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Como se pode gerar mais impacto nos projectos KA2 do
Erasmus+ nos grupos-alvo?

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Mestrado em Economia Política

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Departamento de Economia Política

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Agradeço aos meus pais pelo apoio incondicional em todos os momentos difíceis da minha trajetória académica. Desde o início que foram e serão meus maiores e melhores orientadores na vida.

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Resumo

O objetivo desta investigação é compreender como podemos aumentar o impacto dos projetos Erasmus+ KA2 nos grupos-alvo. Relacionaremos a avaliação dos impactos com a teoria da mudança como um argumento teórico.

Para construir esta investigação, utilizámos um estudo com uma metodologia mista. Os dados utilizados foram recolhidos através de entrevistas com organizações que participaram em projetos financiados pela Agência Nacional na agenda anterior e com inquéritos aos beneficiários desses projetos. As entrevistas permitiram analisar o desempenho da Agência Nacional e a forma como esta coordena o trabalho com as organizações. Os inquéritos permitiram compreender o impacto a longo e curto prazo dos projetos e a forma como esse impacto é medido. Verifica-se, em primeiro lugar, que quanto mais estreita for a ligação entre o projeto e a comunidade, melhores serão os resultados. Verfica-se ainda que uma melhor compreensão do estado da arte conduzirá a um resultado mais positivo.

 Os resultados sugerem que os impactos dos projectos são globalmente positivos. Sugerem também que as variáveis externas (por exemplo, os Stakeholders) e internas (por exemplo, as normas locais), bem como a ligação à comunidade, têm um forte efeito sobre os resultados dos projectos.

Palavras Chave:

Erasmus+, União Europeia, Projetos Sociais, Avaliação de Impacto, Estratégias de Impacto, Treino Vocacional de Adultos, Jovens

Abstract

This research aims to understand how we can increase the impact of the Erasmus+ KA2 Projects in the target groups. We will relate the evaluation of the impacts with the theory of change as a theoretical argument.

To build this research we used a mix-methodology. The data was collected via interviews with organizations who took part in projects funded by the Portuguese National Agency in the previous agenda and with surveys to the beneficiaries. With interviews, we analyzed the performance of the National Agency and how it coordinates the work with the organizations. With the surveys, the goal was to understand the long-term and short-term impact and how are they measured. The main result is that the closest the link between the project and the community, the better the outcomes. The second outcome is that a better understanding of the state of the art will lead to a more positive result. The results suggest that the projects impacts are globally positive. The also suggest that the external (e.g. stakeholders) and internal variables (e.g. local norms), as well as the link to the community, have a strong effect on the outcomes of the projects.

Keywords:

Erasmus+, European Union, Social projects, Impact evaluation, Impact strategies, adult education, youth

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*Graphics provided by Portuguese National Agency

https://www.juventude.pt/pt/pages/erasmus

Glossary of Acronyms

KA – Key-Action

EU – European Union

VET – Vocational Educational Training

NA – National Agency

ToC – Theory of Change

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Access to education is now more important than ever for guaranteeing a quick recovery and fostering equality for everyone, as the COVID-19 epidemic has demonstrated. As part of this recovery process, the Erasmus+ Programme takes its inclusive dimension to a new horizon by supporting opportunities for the personal, socio-educational, and professional development of people in Europe and beyond, to leave no one behind[1].

Erasmus+ is a Programme provided by the European Union that supports measures in the areas of training, education, youth, and sport. The budget package for this project has been increasing. In the period 2014-2020, it had a budget of around €16.50 billion allowing around 4 million people to enjoy mobility and training projects. These projects develop skills and allow people to explore different personal, socio-educational, and professional facets. The Programme tries to cover different themes such as social inclusion, political dynamism, promoting European citizenship, and a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, among others. The Programme also aims to promote improvements in quality, innovation, excellence, and internationalization of organizations active in education and training, youth, and sport. The promotion of improved quality, innovation, and internationalization of beneficiary institutions is also at the heart of the Programme.

The Programme's overarching goal is to support, through lifelong learning, the intellectual, professional, and personal growth of people involved in education, training, youth, and sport in Europe and beyond, fostering innovation and fostering a stronger sense of European identity and active citizenship. Consequently, the Programme will serve as a crucial tool for creating a European Education Area, assisting in the execution of the European Strategy for Cooperation in Education and Training and its underlying Sectoral Agendas (European Comission, 2022).

The new Erasmus+ Programme debuted in January 2014 and combines all of the EU's present initiatives for youth, education, and sport. The key-action projects are inside this budget for Erasmus+. Erasmus+ offers subsidies for a variety of initiatives, including the chance for students to do international internships and for educators to take professional development courses. Formal and non-formal education are the two components of the initiatives, and each of them has three important acts. Teachers, headmasters, trainers, and other staff members of educational institutions have a unique chance to take part in international training courses in various European nations thanks to Erasmus+ Key Actions. The Key Actions had some changes since the last agenda (2014-2020). The new

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[1] Taken from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a

agenda (2021-2027) aims to cover more deeply different topics such as digitalization, sustainability, and adult training.

In this sense, as we saw there are a lot of funds involved in these projects. The number of funds involved in these projects justifies a deep evaluation of their long- and short-term impacts. Following, the research aims to do a critical analysis of the Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 project's implementation and the results for the long term in the target groups. To do this I am focusing on the last agenda to understand the real impact of these projects in the communities.

The dissertation will analyze the Programme from 2014-2020 providing critical insights into what has been done and what is still missing in these programs. The goal of the study is to collect views and alternatives to improve the long-term impacts of the implemented projects. Increasing the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and complementarity in the Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 projects is something to keep in mind when monitoring these programs. The study will be focusing on two main target groups: Youth and adult education. The focus on youth/school is justified by the fact that most of the programs involve this dimension and educational organizations. Regarding, adult training, one of the differences from the last Agenda to 2021-2027 is the improvement of adult training programs.

To collect information on how the implementation of the programs works and how the monitoring is conducted, the study resorts both to surveys and individual interviews. The individual interviews involved the project leader's staff that works in the implementation of the projects and aimed to understand the bureaucracy and all the processes before reaching the target groups and the difficulties of the organizations in reaching the target groups and to report the long-term results. On the other hand, the surveys were answered by the projects' target groups, anonymously. The results from the empirical evidence enable us to assess the relevance and level of achievement of project objectives, development effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. These results will help those responsible for managing the resources and activities of a project to enhance development results along a continuum, from short-term to long-term.

The dissertation's structure will consist of the presentation of the literature review, where we will present the overview of the Erasmus projects and the results from past agendas. Also, in the same chapter, we will include a theoretical framework, which will be the theory of change, and introduce the link to the project's evaluation. Chapter 3 will consist of the methodology and present the empirical research developed. Furthermore, we will present the results in the following chapter. To finish, we will sum up the results and the literature reviews together in the last chapter of the discussion.

Overall, the main goal of this research is to find the missing points and where these projects lack to become more effective and efficient. One of the biggest criticisms of the Eurosceptic use is the institutions are not clear about where the budget goes and the transparency of the EU's agenda. By putting in clear words the use of this budget and its implementations is also one step closer to giving credibility to European Union.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1. Understanding the Programme's impact: The theory of change

The Theory of Change (ToC) outlines the logic behind an effort or program at its core. It identifies adjustments deemed required to the goal that needs to happen earlier by first defining long-term goals and then mapping backward from there (preconditions) (Clark, 2003). A theory of change is a technique that uses a causal analysis based on the available data to explain how a specific intervention, or collection of treatments, is likely to result in a specific development change (United Nations Development Group, 2017).

The theory of change directs the creation of good, research-based program plans that clearly define and analyze assumptions and hazards. In essence, a theory of change is a thorough explanation and demonstration of how and why the desired change is anticipated to occur in a specific setting (Clark, 2003). It primarily focuses on outlining or "filling in" what has been referred to as the "missing middle" between what a program or change initiative performs (its activities or interventions) and how these contribute to the achievement of desired goals (Clark, 2003). It achieves this by first identifying the desired long-term goals, then working backward from these to determine all the prerequisites (outcomes), together with their causal relationships, that must be met for the goals to materialize (Clark, 2003). A theory of change also aids in identifying the underlying presumptions and hazards that must be comprehended and reviewed often during the procedure to guarantee that the strategy will result in the desired change. Before deciding on activities, tactics, strategies, and other forms of intervention, stakeholders must first model their desired outcomes in the order in which they must be achieved (for example, a student will not graduate unless they have passed their courses), which is where Theory of Change's innovation lies (Clark, 2003).

Many of the challenges that the Erasmus+ Programmes try to reach out to are complex and are typically caused by many factors and layers that are embedded deeply in the way society functions. The theory of change makes the process of identifying the root causes of these development challenges easier, with a systematic framework. Apart from that, it also helps to ensure a sound logic for achieving change. Lastly, an increasingly popular method for creating and managing partnerships and partnership initiatives is the theory of change. Different perspectives and presumptions are established among program planners, beneficiaries, donors, program employees, etc. during the process of analyzing a programme through the Theory of Change. By including them early in the planning process and demonstrating how their effort adds to the long-term effect, it helps promote

consensus and inspire stakeholders. The literature establishes a distinction between the ToC as a style of thinking (overall strategy), a process (doing a ToC analysis or inquiry), and a finished product (the result of a ToC process) (Es, Guljt, & Vogel, 2015)

A ToC begins by defining a clear issue that you are contributing to and then works backward to determine prerequisites for achieving that objective. Key components in creating a ToC are (Es, Guijt, & Vogel, 2015):

1. Larger mission or objective your effort is helping (insert context, condition of affairs, and other players with the power to affect change)
2. Principal players are those who are either actively involved in the process or who have an interest in the work's long-term results, which you want to encourage for their eventual benefit.
3. Principal actions, their outputs, and results (widespread series of events anticipated (or necessary) to result in the intended long-term conclusion)

ToC could be a methodology used by national agencies to understand the impact of each program, financing the projects that show more positive outcomes. From this, the national agencies could already evaluate or predict the impact of the projects every year. Apart from that, this would also create an evaluation pattern, making this process more transparent for all the parts. Before starting the TOC process, the project coordinator and the partners should carefully consider their resources and capabilities, their ultimate goal for the initiative (e.g., internal decision-making, ongoing check-in, evaluation, presentations to Board members, constituents, and/or stakeholders), and who should be at the table. Once the process starts, any or all these items can alter, so it is wise to consider them at the beginning (ActKnowledge, 2004). After establishing the long-term objectives and a basic framework for change, the mapping process moves on to a more in-depth stage. We continue to map backward, building on the basic framework, until we have a framework that conveys the story, which we believe, is acceptable for planning reasons. In certain cases, even more, detail will be needed since stakeholders want to pinpoint the "root" reasons for the issue they are trying to fix. In other instances, the map will show three or four levels of change, which represent a logical sequence of initial and intermediate stages toward the ultimate objective (ActKnowledge, 2004). Furthermore, establishing linkages makes it easier to spot-check the initiative's rationale and decide where to intervene. Inconsistencies are frequently revealed by following the logical line from the suggested prerequisite to the conclusion. Participants in the TOC can change their frameworks as needed and remove or add outcomes (ActKnowledge, 2004).

The Theory of Change discusses how actions are thought to result in a succession of outcomes that help achieve the ultimate intended impacts. To do this, the project should be broken down into manageable segments, and the key assumptions for the impact model should be noted (ActKnowledge, 2004).

1. Input: the materials required for a certain program. For instance, prosperous businesspeople who are ready to counsel young people without jobs.
2. Output: the goods or services provided. For instance, 8-hour training on how to establish your own business was offered at youth centers by volunteer entrepreneurs.
3. Outcome: what results from the program will provide. For instance, young unemployed individuals know how to implement their company ideas and are inspired to do so.
4. Impact: the results' long-term or collateral implications. For instance, some individuals will launch their businesses, which will both, directly and indirectly, reduce young unemployment (they create job opportunities for others

Theory of Change can define the directions of a project, refine or refocus an intervention (i.e., for formative reasons), or help choose whether to continue, stop, replicate, or scale up an intervention (i.e., for summative purposes). While impact assessments can also be utilized formatively if an intervention is ongoing, many formative evaluations concentrate on processes. By identifying crucial components to closely monitor and control, for instance, the results of an impact evaluation may be utilized to enhance the implementation of a program for the upcoming intake of participants (ActKnowledge, 2004).

Impact evaluation is often used for summative objectives. A summative impact evaluation should ideally include information on what is required to make the intervention effective for various populations in various situations in addition to results concerning "what works" (ActKnowledge, 2004).

If evaluations look at linkages throughout the causal chain between activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes, and effects in addition to links between activities and impacts, they will come up with stronger and more insightful conclusions. To direct causal attribution in an impact evaluation, a "theory of change" that describes how actions are thought to create a succession of outputs that assist achieve the final intended impacts are useful (ActKnowledge, 2004).

Every impact assessment should utilize the theory of change in some capacity. It may be used in any study design that seeks to infer causation, it can make use of a variety of qualitative and quantitative data, and it can enable the triangulation of data from a mixed methods impact evaluation (M.S., Ferré, Martin-ortega, R.Blanche, & Rolfe, 2021).

The assessment may either recommend improvements to the theory of change or affirm it. A causal chain may be successfully followed using an impact evaluation, and other causal routes can be looked at if necessary. Failure to obtain intermediate results, for instance, may be a sign of implementation failure; failure to produce the expected effects at the end, however, may be attributable to theory failure rather than implementation failure. For the suggestions that result from an evaluation, this has significant ramifications. When a theory fails – it can be regarding a policy, project, or programme -, it is vital to reevaluate the entire impact-achieving method; when implementation fails, it is appropriate to suggest activities to enhance the quality of the implementation (Mcloughlin & Walton, 2015).

Recently, there has been a focus on accountability and results-based management, which has sparked interest in assessing not just the processes, products, and results of development programs, but as well as their influence (overall impact) on people's lives. Impact evaluations analyze the effects of interventions on specific households in addition to recording change. Compared to what would have happened without the institutions and the environment, establishing the allowing for more precise attribution of interventions and being counterfactual (United Nations Development Group, 2017). Many development organizations make use of the following definition of effects from the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: "Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended" (OCDE, 2002, pp.24-28).

The only dependable method for creating a body of data on what functions and does not in development is the counterfactual approach to evaluation, which is being promoted more and more. Across many different areas, there are now about 800 quantitative impact evaluations, and more are either being completed or ordered. Although there is growing agreement that more exacting quantitative methods like randomized control trials should be applied more frequently, they are not applicable in all situations (Mcloughlin & Walton, 2015). On one hand, we can consider the indirect effects on the development of key competencies in young people, improving the possibilities for employment – social skills, and intercultural dialogue. On the other hand, the youth exchanges include mechanisms with direct effects on youth employment – labor input of young people (Mcloughlin & Walton, 2015).

2.2. Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus+ Programme has a long history of implementation. This Programme aims to transfer European ideals and principles to the participants through formal and non-formal education. Erasmus+ is a Programme provided by the European Union that supports measures in the fields of training, education, youth, and sport. From a geopolitical perspective, the EU Council and the European Union's interest in harvesting mobility programs responds to a sociological and cultural interest in having a more cohesive European Union. This belief has been linked to common market stability and national political alignment with the economic provisions of the Eurogroup. (European Commission, 2017).

Since its launch, in 1987, Erasmus has expanded in scope and influence and reached several significant milestones. Throughout its history, its goals have been modified and/or added to, including the development of a European "conscience," promoting a European labor market by encouraging former students to cross internal borders, facilitating the transfer of skills and technologies within Europe, thereby boosting the economy, and assisting students in acquiring social skills, such as independence and intercultural respect, as well as helping them improve their language skills (European Comission, 2022).

Furthermore, the budget package for this project has been increasing. According to the Portuguese report, in the period 2014-2020, it had a budget of around 16.50 billion euros, giving about 4 million people the opportunity to enjoy mobility and training projects (National Agency Portugal, 2017). Erasmus+ projects develop skills and allow the exploration of different personal, socio-educational, and professional facets. The Programme tries to cover different themes such as social inclusion, political dynamism, promoting European citizenship, and a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, among others. The Programme also aims to promote improvements in the quality, innovation, excellence, and internationalization of organizations active in education and training, youth, and sport. The promotion of the quality, innovation, and internationalization of beneficiary institutions are also at the heart of the Programme (European Comission, 2022).

The Erasmus Programme aims to convey European values and prioritizes problems on the international agenda – "hot-button issues". Consequently, the Programme will serve as a crucial tool for creating a European Education Area, assisting in the execution of the European Strategy for Cooperation in Education and Training and its underlying Sectoral Agendas (European Comission, 2022). The Commission is committed to the continued development of new tools for a better implementation of the Programme.

Furthermore, Erasmus Programme includes different types of actions, considering the target groups. The division consists of the Key-Action 1 (KA1), Key-Action 2 (KA2), Key-Action 3 (KA3), and Jean Monnet Actions. In this investigation, we focused on projects from the scope of KA1 and KA2. The

KA1 includes the projects that consist of the mobility of individuals, for example, the mobility of staff/learners, youth participation, language opportunities, and other pieces of training. The projects in KA2 are called "partnerships for cooperation", which include small-scale partnerships, partnerships for excellence (universities, Erasmus Mundus…), partnerships for innovation, and capacity-building projects (European Comission, 2022). The reason why we are focusing on these two agendas (KA1 and KA2) is that their durability and their target groups are close together, making the analysis and evaluation clearer and more harmonized.

According to the consulting reports and the reviewed literature, the Programme has been successful and achieved its results (National Agency Portugal, 2017). Apart from transferring European values to its participants, Erasmus+ has four main strategic goals in Portugal's agenda. Firstly, looks to achieve more inclusion and more democratization on the access to the Programme and orientation to disadvantaged groups. It expects to be more flexible and have more autonomy in the management processes and be able to develop decentralization actions in different areas. Furthermore, it pretends to attain more simplification in administrative mechanisms, several documents and papers can be complex for people who are not familiarized with the Programme. And lastly, to reinforce the global budget of the Programme, allowing the inclusion of more applications that have merit and are excellent proposals, however, due to the limited budget can't be accepted (National Agency Portugal, 2017).

In the agenda of 2014-2020, there was a change in the composition of the Erasmus. There was an integration of several programmes into the Erasmus+ budget. According to the reports from Finland (Eronen, Haila, Lahtinen, & Kuure, 2017) this integration had a clear advantage for better communication due to the common brand. "The name Erasmus is well-known and has a good reputation within the education sector in Finland, and therefore it was a natural choice for the programme". (Eronen, Haila, Lahtinen, & Kuure, 2017, p. 23).

Every participant country develops national reports to review the main achievement of the Programme. These reports are also an efficient tool to keep track of the main issues and possible recommendations for further improvement.

The Budget for the Agenda 2014-2020 was 45 million euros per year. There was an increase in the budget every year, reaching the maximum in 2020. Some of the reflections in the last agenda were in fields of the affirmation of European citizenship, better mobility and contact with different realities, new labor market opportunities, better social inclusion, linguistic development, and intercultural experiences, and reinforcing democratic values, freedom, and solidarity. These programs have a non-formal education, meaning that are structured processes of personal and social education to improve

a range of skills and competencies, outside the formal education – schools, and education institutions (European Comission, 2022).

Based on the Portuguese case, the reports (Comissão Europeia, 2018) demonstrate positive results in Portuguese society, marking some areas that should be improved. Starting from the positive results, the school dropout decreases from 28% to 14%, still above the target of 10%. Additionally, the number of adults between 30-34 with higher education was expected to be 40% in 2020, in mid-2021 it was 45%. The target for the percentage of higher education in adults is to be 50% by 2030. There is also a target that at least 82% of the citizens with higher education have a job, in 2020 the percentage was 80.3%. And lastly, the target for the participation of adults in mobility activities is 15%, in Portugal, the numbers are still below that – 10%. According to the report, the participants expressed having acquired new skills and knowing new methodologies and experiences in different countries. The results of mobility projects reflect more contact with cultural diversity (70%), acquisition of communication skills (97%), teamwork (94%), negotiation skills (91%), carrying out actions in the interest of the community (90%) or the identification and projects associated with personal and professional development (88%).

In the participant countries, interim reports and satisfaction surveys are used to monitor the success of the Programme and the beneficiaries' level of satisfaction, and they assess how well the Programme fills in any gaps.

Based on the poll conducted by the Portuguese Erasmus+ National Agency for Youth, there are different parameters to evaluate the answers. The first one is regarding effectiveness. The consensus among mobility (KA1) participants is that they gained new knowledge, techniques, and experiences abroad (European Comission, 2022). These mobility opportunities also enable participants to create networks with contacts abroad. Participants in mobility (KA1) report that communication skills, resourcefulness to handle disputes, and active citizenship are attributes that have improved along with resilience and resiliency (European Comission, 2022).

The effects of the initiatives have been beneficial overall in recent years. Commitment indicators and end-of-period objectives are mandated at the start of each budgetary cycle. This makes it feasible to track the development of many indicators about education, training, and other Programme impact areas. The Programme is valued by the recipients generally. According to the report from the Portuguese National Agency, the findings of the various assessments show that the reviewed programs are successful in their intended intervention areas. Beneficiaries exhibit satisfaction levels of more than 90% (National Agency Portugal, 2017). The programs benefit students' skill and competency development, boosting employability and entrepreneurship, and reducing the time between education and work. The mobility programs encourage people that want to work and live abroad to be more receptive to possibilities for fresh encounters and cultural exposure. Professional growth for

participants in these programs includes increased networking opportunities, exposure to new people, and usage of digital platforms (National Agency Portugal, 2017).

The national report examines the Programme's major accomplishments in Portugal as well as the major problems it faces and offers some suggestions for improvement. These recommendations serve as metrics for assessing the outcomes of the projects: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence, and lastly, European value added and sustainability. As said before the principles and ideals of European Union are meant to be reflected in each implemented project. A clear result of "Europeanization" is the need for more participation and integration into national policy. In this approach, the balance is communicated as being favorable, outperforming most of the recognized indicators (National Agency Portugal, 2017).

The fundamental issue is still a lack of finance. Demand exceeds financial sources by a wide margin (Eronen, Haila, Lahtinen, & Kuure, 2017). Young people and institutions are becoming more interested in participating in the Erasmus+ Programme as they become aware of the possibilities of these initiatives. The National Agency still faces difficulties in effectively managing applications and making use of all potential. Regarding efficiency, in Portugal, around 4.4 percent of resources are utilized for administration, compared to 6 percent in Europe (National Agency Portugal, 2017). In this regard, the Erasmus Programme is particularly effective. This administration is necessary due to the high volume of documents and bureaucracies in the processes of the projects. On the other hand, the success rate for applications that were funded was 32 percent, below the 44 percent European average (National Agency Portugal, 2017). Considering the limited funding, fewer than half of the high-quality proposals can be funded. The interviews with the organizations will enable us to get more insights into this aspect.

Another evaluation criteria is relevance. The goals set out in these programs serve as broad guidelines for the formulation of national policy in several fields. The beneficiaries of the Programme admit the importance of its implementation, and recognition of spreading a spirit of solidarity and cosmopolitan European culture (National Agency Portugal, 2017). Accordingly, to the National agency report, the presentation of projects has shown a good dynamic, with more applications and significant growth rates. The internal and external coherence efforts are also being noticed. Better coordination between the centralized and decentralized efforts of the Erasmus+ Programme and the Portuguese youth and sports programs is necessary for internal and external coherence (National Agency Portugal, 2017). These are in line with national policies to enhance quality and effectiveness in education and training, support youth activities, promote equity, and foster social cohesion. There is certainly room for improvement in the way the various initiatives are integrated into the national education and training programs. The beneficiaries and the institutions benefited from the integration of these initiatives. The national agency places a lot of emphasis on decentralizing operations. The last indicator

is the European added value and sustainability. About this last one, the results were that through education, training, youth activities, and other means, these initiatives encourage greater integration of European ideals in society. These events help to promote a sense of community inside the EU (National Agency Portugal, 2017).

Furthermore, going through the main issues and recommendations, dealing with the recent years' challenges, the Erasmus+ Agenda has been adapting to the youth's necessities. In Portugal's case, in the last few years, more and more applications have been received. This can be seen as a negative and a positive aspect. On one side, this reflects the increased interest in the Programme and the increase of awareness for its value. However, due to a lack of financing, only a tiny portion of these applications was accepted. As a result, these programs' budgets must be increased to fund the implementation of excellent projects and good practices. Each nation should be given resources that are tailored to its own needs in terms of education and training. Portugal, a country with fewer favorable circumstances than other nations, must do more effort to meet its goals. Additionally, often the Programme does not take into consideration extra costs and the unfavorable situations of many families. Financial support from families, organizations, and the government should be considered and accounted for in the Programme assessment. Young people from low-income backgrounds should have access to the same programs, enabling true inclusion, via the discussion of new methods.

Furthermore, these new methods should consider a new dissemination plan and how to reach everyone from different backgrounds. The aim of full inclusion is still a gap, that has not been reached. Some programs are still centralized, being difficult for everyone to reach. One of the suggestions is increased school education collaboration. The dissemination of projects has been a continuous challenge for national agencies. Enlivening classes at educational institutions, taking part in job fairs, and other events.

Moreover, still in the dissemination topic, an informational platform was launched. Portugal's commitment to Vocational Education and Training (VET) with a better dissemination plan, promoting trainees and graduate mobility. Portugal is the 7th most popular country for Erasmus mobility. This shows the quality of the teaching system as well as the favorable living conditions. Under VET and Higher Education, the number of internships should increase, boosting employability. The resource-allocation mechanism in higher education mobility should be adopted in other areas, especially VET. Moreover, there should be an adoption of the Student Loan Guarantee Facility. This means that the resources should be reallocated to areas where they are missing, such as the mobility of postgraduate students, and to increase the number of Erasmus Mundus Joint master's degrees. Still, regarding the restructuring of the budget, national agencies should be able to evaluate the remaining funds after the mid-term project implementation to carry over reserve list projects.

The relocation of the budget was something that happened mainly during the pandemic times. Due to the transfer to an online format, the budget was not used, and sometimes it was spent on unofficial activities. The primary drawbacks of the Erasmus+ Programme in Portugal are due to inadequate funding provisions. Numerous high-quality proposals with high scores (more than 60 points, exceeding 50% in all criteria) exist in all sectors and for most actions but cannot be funded because of financial constraints. All applications received throughout the Programme's three years of existence had a relatively low success rate. Portugal looks to have the most constrained fiscal condition around education and training when compared to certain other nations. Portugal is one of the nations with the lowest success rates among the 33 nations involved in the Erasmus+ Programme, even though the great majority of applicants show promise. Turning to inclusion, adult education is the field where this can be best achieved. The incentive for continuous improvement and learning progress is one of the factors to increase the number of high-skilled workers and better life quality. Adult education should focus on social inclusion programs and outreach to underprivileged communities. VET and Adult education should start to have joint coordination. This way the focus would not be divided, and better dissemination could be easier achieved.

Another aspect to improve is the dissemination plan. As we referred to before, to encourage young people to participate in these projects, young people should have access to small-scale national actions. Dissemination through past experiences should be more explored in other to incentive more young people. For example, with the European Volunteer Service, or the current Solidarity corps, one of the strategies to influence participation is through testimonials and meetings with former volunteers. It is also argued that the development of interpersonal skills should continue to be one of the focuses of the projects. Soft skills and informal capacities are characteristics that have been more and more valued in the job market lately. Besides, a greater effort should be made to involve more potential beneficiaries. Establish a push line of institutions and organizations willing to work together on initiatives.

Figure 1 shows some general numbers from the agenda for 2014-2020. First, it shows that the number of participants has risen during the investigation, particularly in 2015, when it nearly doubled from 2014 to 2015. Secondly, in comparison to the average and the first two years of Erasmus+ Youth in action implementation, fewer projects have been started in the Programme. One of the explanations for the growth in the investment of the projects is the number of participants, shown in Figure 2.
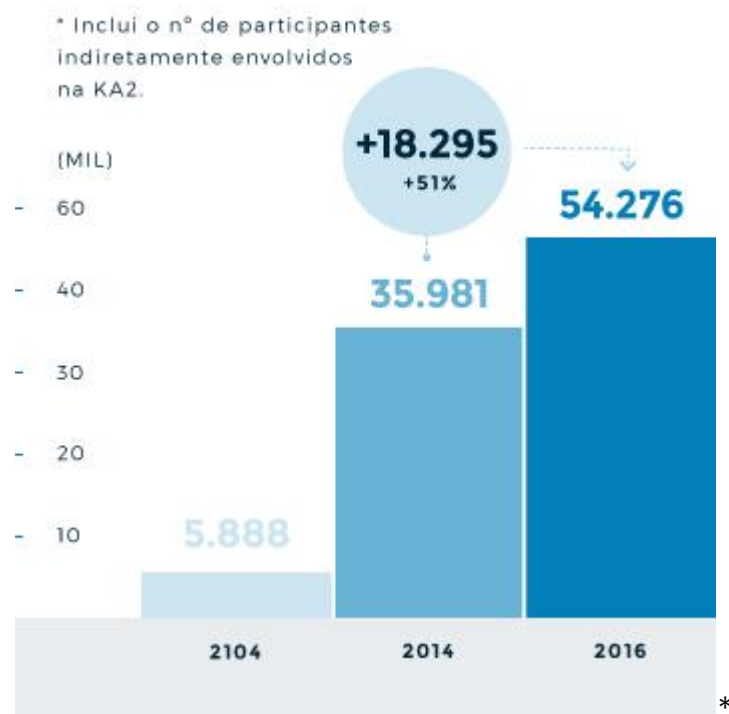
Figure 1. Number of Participants in Erasmus+, Portugal, 2014-2016
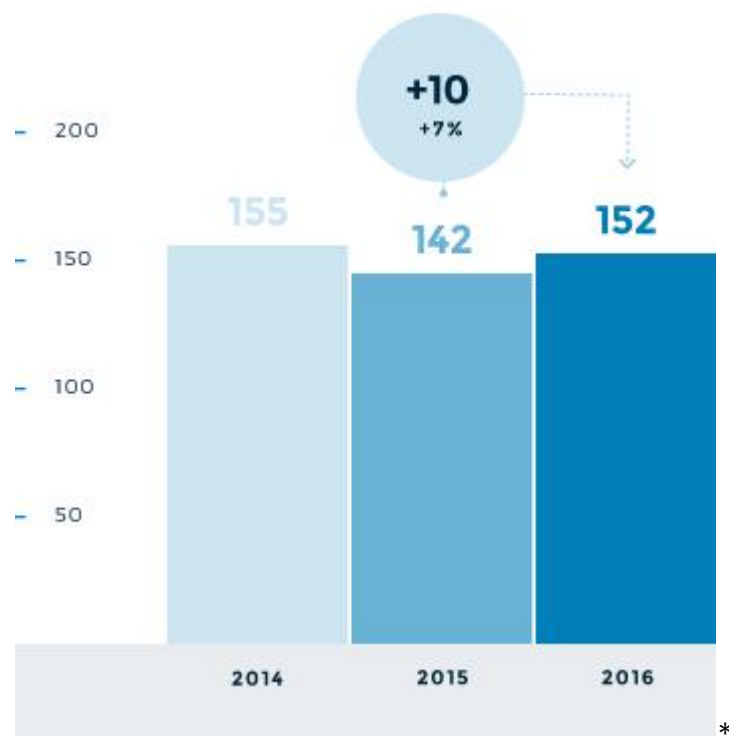
Source: Portuguese National Agency of Youth

Figure 2. Number of Funded Projects, Portugal, 2014-2016

Source: Portuguese National Agency of Youth

Figure 3 illustrates how funding for Erasmus+ JA projects has changed over time in several territories including the interior, the coast, and urban centers. It is crucial to emphasize the trajectory of alignment between each territorial area's percentage of project investments and its proportion of young people (aged 15 to 29) in these same regions.
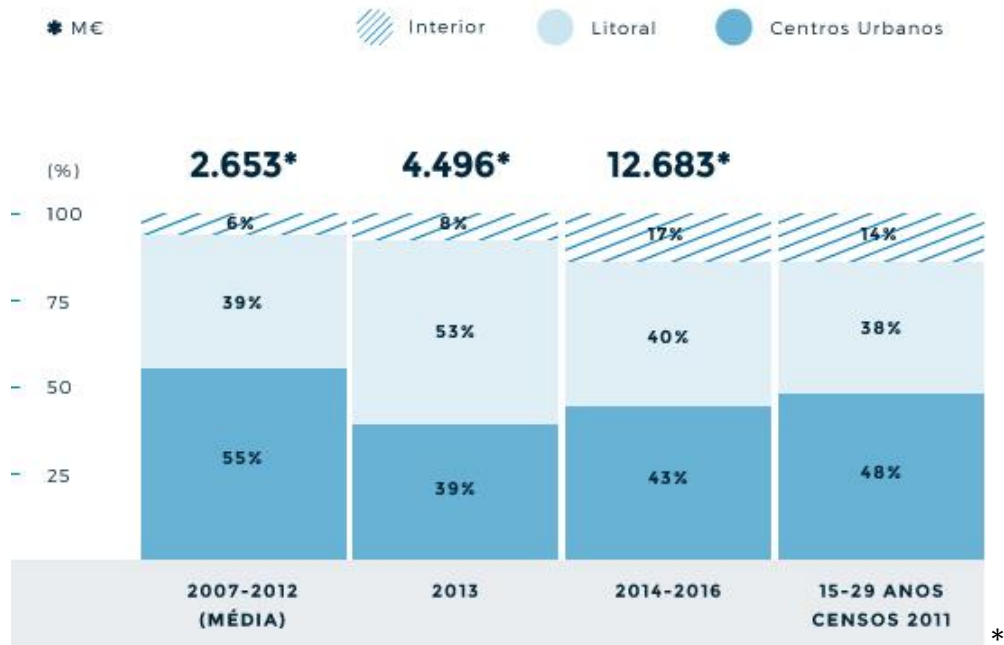

Figure 3. Investment of the projects in geographic areas, Portugal, 2017-2020

Source: Portuguese National Agency of Youth

There are some major differences for the next Agenda considering these last suggestions given in the report. One of the greatest achievements for the next 2021-2027 plan will be the greater inclusion of young and adults, without their monetary possibilities being a limitation for their participation. In addition, adult education will also receive more funding than under the previous plan. Apart from that, the Jean Monnet programme will be reshaped in the future to address a wider target group to raise awareness of common European values.

Methodology

The research question developed for this paper is: How can we increase the impact of the KA2 projects from Erasmus+ in the target groups? To answer the research question, we focused on a certain period and areas of interest from the projects. Portugal's case and performance are the research objects of this study. Portugal has been an example in the performance of the Erasmus+ Programme. As we saw before, Portugal's participation in Erasmus+ Programme has been receiving a positive response. The participation and interest have increased between the young people and the different target institutions. Erasmus+ strengthens education and youth systems and improves employability through funding for education, training, youth, and sport. Between 2014 and 2020, Erasmus+ has given 3.7 % of young people in the EU a chance to study, train, volunteer or gain professional experience abroad. The budget for Erasmus+ was €3.37 billion in 2019. Also in 2019, 24 454 participants in 419 Portuguese projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning, and youth for a total grant amount of € 49.00 million.[2]

To organize the research, we will focus on the Portugal space and its projects' results from agenda 2014-2020. The goal is to analyze the last agenda to have a complete view of the results and the achievements. Having in mind that these projects cover different fields and institutions we are going to focus on two main areas. First, we are going to cover "schools/education" because it represents the bigger piece of the budget. We are going to be meeting on youth/school because most of the programs are involved in schools. Secondly, we will also cover adult education/training because it is the one in which the budget increased the most from the last agenda to the current one. We will not compare them; The aim is to reflect on the real effects of each of them and understand the determinants that break these projects to have a bigger outstanding result. The database with all the projects developed in the last agenda was taken from the National Agency's website. In figure 4 we can find the types of organizations developing projects in youth and adult education fields. The database has the funding received by year and the main results in the different target groups. We can observe that the majority are NGOs and Educational centers. From the original list of the coordinated projects, 212 were involved in youth and adult education and were already finalized. The projects were initiated between 2014 and 2018. The grants of the projects had a variation between 35 - 999 thousand euros.

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[2] Taken from https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/factsheets/factsheet-pt-2019_en.html
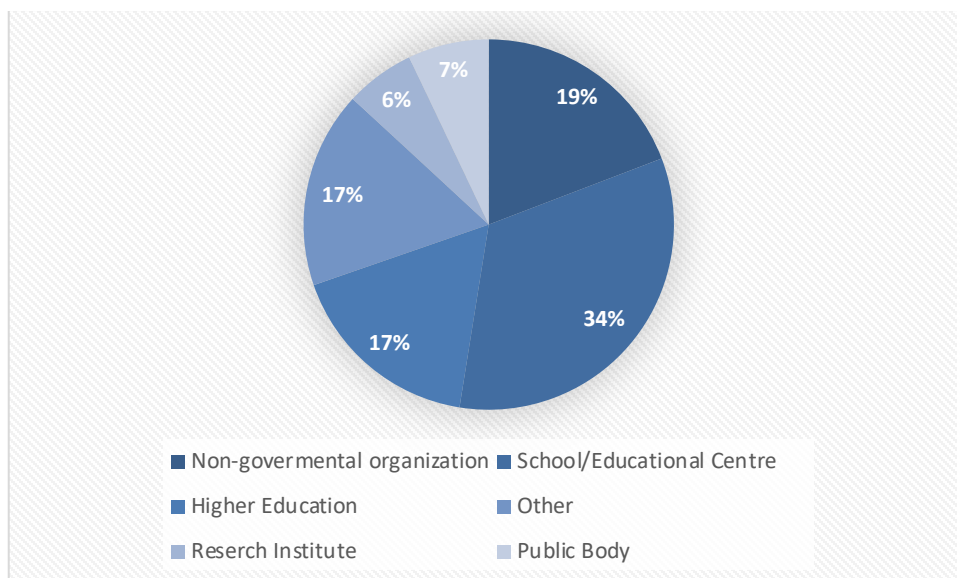
Figure 4. Types of Organizations developing Youth and Adult Education Projects, 2014-2018

Source: Portuguese National Agency of Youth

This study has an exploratory nature. The methodology of the study was a mixed methodology. This means that interviews and surveys were used and both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed. This methodology aimed to get the point of view from the organizations' side – project leader – (implementation) and the beneficiaries (results). Both surveys and interview questions were developed taking into consideration the determinants of the Erasmus+ national report: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence, and European added value and sustainability.

To collect information about how the implementation of the programme's projects and how is the monitorization after we developed surveys and individual interviews. The individual interviews were made with the staff from different institutions that led the projects, that is, individuals that worked in the implementation of the projects. The interviews were conducted on zoom, for practical reasons. The duration of the interviews was between 30 min to 1 hour. Due to the protection of the interviewees' data the interviews were not recorded, just the answers were transcript. The answers to the interviews were united and analyzed taking into consideration the evaluation parameters previously discussed: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence, and lastly, European value added and sustainability. The organizations were chosen considering the field of impact of their project (youth or adult education) and based on the projects that were implemented during the last agenda. The organizations are mainly private institutions or NGOs. From the 25 emails sent we got answers from 13 organizations. The response rate is 52%. These interviews had the goal to understand the bureaucracy and all the processes before reaching the target groups to understand

the difficulties of the organizations in reaching the target groups and to report the long-term results. The interview schedule is presented in Annex A.

On the other hand, the surveys were answered by the projects' target groups, anonymously. The surveys were disseminated by the interviewed organizations and in Facebook groups, concerning the Erasmus+ projects, by providing a link to a google forms questionnaire. These got the point of view of the different target institutions to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the projects and how can it improve. The questionnaire is presented in Annex B. We reach 50 surveys answered and 13 interviews with the staff.

We used different evaluation parameters from the reports of the Portuguese NA, mentioned to analyze the effects. The variant determinants to analyze the different outcomes from the programs will be effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, internal and external coherence, and European value and sustainability. These were chosen based on other reports of evaluation of the Erasmus+ results. These are the main points of evaluation to choose a project to receive the budget and to determine the application's value. It is important to define these determinants beforehand to not be influenced when analyzing the results.

CHAPTER 4

Results

4.1. Interviews: The project's leader perception

The interviews had Portuguese project leaders' organizations as a target. These organizations developed at least one Erasmus+ KA1, KA2 project in the last agenda (2014-2020).

Most of the organizations we interviewed were implemented in adult education (55%). The others were equally divided between school projects and youth-focused. Moreover, in terms of geographic areas, the projects were developed in different parts of Portugal reaching the global territory. This shows that the information and the opportunities can reach different parts of the country.

Firstly, we looked for if Erasmus was an important part of the organizations and how far it increases their contact with international partners. The answers in this sense were synchronized since all the organizations underlined Erasmus+ projects as the main tool for internationalization and escalating new ideas and exchange of innovation gears. The organizations feel the honor to be able to participate in these projects, and some of them pointed out that unfortunately, they could not keep more than one project working at the same time due to human resources constraints. They indicated the importance from a perspective of learning and sharing – innovating and growing, sharing to innovate. Moreover, it also emphasized the good practices and interchange of ideas that make all the partners evolve from a single project. Undoubtedly, it is a key tool to bring entities and countries closer together.

On the other hand, it was also asked about the biggest challenges in implementing a project. In this section, the answers went in different directions. Some organizations complained about time management and short budget. This is related to the fact that some organizations are not able to have a team exclusively for Erasmus+ projects due to the low budget. In this way, it is a difficult time between regular professional activities and activities exclusively for Erasmus+. Consequently, they explained that the deadline can be difficult to achieve in some cases.

Moreover, some organizations pointed out challenges related to the partnerships. There were some cases where the project was stopped due to the pandemic situation, and this led to demotivation from the partners. When there are difficult times in the project, some partners "give up" and others "pull the boat by themselves". Following this, some commented that finding the right partner is always

an important part of the project, they never know what to expect when they do not the partners from previous activities.

Also, relationships with stakeholders can be challenging since it is difficult to get them fully compromised. The entities that can benefit most from the projects are also the ones that are more difficult to become involved in projects. Likewise, when the project involves the mobility of staff it is a problem to miss their responsibilities and that complicates the process.

Furthermore, some organizations mentioned challenges related to the lack of assistance in the development of applications. There were some answers regarding the claim for a high-profile application. The National Agency (NA) has a high demand for professional applications. This means that they argued that when the NA demands a certain quality, it should also assist with training in this matter. When the applications must be highly professional the outcome is a predominance of applications from companies that can afford professional to develop them. Some organizations complained regarding the whole design part of the project must be well thought out, but this cannot be a business.

The last critique was more related with to NA's performance. There are two national agencies in Portugal, working with Erasmus+ projects. One of them is more focused on education subjects – the Education National Agency -, and the other working with youth activities – the youth agency. The fact of having two agencies with two different conducts of evaluating and submitting the application makes the method of understanding the processes of the organizations more difficult. There was an organization that had problems, bureaucracy issues, with one of the agencies. They argued that these problems came from public service flaws. Some projects are not approved of by the Portuguese agency and then are accepted by the French NA, for examples. This happens because of the different visions of each NA and each country. The interviewees argued that the Portuguese vision does not go with their projects. For smaller projects, Portugal is a good target, as well as in the youth field. However, for bigger projects, the NA has another view. They mention that it is positive to know and understand what is going on in other countries to get to know other strategies and approaches that can be more related to the projects.

The interviews also covered the topic of the performance of the NA, and in how it could improve. The organizations stressed the processes of writing a project, submitting it, and evaluating it, as well as the support in the implementation and the budget-related purposes. The comments on this subject were mainly positive. To begin, regarding the application process the organizations argued that everything was well explained. They underlined that it is an important phase, and it is essential to be all clarified. Concerning the evaluation phase, the opinions are divided. While some organizations

answered that they understand why some of their applications were rejected, others say that they feel the need for a clearer justification. They argued that the selection it is very subjective, and it depends on the evaluator. They consider that the evaluation should be more standardized. Some professionals understand the project's concept and others do not, and then it is very difficult to proceed. The fact that both agencies have different ways to proceed makes these processes more difficult to understand. Moreover, some budget distributions are less clear. Sometimes some activities are not allowed to be included in the budget, and the reasons are not clear. There were also some comments involving the professionalism expected from the applications. As we said before, the expectations are high, taking into consideration the number of applications, however, there should be more clarification sessions with easy language. The way to explain the details can be difficult if you are not used to the Erasmus+ terms. In this sense, the smaller institutions, that cannot afford a professional team are harmed.

Passing on to the other point, concerning monitoring the projects while they are being implemented, organizations have a positive perception. When they have any questions, the NA answered fast and tries to help in any doubt. They also commented that during the process they do not receive any contact from the NA, beyond the mandatory reports. This was not commented on as a negative point, just an observation. Regarding the assistance in the financial and budget process, the perception are also good. The interviewees clarified that it is extremely important that all the partners have all the questions answered and that more assistance is never too much. However, the rules are simple to follow and after two or three projects the procedures become automatic.

In general, the behavior of both National Agencies was considered as positive by the participants. They are efficient at all points. The National Agency of Youth is seen as a good facilitator. They monitor projects and promote meetings to guide the procedures. The other agency – the National Agency of Education - is more demanding, with the applications and with the bureaucracies. Some recommendations in these points are that there could be more activities and exchange of experiences between projects and that the meeting of approved projects should be more elaborate. For example, for this new agenda, where the rules changed, the clarification sessions were not enough for some organizations. It would be positive and attractive for the participants to see a link being created between projects – an exchange of experiences and ideas.

Figure 5 shows the improvements suggested in the interviews to understand where the agency has space to improve and where the expectations are achieved by the organizations. We selected the different fields considering the previous reports and based on the negative aspects of the previous agenda.
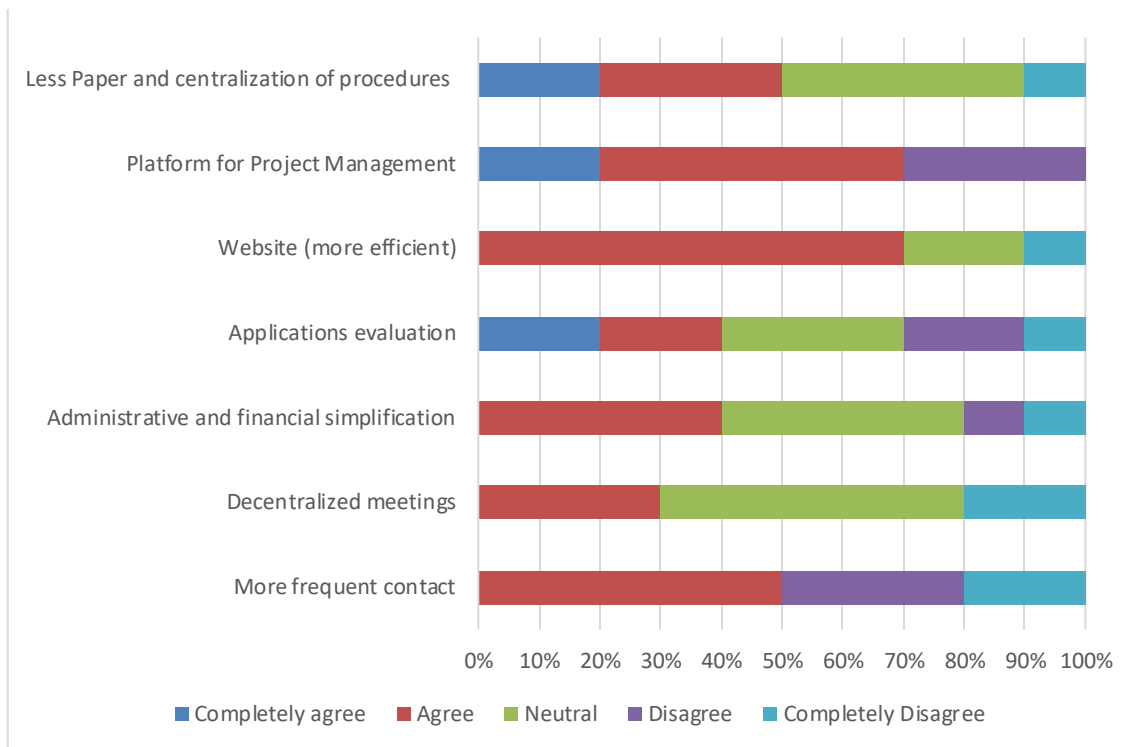
Figure 5. Improvements suggested in the interviews

As we can analyze there are some fields where the opinions are more aligned, and others where the perceptions vary for different reasons. First, we observe the fields in which the answers were more aligned. This is the case of the website. The participants agreed that the website could be more user-friendly. Some of the interviews compared with other agencies' websites, pointing out some flaws. The website is one of the main sources of dissemination and general information about Erasmus+ Programme. For this reason, there should be a bigger concern about the website.

Regarding the closer and more frequent contact, 50% of the interviewees answered that they agree this should be improved. This follows the previous comments about the proximity of NA during the project's implementation. The contact is just made when there are mandatory reports to be finished. This was not pointed out as something negative, but the organizations would appreciate it if the NA would pay more attention to the different stages. This would also benefit in the phases of the projects where the motivation starts to withdraw. The other half of the answers argued that for every doubt they would receive fast answers. They can always count on the NA's support. They do not necessarily insist on recurrent contact, when not necessary.

The next point is about decentralized meetings. Half of the answers were neutral, due to the pandemic situation. The meetings were transferred to a virtual format; in this way, everyone can participate. The interviewees agree with the remote solution. Even in the on-site meetings, 20% agreed

that they could see efforts from the NA to go out of large cities. We should underline that the interviewed organizations are situated across the country. After the covid pandemic, online meetings would be a more effective and democratic solution.

Regarding the creation of a single platform for facilitating project management, 70% (20% completely agree, 50% agree) agreed that it could help smaller institutions, by communicating with experts and with more assistance. With this single platform, we meant a tool to assist in the different tasks of managing an Erasmus+ project and communicating with different institutions that are in the same process. This would work as a social/networking tool for an organization that develops work in the same fields and as a diary to track the processes of operating a project. This would facilitate the work of new organizations that could feel lost in the beginning. The other 30% argued that there are already plenty of tools for this purpose, for example, a mobility tool. However, there is no networking and communication area to exchange ideas and developments.

Going through the simplification of procedures and fewer certificates, the answers were quite ambivalent. 50% were on the agree side, 40% were neutral, and 10% disagree. The neutral answers claimed that there was already a positive evolution of less paper and simplification of procedures. The KA1 has still a lot of paperwork involved, however, KA2 is more simplified. There were also some comments regarding the paper folders that are still requested, the transfer to digitalization documents is happening but at a slow pace.

In a similar topic, related to administrative and financial simplifications the answers were also diverse, and very similar to the previous one. The main argument was that the first project can look like a difficult task, however, after one or two projects the procedures are already known and easy to follow. But there is always space to improve, allowing the organizations to focus on the good development of the outcomes and not so much on financial documents.

Lastly, the more distributed answers were about the application evaluations. The opinions were diverse because they depended on past experiences with the different agencies. In the interviews, we had organizations from all different backgrounds and constitutions, some more experienced than others. From these we can understand the different opinions, some already understand the process and others are still trying to understand the requirements.

The last part of the interview was focused on evaluating the impact of the project. The research question we are exploring is exactly about this concern. With these interviews, we had the aim to understand how this impact can be measured and followed the project.

Most of the organizations answered that the project had the expected impact, and some of them still receive feedback from users of their content. The first question concerning the impact was if the project had an impact on the community. All the organizations felt the project has generated an impact, however not in all cases in the community. One of the answers was that the impact was more in the beneficiary organizations, in this case, enterprises. They built a service for companies that is still being used nowadays, considering this a long-term impact. In another case, the project had a pyramid impact. They worked with stakeholders and there are still groups working on their content. There was just one project that said that the results were not what they expected. The pandemic situation restricted the activities they had planned, and virtual activities do not impact in the same way as they would be face-to-face – especially when it is with young people. Nevertheless, they still were able to see the creation of a community after the project. Two organizations consider that their projects overcame the expectations. One of them developed a learning community to keep developing activities in the field of the project and many more, these activities involve stakeholders and participants. The other one was recognized as a good practice. In this case, they lost contact with the rest of the partners, so they do not know how it is going in the partner countries, but in Portugal it is still being developed. This project is still receiving feedback from people using their online courses.

As we can observe, the project leaders consider that the projects had positive outcomes and even though the impact is not something constant (depending on variables), we can still consider that the interviewed organizations have an optimistic view. For a more efficient impact, it is not possible to design a pattern due to the flexible variants that depend on. These variants are the subject of the project and the relevance it has, depending on the timing and area of the project. The variable that affected the most the analyzed projects was the pandemic situation. Many projects had to change their intellectual outputs and their final projects. Many mobilities were canceled, also affecting the good productivity and development between projects. But the results still proved that the projects were a tool to facilitate different tools in the fields of adult education, youth, and schools.

The last question of the interview was if the project was well finalized, even if in some cases did not go as planned. All the organizations were confident that the effects were positive. Many of the projects were able to start a network concerned with the field they were working on. These networks develop initiatives in different areas and support the community where the projects were implemented. One of the interviewees explained that the results at the corporate level were very interesting. It was the first time they had this international involvement. It had an impact on students, their families, and the region – in the dissemination events. Even though the pandemic situation the project's outcomes were positive. Another example is a different project where some of the activities are still being used in schools. Teachers continue to use activities in class. They were trained and

continue to use the tools from the project. There was also an impact to do an event which it disseminated to other schools in the area. The activity was carried out with parents to help students at home. They continue to get feedback through the Facebook page, apart from that they also have access to the downloads and visualizations of the content.

The less positive points highlighted in this section were like the ones referred to previously. One organization underlined the low budget for some activities that could have a bigger impact. However, with fewer resources it was a challenge, especially when it is a small organization. This interviewee also referred that due to the high expectation for the elaboration of the application, they must request external services to complete this phase. The know-how of some procedures is demanding to smaller organizations. Another organization pointed out that the mobility tool, the managing platform would be more useful if it had an interacting part, exploring the other projects and comparing ideas. The NA should try to make more network links between the organizations with ongoing projects. This would lead to a cooperative learning community, and exchange of good practices. The last input was that it would be interesting if there would be a possibility of including outside EU countries in some projects. This is an idea that is being slowly integrated into the Erasmus+ agenda, however, this would also request for an increase in budget and possibilities.

In most cases, the impact can be evaluated by the number of people participating in their courses and using the content from the project. Apart from this, the feedback from the participants and the stakeholders can also be a tool to understand the effects. Lastly, the interviewees also mentioned to the multiplier events and the number of participants as a good instrument to see the influence and who did they reach while implementing the project. Unfortunately, the Covid-pandemic delayed some developments that were being done in these programs.

From the interviews, we were able to understand different points of view and possible outcomes and variables for the impact of the projects. The interviewed organizations were from different size cities/villages, and we were able to detect that the bigger the city was, the more difficult was to catch people's attention and motivate stakeholders and participants for the project's activities.

## 4.2.   Surveys: the beneficiaries perception

The survey was shared online and was answered by former beneficiaries of the different Erasmus+ projects. We collected 50 answers, evaluating different kinds of projects. The surveys included questions to evaluate the performance of the National Agency and the outcomes of the project: negative and positive. The analysis of the data from the surveys will give us a closer look at the

beneficiary's perceptions. The good development of the project depends on the involvement of the community, and how far are the beneficiaries are willing to get involved and learn with the project. In this sense, it is vital to keep taking notes regarding what are they feeling about the projects and what can we do to improve them.

In figure 6, we have the representation of the projects in which the beneficiaries participated. We can see that we have a representation of all the fields of interest, being Youth and Higher education the more frequent ones.

In which field was the project developed?
50 answers

- ● Adult education
- ● Elementary School
- ● High School
- ● Higher Education
- ● Youth
- ● Other
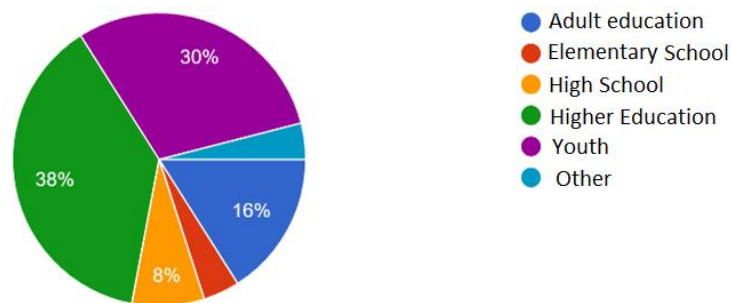
In which areas would you say that the project had a bigger impact?
50 answers

- ● Inclusion and diversity
- ● Digital Transformation
- ● Environment and climate change
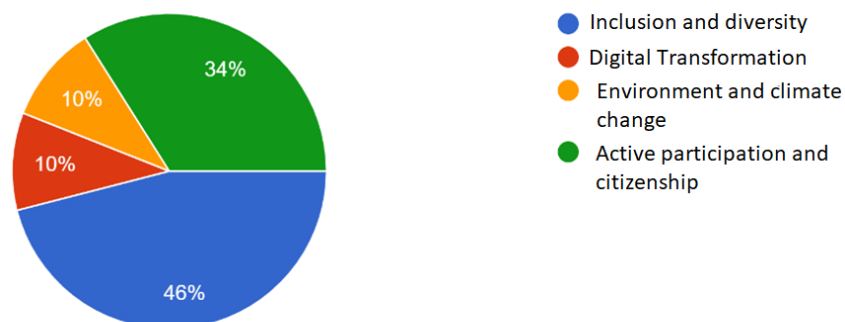- ● Active participation and citizenship

Figure 6. Survey Answers

We asked in the survey what the areas where the project had a bigger impact. In the figure 6, we have the results of the answers. The majority of the projects were involved in inclusion and diversity (46%) and active participation and citizenship (34%). The Erasmus+ Programme has a high emphasis on these two areas, as we said previously in the literature review. The Portuguese national agency has

settled the type of projects that is willing to finance. As we presented in the previous section, some organizations chose to take their projects to other countries' agencies because Portuguese funds are reserved for certain topics. However, with the new agenda, the emphasis will change to digital transformation, especially in the adult education sector. The organizations need to keep informed concerning significant topics in international relations, culture, and politics. Apart from that, they must understand what could be new for the study of art and what has not been done. These are steps closer to get an approvement by the National Agency.
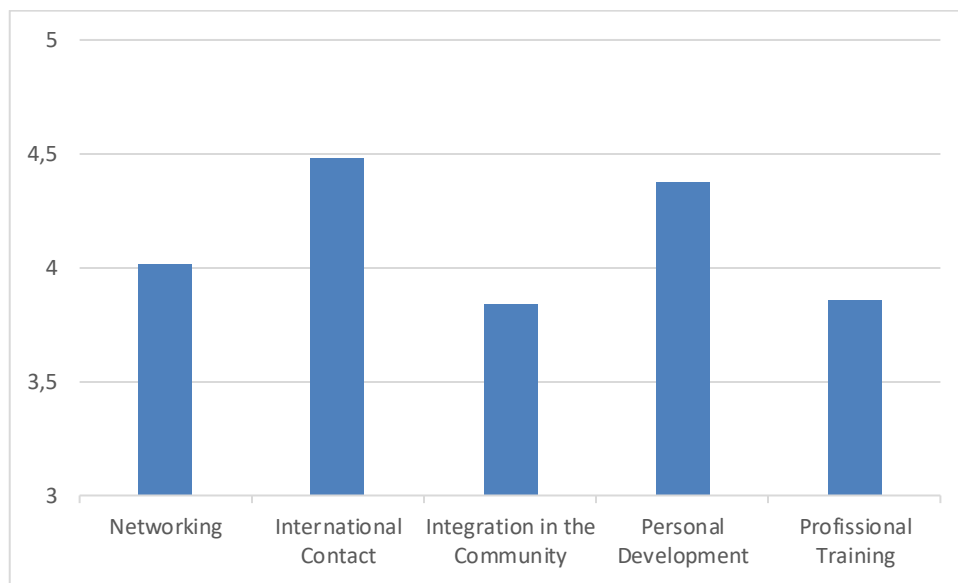

Figure 7. Impacts on Participants

Figure 7 represents the average result of the fields where the projects should create change in the beneficiaries. The grading system was titled from 1 to 5, being 1 not relevant and 5 very relevant. The graph was developed based on the calculation of the average of answers. In this way, we can analyze the area where the projects have bigger effect in the participants and understand what is missing in the area that impacts less. As we can see, the two areas with more impact are the international contact and personal development. It is positive to say that international contact is an important outcome, due to the Erasmus+ ideals. One of the tools that Erasmus aims to bring to participants is the international experiences and multicultural tolerance. So, we can see that these goals were achieved. Furthermore, all the sectors were evaluated as more than neutral. All of them had a positive change in the participants.

Moreover, the aspect that was considered less significant was the impact in community. This can be explained from the lack of incentive for the participants to continue the project and its ideals

in their communities. The multiplier events or any other training/meeting are planned, and the project finished there. There is a lack of continuity, as we will see in the next figure (fig.8). Regardless, we can consider as a positive outcome that all the fields were consider as impact from the different projects. This can tell us that the impact exists in the individuals. The participants feel that by participating in the project they will always acquire new skills valuable for their future perspectives.
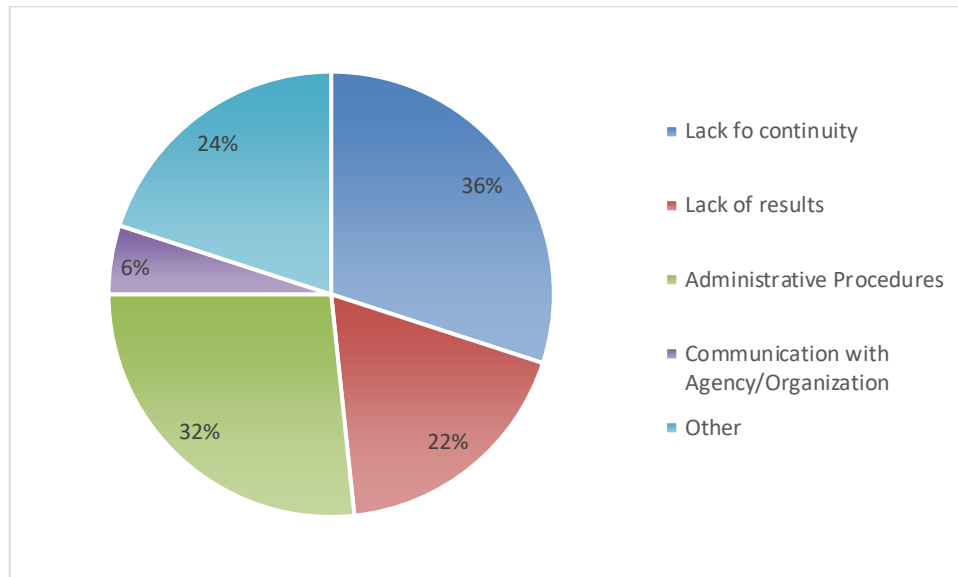

Figure 8. Difficulties in the Projects

In the figure 8, the results for the question about the biggest challenges in participating in the projects. As we said before, the lack of continuity will affect the bigger impacts that the projects could create. In the interviews, we had examples of a project in which the outcomes were platforms/learning courses that are still being used for stakeholders and other enterprises. However, the 36% makes us wonder if the projects are being finalized in the right way to leave long-term effects. This answer came from the participants, which means that they would like to see the project continue and the positive result that it could have in the community. This is also explained by the 22% of lack of results. This means that the beneficiaries feel the need of knowing the results of the project. The communication of results is something that could be shared with the participants, by report form or similar. This would be enough for them to understand that these projects have direct and indirect effects on the target groups and stakeholders. The second difficulty was the administrative procedures. This aspect was also pointed out in the interviews. The bureaucracies and the paper required are still considered unnecessary and can demotivate the participants when the paperwork is not properly explained by the organization.

Beside this, we can identify these two negative aspects of the projects as the ones also identified in the interviews. Both organizations and beneficiaries feel the same difficulties in implementing and participating in a project.
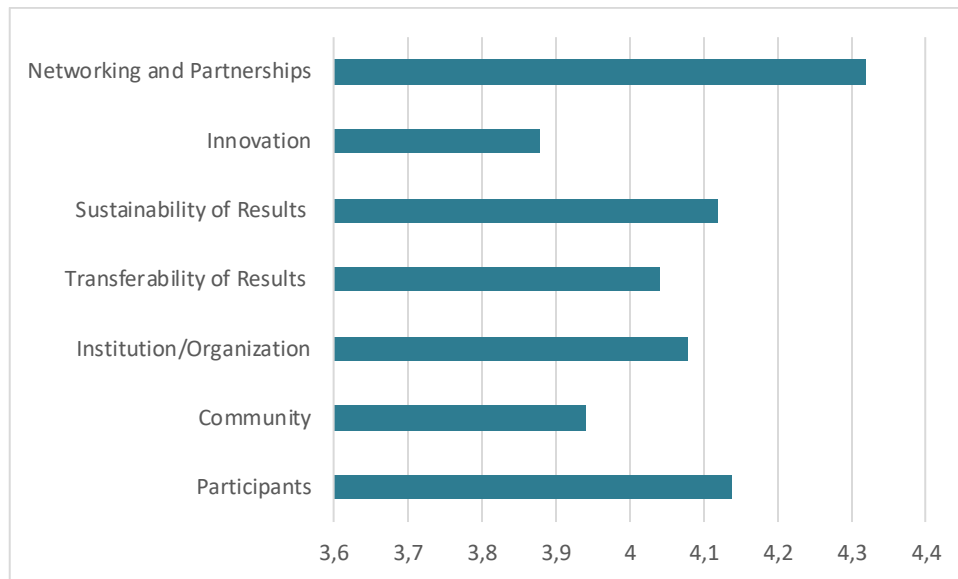

Figure 9. Impacts of the Projects

Lastly, the figure 9 represents the answers to the question regarding the impacts of the project. As before, the evaluation grade was from 1 to 5, with being 1 not relevant and 5 very relevant. On the positive side, we can observe that before, the sectors are all above the neutral grade. The beneficiaries consider that the project has an impact in all the sectors presented. As expected, the biggest impact was considered to be regarding networking and partnerships. As already observed in the interviews, the Erasmus+ projects are the main tool for these organizations and good practices to be internationalized. This is seen as one of the most positive incentives for organizations to participate and find new connections in their fields of impact. The second sector with more impact was the participants. The direct participation in activities of the project contributes to a bigger effect. This could lead to a continuity of the project's purpose. The project events and dissemination activities are one of the best ways to contribute and motivate the community to be aware of the projects, and what is happening in the European Union context.

4.3 Summary of Results

The key findings may be summed up as follows:

- The organizations that participated in the study had a positive view of what the Erasmus+ brings to their international and local activities, as well as, being considered a facilitating tool for network and exchange of good practices.

- The results appear to be more permanent in projects directly related to the community/local needs. Organizations located in smaller towns and more connected with the population have easier access to approach more participants and feel the long-term results.

- The small budget and demand of time are a challenge to smaller organizations, who are not able to hire third parties to take part in the application processes and administrative procedures.

- All the organizations confirmed the success of the projects, and most of them had long-term effects, being still used nowadays by the stakeholders/companies. However, in the surveys, the negative aspect was highlighted as the lack of communication of the results. Following this, the beneficiaries do not understand the remaining impacts of the projects.

- Even with the challenges and difficulties concerning the projects, the participants feel the significant impact in the different sectors we illustrated. The overview of the beneficiaries is positive and represents interest on their part.

- On one hand, we can consider the effects felt by the organizations and stakeholders in long term, concerning the project's continuity and the platform user's feedback. On the other hand, the participants feel impact during the project however, they feel the need for the communication of the results and continuity of the project, after the official finalization.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

A first result that we can start with is the appreciation that the organizations have for this Programme. Erasmus+ is a facilitator for the internationalization and exchange of good practices. This illustrates the relevance and how this contact/network would be much harder to achieve without it. The opportunities provided to this organizations to keep outgrowing themselves is one of the most important impacts from Erasmus+. As this organizations develop themselves, also develop the communities where they insert at. Providing indirect results to the communities. Apart from that, from these projects the good practices and European values are continuously shared and implemented in the organizations' policies.

At some level, the projects were anticipated to spur modernization and reinforce the response of education, training, and youth systems to the major challenges of the modern world: environmental sustainability, digital transformation, employment, economic stability, and growth, as well as the need to promote social, civic, and intercultural competences, intercultural dialogue, democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion, mental health and well-being, and non-discrimination. In the literature review we analyze the number that lead us to first impression of the Erasmus+ projects in society. These numbers showed a clear evolution on all the factors where the Erasmus+ should impact, mainly directed with education, internationalization and political tolerance. There is a need for better use of European reference tools for the recognition, validation, and transparency of skills and credentials, as well as enhanced connections and synergies across various education, training, and youth sectors at the national level. Furthermore, to have practical answer and results the interviews and surveys gave us access to understand what do the people that work every day with these projects feel that can be improved.

Based on the literature review and on the empirical study, two results were achieved from the research that are in line with the research question. The first result showed the closest the link between the project and the community, the better the outcomes. The second results is that a better understanding state of art will lead to a more positive result, with this also including the choice of the partners and the IO's for the implementation.

According to the Hivos article, the ToC gives space for a critical thinking of the project and its implementation, as well as for questioning and room for complexity (Es, Guijt, & Vogel, 2015). ToC developed and explained what, how, and why of the expected change process and the contributions for the field (Es, Guljt, & Vogel, 2015). The theory of change can easily improve the evaluation of the impact in the Erasmus+ projects, by identifying crucial components to closely monitor and control. The

results of an impact evaluation may be utilized to enhance the implementation of a Programme for the upcoming intake of participants. Other impact analyses neglect to take into account crucial facets of a theory of change. At various stages of the intervention, it is highly common for there to be many theories of change. For instance, a "train the trainer" methodology aims to increase instructors' familiarity with various teaching approaches so that they may instruct students more effectively and deepen their own subject knowledge.

To explain how the intervention works directly with instructors as opposed to how those teachers will interact with kids, other theories of change may be required. To address the changes that are planned at many levels, such as with workers, managers, lawmakers, and community organizations, upstream policy work will need a variety of theories of change. Weak theories of change fail to take into account the many levels of change.

Theories of change also need to define and discuss intermediate results. For instance, an important intermediate goal, that essential stakeholders were persuaded of the effectiveness of the pilot project and of the viability of it being scaled up, was not identified or addressed in one UNICEF study. (Es, Guijt, & Vogel, 2015)

In the end of the data collection results the analysis was positive. The problem statement of how to analyze the impact of the project and understand the dependable variables was possible to reach through the research developed. The external and internal variables, as well as the link to the community have a strong effect on the outcomes of the projects.

Furthermore, from the data that the projects that felt more impact and more long-term duration of the platforms were implemented in small communities. The closer the link between the organization and the community more probabilities it must be well received. This can be seen as a challenge in for the organizations implementing projects in bigger cities. However, even in big cities you can be well insert in local communities. We also confirmed that decentralization is happening. In fact, the National Agency accept a good number of applications coming from small communities. The NA chooses and evaluates the applications considering the effectiveness and the impact they may have. However, the high range of rejection of quality application also happens due to the lack of finance. Few high-quality applications are funded, a big part of them end up on the "rejection bag". The Portuguese National Agency has some specific topics that tries to cover with the projects. Being to focus on some fields, the NA discards possible opportunities to expand to other grounds. The different target and a low level of getting out of the goals of the NA. Both problems were underlined in interviews as we observed before.

Apart from that, because of low budget there are also unfavorable situations for some families that require extra costs, due to the budget not covering the desire. From a different situation but also budget related, during the pandemic there was budget left from each project, due to meetings that

were not made on-site. The transfer of these meetings to the online form saved a lot of money from the projects and the way this money was allocated was not completely regulated. Reserved funds should be better settled and reimplemented in new projects. For example, the reserved plans could be used to the dissemination activities, or the multiplier events. It was already proven that a good dissemination plan also means a more people involved and more impact.

The outsourcing of good practices plans is also something that the NA should avoid, making the Portuguese organizations feel accepted in their own country. In the results we observed one organization that they used as a strategy to apply in different countries NAs with their projects. Their projects were said to be with a bigger dimension; therefore, they would need a higher budget. The same organization that explained their issue of going outsourcing for funds for their projects, also said that recently they applied to the Portuguese NA and their project was accepted. The Erasmus+ topics frequently supplement the issues in the international agenda. The current trends are often changing. In this way, the project becomes more attractive for the participants.

However, with these flaws in the management of the projects there are significant positive outcomes and evolution. The projects are being decentralizes and the opportunities are reaching a lot of part from Portugal, from big metropoles to the smaller villages. The projects are being developed to bring tools for an exchange of goods practices and countries to work together.

Also, the approach of relating theory of change to analyze the impact of the projects is promising. A theory of change can help determine the facts that must be gathered and how they should be analyzed in an effect study. It could also offer a structure for reporting. It's crucial to make sure that the theory of change accurately describes what the intervention seeks to achieve and how - to the satisfaction of people who will use it. Developing a theory of change is not just a question of checking boxes. A theory of change should ideally describe how change is thought to occur rather than just drawing an arrow connecting actions to anticipated outcomes (Rogers, 2014). By reviewing the impact of the project with a ToC adaptation it is possible to avoid typical issues with demotivated partners and with bad functioning of the implementation in the different countries. Through a ToC it is possible to predict if a project will be effective and develop the expected results. This would answer to development challenges, to difficult communication with partners and a more harmonized implementation, leading to a systematic framework. Through a positive partnership is positive to develop network in the different fields your organization works in.

The main goal of this dissertation is to understand how to analyse the impact in the target groups and how can we increase it. The impact can be analysed through the reports during the project and the users of the platforms/ outputs of the projects. We understood already that the ToC can provide solution for development challenges and with partnerships. Through the surveys the questions were directed to comprehend the impact in each of the participants. The surveys revealed a strong

impact in the target groups. In the different fields available, all of them showed positive outcome. The areas of impact were seen as all be working and being implemented in the projects, mainly the internalization and the self-development.

After evaluating the positive aspects found in the research, there are still fields where there is a need for improving. First of all, we can start by selecting the improvements directed to the NA. The comments were positive regarding the NA performance, however there are space for improvement in some of the fields. It was consensual that the beginning of the Erasmus+ integration could be difficult to get on hand of all the mandatory documents and there should be more clarification sessions for beginners. The meeting of approval projects is the perfect opportunity to clarify all the procedures and the best strategies on how to manage an EU project. From the interviews, there was an understanding that the organizations feel the need of a better integration plan as a first timer involved in an Erasmus project. To explain the inconveniences, and even to exchange ideas and strategies between the coordinators. This would also contribute for a more collaborative environment between partners/coordinators. In this way, it would give the chance for the impact to increase.

Moreover, the impact is evaluated through the number of participants in the events, the users in the platforms and the download of the contents developed. These numbers could be risen by better dissemination plans, contacts and closeness between organizations and the locals. Apart from that, the website also was highlighted as not really user friendly. The projects should be easier to reach as well as the guidelines for each agenda. The website is the biggest tool for dissemination, in this sense, should be taken care of.

Lastly, the problem that was more underlined was the lack of continuity of the projects. There should be a plan for the publishing of the results and to keep the platforms actives to keep the project running. Even if the project was passed to another entity, at least the project would not be lost. The NA should motivate the organizations and provide a compensation for the ones who would do efforts to keep the project running. Otherwise, some of these projects are lost due to the finish deadline and the end of the budget.

In order to identify the existing situation (in terms of needs and opportunities), the planned state, and what has to be done to shift from one to the other, a theory of change can be used for strategic planning or programme/policy planning. By doing so, it may be possible to create goals that are more achievable, define accountabilities, and create consensus over the methods to be employed (Rogers, 2014). It is important to keep in mind that to a project to have a proper impact it should follow some requirements. The organization should earn the trust of the community even before the implementation. Even with smaller action for the local communities is positive to create a connection. Start smaller actions in the local communities and then paint the bigger picture. Also, relating with the response of the community to the project, it will also depend on the field is directed to. The project

must be related to the target group needs and their response would depend on how much they need those solutions. The more the community feel the problem that the project is directed the more probable is to take part on it. Every impact evaluation should employ a theory of change in some capacity since it serves as a fundamental component of impact evaluations. It is especially helpful when the goal is to adapt the lessons learned from an impact evaluation completed at one site to another. Any current theory of change for the Programme or policy should be assessed for appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and correctness and amended as necessary when planning an impact evaluation and formulating the terms of reference. If the intervention itself or our knowledge of how it operates — or is supposed to operate—changes during the assessment, it should be updated accordingly. Exploring the ToC approach will help organizations develop a more universal view of their mission, fundamental values, and strategic decisions. This then creates the framework for more consistently implementing the programme.

Moreover, it was also commented that the change in the internal organization of the projects' fields could happen. Just as the joint coordination of the Erasmus (for studies) and the KA projects brought attention to both initiatives, bringing more awareness and participation. The same could happen with VET and the adult education fields. These two fields are related and with a joint coordination it would bring more attention to the VET opportunities and generate more projects in this ground.

Lastly, the positive outcomes of the project were notable in the interviews and in the surveys. The projects were reflected as an important part of the community where the organizations are in and a valuable tool to scale their ideas and good practices. The idea of continuity although for some beneficiaries is not noteworthy, for the interviewees it was underlined as the evaluation of the impact and the necessity of the project. If the project after its end it is still requested by the stakeholder and the institutions involved, it proves that it was something that it was missing. The outcomes of some projects are reported to still being used in schools and between the stakeholders. After the project finishes the institutions still receive feedback regarding the downloaded content, and the online platforms. In this sense, the coordinators keep the platforms active or pass it to the stakeholders to regulate it.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The Erasmus Programme is a prime example of successful European integration and a cornerstone of the creation of the European identity, according to the European Commission and academics (Comissão Europeia, 2018). Since 1987, both the globe and Europe have transformed. A greater understanding amongst people and cultures has been made possible by easier transportation and faster communication, which has also led to greater openness. However, there has been some retreat in recent years, particularly with respect to the right to travel freely inside the European Union. Some Member States have temporarily closed their borders and/or strengthened their control due to the refugee crisis, the resultant external and internal overpressure on the EU's borders, and terrorist threats. It is relevant to evaluate the results of Erasmus in the communities where the projects are implemented and the impacts of this role in the target groups. Those that gain from ERASMUS inevitably develop their talents. They enhance their capacity to interact with persons from different cultures and to acknowledge and respect their distinctions, acquiring new language skills, learning about other workplace realities, and developing one's professional abilities. In addition to providing opportunities and expanding horizons for many generations of students, Erasmus is "a program by people for people" and is regarded as one of the great success stories of the European Union. It has also indirectly engaged a sizeable portion of society in the process of learning, discovery, and intercultural dialogue between Europeans (Cunha & Santos, 2017).

From a general point of view, this work was proposed to understand if the Erasmus+ projects generate long-term impacts, and what are the variants to increase them in the target groups. It is focused on investigating ways to improve the influence of the Erasmus Programme on the target groups because there aren't any empirical data in that area. According to the study's findings, those who benefited from the Programme felt significantly more connected to Europe and believe that participating in these projects is valuable for their international career and training.

The results showed that the internal and external factors can influence the impact and the number of people that the project reaches. The dissemination and the connection with the beneficiaries were reinforced as important features for a good implementation. Apart from that, the commitment of the partners is another important factor to motivate the active participation of all the entities involved. A good and structured management and dissemination plan promotes better results.

One negative factor was the COVID pandemic that created borders between the institutions and the target groups. The face-to-face events are crucial for a better communication of the goal of

the project. This goes aligned with the connection with the locals. During the pandemic that connection was restricted to be online, multiplier events and dissemination activities have not the same effect online. This was one of the main impacts on the projects in the last years.

The support of the NA was also highlighted from the negative and positive point of views. The negative passes through the lack of support for the beginners with Erasmus+ projects. The clarification of the documents and procedures is vague; however, it was also underlined that they are available to answer any questions. The cooperation between coordinators is also a point to keep in mind. Organizations devoted to the same areas could support each other even in dissemination activities. This simple help could make a difference to the reached target group. There should be more support in this case for a creation of a network environment between coordinators. Another important factor that influences the impact is recognizing the problems affecting the locals. The organizations should be updated about the issues affecting the community to get the desired answer in the projects.

One of the contributions of this research is the evaluation of the Erasmus+ projects, taking in consideration how can we increase the impact in the target groups. We evaluate the external and internal factor that were able to tell us how to increase the effects. Joining this with the use of the theory of change methodology can be use in future project designing. Previous studies were developed under the analysis of other projects, mainly the mobilities, focused on high education, or reporting the numbers of the different projects results. In this paper, we relate the Erasmus+ effects and the Theory of Change. As we previously reinforced, the Theory of Change supports a systematic plan to implement with the local/target group. Therefore, the research contributes to the literature on wicked problems by providing a fresh option rather than just invalidating current evaluation techniques. It also offers a fresh viewpoint by connecting the modest victories policy perspective to Theory of Change. The methodical framework provided by theory of change facilitates the process of locating the underlying reasons of these development issues. In addition, it ensures a clear reasoning for bringing about change.

The dissertation also contributes to the debate regarding if these projects have the desired effect or not. In the introduction, we made it clear about the goals on these initiatives. The main goal is the inclusion dimension and providing support for personal, socio-economic, and professional development. From the results we can conclude that the project acquires these dimensions to the local communities as well as the target groups. Apart from that, it should also improve the quality, innovation, and internationalization of the beneficiary institutions. This level also is acquired, according to the interview's answers.

Finally, we looked for the reason for the long-term results and how to achieve them. From the interviews we were able to have a clear inside of what is implementing a project and changes that can be made to attract more participants and stakeholders. As an overall results, we can conclude that the project has a real effect on the community, and it depends on the quality management team if they have a long, lasting result. An incentive should be created to improve the management in some of the projects. This paper provided a critical overview of the implementation of these projects, providing the external and internal factors as well that could increase the impact in the target group. The objective of these projects, apart from promoting the European values, is to focus the projects and the outcomes for the target group, and for the interested parts. The success rate and the continuity will always depend on the good purposes and the authenticity of the coordinator and the partners.

However, the study has a set of limitations. The sample size of participants was insufficient to draw more firm conclusions on the factors that were examined. Due to a lack of participants in all the groups, we were therefore unable to determine if variations in perceptions of skills progress may be influenced by other factors such as nation, age, study region, and the year the exchange was conducted.

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Annexes

Annex A

Interview Questions

- Resumo do projeto em que participaram

- Em que grupo de implementação se inseria: jovens, escolas, educação para adultos;

- Erasmus+ é uma parte significativa da atividade internacional da sua organização?

- A cooperação internacional e a mobilidade teriam diminuído significativamente sem o programa Erasmus+?

- Quais foram os principais desafios?

- Em qual das seguintes fases acha que deve haver melhoramento e em qual acha que a Agência Nacional teve melhor desempenho?

  - Processo de avaliação de candidaturas

  - Apoio à elaboração e apresentação de candidaturas

  - Ações de monitorização dos projetos

  - Apoio técnico-financeiro à execução de projetos

- Assinale conforme a sua opinião relativamente às melhorias que poderiam ser implementadas pela AN.

Melhoria em/na…	Concordo completamente	Concordo	Neutro	Discordo	Discordo completamente
ter contacto mais próximo e frequente					
Reuniões descentralizadas					
Simplificação administrativa e financeira					
Avaliação de candidaturas					

Website (mais eficiente)					
Em criar uma só plataforma para gestão de projetos					
Ter menos papéis e certificados e mais centralização e simplificação de procedimentos					

- Sente que o projeto teve impacto na comunidade? Se sim, quais? E se podemos designá-las impactos de longo prazo?
- Na sua opinião acha que o projeto foi bem finalizado, realizando os objetivos pretendidos?

Annex B

Survey

Avaliação dos Projetos Erasmus - Beneficiários

Este questionário situa-se no âmbito da invetigação para o desenvolvimento da dissertação de mestrado. Procura avaliar o impacto dos projetos Erasmus+ nos grupos alvo.
Pede-se que se foque num projeto Erasmus em que participou e responder às seguintes perguntas.

*Obrigatório

1. Quando foi finalizado o projeto em que participou?

_____

2. Em que contexto se inseria o projeto em que participou? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- ( ) Educação para adultos
- ( ) Ensino básico
- ( ) Ensino Secundário
- ( ) Ensino Superior
- ( ) Juventude
- ( ) Outra

3. Como teve conhecimento dos projetos Erasmus+? *

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- [ ] Website ANE+EF
- [ ] Email ANE+EF
- [ ] Sessões de divulgação
- [ ] Instituição onde desenvolve atividade profissional
- [ ] Redes Sociais
- [ ] Amigos/colegas/familiares

4.   Quais das seguintes mobilidades/projetos Erasmus conhece? *

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

☐ Mobilidade para formação profissional
☐ Atividades de participação juvenil
☐ DiscoverEU (participação de jovens de 18 anos)
☐ Parcerias de Excelência (ensino superior)
☐ Parcerias de cooperação (pequena escala)
☐ Parcerias de inovação (projetos forward-looking)
☐ Plataformas online (EPALE, eTwinning…)

5.   Das seguintes vertentes em quais diria que o projeto teve impacto? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

◯ Inclusão e diversidade
◯ Transformação digital
◯ Ambiente e combate às alterações climáticas
◯ Participação ativa do cidadão

6.   Qual o tópico central do projeto? *

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

☐ Abandono escolar
☐ Desemprego
☐ Cursos de formação profissional
☐ Cidadania ativa, valores europeus e democracia
☐ Educação para o empreendedorismo
☐ Acesso para os desfavorecidos
☐ Cooperação entre instituições de ensino
☐ Inclusão
☐ Outra

Em que medida o projeto ajudou na sua vida profissional/pessoal? | De 1 (nada relevante) a 5 (muito relevante) em quanto ajudou o projeto na sua vida.

7. Networking *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

8. Contacto Internacional *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

9. Integração na comunidade *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

10. Desenvolvimento Pessoal *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

11. Formação Profissional *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. Além das opções anteriores, houve mais algum impacto que ache relevante especificar?

_____

Medidas a melhorar

13. Que dificuldades sentiu no projeto: *

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

☐ Falta de seguimento depois do projeto

☐ Falta de comunicação dos resultados

☐ Procedimentos administrativos

☐ Comunicação com a Agência e/ou organização foi insuficiente

☐ Outra

14. De 1 (nada relevante) a 5 (muito relevante) avalie o impacto do projeto nos   *
    seguintes aspetos.

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	1 - Nada relevante	2 - Um pouco relevante	3 - Neutro	4 - Relevante	5 - Muito relevante
Impacto nos participantes	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Impacto na comunidade	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Impacto na instituição	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Transferibilidade: resultados utilizáveis noutros contextos, instituições ou setores	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Sustentabilidade: resultados utilizáveis para além do fim do projeto	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Inovação: desenvolvimento de soluções ou resultados inovadores	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Networking e estabelecimento de parcerias	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Avaliação Geral

15. Como aconselharia a Agência Nacional a melhorar os seus serviços, para um   *
    maior impacto.

_____

16. Na sua opinião acha que o projeto foi concretizado, atingindo as suas expectativas? *

_____

Este conteúdo não foi criado nem aprovado pela Google.

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