last 5 years) **158** Overseas (2012-2013)	8/4/13 (1° group in + out) 17/4/13 (2°) 23/4/13 (3°)	24/4/13 (in) 24/4/13 (out)	**1257**
Leuven[2]	**1396** Erasmus (2012-2013)	**1074** Erasmus (2012-2013) **656** International - Master (2012-2013)	15/4/13	16/4/13 (inter) 23/4/13 (inter)	**3126**
T.M.Kempen[3]	**1391** (years 2007-2013)	**307** (years 2005-2013)	17/4/13		**1698**

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[1] Estimated figure (email John Osborne 15 April 2014)
[2] Included two calls through an e-newsletter for international students and through a facebook group
[3] Estimated rate of invalid addresses: 1/3.

TOT	6301 (without Chambéry)	4502 (without Chambéry)			12.403

Appendix D: Guidelines for the Focus Groups

Focus group: Guidelines for the moderators

Tool management[4]

To get started:
1. Enter your username and password (in the UNIBO system only Ana and Claudia can do that and appear as hosts);
2. Click on "open a new meeting room window" (if the room does not open automatically)
3. Participants will be provided with the link to the meeting beforehand. When they enter the meeting, a notification window appears asking the moderator to accept or decline their request to enter. Click the checkmark to accept the request.
4. Check that the three icons at the top ("speakers", "microphone" and "webcam") are green or adjust them → Remind all participants to do the same.
5. **IMPORTANT! - Recording**: Go to "Meeting" → click on "record meeting" → Choose a name for the file (i.e. "IEREST_students") and select "ok" [a small red ball must appear on the upper right-hand corner]. After one hour or so from the beginning of the meeting (choose a moment when there is a pause in the conversation), click on "stop recording" (by placing the cursor on the recoding icon) and start "record meeting" again (this is in order to create two smaller files rather a single big one). **Please, from time to time, check that the system is recording the meeting**.

To show a powerpoint presentation:
1. Click on "Presentation" on the right-hand bar ["Share my screen" should appear on the screen];
2. Click the right arrow beside "Share My Screen" and select "Share Document";
3. Click "Browse My Computer" to select a file from your system [The file is automatically uploaded and converted];
4. Use the "Next" and "Previous" controls to navigate through your presentation. Do it slowly as for participants the slideshow might be slower (with a 5-6 sec delay).

Additional features and tools
- Board (in "Collaboration" on the right-hand bar);
- Upload/download file (in "Collaboration" on the right-hand bar);
- Chat box with a set of icons and emoticons (fourth icon at the top). The chat box is available in every modality ("Presentation", "Discussion" and "Collaboration").

At the end:
1. **IMPORTANT! - Recording**: Click "Stop recording" by placing cursor on recoding icon (the small red ball on the right upper corner);
2. Go to "Meeting" → click on "Manage meeting information" (a webpage will open) → "Recording/registrazioni" (you will see the recording with name you chose for it at the beginning) → click on "offline/rendi non in linea" (a new tab appears) → click on "Proceed with offline recording" → choose the area of your computer where you want to save the file and press "ok" (this process might require an hour or so, depending on the length of the recording). For your serenity, consider that the recording will remain on

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[4] See also the attached documents "Guide for moderatos" and "Guide for participants"

AdobeConnect anyway (if you do not press "delete/elimina!). Remember also to do this with BOTH files (if you remembered to create two smaller files instead of a single large one).

3. Simply close the window of the meeting.

Focus group protocol

General considerations on IEREST members' roles

One of us could be the moderator, while the other person could act as observer and back-up. The latter would also be the one to check whether the recording is working and intervene in case of necessity.

Introductory stage

- We introduce ourselves and then invite participants to introduce themselves in order to ensure that everyone has contributed something from the beginning;
- The moderator briefly introduces the goal of the focus group discussion as stated in the invitation letter.
- We introduce the tool and its facilities (see above);
- The moderator explains the nature of the focus group discussion,
  - Reassuring the value of all participant views, regardless of how different they are, creating room for disagreement to elicit a range of perspectives on a topic;
  - Encouraging individuals to speak to each other instead of addressing the moderator. The moderator might want to take inspiration from the following quotes:

    To try and get your views of what's important and not ours, we want to take as little part in this as possible; ... We have some broad questions we can ask to get the ball rolling or steer things back on course if the discussion goes too far off track. You can say as much or as little as you want; we might try and come in on the conversation if it seems that someone isn't getting a chance to talk. Other than that, we'll leave you to it for about an hour... (Liamputtong, 2011: 74)

    From past experience in groups like this we know that some people talk a lot, and some people don't say much. We really want to hear from all of you because you have had different experiences. So if you are talking a lot, I may interrupt you and if you aren't saying much I may call on you. If I do, please don't be offended. ... It's just my way of making sure we get through all the questions and that everyone has a chance to talk. (Liamputtong, 2011: 82)

Conducting the focus group

- Choose the input (slide or question from the question guide) you consider the most appropriate to start with. It is usual for the moderators also to ask additional questions which are not listed in the question guide depending on the answers of the participants so that more in-depth explanations and meanings can be obtained. To this end, moderators can ask probing questions, follow-up questions, specifying questions, direct and indirect questions, structuring questions, interpreting questions.
- Try to reduce your intervention - at least at first. This might permit participants to set the priorities. Mind that priority should be given 'to the respondents' hierarchy of importance', *their* language and concepts, *their* frameworks for understanding the world' (Kitzinger, 1994: 108). On the other hand, the moderator should continuously consider whether the information obtained from the discussion is sufficient. Therefore, moderators should try to balance the control and flow of the focus group by adopting either a more

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interventionist or a more flexible style. For example, sometimes a more interventionist style might be convenient in order to ensure that the debate continues beyond the stage it might otherwise have ended, or to challenge people's taken for granted reality and to encourage them to discuss the inconsistencies both between participants and within their own thinking (Kitzinger, 1994).

- Some facilitators find it useful to start with very open questions and proceed with more specific issues. Consider for example the following structure:
  - o Introductory question: a simple question to encourage interaction, eg. Can you please tell us about your experience of teaching the intercultural?
  - o Transition question(s), following gradually from the introductory question to lead to the focus questions;
  - o Focus questions;
  - o Summarizing question;
  - o Concluding question: "I have no more questions to ask but is there anything else you would like to bring up or ask about before we finish this session?".
- During the focus group, it might be useful to remind participants they can use the chat box, the board, and also upload files in order to be shared. These tools (emoticons, in particular) can indeed compensate for the scarcity of non-verbal and discourse cues in online focus groups.
- Ask for opinions and manage turns taking into account that participants are sitting in front of their computers and might get distracted by external business. Focused questions such "do you agree with…", "What do you think of…" might help.
- Consider that some participants may not feel comfortable in participating in the focus group, due to their limited technological skills or their English language skills.

Ending the focus group
- The moderator asks the participants about their experiences of the session.
- Participants are informed that the findings based on their contributions will be available at the end of the year (December 2013).

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Appendix E: Consent form for the Focus Groups

IEREST
Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers

Project purposes: IEREST is an Erasmus Multilateral Project (2012-2015) which aims to develop an Intercultural Path (a set of teaching modules) to be provided to Erasmus students before, during, and after their experience abroad. Being a project aimed at students, teachers and higher education institutions, IEREST includes several experimental/piloting sessions with volunteers, representative of the three above mentioned target groups.

Focus group purposes: Three online focus groups will take place in September 2013:
- 06/09/2013 (8.00 GMT time) – Focus group with 6/7 teachers of intercultural/multicultural/cross-cultural/global education or communication in higher education
- 13/09/2013 (8.00 GMT time) – Focus group with 6/7 officers at higher education institutes who are responsible for Erasmus programs
- 20/09/2013 (8.00 GMT time) – Focus group with 6/7 students who have returned from their study abroad in Spring/Summer 2013

The purpose of each online focus group is to enable the IEREST research team to gain insight into how each of the three principal target groups (students, teachers, HEI officers) make sense of the results of a student questionnaire the IEREST consortium submitted to future, present, and past Erasmus students in Spring 2013. Thus, focus groups participants will be asked to discuss the questionnaire results and to interpret these results from multiple perspectives (including their own professional and personal experience, institutional contexts, teaching/working/studying practices, etc.). Two representatives of the consortium will moderate the discussions and provide any additional information needed. The focus groups will be held on line, and will be video-recorded for the purposes of the project.

Nature of participation in the research: Participation in the IEREST focus groups is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may at any stage withdraw your participation without needing to justify your choice. Your privacy and confidentiality will be guaranteed. No personal data that can identify you individually will be revealed. All personal records will be kept in a safe location by the data controller (Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, via Zamboni, 33, 40126, Bologna, Italy). Video-recordings of the focus groups might be transferred to IEREST partners[5] for research purposes only; should this happens, each partner will act as an independent holder of the data treatment with the limitations and restrictions of use arising from this consent form. For further information on the people responsible for the treatment of data please contact the IEREST coordinator (Ana Beaven, University Language Centre, Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna).

Certificate of consent

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[5] Durham University (UK), Université de Savoie, Chambéry (FR), University of Helsinki (FI), University of Primorska (SI), University of Leuven (BE), Open University (UK).

I, the undersigned, have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the IEREST project. I confirm that my participation in the IEREST project is entirely voluntary and understand that I may withdraw at any stage without needing to justify my choice. I have been informed and understand that the participation in the research involves the realization of audio and video recordings, short video clips, photos and that the likeness, image, voice, appearance and/or performance of myself will be recorded and be a part of those recordings.

I have been fully informed that information about me will be used solely for the purposes of IEREST project, which may include written publications. Information may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) and partners participating in this project in an anonymous form. All information I give will be treated as confidential. I am aware that all the data will be kept in a safe location by the person responsible for the project (Ana Beaven, University Language Centre, Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna).

The data (video-recordings, images and word transcriptions) taken during the IEREST project will be used solely for research purposes, which may include publications or presentations to professional audiences concerned with intercultural communication/education, and mobility. The data may be shared with other project partners and used by the latter only for the purposes of IEREST project and/ or for other non- commercial research and educational purposes provided that project partners shall be compliant with the limitations and restrictions of use arising from this consent form.

Duration of the participation: 2 hours, plus ½ hour for technical tests of the online tool

_____ (Signature of participant)   _____ (Date)

_____ (Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by IEREST coordinator:
Ana Beaven
Centro Linguistico di Ateneo
Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna
Piazza San Giovanni in Monte, 4, 40124 Bologna (Italia)
Email: ana.beaven@unibo.it

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:
Claudia Borghetti
Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne
Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna
Via Cartoleria 5, 40141 Bologna (Italia)
Tel. +39 0512097161
Email: claudia.borghetti@unibo.it

This consent form is made pursuant to the relevant national, European and international data protection laws and regulations and personal data treatment obligations. Specifically this consent form complies with the following laws and regulations:
- EC Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data,
- Council Of Europe Recommendation 83/10 Protection of personal data used for scientific research and statistics;
- Council Of Europe Recommendation 97/18 Concerning the protection of personal data collected and processed for statistical purposes

For Italian project partners:
- Legislative Decree No 196/2003
- Attachment A4 to the Legislative Decree No 196/2003 "Code of conduct and professional practice applying to processing of personal data for statistical and scientific purposes" (Published in the Official Journal no. 190 of August 14, 2004)

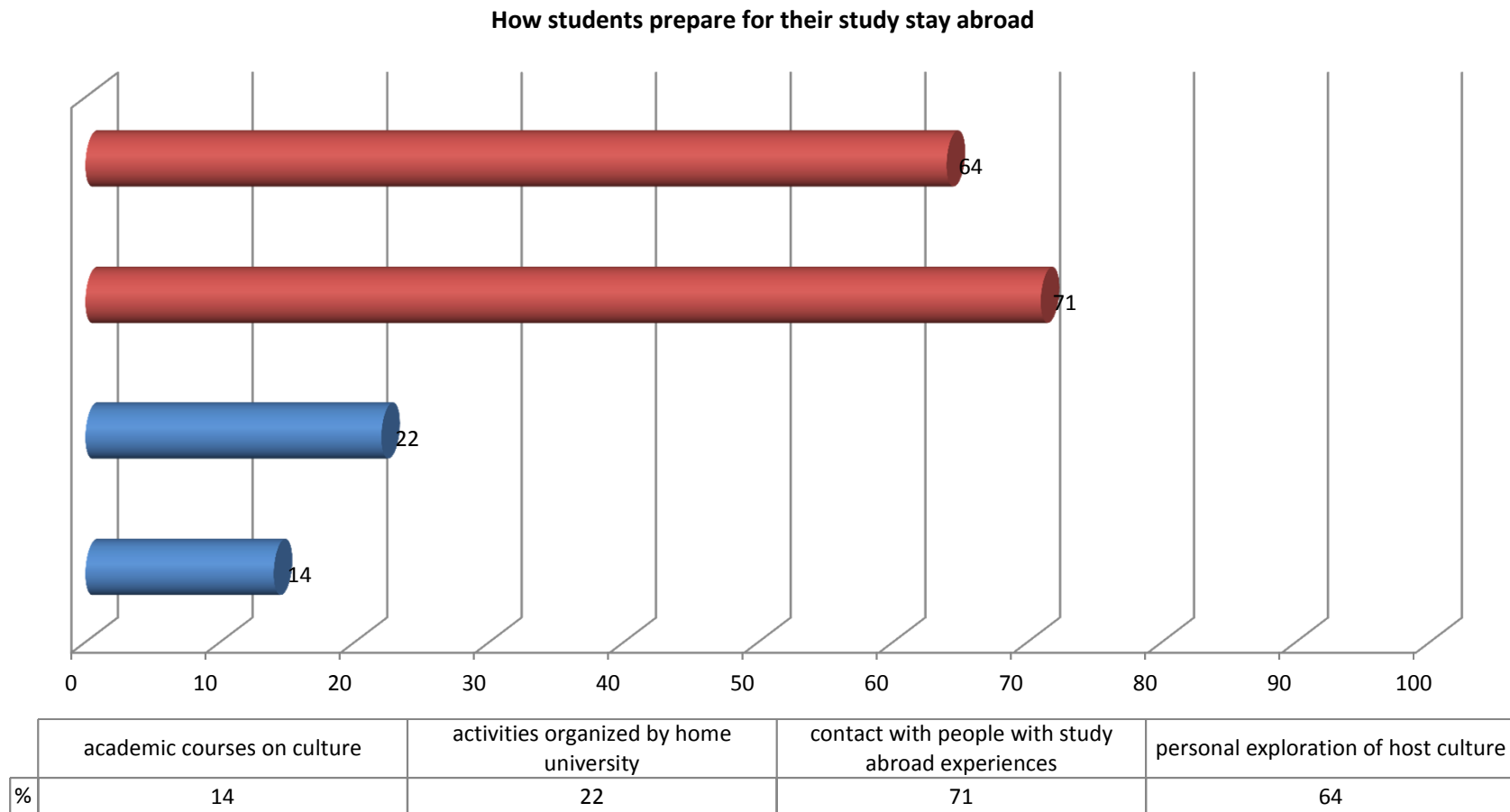# APPENDIX F: INPUT FOR IEREST'S TEACHERS' FOCUS GROUP

Online Focus Group
Teachers of the Intercultural in HE

6 September 2013

1. What does/do intercultural communication/ courses have to offer mobility students?

i.   In your opinion, does this mean that students can themselves take on the responsibility for their preparation? Or assuming that courses on culture or the intercultural have something to add, what could be their "unique selling point" or positioning statement?

ii.   What do you consider are powerful principles and practices for effective intercultural learning? Which of these should be included in the IEREST intercultural path ?

How students prepare for their study abroad

How students prepare for their study stay abroad

	academic courses on culture	activities organized by home university	contact with people with study abroad experiences	personal exploration of host culture
%	14	22	71	64

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2. A successful study abroad experience?

Top criteria for considering the experience successful:
- ➢ *Becoming more independent*
- ➢ *Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home*
- ➢ *Interacting with people from different origins*

i. Which of these do you consider as objectives or desirable outcomes of your teaching? Why? Why not?

ii. Would you add other objectives/outcomes?

iii. What choices of activities and approaches you might adopt to achieve these objectives?

3. Developing intercultural interaction

i. In your opinion, how can teachers work on the issue of personal vs. external attribution of responsibilities with their students? How is this issue linked to the intercultural? What practical advice can you give in the form of activities and/or approaches (in view of the IEREST intercultural path ?

ii. If you were developing an intercultural pathway for ERASMUS mobility students, what activities/learning materials would you include in your programme? Are there any that you would leave out?

How students explain (lack of) contact with local students

%	Attribution to oneself	Attribution to locals	Attribution to institution	Shared responsibility
Lack of contacts	1	33	38	20
No lack of contacts	72	0	1	1

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4. Post-Erasmus: Reflection and action for change

i.   Do you address reflexivity and commitment (action for change) in your courses? How do you usually do that?

ii. In your opinion, what kind of debriefing session/event to mobility students might be the most effective for intercultural purposes? Why?

iii. What would such a debriefing session focus on? What teaching activities might you draw on?

What students recommend to their home universities

a) "My uni had a 'welcome back to Nottingham' session for returned exchange students, which was great. I had reverse-culture shock really badly, and it was really the best thing to be able to go to talk to other students who had returned from universities across the world, and hear that they were all experiencing the same thing."

b) I think that the "abroad experience" should be seen as a motivational push, or as a kind of a driver, where one could actually change their state of mind and remain active for being a agent of change.

Thank you very much!

The IEREST team

APPENDIX G: INPUT FOR IEREST'S HEI OFFICERS' FOCUS GROUP

Online focus group with HEI officers on the intercultural in higher education
Topics for discussion

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Topic 2

Can you predict what students expect to mention as top criteria for considering the experience successful?
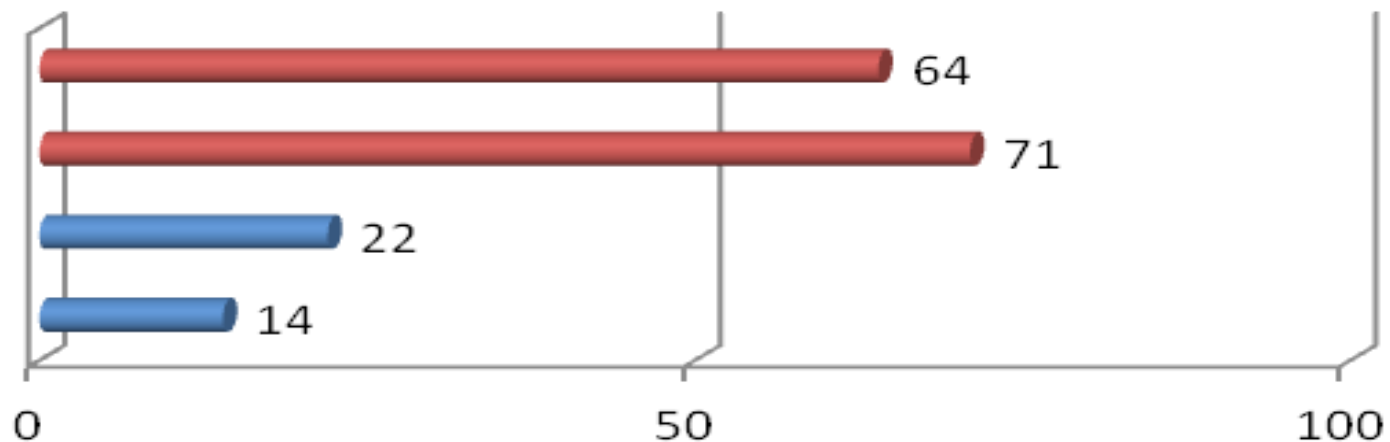
Topic 2

Top criteria for considering the experience successful

•*Becoming more independent*

•*Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home*

•*Interacting with people from different origins*

Topic 3

How students prepare for their study stay abroad

	academic courses on culture	activities organized by home university	contact with people with study abroad experiences	personal exploration of host culture
%	14	22	71	64

Topic 4

- **What would you recommend that your home university provide to students like you upon return from a stay abroad experience?**

- *My uni had a 'welcome back to Nottingham' session for returned exchange students, which was great. I had reverse-culture shock really badly, and it was really the best thing to be able to go to talk to other students who had returned from universities across the world, and hear that they were all experiencing the same thing.* (4.3c,4_home)

- *A seminar of reintegration and follow ups. I think a lot of students come back having difficulties to readapt or what is worst..some readapt so well that they even forget all the cool things that were making them grow on the "abroad experience".. I think that the "abroad experience" should be seen as a motivational push, or as a kind of a driver, where one could actually change their state of mind and remain active for being a agent of change.* (4.3c,4_home)

- *A reflection tool, especially designed to improve experiences of the following generation* (4.3c,4_home)

APPENDIX H: INPUT FOR IEREST'S STUDENTS' FOCUS GROUP

Online Focus Group - Students
Topics for discussion

20 September 2013

The Intercultural Path

Before

During

After

Outgoing
Face-to-face module

Outgoing
Online module

Outgoing
Face-to-face module

Incoming
Face-to-face module

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The questionnaire

Versions of the questionnaire:
- 3 perspectives: before - during - after
- 4 languages: Italian, English, French, Slovenian

Question categories:
- Biodata, included study-abroad related information
- Level of satisfaction with the stay abroad
- Opinions and recommendations on how to prepare
- Criteria for considering one's stay successful
- Aspirations

Responses: 3.152

Topic 1 - A successful study abroad experience?

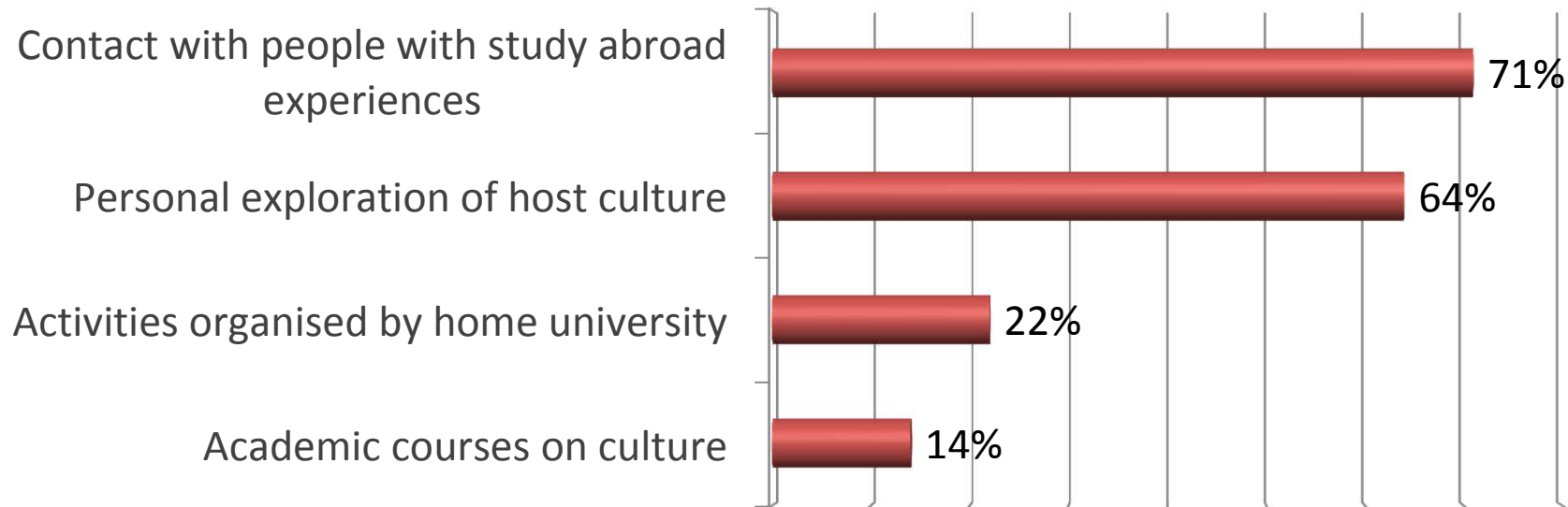Top criteria for considering the experience successful:

- ➢ *Becoming more independent*
- ➢ *Gaining another perspective on the way things are at home*
- ➢ *Interacting with people from different origins*

Our respondents selected these as the most important criteria for considering a stay abroad experience successful.

Please, can you help us to make sense of these answers? I.e. what exactly do these criteria mean to you?

Topic 2 - How students prepare for their study abroad

Contact with people with study abroad experiences — 71%
Personal exploration of host culture — 64%
Activities organised by home university — 22%
Academic courses on culture — 14%

1. How do you interpret these data?

2. Looking back on your abroad experience, what sort of intercultural preparation would you have liked to have had? What kind of preparation should the intercultural path give to students?

Topic 3 - Making friends with local and other international students

Before departure respondents attach about as much importance to making friends with the local students as with other international students during their stay abroad. This changes in the course of the experience and students who had returned from their experience responded dramatically differently.
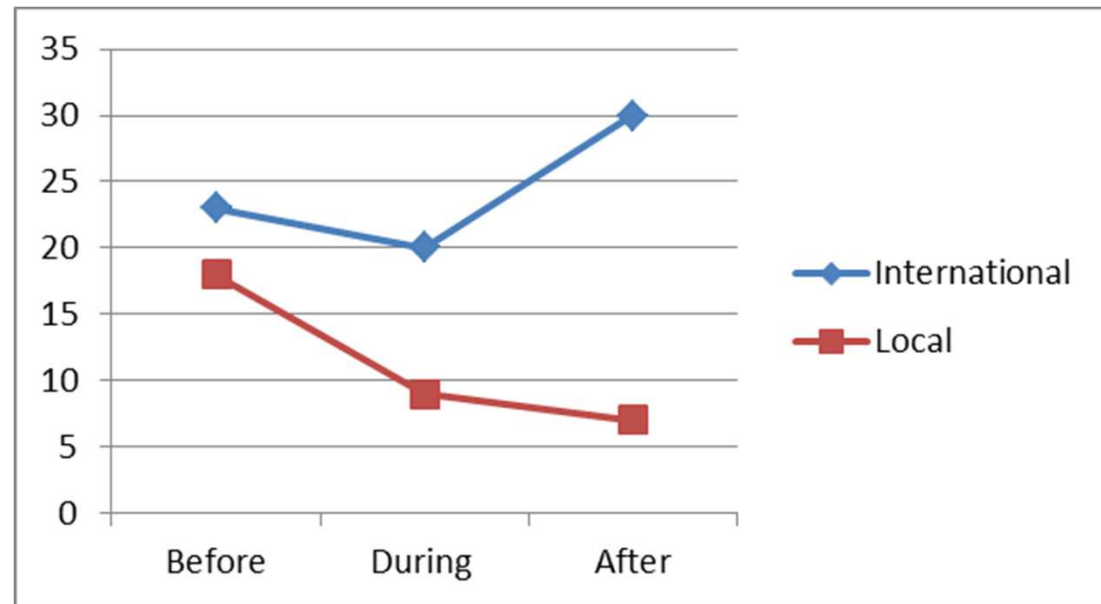
Please, can you help us to make sense of these findings by relating them to your own experiences?

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Topic 4(1) - What home and host universities should provide

Home university - before departure
- **we don't need university for know what to do**

Home university - while abroad
- **Stay out of their lives so they don't have to think about the return much**
- **nothing, that's what Erasmus is for: independence**

Host university - while abroad
- **nothing more, you have to learn to be independent**

Home university - upon return
- **Nothing :DD What he hell they should provide? Am I a baby?**

The majority of respondents (approx. 70%) recommend that home institutions offer **(better) support** to outgoing students while they are abroad.

However, there is also an interesting minority who affirms that home and host universities should provide **nothing**

How do you interpret this in the light of your experience? What do these two different groups of students want?

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Topic 4(2) - What the host university should provide

1 out of 4/5 students recommended that the host university provide opportunities to contact other students (by organizing parties, visits, tandem, etc.). They preferred this advice over, for example, 'providing help with paperwork' or 'ensuring recognition of credits', etc.
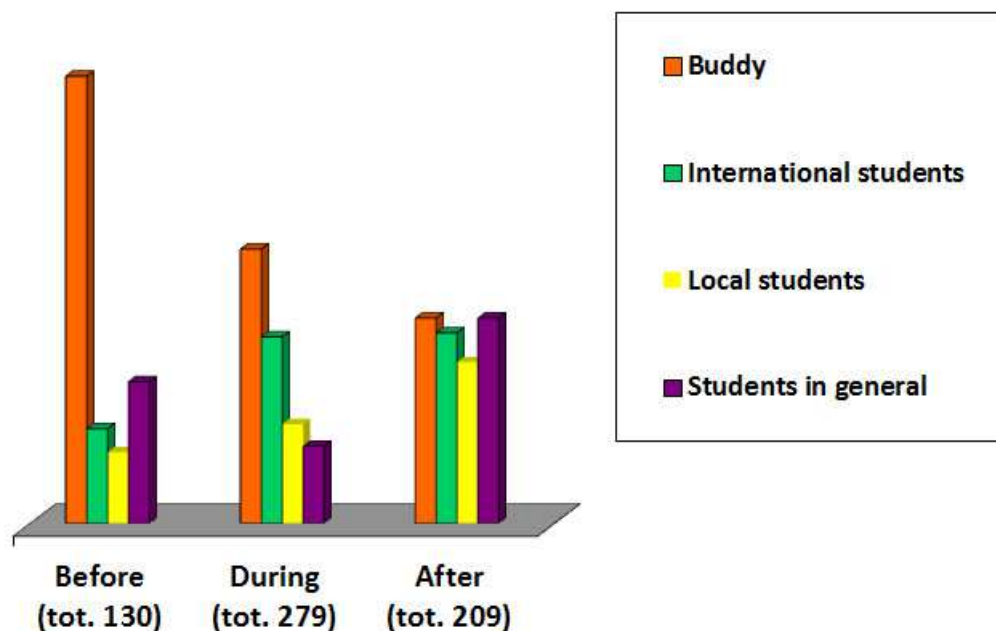

How do you interpret these data?

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Topic 4(3) - What the home university should provide to students upon return

- **A seminar of reintegration and follow ups. I think a lot of students come back having difficulties to readapt or what is worst..some readapt so well that they even forget all the cool things that were making them grow on the "abroad experience".. I think that the "abroad experience" should be seen as a motivational push, or as a kind of a driver, where one could actually change their state of mind and remain active for being a agent of change.**

- **opportunity to become the part of the team supporting foreign students, as well as students from my country interested in study abroad**

- **A chance to share your experiences, a chance to tell the university about what things it could improve (both infrastructural and educational), a helpgroup for people coming back from an experience abroad**

1. After your return, did you experience something similar?
2. What advice can you give us when we plan the module for returning students in order to better address these needs?

Topic 5 - Have fun!

One consistent finding is that 'having fun' is considered an important criterion before and after but not during the experience.
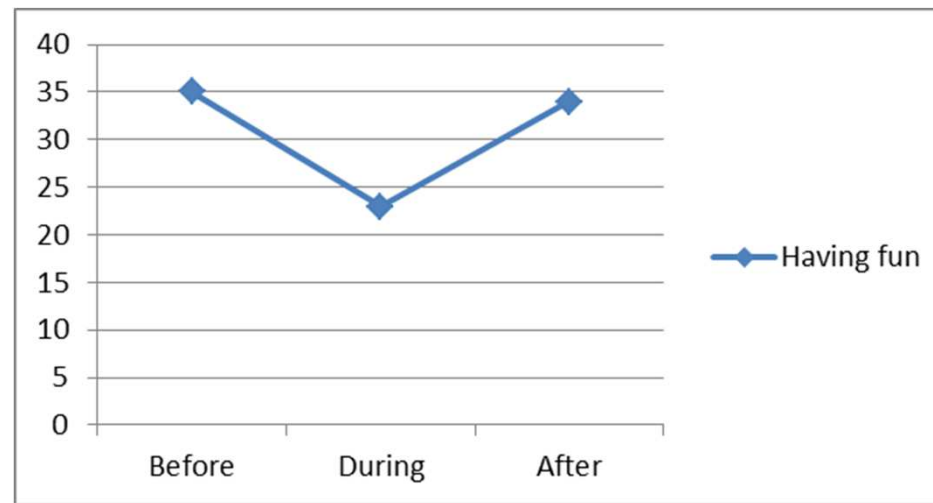
1. Please, can you help us to make sense of these findings by relating them to your own experiences?
2. What advice can you give us when we plan the teaching modules? E.g., what role should 'having fun' have, in your opinion?

Thank you very much!

The IEREST team