

# ESTUDOS DO SÉCULO

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A participação dos estudantes no ERASMUS  
a conceção europeia à implementação nas universidades

The participation of Portuguese students  
in ERASMUS

From its European conception  
to its implementation in universities\*

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A PARTICIPAÇÃO DOS  
ESTUDANTES NO ERASMUS:  
DA CONCEÇÃO EUROPEIA  
À IMPLEMENTAÇÃO NAS  
UNIVERSIDADES

O Programa ERASMUS, criado em junho de 1987, tem sido considerado como um dos programas europeus de educação mais popular, na medida em que favorece a mobilidade científica de milhares de estudantes. Dada a relevância do ERASMUS na construção de uma Europa do conhecimento, pretendemos, com este artigo, analisar a importância do ERASMUS para Portugal desde a sua implementação. O estado da arte nacional sobre o assunto não é exaustivo. Apesar de a investigação sobre mobilidade estudantil a nível europeu, com enfoque no ERASMUS, ter uma expressão relevante – sendo inclusive difícil de a resumir dada a diversidade de estudos –, esta não é, contudo, acompanhada a nível nacional, uma vez que os trabalhos existentes sobre o país são sobretudo dissertações de mestrado, de índole qualitativa, muito suportadas por entrevistas a antigos estudantes ERASMUS e sobre os últimos anos do Programa. Neste sentido, neste artigo de fundo, além de identificarmos as principais etapas que levaram à instauração do Programa e de evidenciarmos os contornos da aplicação do ERASMUS em Portugal, pretendemos sobretudo analisar a tendência participativa dos estudantes portugueses do primeiro ciclo universitário (os chamados *outgoings*), desde 1987 a 2014, ano em que iniciou o ERASMUS+.

**Palavras-chave:** ERASMUS, mobilidade estudantil, Portugal, União Europeia

THE PARTICIPATION OF  
PORTUGUESE STUDENTS  
IN ERASMUS: FROM ITS  
EUROPEAN CONCEPTION  
TO ITS IMPLEMENTATION  
IN UNIVERSITIES

The ERASMUS Programme, established in June 1987, is considered one of the most popular European education programmes as it favours the academic mobility of thousands of students. Given the importance of ERASMUS in building a Europe of knowledge, this article aims to analyse the importance of ERASMUS to Portugal since its implementation. The state of the art on the subject is not exhaustive. Although much research on student mobility with a focus on ERASMUS at the European level has been undertaken – albeit difficult to summarise given the diversity of studies – Portuguese literature has not kept pace since existing studies are mainly Masters dissertations of a qualitative nature, supported by interviews with former ERASMUS students and covering the recent years of the Programme. Bearing this in mind, this article, in addition to identifying the main stages that led to the establishment of the Programme and highlighting the contours of its implementation in Portugal, seeks to analyse the participatory trends of Portuguese students attending the first university cycle (the so-called *outgoings*) from 1987 to 2014, the year ERASMUS+ started.

**Keywords:** ERASMUS, student mobility, Portugal, European Union

LA PARTICIPATION DES  
ÉTUDIANTS À ERASMUS: DE  
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Le Programme ERASMUS, créé en juin 1987, est considéré comme l'un des programmes européens d'éducation les plus populaires dans la mesure où il favorise la mobilité scientifique de milliers d'étudiants. Compte tenu de l'importance du Programme dans la construction d'une Europe de la connaissance, nous souhaitons, dans cet article, analyser l'importance d'ERASMUS pour le Portugal depuis sa mise en œuvre. L'état de l'art national sur ce thème n'est pas exhaustif. Bien que la recherche sur la mobilité des étudiants au niveau européen, en particulier sur ERASMUS, ait une expression importante – il est d'ailleurs difficile de la résumer compte tenu de la diversité des études – elle n'est cependant pas suivie au niveau national, car les travaux existants sur le pays sont surtout des dissertations de master, à caractère qualitatif, réalisés sur la base d'entretiens d'anciens étudiants ERASMUS et sur les dernières années du Programme. De ce fait, nous prétendons identifier les principales étapes qui ont amené à l'instauration du Programme et mettre en évidence les différents aspects de son application au Portugal. D'autre part, nous allons analyser la tendance participative des étudiants portugais du premier cycle universitaire (les *outgoings*) de 1987 jusqu'en 2014, lorsque s'initie le Programme ERASMUS+.

**Mots clés:** ERASMUS, mobilité étudiante, Portugal, Union Européenne

The history of the construction of Europe is the sum of many narratives, policies, actors and programmes; and universities and their students also have a place in this same history. In relation to the latter in particular, the 1980s gave rise to the idea that universities might well be considered a means to create a stronger European identity with student mobility seen as an instrument to achieve this. This then became the target for some “rare political promotion”<sup>1</sup> that was reflected particularly in the creation of the ERASMUS Programme, which now, some thirty years after its inception, has become the most well-known, the most popular and the most emblematic programme<sup>2</sup> of the present-day European Union (EU).

Unlike the general European panorama where research on student mobility with a focus on ERASMUS is fairly abundant, the state of the art in Portugal is relatively incipient and consists primarily of Masters dissertations of a qualitative nature, mainly supported by interviews with former ERASMUS students and covering the last few years of the Programme<sup>3</sup>. The reason for this could be, in our opinion, that the quantity

<sup>1</sup> PAPATSIBA, Vassiliki – «Political and Individual Rationales of Student Mobility: a case-study of ERASMUS and a French regional scheme for studies abroad». *European Journal of Education*. Chichester: Wiley. ISSN 0141-8211. Vol. 40, No. 2 (2005) p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> TEICHLER, Ulrich (ed.) – *Erasmus in the Socrates Programme. Findings of an Evaluation Study*. Bonn: Lemmens Verlags & Mediengesellschaft mbH, 2002. ISBN 3-932306-41-4.

<sup>3</sup> VIEIRA, Maria Manuel – «Das disposições cosmopolitas à mobilidade como competência? Ensino superior, Programa Erasmus e mobilidade estudantil». In *Revista Educação em Foco*, Ano 18, n.º 26, 2015. pp. 15-42; COSTA, Lara Sofia de Sousa Barbosa e Dias - *Os Gabinetes de Relações Internacionais e o seu contributo para a promoção da Internacionalização do Ensino Superior: o Caso do GRI da ESEC*. Coimbra: Superior de Educação de Coimbra, 2015. Dissertação de Mestrado em Marketing e Comunicação; MONTEIRO – Anabela Figueiredo Machado – *A mobilidade académica europeia e o turismo educativo e cultural: Fatores de decisão e de motivação*. Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 2014. Tese de Doutoramento em Turismo, Lazer e Cultura; CAROÇO, Inês Raquel Freixo – *Sexualidade, Amor e Cosmopolitismo no Programa Erasmus*. Lisboa: FCSH, 2014. Dissertação de Mestrado em Migrações, Inter-Etnicidades e Transnacionalismo; GOUVEIA, Regina [et. al.] – «A importância das TIC na integração/inclusão de alunos ERASMUS em institutos politécnicos». In *Atas do XII Congresso da SPCE*, 2014, pp. 979-991; TRANFAGLIA, Ludovica – *O desafio para o multilinguismo: o projecto Erasmus*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2014. Dissertação de Mestrado em Língua e Cultura Portuguesa; SILVA, Sandra Isabel Costa – *Saudades de casa e estratégias de adaptação em estudantes em mobilidade internacional: determinantes e consequências*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Psicologia, 2013. Dissertação de Mestrado em Psicologia; LEMOS, Sofia Maria dos Reis Ferreira Correia – *O Programa Erasmus na Universidade da Beira Interior (UBI)*. Covilhã: UBI, 2012. Dissertação de Mestrado em Relações Internacionais; BOA-VENTURA, Ana Cecília de Oliveira Gândara - *O Impacto da Comissão Europeia nas Dinâmicas de Mudança no Ensino Superior da UE*. Coimbra: Faculdade de Economia, 2012. Dissertação de Mestrado em Relações Internacionais; DALCIN, Vânia Leticia – *A mobilidade dos estudantes universitários: contribuição para o desenvolvimento da interculturalidade*. Lisboa: Instituto de Educação, 2011. Dissertação de Mestrado em Ciências da Educação; JORGE, Ana Patrícia Gaspar – *Erasmus abrindo a porta ao(s) mundo(s): percepções e expectativas de estudantes Erasmus na Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação da Universidade de Coimbra*. Coimbra: Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação, 2010. Dissertação de Mestrado em Ciências da Educação (Pedagogia Universitária); ANDRADE, José Romão Costa - *A Universidade e o seu contributo para o desenvolvimento da União Europeia*. Lisboa: Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, 2010. Tese de Doutoramento em Ciência Política; GONÇALVES, Ramiro José Henriques Pinto Ribeiro – *ERASMUS: Uma experiência para toda a vida*. Lisboa: Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada, 2009. Dissertação de Mestrado em Psicologia; ALBUQUERQUE, Alexandra; CARVALHO, Milena e BARROS, Teresa – «Can ERASMUS mobility really help crossing borders? The in and out of a case-study». [S.l.]: SPACE, Higher Education Press, 2008; LOURO, Lília Maria Gonçalves – *A mobilidade de estudantes no Espaço de Ensino Superior*

and quality of the data is not well balanced for all the phases of the Programme together with the fact that consultation of primary sources, both institutional and administrative, is still not available<sup>4</sup>.

The process by which the European mobility programme was designed and consolidated went through various stages and many alterations were made in order for a European consensus to be reached at the end of the 1980s. In fact, in 1957 when the Treaty of Rome, which led to the constitution of the European Economic Community, was signed, cooperation at the level of Education was not one of the concerns of the signatory-States even though vocational training was envisaged. This state of affairs gradually changed and advances in this area were made, driven first by the political will of the Member States and later by the conclusions reached by several studies<sup>5</sup>. These were all convergent on the idea that there should be greater integration in education through the promotion of student mobility, inter-university cooperation and recognition of higher education diplomas.

Even then, the decisive step would only be taken in the mid-1980s with the adoption of the ERASMUS (*European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*) Programme<sup>6</sup> on 15 June 1987. However, this continued not to find favour with all the Member States as bringing education into the sphere of community competences was not on the agenda, nor in the interests of many of them. This reticence existed in spite of the fact that the principal objective of the Programme went far beyond the scope of education since the aim was that it would serve as an instrument to stimulate the process of European integration by strengthening integration among Europeans, who should recognise the cultural heritage and common values shared by the different European countries.

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*Europeu como forma de construção de uma identidade europeia. Estudo de caso da Universidade de Lisboa.* Lisboa: Universidade Aberta, 2007. Dissertação de Mestrado em Relações Interculturais; PINHO, Maria de Fátima Duarte de Almeida – *Mobilidade transnacional e competências profissionais: Um estudo de caso com alunos envolvidos no Programa Erasmus.* Lisboa: Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, 2002. Dissertação de Mestrado em Ciências da Educação, Educação e Desenvolvimento.

<sup>4</sup> As is the case for the documentation held by the Ministry of Education and the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

<sup>5</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION – «For a Community policy on education. Report by Henri Jannes». Bulletin of the European Communities [online] Supplement 10/73. [Consulted 25 September 2017]. Available at: <<http://aei.pitt.edu/5588/1/5588.pdf>>; COMMISSION DES COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES - «L'éducation dans la Communauté européenne». Bulletin des Communautés européennes, supplément 3/74. Luxembourg: Office des Publications Officielles des Communautés Européennes, 1974; EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. COMMISSION – «Report on European Union. Report by Mr Leo Tindemans, Prime Minister of Belgium, to the European Council». Bulletin of the European Communities, Supplement 1/76, Bruxelles: European Communities, 1976; EUROPEAN COUNCIL - «Ad Hoc Committee 'on a people's Europe'. Report to the European Council». Milan: European Council, 1985, A 10.04 COM 85, [online] [Consulted 25 September 2017]. Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/historicaldocument.faces/en/4659/html.bookmark>.

<sup>6</sup> Decision of the Council of 15 June 1987 which adopts the community action programme in the matter of student mobility (ERASMUS) (87/327/CEE). On the history of ERASMUS, consult: PAOLI, Simone – *Il sogno di Erasmo. La questione educativa nel processo di integrazione europea.* Milano: Franco Angeli, 2010. ISBN 978-88-56-82434-6.

Over the last thirty years, since the moment it was created, the ERASMUS Programme has known various different phases, all of which reflect its constant evaluation and the search to optimise it. In the initial phase up to 1995, a period that saw new countries joining, two objectives guided the Programme: on the one hand, the promotion of student mobility, and on the other, the strengthening of university cooperation among European Union countries. In parallel, there were also other programmes that enhanced student mobility in specific areas of study. One such programme was the LINGUA Programme that was reserved for language students and teachers who wished to improve their language level through a stay abroad.

In 1995, the ERASMUS Programme was officially integrated into the SOCRATES I Programme, which centralized the various mobility programmes offered by the EU and in particular the LINGUA programme mentioned above. In an attempt to embrace various areas, it sought to encourage student and teacher mobility, develop curricula and intensive programmes, and create the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). During this phase, the Programme was extended to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, among which Poland and the Czech Republic. Shortly afterwards, in the year 2000, a new seven-year programme was started. Influenced by a desire to strengthen the internationalisation of European universities, SOCRATES II (2000-2007) was defined by its effort to reform higher education, characterised by standardising it through the Bologna process, and by its promotion of both learning and lifelong learning. During the period when it was in force, SOCRATES II was further extended to include other European countries, including Turkey, so that in 2002 there were already thirty participating countries.

Finally, between 2007 and 2014, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) – whose basic premise, as the name itself indicates, was learning throughout one's lifetime – included ERASMUS as one of its sectorial programmes. Like the previous programmes, the aim of this one continued to be to promote cooperation, exchange and mobility among European universities, but it also included administrative staff working in higher education.

Taking this evolution into account, and although the Programme caters for different types of recipients<sup>7</sup>, this article focuses on the participation of Portuguese students – outgoing students in the Programme's jargon – between the academic years 1987/1988 and 2013/2014, thus covering the four first phases of ERASMUS. By adopting this approach, we seek not only to understand how the Programme was implemented in Portugal over the years, but also to look at it from the perspective of those who directly benefitted from it so as to rank Portugal on the European level as well as to discover what national and university dynamics were associated to it. In concrete terms, we wish to ascertain how many students participated in ERASMUS, what their university of origin was, what destinations were chosen and their reasons for taking part in the Programme as well as the difficulties they encountered.

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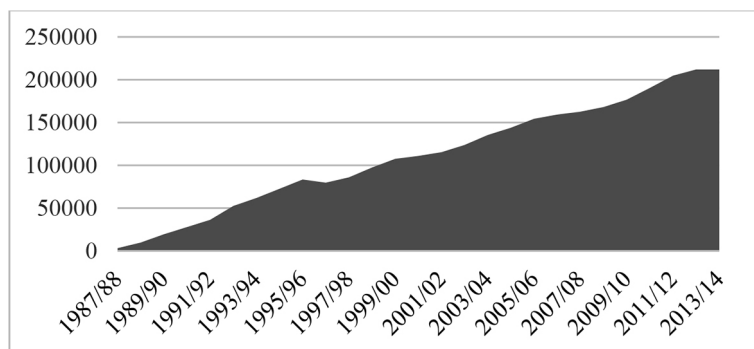
<sup>7</sup> Higher education institutions, students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff.

## Participation trends

Ever since its implementation, ERASMUS has achieved its successive targets and grown in size and impact. During its history, its objectives have been altered and/or complemented, with a view to creating a European “conscience”, developing a European labour market, allowing the transfer of competences and technologies within Europe, and helping students acquire social skills such as independence and intercultural respect and improve their language competences.

Furthermore, the implementation of ERASMUS saw a new era begin in the field of European inter-university cooperation and student mobility. Looking back at the thirty years of the Programme, 3244 students undertook a stay abroad in the first academic year of its implementation while in the academic year 2013/2014 this initial figure increased to 200 000 in an almost uninterrupted rise in the number of participants (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Total number of outgoing students by academic year, 1987-2014

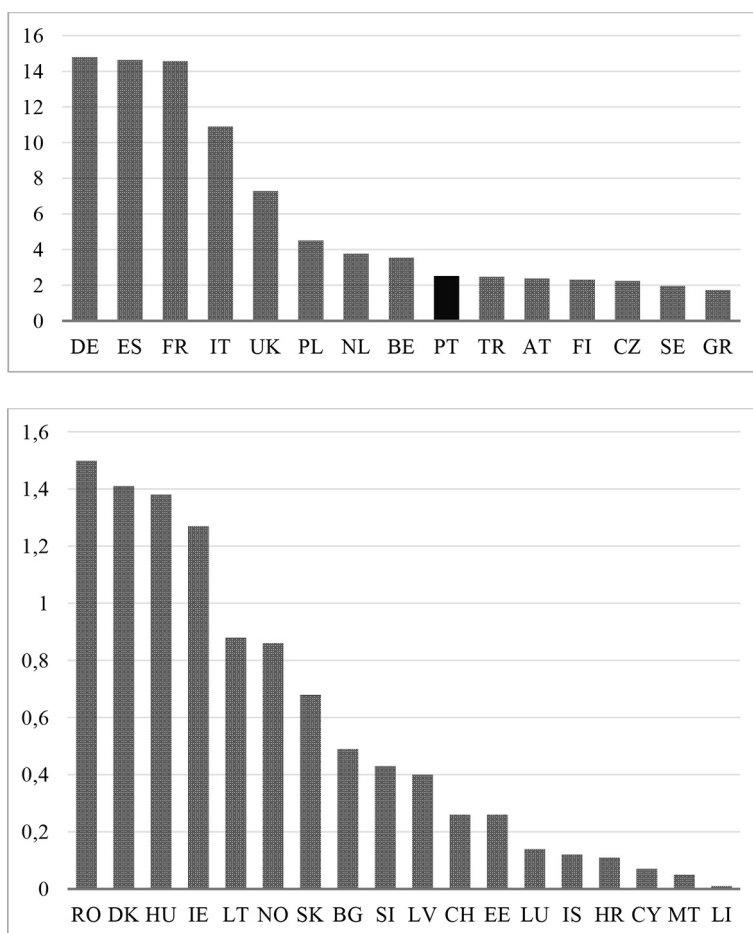


Sources: Calculations based on data collected from EUROPEAN COMMISSION – On the way to Erasmus+.

A Statistical Overview of the Erasmus Programme in 2012-13. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, ISBN 978-92-79-46581-9, pp. 216-217; EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Erasmus. Facts, Figures & Trends. The European Union support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2013-2014. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, ISBN 978-92-79-52814-9, p. 31.

From the beginning and until the academic year 2013/2014, Germany stood out as the main sending country, followed by Spain, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. Here Portugal ranks in ninth place among the countries that first adhered to the ERASMUS Programme as can be seen in the figure below.

Figures 2 and 3 – Total number of outgoing students by country of origin (%), 1987-2014



Note: Although not included in the figure above, Liechtenstein recorded a figure of 0.01%.

Legend: AT (Austria); BE (Belgium); BG (Bulgaria); CH (Switzerland); CY (Cyprus); CZ (Czech Republic); DE (Germany); DK (Denmark); EE (Estonia); ES (Spain); FR (France); GR (Greece); HR (Croatia); HU (Hungary); IE (Ireland); IS (Iceland); IT (Italy); LT (Lithuania); LU (Luxembourg); LV (Latvia); MT (Malta); NL (Netherlands); NO (Norway); PL (Poland); PT (Portugal); RO (Romania); SE (Sweden); SF (Finland); SI (Slovenia); SK (Slovakia); TR (Turkey); UK (United Kingdom).

Sources: Calculations based on data collected from EUROPEAN COMMISSION – On the way to Erasmus+..., pp. 216-217; EUROPEAN COMMISSION– Erasmus. Facts, Figures & Trends..., p. 31.

As can be seen above, there was a constant increase in the mobility flow at the European level with the trio Germany-France-United Kingdom remaining from the start of the programme as the main sending and receiving countries. However, whereas

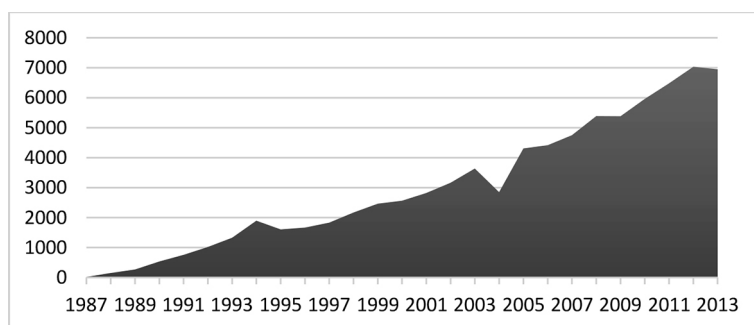


in 1988/89 this trio accounted for 62% of students, within one decade the attraction of these countries had fallen to 49%. Moreover, there was a drop in the number of incoming students in the United Kingdom while Spain (especially) and Sweden became the new large sending and receiving countries as from 1995.

In fact, during the SOCRATES II phase, Spain, France and Germany were the main countries sending and receiving ERASMUS students, followed by Italy and the United Kingdom. For LLP, until 2014 Spain would continue to be the main country providing outgoing ERASMUS students followed by France, Germany, Italy and Poland, countries with the highest number of students in proportion to their respective populations. With the exception of Poland, these countries were also, in parallel, the main receiving countries.

Portugal followed the European trend by showing a steady increase in outgoing students (Figure 4). Although in the first year of the programme Portugal registered only 25 outgoing students, 1609 students participated in the academic year 1995/96 and in 1999/2000 they were already 2472<sup>8</sup>. In 2013 over 7000 Portuguese students left to go on ERASMUS. In this aspect, the highest average growth rate in national outgoing students, around 71.86%, was seen at the time of the Programme's start-up phase between 1987 and 1995, with this figure stabilizing in the following phases at 8.97%, 8.07% and 5.59% for SOCRATES I, SOCRATES II and LLP respectively.

Figure 4 – Year-on-year growth of outgoing Portuguese students, 1987-2014



Source: Calculations based on official data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

In 1993, however, departures peaked followed by a slowdown in the years 1994 and 1995, which coincides with the ERASMUS Programme passing over to the SOCRATES I Programme; furthermore, there was a significant drop in numbers of outgoing students in 2004 that might correspond to a year when fewer mobility grants were awarded.

Over the last thirty years, the majority of Portuguese students have chosen as their destination some of the Programme's original countries – Spain, Italy, France, Germany and the United Kingdom – followed by countries in Central and Eastern Europe – Poland and the Czech Republic. Through the web of relationships woven by teachers and researchers, Portuguese universities have developed and maintain

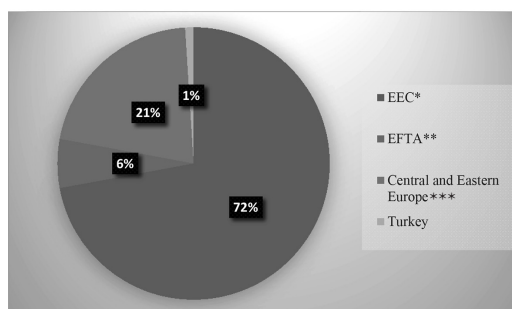
<sup>8</sup> Data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

contact networks with their European counterparts, especially those that have been participating the longest in the Programme, although this network expanded when the Programme was extended to include countries of Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 2000s.

Apart from the importance of university networks, the student's choice of destination country is in response to other factors such as language, the institution's academic quality, geographical distance, climate and also tourism and leisure opportunities; however, despite the EU's financial support, cost of living and geographical proximity continue to be important factors to explain the choice of certain destinations<sup>9</sup>.

In the period 1995/2000, Spain, France and the United Kingdom were the main countries attracting Portuguese students<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, Estonia, Lithuania and Iceland received almost no Portuguese students. The principal reasons that led students to choose Spain as the main destination country would seem to be its geographical proximity, language facility and cultural affinity<sup>11</sup>. What should also be highlighted is the steady increase in outgoing students going to countries that were former members of EFTA (Sweden and Finland) and to Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Latvia) when these countries joined the ERASMUS Programme in 1998/99 to the detriment of France, Germany and the United Kingdom (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5 – Principal destination country groups for Portuguese students (%), 1995-2014



\* EEC: BE, DE, DK, ES, FR, GR, IE, IT, LU, NL, UK

\*\* EFTA: CH, NO, SE, SF, LI, IS

\*\*\* Central and Eastern Europe: AT, BG, CY, CZ, EE, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK, HR

Sources: Calculations based on data collected from EUROPEAN COMMISSION – On the way to Erasmus+..., pp. 216-217; EUROPEAN COMMISSION - Erasmus. Facts, Figures & Trends..., p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> GONZÁLEZ, Carlos Rodríguez, MESANZA, Ricardo Bustillo and MARIEL, Petr – «The determinants of international student mobility flows: an empirical study on the Erasmus programme». *Higher Education*. Local: Editor. ISSN. Vol. 62 (2011) p. 417, p. 427.

<sup>10</sup> The destinations of Portuguese students in the first phase of the programme cannot be accurately ascertained from official national statistics.

<sup>11</sup> AGÊNCIA NACIONAL SÓCRATES E LEONARDO DA VINCI - Estudo sobre a Evolução da Acção. Programa Sócrates 2000-2004. Lisboa: Agência Nacional Sócrates e Leonardo da Vinci, 2005. p. 39. No ISBN.

During the LLP, the number of outgoing Portuguese nationals followed the general trend. This rose from 5000 students in 2008 to over 7000 in 2012, but slightly fell again at the end of the programme. For the first time, Portugal recorded a significant difference between incoming and outgoing students as from the academic year 2007/08 with the number of incoming students being much higher than that of the outgoing. For example, in the 2011/12 academic year, 5269 Portuguese students went on ERASMUS while the country received 8087 foreign students.

From 2007/08 to 2013/14, Spain remained the main destination country for Portuguese students, followed by Italy and Poland. Meanwhile, the remaining order of preference changed, with the Czech Republic coming in at fourth place, with France in fifth, followed by the traditional receiving countries (i.e. Germany and the United Kingdom). The countries that were less attractive to Portuguese students were Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

### Outgoing students by area of study

Besides destination preference, the last thirty years have also been marked by a diversity in areas of study. Portugal followed the European trend in which Management, Social Sciences, Languages and Engineering stand out the most. However, the areas that only had a small number of students also grew, thereby ensuring greater representation of all areas of study, with Medical Sciences particularly becoming important as from the late 1990s in comparison with the European trend.

In the start-up phase, little is known about the areas of study in which Portuguese ERASMUS students were matriculated. From an analysis of 29 bilateral agreements in which Portugal figured as the coordinating country of the Inter-University Cooperation Programme (ICP)<sup>12</sup>, it was found that the main areas of study represented were Management, Languages, Engineering, Social Sciences and Law<sup>13</sup>. Progressively, and in consonance with the areas of study at the European level, Management, Social Sciences, and Languages and Philology became predominant in Portugal up to the 2000s.

During SOCRATES II, in the case of Portugal the main areas were: Management and Social Sciences (25%), Architecture and Engineering (18%), Art, Humanities and Languages (14%) and Medical Sciences (12%). This also followed the European trend. With the adoption of a new classification of areas of study by the National Agency in 2007, aggregating Social Sciences, Management and Law into one single area, the official data available makes it impossible to desegregate the number of outgoing students by area of study and so guarantee a reliable comparison with the previous phases. At the European level up to 2014, Social Sciences, Management and Law were the most representative areas of study (30-40%), followed by Humanities

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<sup>12</sup> The coordinating country, through the universities, is responsible for the coordination of the Inter-University Cooperation Programme and of the partner countries associated to this ICP. An Inter-University Cooperation Programme determines which higher education institutions are involved as well as the participation modalities of each university in the ERASMUS mobility.

<sup>13</sup> From the report: COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES – Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, Erasmus Directory/Répertoire Erasmus, 1989/90. Bruxelles: Task Force: Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, 1990. ISBN 92-826-1408-5. pp. 703-719.

and the Arts, which were steadily increasing (20-30%), and by Engineering (12-16%). In the case of Portugal, Social Sciences, Management and Law was also the main area of study of Portuguese students (35%), followed by Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (19%) and by Health and Welfare (18%). Contrary to the European trend, Humanities and the Arts were below 10% in Portugal<sup>14</sup>.

The provenance of Portuguese students according to area of study also depends on the higher education institution to which they belong as well as on the dynamic the institution has built up to favour student mobility. Portuguese institutions have contributed differently, revealing disparities in their participation in the Programme from the beginning. This is in accordance with the type of institution as well as geographical disparities with there being a different dynamic operating between the coast and the interior.

On the national level between 2000 and 2014<sup>15</sup>, universities clearly stood out as being the higher education institutions that supplied the greatest number of Portuguese students to the programme. The University of Porto clearly set itself apart and outranked other universities and polytechnics as a sending university. The Technical University of Lisbon and the NOVA University of Lisbon were in second and third position. The University of Coimbra, which had provided the most students at the start of the ERASMUS Programme<sup>16</sup>, found itself in fourth place. At the level of polytechnics, the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança was first, closely followed by those of Porto, Lisbon and Coimbra. It should be noted, however, that the polytechnics had made a considerable effort from the late 1990s on to attract students not only in the large student centres on the coast but also in the interior in both the north and the south of the country. What should also be underlined is the dynamism shown by the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro and the University of Beira Interior when compared to other higher education institutions of the interior as well as that shown by the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, which had a higher number of outgoing students than the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (Figure 6).

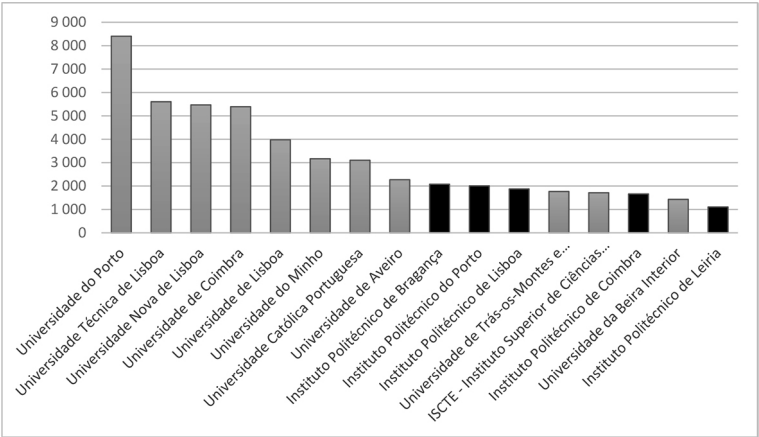
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<sup>14</sup> Statistics from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

<sup>15</sup> The data from the National Agency only refers to universities as from the year 2000.

<sup>16</sup> The University of Coimbra was the main university in the 29 bilateral agreements that existed in the first years of the Programme when Portugal was the coordinating country.

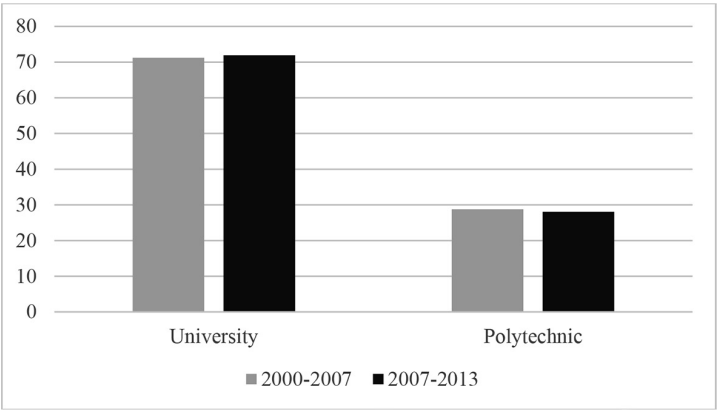
Figure 6 – Total number of outgoing students, equal or greater than 1000, by higher education institution of origin, 2000-2014



Source: Calculations based on official data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

However, looking at the evolution of the numbers of outgoing students from higher education institutions during SOCRATES II and LLP, there was only a slight increase in the number of outgoing students from universities (+ 0.70%) and a slight decrease from polytechnic institutes (- 0.70%). With regard to institutions that recorded a very limited number of outgoing students (less than five a year), participation in the Programme tends to be irregular.

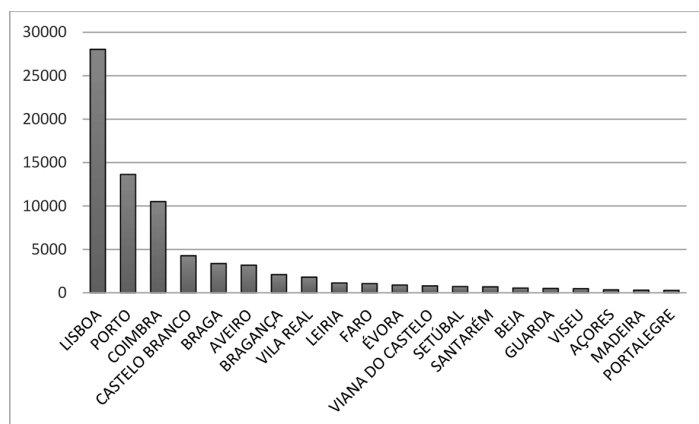
Figure 7 – Growth in total number of outgoing students from universities and polytechnic institutes (%), 2000-2014



Source: Calculations based on official data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

However, in relation to departures at the district level, the large number coming from the district of Lisbon is the result of the large concentration of higher education institutions there. This is followed by the districts of Porto and then Coimbra. This data further confirms that it is the country's large university centres and those on the coast that provide the majority of ERASMUS students, as the following figure shows.

Figure 8 – Total number of outgoing Portuguese students by district, 2000-2014



Source: Calculations based on official data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

What should then be considered key factors to explain the degree of involvement of higher education institutions and their active promotion of the Programme, which is consequently reflected in the volume of outgoing students, are the following: the importance and maturity of university cooperation networks between Portugal and other European countries, the extension of the Programme to different types of student (the three cycles and vocational training), the capacity of the university to attract a greater number of students, and the offer of mobility grants to supplement the European grant.

## Motivations and constraints

Despite the flow and volume of outgoing students, their socio-economic environment as well as the amount of the grant offered under the scope of the Programme must also be considered.

The initiative was conceived and designed to be as inclusive as possible. However, despite the genuine intention to widen the range of beneficiaries to include students from every socio-economic background and not only those from privileged educational environments, in the Programme's first years the educational level and

the income of the parents of ERASMUS students were in effect considered to be medium-high<sup>17</sup>.

Data referring to the academic year 1990/91 show that 35% of the parents of these students had a university degree, with this percentage rising in those countries where the democratization and massification of higher education occurred in the decades prior to the implementation of ERASMUS. In SOCRATES I, although difficult to validate, the ERASMUS students generally continued to belong mainly to the upper-middle class<sup>18</sup>, but with an increase in the number of students from the middle and lower class compared to the start-up phase.

Up to 2006, at the European level the participation of a large proportion of students who were children of executives, liberal professionals and senior administrative staff (38%) and university graduates (60%) continued to be confirmed<sup>19</sup>. In the period 2005-2008, the social status of the students' parents still affected the decision to undertake a stay abroad<sup>20</sup>.

In reality, the socio-economic origin of the parents continued to determine the type of student who participated in the Programme, with the economically poorer European countries, like Portugal, sending abroad students from a high socio-economic background. Although an effort was made to increase the grants in certain phases of the Programme, especially in Portugal's case, the value of the ERASMUS grants awarded was considered the main obstacle for outgoing students, irrespective of the country of origin and the year of departure. Currently, the demand for ERASMUS grants is by far greater than the offer, which has led to a "growth crisis" for the Programme even though back in 1990 the risk of it "becoming the victim of its own success"<sup>21</sup> had already been admitted.

Looking at the value of grants awarded by the National Agency, we can see that, in the initial phase of the programme, Portuguese and Greek students received the biggest grants in terms of value compared to other countries so as to provide an incentive for students to leave<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, from 1993 to 2005 the value of the total average monthly grant fell relative to previous years, but then rose and remained stable until 2014 when there was a steady increase in outgoing students (Figure 9). The extension of the Programme to Central and Eastern European countries and Turkey could partially explain this fall. In comparison with the other European countries,

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<sup>17</sup> TEICHLER, Ulrich and MAIWORM, Friedhelm – The ERASMUS Experience. Major Findings of the ERASMUS Evaluation Research Project. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997. ISBN 9282806669. pp. 71-72.

<sup>18</sup> MAIWORM, Friedhelm and TEICHLER, Ulrich – «The Students' Experience». In TEICHLER, Ulrich (ed.) – Erasmus in the Socrates Programme. Findings of an Evaluation Study. Bonn: Lemmens Verlags & Mediengesellschaft mbH, 2002. ISBN 3-932306-41-4. p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> OTERO, Manuel Souto – «The socio-economic background of Erasmus students: A trend towards wider inclusion?». International Review of Education. UK: Springer. ISSN 0020-8566. Vol 54 (2008) pp. 146-147.

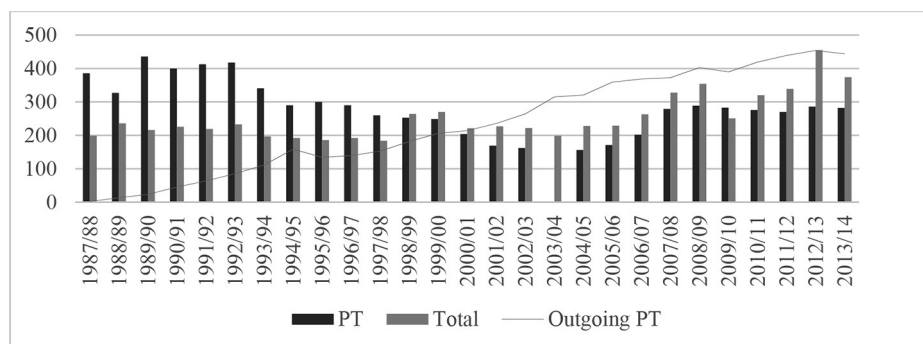
<sup>20</sup> GONZÁLEZ, Carlos Rodríguez, MESANZA, Ricardo Bustillo and MARIEL, Petr – «The determinants of international student mobility flows...», p. 420.

<sup>21</sup> ERASMUS: Information Bulletin. Brussels: ERASMUS Bureau. ISSN 1012-9081. Volume 1990, n.º 9 (1990) p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> This also happens when European countries enter the ERASMUS Programme.

the average annual value of grants remained higher than the European average until 1998, the year Portugal had a value below the average even though this value had risen in comparison with the previous period<sup>23</sup>.

Figure 9 – Total average monthly value of grants by academic year, 1987-2014



Source: Own calculations based on official data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

Faced with financial difficulties and although the European Commission has made an effort to increase the value of grants, the decision to leave has to be carefully considered taking into account the expense required. Some universities as well as other entities have created grants to complement the ERASMUS grant. However, this is not the generalised practice either in Portugal or in other countries<sup>24</sup>, and at times the support offered is not extended or adapted to the different socio-economic situations of the students. Hence one can distinguish mobility seen as “consumption” by students belonging to higher socio-economic groups from countries with high salaries, as opposed to mobility seen as “investment” by students with lower incomes from countries with lower salaries<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to the financial difficulties relating to participation in this Programme, other issues are generally pointed out as well, such as the poor dissemination of the Programme to students or the preparation of students for their stay abroad, particularly through language courses or institutional help to find accommodation at an accessible price in those countries where the cost of living is higher than in Portugal.

<sup>23</sup> Data from the ERASMUS+ National Agency.

<sup>24</sup> TEICHLER, Ulrich (ed.) – *Erasmus in the Socrates Programme...*, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> OTERO, Manuel Souto – «The socio-economic background of Erasmus students...», p. 137.



However, one of the Programme's greatest complexities lies with the varied system of cycles or levels of education<sup>26</sup> which makes it difficult to recognise diplomas at the European level. At the same time, the fact that students are free to choose their subjects – inscribed in one of the principles relating to the discovery of new methods and new knowledge that guides the ERASMUS Programme – makes it difficult to standardise diplomas at the European level and to accept the period of study outside as an integral part of the course in which the student is matriculated. This ambiguity was reflected in preparing the stay in the receiving institution since, until the Bologna Declaration, the majority of students were given the freedom to choose which subjects they wished to take<sup>27</sup>.

In this respect and although an improvement was gradually seen in the percentage of stays abroad recognised from the mid-1990s<sup>28</sup>, the students who took subjects their institution of origin did not offer, or did not recognise, were obliged to prolong their course to finish their degree. In the 2000s, and especially with the Bologna Declaration, universities sought solutions to enhance the Programme and guarantee the greater recognition of subjects taken abroad. Meanwhile, some problems persisted particularly in regard to administrative formalities (e.g. waiting time for grant requests, guidance about academic programmes at the receiving institution), financial issues, accommodation, recognition of diplomas and credit transfers.

## Reach and future potential

Although ERASMUS is not the only student exchange programme – close international collaboration also exists between many European universities and their counterparts in the United States of America and Japan, for example – this Programme has, since the beginning, been an important instrument to help the Europeanisation and internationalisation of both students and Portuguese and European universities.

In fact, Portugal has actively participated in this Programme since it was first implemented in 1987. This can be seen from the increase in the number of participants and in the diversification of destinations, participating higher education institutions and student profiles. However, many shortcomings and weaknesses that are difficult to resolve still persist, especially in terms of the effort that higher education institutions and also national state entities need to make in order to reduce national and local imbalances in student participation.

Evaluating the Programme's true impact – besides the broader objectives of acquiring greater knowledge of other European countries and peoples, and developing a European conscience – is difficult to determine since it varies depending on the degree of motivation and academic and personal involvement of the students, the areas of study, the degree of internationalisation and the level of difficulty recent graduates face when entering the job market, but also because it depends on the perception

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<sup>26</sup> AMORIM, Fernando – «O sistema europeu de transferência de créditos (ECTS)». Janus. Lisboa: Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa. e-ISSN 1647-7251 (2006) pp. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> TEICHLER, Ulrich; MAIWORM, Friedhelm – *The ERASMUS Experience...*, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> MAIWORM, Friedhelm; TEICHLER, Ulrich – «The Students' Experience», pp. 108-110.

of employers themselves and the value they give (or not) to this Programme and the extra advantages it brings.

If, in the early years of the ERASMUS Programme, having taken part in the Programme was an important selection criteria when graduates applied for a job, today this is only considered important when applying for the first job, and even then not in all areas since if international experience (not necessarily European) for graduates in Languages or International Relations is valued, this does not carry the same weight for Medicine or Law.

Even so, it is indisputable that participation in ERASMUS enhances the acquisition of personal and professional skills that should be considered positive employability factors<sup>29</sup> such as tolerance towards the other, ability to adapt to challenges posed by a foreign environment, a sense of responsibility, confidence and the ability to manage and solve problems. In addition to this, by providing an internationalised academic curriculum, personal development, the acquisition of much broader cultural knowledge and improved language skills, the ERASMUS experience is a factor that has a positive impact on entry into the job market.

Despite this positive impact – and because the number of people who did not consider participating in ERASMUS a positive experience is residual (a view not always related to academic issues but more often than not to personal ones) – the other side of the coin is in fact the reduced number of participants if we take into account the universe of university students. Going on ERASMUS has associated financial costs and the value of the grant is not always sufficient to bear those costs. There is also a limited number of grants available, which drives away many potential candidates who are highly motivated but do not have the financial capacity. This has, moreover, been one of the limitations of the programme over the years. However, in some countries this has been offset at the regional and national level by awarding grants and additional support precisely to encourage broader participation. And although this is a flagship programme of the EU, no increase in its budget is foreseen so that this weakness is likely to remain.

What is more, those who end up participating in the ERASMUS Programme are above all those who consider themselves to be tolerant and pro-European, and who already have a European conscience. Therefore, there is also work to be done by the EU at this level so as to encourage and support those who are not part of this group, in particular by giving them the tools they need to get to know better the EU and its people, the ultimate beneficiaries of this project for peace and economic progress.

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<sup>29</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION – The Erasmus Impact Study. Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014. ISBN 978-92-79-38380-9. p. 142.