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Enhancing the intercultural effectiveness of exchange programmes: formal and non-formal educational interventions

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the addition of intercultural interventions carried out throughout European credit-bearing exchange programmes can enhance sojourners' development of intercultural competencies, and it explores how both formal and non-formal pedagogical interventions may be designed and implemented. Such interventions were conducted at a Portuguese university with 31 sojourners throughout one academic year, and their impact was assessed using a mixed methods research design. Sojourners included incoming students of the exchange programmes *Campus Europae* and *Erasmus*, as well as highly skilled immigrants. Findings confirm the positive impact of interventions on the development of intercultural competencies and, in turn, their contribution to internationalisation efforts. Implications for further research suggest a need to increase interventions and to develop a systematic approach for fostering intercultural competencies throughout the study abroad cycle.

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Introduction

In Europe, exchange programmes constitute a key component of efforts to internationalise institutions of higher education. Such programmes are motivated by a mix of academic, political, economic and (inter)cultural imperatives, which have been further enhanced by the Bologna reform project of 1999 and work towards the realisation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Given this background, an important issue arises: *Are these imperatives assessed solely by the number of students participating in exchange programmes? Should they not also be assessed according to student learning outcomes that reflect the impact of their participation in an exchange experience?* If outcomes are to be framed in terms of the latter, i.e. in terms of the educational impact upon participants, then another dimension must be added – *interculturality*. Or, stated in terms of competencies – *intercultural competencies*. In this case, it is important to situate 'intercultural competencies' within the field of intercultural education and its attempts to address the needs of multicultural societies where cross-cultural contacts are part of everyday life. It is this need for increasing intergroup harmony and consciousness, whereby cultures do not just coexist but interact, which undergirds intercultural competencies in international higher education and student exchange.

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Internationalisation, student mobility and intercultural competencies, then, constitute three important dimensions at the heart of the present inquiry, which explores a single overarching question: What is the key for successful internationalisation from an intercultural perspective that might best apply to European student exchange programmes and other sojourner populations in higher education?

To provide sustained responses to this question, this paper examines data generated from a doctoral research (Almeida 2015) that encompassed the design, implementation and evaluation of intercultural interventions with two sojourner cohorts. The first cohort is composed of 19 incoming exchange students attending the University of Aveiro, in Portugal, as participants in the exchange programme *Campus Europae* (CE, www.campuseuropae.org). The second cohort is made up of 3 incoming *Erasmus* students and 9 highly skilled immigrants attending the same university. The link uniting these 31 sojourners was two intermediate Portuguese Foreign Language classrooms where the formal intervention was employed. Non-formal interventions were carried out on and off campus by a local section of the international student association *Erasmus Student Network* (ESN, www.esn.org).

The type of student exchange embodied by both *Campus Europae* and *Erasmus* programmes occurs within parallel study cycles to permit transferring credits earned during the sojourn back to one's home institution (Szarka 2003; Wächter 2008). In Europe, this type of student mobility is commonly referred to as 'horizontal', 'temporary', 'credit' or 'non-degree' (see Kelo, Teichler, and Wächter 2006; Teichler, Ferencz, and Wächter 2011). This study, then, explores how the development of sojourner intercultural communicative competencies (ICCs) may be enhanced in European credit-bearing exchange programmes and other sojourning situations in institutions of higher learning. To this end, it examines how ICCs can be developed in formal and non-formal contexts through pedagogical interventions. Whereas 'formal' educational interventions are typically intentional and planned by a teacher or trainer, 'non-formal' educational interventions often arise from unplanned and non-institutionalised experiences occurring anywhere and at any time (Eraut 2000).

Given this approach, three primary research objectives are established:

- (1) To examine the impact of the formal intercultural intervention (inside the language classroom) upon sojourner intercultural gains;
- (2) To examine the impact of non-formal intercultural interventions (outside the language classroom) upon sojourner intercultural gains;
- (3) To identify and recommend additional ways to enhance the development of ICCs in future participants of credit mobility programmes and other sojourners in institutions of higher education.

Internationalisation and student mobility

Concepts such as Europeanisation, Internationalisation and Globalisation are often used to describe the goal universities pursue as international institutions. Despite variations in terminology, all three terms point to the need for tertiary institutions to internationalise in today's world. Formerly of little concern, this goal has become a major focus in Europe from the mid-1980s onwards. Nonetheless, educational approaches undergirding the international agendas of many European post-secondary institutions remain unclear and require further elaboration (Hermans 2005). Moreover, a clear definition is needed of what

'internationalising' means for the 21st-century university. A commonly cited definition of internationalisation put forth by Knight (2004) is the following: 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education' (11). If internationalising post-secondary education is seen as a process of change, the question arises: *What does this change imply?* In Europe, responses to this question are largely driven by the rationales set forth by the Bologna reform project, in addition to the political intentions of the European Union (EU) within a scenario of inter-governmental and supranational interplay.

This background sets the context for student mobility programmes and how they are viewed in Europe, i.e. primarily as a vehicle for development in European knowledge societies. Student mobility programmes are, nonetheless, commonly referred to according to participant metrics even if numbers do not necessarily translate into quality intercultural educational experiences. Hence, it might be better to frame this problem in this way: *How can effective intercultural outcomes emerge as a reality of student mobility while also furthering the internationalisation agendas of higher education institutions?* This question is addressed in the next section.

Intercultural competencies: expected or effective learning outcomes of student mobility?

Pedagogies that support and enhance the intercultural learning of exchange students are advocated in European student mobility but these efforts are both recent and rare as intercultural learning tends to occur accidentally and haphazardly (Hermans 2005). Scholars such as Almeida (2015); Anquetil (2006); Beaven and Borghetti (2015); Byram and Feng (2006); Carroll (2015); Dervin (2008); Shaules (2007); Strong (2011), all cite the importance of intercultural learning in student mobility. Yet, there is little implementation beyond a few individual cases.

Similarly, in the political realm, culture has only been explicitly emphasised in the EU and Council of Europe (CoE) agendas in the field of culture, youth and education from 2001 onwards (Hoskins and Sallah 2011). Whether in academic or political–educational arenas, efforts until now have not yet produced concerted intercultural actions in European credit-bearing exchange programmes. To the best of our knowledge, aside from the research underpinning this paper, only five other initiatives aimed at enhancing intercultural competencies in European student mobility through systematic actions have been identified.

Two of these initiatives are multilateral projects, viz.: (1) 'Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers' (IEREST, www.ierest-project.eu) and (2) 'Erasmus Mundus Intercultural Competence' (EMIC, www.emic-project.org). Both projects share the goal of fostering intercultural competencies among exchange students across pre-departure, in-country and re-entry phases, but whereas the IEREST project targets *Erasmus* students, EMIC caters to *Erasmus Mundus* students.

The third initiative is a two-phased project under the scope of the CoE and the European Centre for Modern Languages: 'Mobility Programmes for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education (Phase 1)/ for Sustainable Plurilingual and Intercultural Learning (Phase 2)' (PLURIMOBIL, www.plurimobil.ecml.at). This twofold project aimed to promote good practices in mobility programmes using language and intercultural pedagogical tools developed by the CoE. While the first phase of the project (2010–2011) focused on teacher trainers and

their pupils at primary and lower secondary levels, the second phase (2012–2014) addressed the upper secondary level.

The fourth initiative falls under the auspices of the CoE and the EU by adapting CoE language and intercultural pedagogical instruments to professional mobility training needs. Entitled 'Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility' (ICOPROMO),¹ this project, carried out from 2004 to 2006, had the goal of developing intercultural communication and interaction competencies in professional settings through training activities.

The fifth initiative was developed by a student exchange organisation based in Siena, Italy – The International Center for Intercultural Exchange (The Siena Center, www.ticfie.com). Founded in 2005, this centre aims at promoting the development of intercultural competencies among its exchange participants through a specific instructional approach called 'Full-Immersion Culture, Content and Service' which utilises reflective writing to promote intercultural competencies.

These five examples aside, a more 'traditional learning paradigm', which assumes that simple contact with differences will lead to intercultural development (Vande Berg and Paige 2009), seems to be the prevalent model of credit student mobility in Europe. Ironically, this type of mobility constitutes a fertile ground for implementing intentional intercultural pedagogies, were it not closely bound to EU exchange schemes and to *Erasmus* in particular. For this reason, credit student mobility could be a vehicle for joint intercultural actions among the 33 countries currently participating in Key Action 1 of *Erasmus+*. The same can be argued with regard to *Campus Europae* (CE) and its 18² partner higher education institutions. This missing component and the intercultural interventions at the heart of this article are discussed next.

The study

To explore the overarching question posed at the beginning of this article, the sections that follow discuss the design and implementation of intercultural interventions utilised with the two sojourner cohorts. Despite the limitations of only two case studies, it is hoped that the process of facilitating intercultural learning among 31 sojourners may provide insight into how intercultural learning can be enhanced among other students in similar sojourning situations. To this end, the three objectives outlined in the introduction are addressed in the following sections. While the first section concerns interculturality inside the language classroom (Objective 1), the second section attends to interculturality outside the classroom (Objective 2). Objective 3 is incorporated in the conclusions, implications and recommendations.

Inside the language classroom: intercultural seminars

The formal intervention employed in this study was designed to support and enhance sojourner intercultural learning during their sojourn in Portugal. The plan involved a sequence of eight two-hour modules implemented by the lead author within two Portuguese Foreign Language (PFL) classrooms, after aligning the intercultural content with the language content taught by the language instructor. Given that the PFL language course was an intermediate proficiency level, the language of instruction was Portuguese, using English as an auxiliary language.

Conceptual foundations for the seminars were based on Fantini's (2006) intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model, which depicts ICC as a set of 'complex abilities needed to perform *effectively* and *appropriately* when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself' (1, [italics in the original]).

From among multiple interrelated components that constitute Fantini's (2006) model, the subset of four dimensions (*Cultural awareness, Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge*) was selected the basis for teaching and assessing the sojourners at various stages of their intercultural development and levels of host language proficiency (in this case, Portuguese). Intercultural communicative competence was, thus, operationalised as a cultural-linguistic construct embodying the necessary capacities to undertake the role of intercultural speaker and/or mediator as required by the context of interaction. This implies not only the *effective* display of the four areas of competency (the subset of four dimensions), but also their *appropriateness* to context, i.e. emic and etic perspectives. The ability to communicate in the host language is, therefore, crucial for integrating knowledge (in this case, linguistic and cultural) and performance *in situ*. As such, communication is judged as competent when it is both *effective* and *appropriate* to the context of interaction and its interlocutors (Spitzberg 2000).

Fantini's (2006) model was selected from an array of intercultural competence models after the following criteria: (1) clear operationalisation of ICC into a higher order construct, (2) explicit articulation of the language–culture nexus, (3) strong empirical and research-based underpinnings, (4) assessment orientation and (5) measurability of the construct via an instrument (see Almeida, Simões, and Costa 2012 for further information on instrument selection). Another important aspect in Fantini's model is the notion of cultural awareness (the metacognitive aspect in ICC) which stands out as central to intercultural development and to higher order thinking.

A second model by Byram (1997) reinforces the pivotal role of (critical) cultural awareness in the development of ICCs, as well the articulation between linguistic and sociocultural competencies. This articulation is key to this study (hence the notion of ICC), but it is often forgotten in more recent models.

The centrality of cultural awareness, advocated by both models above, is also consistent with the critical thinking skills and intercultural maturity expected from higher education students (Barnett 1997; King and Baxter Magolda 2005). It appears, then, that the ability to see from another's perspective constitutes a key component for developing high levels of criticality, reflexivity and cognitive flexibility. For this reason, enhanced cultural awareness is placed at the centre of Figure 1, surrounded by the other concomitant abilities. Together they form the ICC pedagogical and assessment dimensions targeted by the formal intervention, both inextricably linked.

In the spirit of praxis, the formal intervention integrated both theory and research-based content, implemented through experiential activities. The students' host country experience and their diverse cultural backgrounds were areas for introspection, comparison, discussion and learning during in-class activities. Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, pedagogical activities utilised students' sojourn experiences, followed by reflective observations and abstract conceptualisations. These notions influenced the design and delivery of the formal intervention which was sequenced so that each module not only built upon preceding sessions, but also led to ascending levels of complexity. The pedagogical goals of each module are summarised in Table 1.

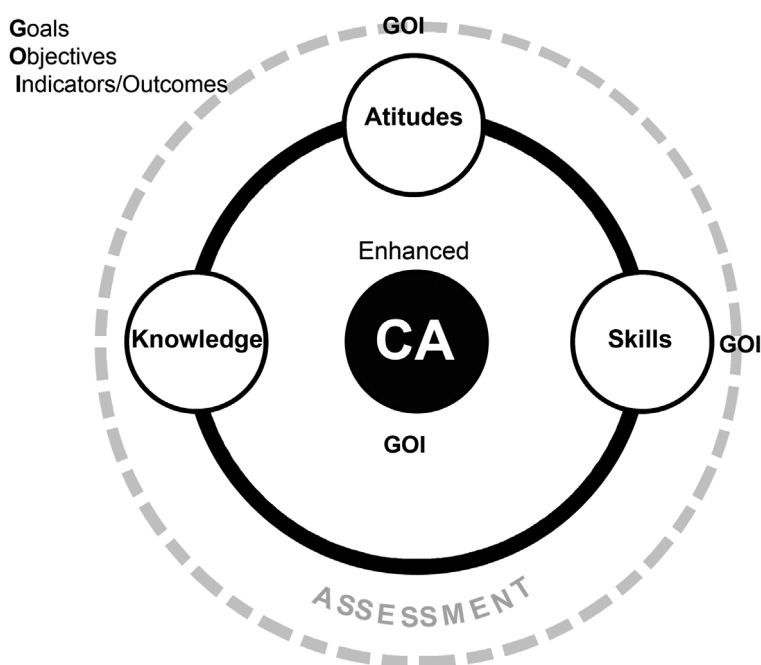


Figure 1. Formal intervention: Pedagogical and assessment frameworks (Almeida 2015).

Table 1. Formal intervention: summary of modules.

Formal intervention modules	Pedagogical goals
1. What is culture, after all?	To raise understanding and critical reflection about the concept of culture while stimulating self-awareness about how culture may influence individual identities
2. Cultural relativism: An everyday richness?	To promote critical reflection about cultural relativism while enhancing abilities to compare values in home and host cultures (through language use)
3. How to live in another culture?	To stimulate self-awareness and critical reflection about the challenges of living in another culture, and concepts like culture shock/stress, acculturation, stereotypes, and generalisations
4. Portuguese culture: A kaleidoscope of different images?	To promote understanding of host culture identity traits while enhancing abilities to relate and contrast home and host cultures
5. Can I know your culture?	To stimulate understanding of cultures in the classroom while enhancing abilities to relate and contrast time value orientations of home and host cultures
6. Intercultural Education: A positive approach towards difference?	To raise understanding and critical awareness about Intercultural Education, intercultural competencies, and interculturality in the Lusophone world
7. Is there space for culture in the PFL classroom?	To promote understanding of the language-culture nexus while empowering learners with language-culture learning strategies during the sojourn
8. The EU: A union of different cultures?	To reflect critically about the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe and core concepts like European citizenship

The goals shown in Table 1 were further broken down into learning objectives and indicators or outcomes for each ICC dimension across the eight modules (Figure 1). The contents were selected from both the literature review and, most importantly, from a needs analysis that had been previously conducted. Accordingly, contents addressed by the modules

corresponded also to participants' areas of interest for intercultural learning and their wish to obtain a more contextualised understanding of Portuguese culture. The host culture, then, was used as a basis for reflecting about the *objective* and *subjective* dimensions of culture and contrasting the multiples identities in the language classroom. The aim was to approach culture from tangible discourse that recognised national culture as one (of other forms) of social identity and meet participants' areas of interest. The understanding of culture behind the intervention is, therefore, a collective form of social identity with discrete and abstract components, the explicit and implicit dimensions purported by anthropologists like Kroeber and Kluckhohn, or the objective and subjective dimensions in Triandis' (1972) work. Accordingly, *objective* culture refers to the institutional (e.g. political and economic systems) and material aspects or products (e.g. art, music, gastronomy, literature) of culture. *Subjective* culture is a society's 'characteristic way of perceiving a social environment' (viii).

Impact of the intercultural seminars upon participant intercultural gains

This sub-section, presented in three parts, examines the impact of the 'Intercultural seminars' upon student intercultural gains while in-country: (1) methodological framework, (2) participants and (3) analysis and discussion of the impact produced by the formal intervention.

Methodological framework. The framework utilised to assess the impact of the formal intervention on student intercultural learning is based on a mixed method multiphase design that involves collection, analysis and integration of quantitative and qualitative data across several research phases (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Both types of data are important to obtain an understanding of participant ICC development given the complex nature of these competencies. Whereas quantitative data depict patterns among the target population, qualitative data add rich anecdotal insights not reflected through statistics alone. Despite the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, the overall design has a qualitative priority, in line with the multi-case study component of the larger mixed methods design. This multi-case component encompasses the sojourner cohorts described in the next sub-section.

Data analysed in this paper stem from a post-test survey questionnaire and a follow-up focus group discussion which triangulates, complements and expands quantitative patterns yielded by the post-test. The quantitative sampling involved all 31 sojourners in the two case studies. The qualitative sampling encompassed only the CE students (the primary case study) and more specifically 6 participants who volunteered for the focus group interview.

The post-test was administered upon completion of the formal intervention, with a six-month interval between administration of the pre- and post-test. The focus group session, conducted in English by the lead author, consisted of a one-and-a-half-hour session 10 days after administering the post-test to CE students.

Participants. The 31 participants engaged in this study included 19 CE students, 3 *Erasmus* students and 9 highly skilled immigrants, enrolled in two intermediate Portuguese language courses during the second semester of 2011–2012. While the 19 CE students formed case study 1, the 3 *Erasmus* students and 9 immigrants formed case study 2. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 56 with an average age of 26.70 (SD = 23.00). Differences in age are related to the diverse age groups of the CE and *Erasmus* students and the immigrant participants. While the average age of the CE and *Erasmus* students is 22.81, the immigrant group average age

is 35.78. The 31 sojourners consisted of 10 men (32.3%) and 21 women (67.7%), representing 9 nationalities: 1 Austrian (3.2%), 1 French (3.2%), 2 Lithuanians (6.5%), 2 Latvians (6.5%), 3 Finnish (9.7%), 3 Russian (9.7%), 3 Venezuelans (9.7%), 5 Spaniards (16.1%) and 11 Poles (35.5%).

Participants were engaged in different fields of study either as students or workers. Of the 22 exchange participants, 8 (36.4%) were undergraduates and 14 (63.6%) were Master's candidates. All nine immigrant participants held a higher education degree and moved to Portugal for family reasons and/or professional added-value.

Impact of the formal intervention. Findings regarding the impact of the formal intervention are based on data from one closed and one open-ended question in the post-test eliciting the extent to which the formal intervention maximised participant intercultural gains while in Portugal, and justifications for the attributed ratings. The criterion for selecting these data was to obtain responses to questions which best revealed an understanding of the intercultural effectiveness of the intervention.

Data from the closed question are analysed through descriptive statistics, based on ratings attributed on a 5-point Likert-type scale wherein 0 represents the lowest point ('To no extent') and 4 the highest ('To a great extent'). This analysis is augmented by data obtained from the open question eliciting justifications for the students' ratings (Table 2). Responses to the closed question reveal that the mean rating for the intercultural effectiveness of the intervention was 2.42 (SD = 0.99), suggesting a moderate overall impact upon sojourners' intercultural gains during their stay in Portugal. Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of each point on the scale.

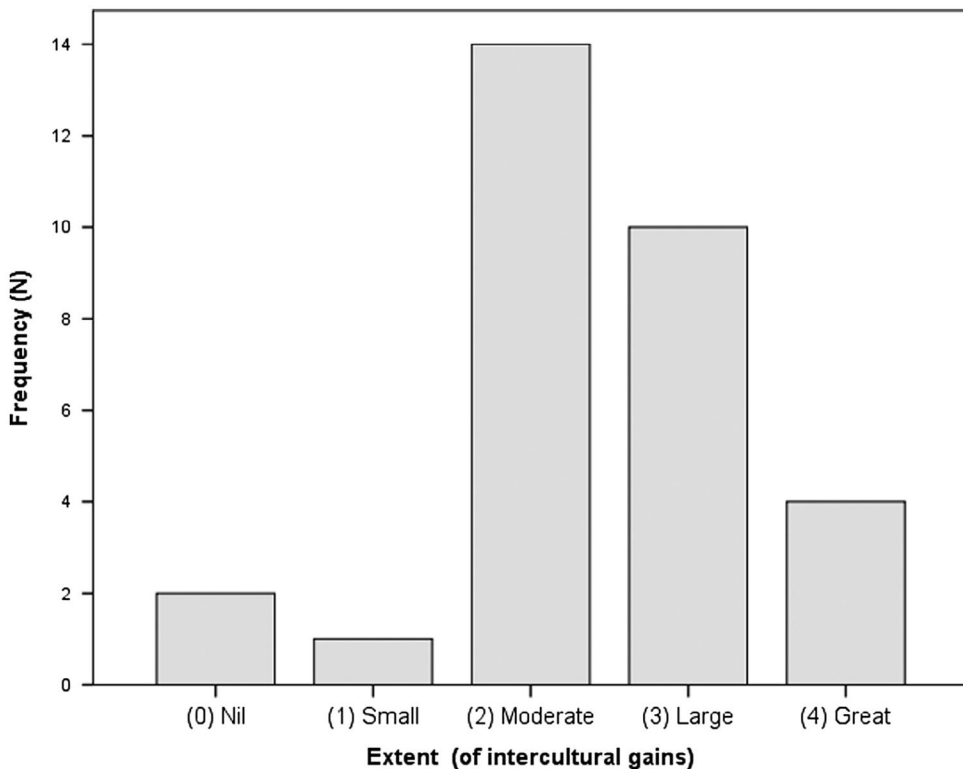


Figure 2. Formal intervention: Frequency distribution of ratings ($n = 31$; 100%).

Table 2. Formal intervention: Justification of ratings.

Ratings	Particp.	Justifications
(0) No extent	A19	'I started integrating to <i>Erasmus</i> and biology department communities before the seminars began. Otherwise, it could have helped me to a medium extent'
	B16	'In my case in particular, I can adapt and live outside my home country because I have done it before. Also, my culture is very similar to the Portuguese culture'
(1) Small	B19	'Despite being useful, I think it wasn't difficult for me because Portugal is very similar to my home country'
(2) Moderate	A23	'The intercultural interaction is still the most important thing, but the seminars can systematize our knowledge and extend, enrich it'
	B4	'Because I have learned very interesting things'
(3) Large	A4	'I understood few things that before I even didn't care about (connected to interculture)'
	B13	'I'm familiarized with multiculturalism and I have always had good intercultural relations, but I could never analyze 'why'. Now, I can'
(4) Great	B7	'It was really interesting to learn things about the Portuguese culture but also about international and European cultures. We really shared a lot of knowledges and I enjoyed it a lot'
	B5	'I think the seminars are really interesting. They allow us to enter in other countries and cultures through the sharing of experiences and knowledges'

Note: Particp.= participant; Case study 1 = A; Case study 2 = B.

As the histogram illustrates, most participants rated the seminars as having a positive impact ($n = 29$; 93.5%) upon their intercultural gains. Of these 29 participants, 14 (45.2%) deemed this impact moderate, and the remaining 15 small ($n = 1$; 3.2%), large ($n = 10$; 32.2%) or great ($n = 4$; 12.9%). By contrast, those participants who considered the extent to be nil ($n = 2$; 6.5%) represent a minority. Given that participant justifications of attributed ratings provide a more in-depth understanding of what this impact actually means, Table 2 offers a selection of responses that better illustrates the five types of ratings chosen across both case studies. Two examples (one by case study) are provided to offer different perspectives on each point of the measurement scale. The only two exceptions are: (a) the second point of the scale given that only one participant considered the extent to be small, (b) the last point of the scale as this category was only selected by case study 2 participants.

Statements in Table 2 show the diversity of reactions expressed, with the impact of the intervention felt at different levels. Of the three students who reported absence or small intercultural gains, only participant B16 considered that there was no impact due to similarities between home and host cultures. The other two participants acknowledged the intercultural value of the intervention, had it started sooner (A19) or were not home and host cultures alike (B19). Interestingly, it can be argued that justifications of participants B16 and B19 disclose an absolute way of knowing, typical of more initial stages of intercultural development wherein one's knowledge(s) is seen as absolute and cultural differences are devalued (King and Baxter Magolda 2005).

The remaining six participants considered the impact positive, but their perceptions vary. While participants A23 and B4 emphasise the knowledge realm, participants A4 and B13 highlight awareness and understanding, explaining that the formal intervention was the trigger for their 'new' awareness of intercultural issues and interactions. The two sojourners in Table 2 who deemed the impact great underscore both the knowledge and renewed awareness of other cultures.

To summarise, results indicate that positive intercultural outcomes occurred at different levels, related possibly to: (a) differences in the way students process the class experience, (b) different ways in which they perceive intercultural gains during their sojourn, (c) different

stages of ICC development, (d) the relative importance students attribute to interculturality inside and outside the classroom and, finally, (e) the type of sojourn (student exchange and highly skilled migration) and underlying language and intercultural needs. Another result suggests that the timing of the seminars might have affected the impact of the formal intervention upon sojourner intercultural gains.

Finally, and most importantly, results demonstrate that intercultural learning is not the sole province of the language classroom but clearly what happens outside these four walls is equally important to sojourner intercultural learning and development. For this reason, the following section explores what happens outside the classroom and how interculturality is experienced beyond the scope of formal education.

Outside the language classroom: interculturality on campus and beyond

It would be naïve to think that intercultural learning occurs solely within the small microcosm of a language classroom and to ignore the cultural environment outside. The breath of intercultural competencies is as wide as the world itself, and it is therefore imperative to explore activities on and off campus and to conduct interventions in these arenas as well. This notion is supported by academic literature that emphasises the possibilities and the limits of interculturality on higher education campuses (e.g. Dervin and Layne 2013; Leask 2009; Schweisfurth and Gu 2009), as well as by studies that address the role student services play in supporting international students (e.g. Kelo 2006; Kelo, Rogers, and Rumbley 2010). In addition, the 2015 *Trends* report by the European University Association deems student services as a differentiating variable in the attractiveness of European higher education and its internationalisation processes (see Sursock 2015).

The point here is that if the exchange experience is meant to address the 'whole student', it is crucial that tertiary institutions explore ways to utilise the whole environment towards the development of intercultural competencies. This entails using formal and non-formal contexts in creative and innovative initiatives that support the integration of exchange students, view them as resources to domestic students, ensure they develop mutual relationships and contribute to nurturing interculturality on campus.

Traditionally, student services encompass: 'academic orientation, accommodation, career guidance, psychological counseling, sports facilities, information on study opportunities, language training, and social and cultural activities' (Sursock and Smidt 2010, 86). At the Portuguese university where this study took place, these services are provided by three distinct entities: (1) Social Services of the University of Aveiro (SASUA); (2) the UA Students' Union ('Associação Académica da Universidade de Aveiro' – AAUAv) which incorporates the Portuguese Student Council of *Campus Europae*; and, finally, (3) the *Erasmus Student Network* (ESN) Aveiro. While the first two are UA services (though fairly different in nature, vision and missions), ESN Aveiro is part of an international student association across 39 countries (ESN, www.esn.org), and has existed at the UA since March 2010. Both AAUAv and ESN Aveiro are student organisations, run on a volunteer basis, which function to support and represent UA students. Whereas the former is geared towards domestic students, the latter caters to incoming exchange students and often works in collaboration with the UA International Office. The *Campus Europae* (CE) student council, in turn, addresses the needs of CE movers at the UA.

It is within the scope of activities promoted by ESN Aveiro that we next discuss how interculturality can be included in university life through non-formal activities. Table 3 summarises some of these activities or interventions.

Table 3. Non-formal activities/interventions.

Non-formal activities	Description
1. Buddy program	Programme which facilitates the search for accommodation, by pairing a domestic student ('The buddy') with an exchange student
2. Celebration of 'Magusto'	Celebration of a popular Portuguese fall festivity, by inviting host and exchange students to celebrate it together with roasted chestnuts and a traditional Portuguese wine liqueur
3. Christmas with Portuguese families	Celebration of Christmas with Portuguese families from the district of Aveiro for those exchange students who cannot return home for Christmas
4. Easter with Portuguese families	Celebration of Easter with a Portuguese family from the district of Aveiro
5. Language Tandem	Project which provides non-formal language support to domestic and exchange students, while fostering social ties through mutual language exchange
6. ESN trips	Organised trips mainly throughout mainland Portugal
7. Movie nights	Organised movie nights celebrating the Portuguese cinema
8. International dinners	Organised dinners with traditional courses and/or sweets from participant home countries

Note: Activities fall under the scope of ESN Aveiro.

Non-formal activities seek to facilitate the integration of exchange students while promoting intercultural practices on campus by bringing together domestic and incoming students, in addition to members of the local community. Activities (2), (3), (4) and (5) were initiated by the lead author as part of her work as a member of ESN Aveiro. The intention was to promote interculturality beyond the scope of the 'Intercultural seminars', and to extend intercultural opportunities to international and domestic students alike. In essence, these initiatives exemplify how interculturality can be nurtured on and off campus, and how internationalisation efforts in higher education can shift from a 'symbolic' to a 'transformative' process of intercultural knowledge, sharing and cooperation (Schweisfurth and Gu 2009; Turner and Robson 2008).

Impact of non-formal interventions: data analysis and discussion

The findings regarding the impact of non-formal activities speak mainly to the experiences of the 22 exchange students and the incoming CE student group in particular, despite activities being open to all incoming students at the UA. Analysed data stem from a closed question in the post-test, listing the ESN non-formal activities in which the 22 exchange students took part, plus excerpts from the focus group interview with the 8 CE students. This selection was guided by seeking responses that shed insights into how students experienced their sojourn in Portugal, outside the language classroom.

Data yielded by the closed question are examined through the descriptive analysis of the number of participants by activity (Figure 3). The scores are complemented and expanded by those focus group excerpts which best illustrate participants' opinion regarding non-formal activities (2), (3), (4) and (5).

Figure 3 indicates that 'ESN trips' and 'international dinners' constituted the most popular activities, both registering a 90.0% share ($n = 18$) of positive responses. This finding is not unexpected in view of exchange students' taste for living abroad (Murphy-Lejeune 2002), and the results yielded by another question in the post-test which elicited preferred facilities for immersion in the host culture. From among the 16 facilities listed, 'traveling throughout Portugal' and 'going to cafés³' were chosen by all but one exchange student ($n = 21$; 95.5%), followed by 'night clubs and bars' and 'restaurants', each registering 81.8% of positive responses ($n = 18$). Immigrant participants, in turn, chose essentially facilities related to

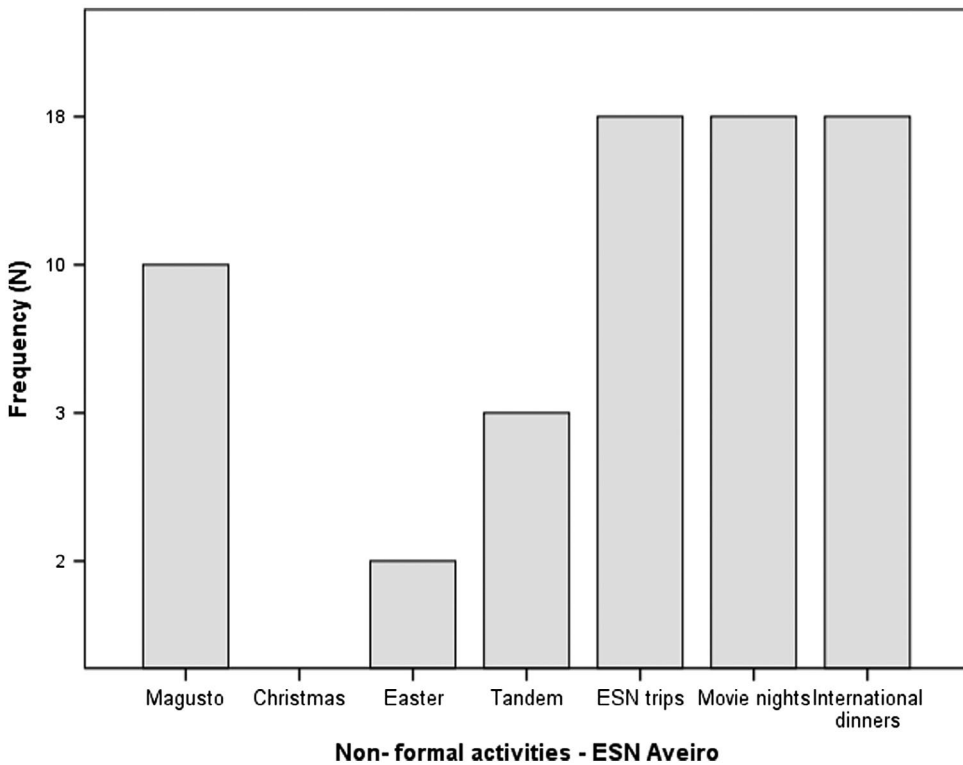


Figure 3. Non-formal activities/ interventions: Frequency distribution ($n = 20$; 100%).
Note: Each category accounts for 100%.

knowledge development and aesthetic appreciation, specifically: 'newspapers and magazines' ($n = 8$; 88.9%) and 'media' ($n = 7$; 77.8%).

The second most popular non-formal activity offered by ESN was international dinners, followed by movie nights and the celebration of 'Magusto', a Portuguese fall festivity.

Analysis of qualitative data drawn from the focus group allows a better understanding of how students perceived these activities (Table 4). It should be noted, however, that due to the brevity of the focus group discussion, only activities (2), (4), (5) and (6) were discussed with participants.

Data in Table 4 show positive intercultural outcomes, with A23 both acknowledging and appreciating the opportunity to interact with host culture members, allowing one to see from 'the Portuguese point of view'. Ironically, data also underscore a lack of contact with hosts since participants spent most of their time within their 'Erasmus family' (i.e. their own group) rather than with Portuguese hosts. Nonetheless, activities (3) and (4), as well the celebration of 'Magusto' (2) all seem to be appreciated, as stressed by A7 and A9 who, while not having had the chance to participate in the activities, expressed their wish to do so. This finding can be better understood if one takes into account the fact that the exchange student subgroup is comprised of European students who usually return home for Christmas. Those who participate in the ESN Christmas activity tend to be from more distant lands, usually, non-European countries.

Table 4. Non-formal activities/interventions: Focus group excerpts.

Participant	Excerpts
I	'Can ESN activities help exchange students get to know the Portuguese culture or the Portuguese way of life, A9?'
A9	'Yeah. International dinners I liked this idea...and I also participated in movie nights. I wasn't in Magusto but I wanted to participate.. but I think I had something'
I	'Yeah. Ok, and the rest of you? Do you agree with A9? Disagree? Do you think these activities can help? For example, I know that A_23 participated in the Easter activity'
A23	'Yes, yes. I participated in Easter, and I must say that this was really a good experience for us. It was one of the best experiences'
A23	'It was a different perspective, because here in Portugal we were rather in our <i>Erasmus</i> family or also our peers of Portuguese people, but not seeing the Portuguese families. And then, all of a sudden we saw the normal, regular families who are living in Aveiro. It was something really enriching!'
I	'Ok, and the rest of you? For example, the Tandem?'
A7	'Yes, well...It didn't work out so good so good because...'
I	'Yeah. The partner?'
A7	'We didn't meet a lot... It was a great idea in my opinion, but it should start much, much, much earlier'
I	'In the beginning?' ((The interviewer asks whether Tandem should have started earlier))
A7	'Earlier...From the beginning, and then maybe trying to join, somehow, people with the same interests. It could be easier...but it's a great idea, in my opinion. I didn't participate in Christmas and Easter activities, although I think it's a perfect idea, also. And I wanted to participate in Magusto and I think it was really a nice opportunity to see some events from a different point of view. The Portuguese point of view'

Note: Case study 1 = A; Number = Participant; I = interviewer.

Another key finding is the added value of non-formal language support offered by the language tandem method. As an autonomous method of language learning, language tandem typically takes the form of pairs of language learners and does not involve a language instructor or trainer. Each pair of learners includes native speakers of the language the pair wants to learn.

In the particular case of the 'ESN Language Tandem project', the tandem method offered exchange students opportunities to practice their Portuguese language skills outside the language classroom with native speakers, as well as to develop relationships and perhaps make new friends. This is particularly important since English is the daily means of communication among exchange students. For domestic students, the tandem method allowed them to practice foreign languages skills with natives and, hopefully, to make friends with exchange students at their home institution.

Offering advantages for exchange and domestic students alike, the language tandem method can complement formal language instruction. As an autonomous method of language learning it does have limitations, particularly when the pair of partners has different interests and levels of commitment to language learning. Participant A7, for example, cites both these limitations. It is worth noting, however, that student A7 participated in the first pilot of the Tandem project, an initiative which was confined to the second semester of 2011–2012.

Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Although the overarching question of this inquiry is investigated through only two case studies, careful examination of even one context can provide insights and suggest strategies for successful higher education internationalisation efforts from an intercultural stance. This paper discussed some practical ideas that can enrich the intercultural dimensions of

European credit mobility programmes and other sojourners in institutions of higher learning. The key findings, however, show that for interculturality to occur it must be explicitly nurtured in both formal and non-formal contexts, as demonstrated by participant appreciation of the added-value of interventions.

Despite the time limitations of the formal intervention, the limited number of participants and the lack of a comparison group, these constraints did not impede the intercultural gains of participants while in Portugal. The eight modules that formed the formal intervention were always understood as a short window of time allowing for a minimum impact on students' intercultural learning. Nonetheless, they constitute an initial step towards enhancing and expanding on intercultural pedagogies which must become part of the design and delivery of European credit exchange programmes.

Further research will certainly highlight the need for additional work in the design and implementation of purposeful intercultural pedagogies which support the gains of sojourners during academic exchange programmes. Although the doctoral research undergirding this study was devised to identify formal ways to enhance sojourner intercultural learning, the research also revealed the importance of addressing the entire intercultural experience in formal and non-formal settings. Happily, the lead author's involvement with an international student association allowed her to reach out to other exchange students beyond the target groups, and to draw attention to the importance of developing intercultural competencies outside in a real-world context.

Enhancing the international and intercultural dimensions of activities provided by post-secondary institutions must be promoted jointly by international and intercultural educators, foreign language teachers, higher education institutions, student services, international offices, as well as national and supranational entities, i.e. all those involved with international exchange programmes. At the institutional level, joint efforts are fundamental to avoid the discontinuation of helpful initiatives like the Tandem project which ceased in 2012–2013. Incorporating these kind of initiatives into an internationalised curriculum (in its cross-border and at home pillars) is key to ensure that an intercultural dimension is actually infused into the internationalisation agenda of the 21st university, as alluded to in Knight's (2004) definition.

Finally, the collaboration of those working closely with exchange programmes is paramount to strengthen the educational value of student mobility in Europe. Moreover, if recent EU educational and training initiatives such as 'Erasmus+' are to place renewed emphasis on learning mobility in formal and non-formal settings, this relationship must be clarified, strengthened and expanded. Only in this way can exchange programmes in Europe be infused with intercultural pedagogical strands and foment the development of intercultural competencies as effective learning outcomes.

Notes

1. More information available at: http://archive.ecml.at/mtp2/ICOPROMO/html/Icopromo_E_pdesc.htm (CoE – ICOPROMO) or <http://www.ces.uc.pt/icopromo/> (Leonardo Da Vinci – ICOPROMO).
2. Number of individual institutions that are members of the European University Foundation-Campus Europae network [Last update July 2015].
3. Cafés' are coffeehouses that serve light meals, coffee and other refreshments. They are also a site of touristic attraction and socialisation in Portugal.

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