

MAARJA BEERKENS AND HANS VOSSENSTEYN

4 THE EFFECT OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME ON EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Visible Hand of Europe

4.1 INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, European higher education has gone through significant transformation which has been driven by broad global developments, such as massification of higher education, a global competition, and economic benefits of education (Maassen & Stensaker, forthcoming). The direct and indirect influence of the European dimension is another force that gradually changes the nature of higher education in Europe. The pace of change has accelerated since the 1990s, particularly with the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999), and the Lisbon Strategy (2000). The first two have led to a process to make study programmes more compatible and transparent across Europe as well as to the outside world. The Lisbon process seeks to reform the continent's still fragmented national systems into a more powerful and more integrated knowledge-based economy in which higher education is regarded one of the key drivers of innovative capacity. Subsequent communications from European policy makers have strengthened the belief that higher education institutions will be crucial to Europe's future well-being and that stronger cooperation between countries and universities in this endeavour is a necessary condition for success.

The effect of the European Union on higher education goes beyond these policy declarations. As shown by Beerkens (2008), we can observe the process of Europeanisation in higher education in all dimensions of the supranational governance—in the EU rules, EU organisations and the development of a transnational society. Not only the mobility of students and staff and academic cooperation within Europe have significantly grown, but also institutions such as the Framework Programmes, the European Research Council (ERC), the European Institute of Technology (EIT) have strengthened the role of Europe as a player in the higher education landscape. Also legal regulations, such as recognition of qualifications, right of residence for students, or the rights of children of migrant workers have significant policy effects. Furthermore, legal regulations from other sectors have proven to have an indirect effect. For example, the general principles of common labour market and non-discrimination have had a direct implication on funding and admission policies for international European students, as ruled by the European Court of Justice (Reuvers, 2010).

The relationship between European initiatives and national developments in the area of higher education is an interesting issue. Formally, the education sector is left outside the jurisdiction of the European Union and is only a national responsibility. Nevertheless, we can observe a significant and increasing effect of the European dimension in higher education systems everywhere in Europe. This chapter analyses the effect of one of the supranational instruments of the European Union—the ERASMUS programme. It is one of the best-known European level instruments in higher education and is called a ‘flagship’ programme (EC, n.d.). It has been in place for 25 years while its original function of facilitating student and staff mobility is still dominant next to stimulating institutional collaboration. This chapter aims to track the effect of ERASMUS on higher education institutions, national policies, and supranational developments. It also aims to demonstrate the expansion in breadth of the programme.

4.2 THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME AND EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

ERASMUS is a programme of the European Commission. It was launched in 1987 as a student exchange programme. Since its inception, it has enabled more than 2.2 million students and 250,000 academic staff to be mobile within Europe (EC, n.d.). Around 90% of European higher education institutions (more than 4,000) in 33 countries participate in the programme. ERASMUS, however, is not only a mobility programme. Over the years, its scope and contribution have broadened. In the framework of its decentralised actions – coordinated through national ERASMUS units – the programme supports projects that bring together students and staff from several countries for an intensive programme, linguistic courses and preparatory visits to widen the ERASMUS network. In addition, under the umbrella of the European Union’s Socrates (1994–1999), Socrates II (2000–2006) and Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013), ERASMUS has supported many centralised actions which are coordinated by the Brussels’ ERASMUS office, including multilateral projects for curriculum development, modernisation of higher education, virtual campuses and facilitating academic and non-academic networks. Some of these initiatives have had a significant influence on broader developments in the higher education sector, as we will discuss below. ERASMUS has been thus constantly expanding its scope and developing new ways for stimulating and supporting higher education. Since 2007, ERASMUS has three new components: student placements in enterprises, university staff training in enterprises and teaching business staff (EC, n.d.).

Over the years, ERASMUS has had an important role in making European universities more international. As shown by various evaluation reports, its effects exceed the direct impact on mobile students and staff. As early as 1996, Maiworm et al. refer to the fact that institutions supported by ERASMUS are more internationally oriented. The effects of ERASMUS became visible in the institutionalisation of international activities. Since its launch, universities have been more likely to establish an international office, language centres and other specialised units (Teichler & Maiworm, 1997). The integration of ERASMUS in the Socrates

programme increased institutions' awareness for European and international activities even further (Barblan et al., 2000) and resulted in a reinforcement of institutional policies (Teichler, 2001). There is also a clear trend of institutions moving from ad-hoc decentral strategies for internationalisation to a more centralised strategy, where a large volume of international work is undertaken and the international mission is explicit, followed through with specific goals and procedures (Brakel et al., 2004).

The European Policy Statements (EPS) have had a significant impact. According to a Europe-wide survey, representatives from most universities agree that the requirement to submit an EPS has helped to increase awareness and co-operation in Europe-oriented activities (Brakel et al., 2004). Moreover, these authors indicate that some aspects of internationalisation have become more prominent, such as the Europeanisation of the curricula, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning for mobile students, and quality assurance.

While the impact of ERASMUS on the international dimension of European universities is well documented, its effect on the quality of teaching, services and management is much less studied. Although ERASMUS/SOCRATES is believed to have had a considerable effect on higher education institutions, less than one third of survey respondents – being ERASMUS coordinators – were convinced that the programme had contributed to an improvement of the quality of *teaching and learning* (Teichler et al., 2001). While many students see academic development as a benefit of their ERASMUS period, the primary contribution is linked to personal development and soft skills, not to academic enhancement (Teichler, 2001). Nor are mobile teachers very optimistic about enhancements in terms of teaching methods and curricula as a result of their stay abroad (Kreitz & Teichler, 1997). Most mobile teachers reported positive effects of the programme, but these referred to closer contacts between the institutions involved, an increase in joint activities between the teacher's home and host institution and efficiency of administrative processes. The importance of teacher mobility is recognised by university leaders, not because of its effect on teaching and learning, but as an instrument of reputation building (Bracht et al., 2006).

The effect of ERASMUS on European universities cannot be viewed in isolation, but against the background of a more general trend of internationalisation. The changes that internationalisation inspires mainly concern organisational structure and management (Vossensteyn et al., 2008). It has become more important in universities' strategy. International offices and international relations offices have been established, with major growth in the 1990s. These offices often have direct access to the highest level of institutional decision-making and the international dimension has achieved a prominent place in universities' goals and mission statements. While universities differ in terms of their level of internationalisation and ambitions, international networks and cooperation are perceived to be beneficial in most institutions.

Internationalisation affects not only organisational structure, but also teaching and research. Internationalisation of the curriculum, joint degrees, and collaborative research networks affect the core activities of universities. Adjustments in the language

of instruction are a clear side-effect of internationalisation. English-taught Bachelor and Master programmes have grown rapidly from 700 courses in 2002 to 2,400 in 2007 (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008). Universities are motivated by their governments to offer programmes in English in order to attract international students, prepare domestic students for the global labour market and raise the profile of the institution. These programmes seem to have had some interesting side-effects in institutions. For example, universities have had to develop ‘marketing’ strategies for their English-taught programmes to attract both domestic and international audiences. As a result, the marketing of traditional domestic programmes has also improved. Improvements in student services and more targeted student recruitment are also identified as positive side-effects (Vossensteyn et al., 2008).

However, universities not only respond to internationalisation, but also use it actively to achieve their own goals (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2005). The reasons for developing an international dimension vary by country and type of institution. Some universities use international activities to acquire the status of global player or ‘world class university’. Others find this goal either unachievable or undesirable and, while also responding to competition, they aim to strengthen their European or regional profile. In some countries, international students have become an important financial resource for universities and internationalisation is sometimes necessary for the survival of a faculty or programme. Another group of universities uses internationalisation to help enhance their reputation in the local community and/or nationally. Internationalisation of curricula and students may also be regarded as a way of improving the quality of teaching. As such, teaching programmes keep up with developments in the professional field and students mutually learn from other perspectives.

The effect of ERASMUS is therefore congruent with a general trend of internationalisation. Interestingly, however, two recent ERASMUS evaluations (Brakel et al., 2004; Teichler et al., 2001) conclude that the EU view of internationalisation is becoming more inclusive, looking further than just promoting the mobility of individuals. EU policies and actions are said to increasingly influence policies and planning practices of higher education institutions and systems. This is an interesting trend in the light of the restricted authority of the European Union in this particular area.

4.3 EUROPE, NATION STATES AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The authority of the European Union in the area of higher education is quite limited. As stated in Article 149 in the *Treaty Establishing the European Community*, the education sector is under the control of the Member States, fully respecting their responsibility for ‘the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity’. The actions of the European Union in this sector are limited to the following aspects (Article 149):

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States,
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study,

- promoting cooperation between educational establishments,
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States,
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors,
- encouraging the development of distance education.

The ambition of the European Union is thus limited to mobility and cooperation among institutions. The overall goal, as defined in Article 149, is to ‘contribute to the development of quality education’, but only within the limits mentioned.

Although the mechanisms for support are quite limited, this does not necessarily mean that the effect of these initiatives is as modest on institutions and systems. We can predict from a functionalist perspective that active mobility and cooperation require some adaptation from universities. When mobility becomes widespread, universities need to set-up structures to facilitate the process. This includes organisational structures to accommodate the needs of mobile students and staff, e.g. information and accommodation. It is also likely that a more international environment has an effect on curricula and other aspects of the academic environment. Finally, when mobility and cooperation between institutions increase significantly, there emerges a need at the institutional level to address the international dimension more systematically, formally, and perhaps also selectively.

The relationship between the initiatives and regulations of the European Union, national policies and institutional activities cannot be viewed as unidirectional. There is a feedback loop at every level. Stone Sweet and Sandholtz (1998) conceptualise European integration as an interaction between transnational exchange, supranational organisations, and EC rule-making. If transnational activities emerge in one specific area, then the activities trigger further supranational regulation in order to coordinate these transnational activities and increase the role of supranational organisations. According to this framework, a relationship between transnational activities and EU policies is neither a top-down nor a bottom-up process, as for example in the distinction between the Europeanisation and European integration approach of Börzel (2003). We speak of the ‘bottom’ and the ‘top’ developing together, facilitating and triggering each other.

From this perspective, we can expect a feedback effect between developments in higher education institutions and related European policies. When mobility and international cooperation activities spread in universities, they not only trigger changes in institutions to adapt to the new environment, but the new environment requires more facilitation and regulation at the national and the European levels. It is therefore expected that the role of Europe has extended from supporting mobility and cooperation to creating the wider structures and policies that facilitate mobility more generally.

One must keep in mind that the term EU policy is used here quite loosely. EU policy-making is still restrained by the limits that are identified in the EU Treaty mentioned above. The policies would take the form of initiatives, projects, norms and recommendations, not of regulations and directives. However, the Bologna Process cannot be called an EU policy as it is a voluntary intergovernmental process

to internationalise and integrate the various national higher education systems. The ERASMUS programme is a European policy initiative but activities under this programme, as an example, are in no way forced on any country or institution. Nevertheless they have a strong impact. In the next chapter, we will focus on the effects of the ERASMUS at two levels. First, we analyse the perceived effects on higher education institutions, including their central management and academic programmes. Secondly we analyse how far ERASMUS has triggered or contributed to more substantial and large-scale initiatives in the new, more transnational environment at system level.

4.4 THE IMPACT OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

Adding to the large body of knowledge about the impact of ERASMUS on students, staff and higher education institutions in Europe, the 2008 study (Vossensteyn et al., 2008) – which is central in the remainder of this chapter – takes a broader look at its various effects. It examines the impact of ERASMUS not only on internationalisation policies, but also on academic activities in universities. Therefore, the starting point of this 2008 study was the core functions of a higher education institution: teaching, research and openness to society. A potential impact on teaching would, for example, concern innovations in the curriculum, teaching methods, examination and evaluation, and other related areas. A potential effect on research would relate to the research agenda and quality, but also to research networks and communication strategies. Lastly, openness to society is not only understood as the contribution to the region, the economy and society, but also to networks and international cooperation in general. While these three missions are the core tasks of universities, they are not the only possible ways in which ERASMUS impacts on institutions. Strategies set at the central level and policies related to quality assurance, credit accumulation may also be important impacts that influence universities' functioning.

One can thus identify different organisational levels to determine a potential impact of ERASMUS. In this chapter, the focus is not on the immediate personal level of the ERASMUS impact on students and staff in terms their career-related and personal development. The core focus is on the effects of ERASMUS on higher education systems and institutions. The potential impact relationships between the various levels are summarised in [Figure 1](#).

The academic department level is most directly involved in the core tasks of teaching, research and openness to society. ERASMUS can affect faculties and academic departments in various ways. The centralised actions such as curriculum development, thematic networks and intensive programmes contribute directly to curriculum and learning opportunities. Mobility actions have an effect not only on mobile students and staff, but also on an academic environment more broadly. Mobile teachers can bring new ideas, experiences and competences and mobile students may enrich the classroom with different perspectives. Furthermore, in order to accommodate the needs of mobile students and staff, departments may need to adjust their academic programme and support structures.

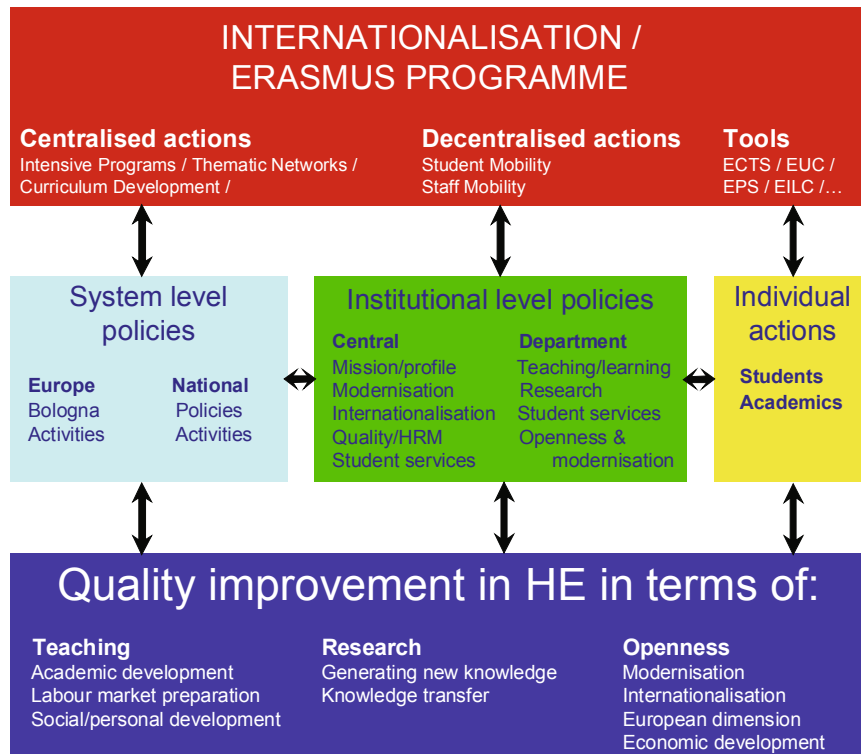


Figure 1. Operational model for evaluating the impact of the ERASMUS programme on higher education in Europe

Note: Figure 1 shows a simplified overview of the relationships that matter in the implementation of internationalisation programmes such as ERASMUS. One must realise that actions and policies at one level result in reciprocal effects in actions and policies at the other levels. In the study of which results are presented it was intended to show the impact of the ERASMUS programme on quality improvement activities and policies at the level of higher education systems and institutions.

At the institutional level, the central management activities affect teaching and research objectives indirectly through institutional policies such as profiling, internationalisation strategies, quality assurance, student services, etc. The central management level activities and policies provide an overall direction to an institution, specify standards and thereby facilitate and influence practices at the academic unit level. In the context of the ERASMUS programme, universities may have adjusted their structures and policies to accommodate mobile staff and students – e.g. with mobility grants or flexibility in the academic planning – to support partnerships and networks with other institutions or to support curriculum development and intensive programmes.

The effect at the national and supranational levels is more indirect and emerges through other means than the main activities in the programme. If institutions and departments start to internationalise more, or governments specify that internationalisation and modernisation are increasingly important, then different conditions must be created in order to facilitate smooth mobility and international cooperation. At a system level, including the national and supranational level, policies shape the environment in which higher education institutions operate and organise their activities. The most important effects at the system level are therefore policies and policy instruments that stimulate higher education institutions to change.

In attempting to document a relationship between ERASMUS and developments in the European higher education sector, two approaches were used. To evaluate how ERASMUS has contributed to – or hindered – achieving teaching, research and other goals of European higher education institutions and departments, a large scale survey was conducted among two groups of university representatives: university internationalisation/ERASMUS coordinators and faculty representatives responsible for the coordination of ERASMUS. A smaller scale survey was conducted among university leaders. In total, the survey received 951 responses from central ERASMUS coordinators, 903 responses from departmental coordinators (from 328 institutions) and 752 responses from institutional leaders (Vossensteyn et al., 2008).

To analyse the effect of ERASMUS on large-scale developments at the national and supranational levels, we attempted to document the main initiatives under the ERASMUS umbrella which have had a lasting and visible effect on the higher education sector in Europe. As shown in other studies (e.g. Brakel et al., 2004), a survey and interview approach among stakeholders is not particularly effective to establish a link between ERASMUS and (inter)national developments. Since the factors behind such large-scale developments are multiple and because the role of ERASMUS in these developments is often rather ambiguous, it would be difficult for respondents to make the link. Therefore a systematic overview of ERASMUS-related initiatives is the most transparent way to think about the broader effects of ERASMUS.

4.4.1 The Impact of ERASMUS on Higher Education Institutions and Academic Departments

Examining the perceived effect of ERASMUS on different aspects of academic life, the results of the centralised ERASMUS coordinators, departmental coordinators and institutional leadership are discussed simultaneously as far as possible. In case of major distinctions, they will be dealt with separately. It is interesting to note that the relative importance of ERASMUS for different aspects is quite consistent among the groups, but the coordinators seem to be more optimistic than the departmental representatives about the contribution of ERASMUS. This is an expected outcome. The day-to-day work of central ERASMUS coordinators revolves around the issues of internationalisation and its policies, whilst the departmental representatives see the interaction with various other factors and limitations related to internationalisation at the shop-floor level. The percentages below report the proportion of respondents in each group who consider the contribution of ERASMUS in various aspects as

either important or very important. In the survey, we also distinguish between a triggering and a supportive effect because it is likely that in many cases ERASMUS may have supported larger processes without triggering activities or the other way around.

4.4.1.1 The Impact of ERASMUS on Teaching, Learning and Student Services

The results indicate that the greatest contribution of ERASMUS is in the area of student services. As one could expect, the areas related to student and staff mobility are perceived to be affected the most (Figure 2). 75% of central coordinators indicated the role of ERASMUS in improving the counselling for staff and students interested in study abroad, 68% reported improvements in the non-academic support for incoming students, 61% see that ERASMUS triggered the institutions' efforts to provide course and other information in English. ERASMUS has had a significant impact on adapting campuses to the needs of international students. Universities have set up and expanded international offices, provided language training for outgoing and incoming students and provided contact persons at international support offices. Information provision has also improved, e.g. websites for international students and information on health issues. Additional services for students, such as accommodation services, have been created on many occasions. ERASMUS procedures (e.g. learning agreements) are often extended to other international mobility programmes and thus benefit non-ERASMUS students. Interestingly, the respondents see the role of ERASMUS as triggering rather than supporting these improvements.

The major contribution of ERASMUS is therefore linked to mobile staff and students, but one can also detect some spill-over effects on domestic students. An interesting result is the fact that all arrangements made for mobile students also improved the facilities, information provision and transparency offered to local students. A significant 38% of central coordinators found that ERASMUS contributed to services for domestic students. As an example, a need to provide information to international students on accommodation, health and other important aspects of student life also improves such information for domestic students.

ERASMUS has less impact on teaching functions than on student services. As reported by departmental representatives, the contribution is largest in the areas of internationalising teaching and learning (45%), fostering soft skills (41%), setting up courses in English or in other foreign languages (36%) and internationalising the curriculum (36%). A contribution to introducing a foreign language requirement in the programme receives quite a number of responses (28%). We can thus see that ERASMUS has a significant effect on making a programme more international. One aspect that sticks out from this pattern is the contribution in developing soft skills. This area is not directly linked to internationalisation, but, according to departmental representatives and central coordinators it is the second most important contribution after internationalising teaching and learning. All other aspects, such as curriculum innovation, teaching methods and examinations are recognised by less than a quarter of respondents.

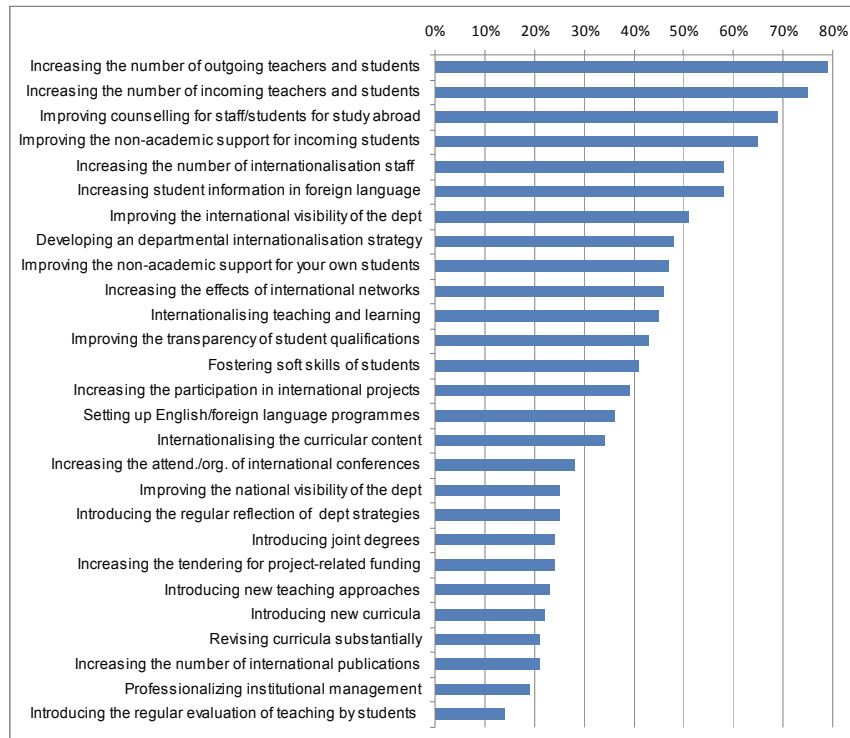


Figure 2. The importance of ERASMUS in initiating selected processes in university organization and academics.

Note: % of departmental ERASMUS coordinators perceiving the effect of ERASMUS as (very) important.

4.4.1.2 The Impact of ERASMUS on Transparency and Quality

ERASMUS is acting as a driver to improve transparency and transferability of student qualifications at more than half the participating institutions (53%). About half the coordinators also reported that ERASMUS triggered language training and intercultural training for teachers. With respect to modernising the learning infrastructure, quality, professionalisation and introducing regular student and/or graduate surveys, however, both the central coordinators and the institutional leaders recognised only a limited effect.

4.4.1.3 The Impact of ERASMUS on Research

Considering that ERASMUS does not directly support research activities in universities, we can expect a lesser influence in this area. Yet 23% of respondents

see ERASMUS as having an effect on incorporating an international dimension in research proposals and fewer (16%) see a link to improving research excellence. We also see that ERASMUS has a considerable effect on research networks. It increases the participation in international projects (34%) and attendance in international conferences (20%). This confirms earlier suggestion that the benefits perceived by mobile teachers are more closely linked to expanding networks than to teaching related activities (Kreitz & Teichler, 1997). Again, ERASMUS has a role of initiator in these activities and concerning the international networks we see the biggest gap between initiation and support.

4.4.1.4 The Impact of ERASMUS on Networks and Cooperation

Expectedly, the role of ERASMUS in the area of mobility, networks and cooperation is important. It has a deep effect on promoting outgoing and incoming teachers and students: respectively 79% and 75% of ERASMUS coordinators saw it as an initiator of these activities and 71% and 62% found it supportive. International networks that ERASMUS helped to create are benefiting the institution more generally. Just under half the respondents (42%) recognised the role in the effect of international networks as well as in increasing participation in international projects (34%). Interestingly, 67% of institutional leadership representatives reported (very) great progress in increasing the participation in international networks and projects (in teaching, research or at the institutional level) as well as cooperation with interest groups in their respective university regions. Also with respect to strengthening cooperation with the economic sector, the members of university leadership rated progress slightly more positively (42% (very) great) than the central coordinators.

4.4.1.5 The Impact of ERASMUS on Institutional Management and Development

The effect of ERASMUS is not necessarily limited to the three missions of universities (teaching, research and openness to society) but can also include institutional management and development. At more than half the institutions surveyed, ERASMUS was the trigger for establishing or developing institutional internationalisation strategies, as well as improving international visibility and attractiveness of the institution. Impacts on other aspects followed far behind, but are still considerable. At least one quarter of the institutions reported the effect of ERASMUS on regular reflection on and evaluation of institutional strategies, improving the national and international visibility and attractiveness of an institution and increasing tendering for project-related funding. It is also significant that 40% of the central coordinators and half the university leaders said that ERASMUS played a triggering role in professionalising institutional management. University leaders also reported that it enhanced the international and national visibility and attractiveness of the institution and that in many cases it triggered the development of an institution wide internationalisation strategy. In addition, 22% of the institutional leaders indicated that ERASMUS triggered a process of regular reflection on and evaluation of the general institutional strategies and 18% stated that it was supportive to these processes.

Furthermore, two thirds of institutional leaders stated that ERASMUS strongly contributed to a process towards (financial) resource diversification.

4.4.1.6 The Impact of ERASMUS on Different Types of Institutions

The perceived effect of ERASMUS, however, is not homogenous in different types of universities and between countries. Larger institutions tended to report a greater impact of ERASMUS in most areas. In general, larger institutions are more actively involved and therefore experience a greater effect. There are, however, some important exceptions. Coordinators at small institutions saw the triggering effect of ERASMUS as being significantly higher than their colleagues in mid-size and large institutions: 43% recognised the triggering effect on participation in international projects and 35% on attendance at or organisation of international conferences. ERASMUS seems to be particularly important for small institutions to establish international contacts and expand their international network.

Institutions in the new EU Member States seem to have gained more from ERASMUS than those in traditional EU Member States. For most aspects the respondents from new Member States reported a greater importance of ERASMUS in initiating change and in supporting the developments.

When we look at the general picture of the effects of ERASMUS, we see that these effects are strictly in the line with its main mission – to facilitate mobility and collaboration and promote quality. The most important aspects of the programme relate to triggering mobility and providing services (including information) for mobile students and staff. To a somewhat lesser but still considerable extent it has contributed to internationalising the learning environment and curricula and enhancing international networks. At the institutional level, ERASMUS has helped institutions to build their international visibility and encouraged the development of an internationalisation strategy. The indirect effect of ERASMUS on teaching approaches, curriculum, research activities and quality assessment is relatively small. As will be argued in the next section, however, the perceived effects of ERASMUS give us only a partial picture of the full impact of the programme on European higher education institutions and systems.

4.4.2 The Impact of ERASMUS on (supra-) National Developments

The effect of ERASMUS on national and supranational policies is quite difficult to capture. National policies are triggered and influenced by a range of forces and interest groups. Brakel et al. (2004) attempt to map these higher level effects and admit that policy documents and interviews rarely specify which particular national policies were connected to specific elements of ERASMUS. Yet its traces can be found in the major higher education policy developments in Europe, such as in the Bologna process, Lisbon strategy, quality assurance initiatives and many others. Therefore, particular attention has been paid here to define and analyse the links between ERASMUS and various initiatives and developments at the national and European level.

The Bologna Process is the major development in the European higher education. It is a purely intergovernmental action, and not an initiative of the European Union, but its links to the EC's ERASMUS Programme are quite evident. The Bologna reform agenda builds to a large extent on the 'ERASMUS acquis'. Five out of six of the action lines of the Bologna declaration overlap with ERASMUS: transparent and comparable degrees (diploma supplement), the establishment of a credit system (ECTS), promotion of mobility (ERASMUS students), quality assurance (1998 Council Recommendation, ENQA), and the European dimension (joint and double degrees). Dozens of projects in these areas have been and are being financially supported by ERASMUS.

In addition to contributing to the agenda of Bologna process, there is also explicit evidence of the intention to draw on EU's programmes for its promotion and implementation. With respect to ECTS and the Diploma supplement, for example, 'the importance of the Commission's Socrates-ERASMUS programme as the 'main mechanism' for their introduction' is an explicit aspiration. (Zgaga, 2004; Witte, 2006). ERASMUS helps to provide the basic infrastructure for the running of the Bologna process. ERASMUS grants supported the Bologna Stocktaking exercise, the biennial Ministerial Conferences, the Bologna Follow-up Group conferences, the EUA (European University Association) convention, the EUA Trends reports, the ESU (European Students' Union) survey 'Bologna With Student Eyes', and a series of key seminars and projects.

The Europe-wide application of ECTS also forms a concrete example of how ERASMUS contributes to national and supranational policies. ECTS started in 1987 as a pilot project for a limited number of institutions (departments) involved in ERASMUS. The use of the credit system gradually extended to more departments and more institutions. In adopting and developing the credit system, institutions were supported by targeted ERASMUS grants and assisted by a network of ECTS Counsellors. The use of the system got a boost in 1998 when it was included in the Bologna process as one of the main action lines. At present, almost all 46 Bologna countries have made use of ECTS and extended it from mobile students to all students in all institutions and departments. Credits can now also be used to move from Bachelor to Master programmes within and between institutions. Furthermore, ECTS can be used to recognise informal and non-formal learning. A similar development has taken place with respect to the Diploma Supplement, a transparency tool developed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO.

Besides the Bologna process, the impact of ERASMUS-supported activities is particularly strong in the field of quality assurance. In the 1990s, the Commission organised pilot projects to test the possibility of external quality review of university education. The insights acquired through these ERASMUS projects were presented to the Education Ministers. This led to the Council Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education in 1998. According to this document, all countries were recommended to consider introducing systematic external reviews according to a provided format and exchanging good practices. This Recommendation laid the basis for the creation of ENQA (European Network for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education) in the year 2000. The European activities of ENQA are still supported through the ERASMUS' competitive funding scheme.

Quality assurance is now one of the most prominent action lines in the Bologna process which has contributed to the spread of systematic quality assurance in the sector. The European Commission supports this action line through the ERASMUS and Tempus programmes. The programme supports external (ENQA and quality labels) as well as internal reviews and collegial benchmarking organised by university associations (such as EUA). ERASMUS was instrumental for the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). The EQAR was launched in March 2008, based on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, adopted by the Bologna Ministers in Bergen in May 2005. The Register has the political support of both the Bologna Ministers (London Communiqué, May 2007) and the EU Parliament and Council (Recommendation of February 2006). ERASMUS supported the creation of the Register as well as the first year of its activities. In addition, it funds the first three editions of the annual Forum on quality assurance in higher education organised by E4 (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU) and thereby facilitates a dialogue on quality assurance issues among stakeholders.

One decade after the adoption of the first EU Recommendation on quality assurance in higher education and the start of the Bologna process, all 46 Bologna countries have established one or more agencies that carries out systematic external reviews and puts the reports on the web (e.g. the ERASMUS supported *Crossroads* database). Universities across the continent are now more aware of quality issues and many are engaged in internal and collegial benchmarking exercises. ERASMUS has certainly played a role in this development, even if it is not recognised by university representatives and leaders.

Another European level development where ERASMUS has played a significant part is related to the qualifications framework. Several countries, notably Ireland and Scotland, have had a longstanding experience with national qualifications frameworks. This experience was shared with others in an ERASMUS-supported project, coordinated by a ministry official from Denmark. The seminar he organised led to the inclusion of qualifications frameworks in the Bologna agenda (Berlin Communiqué, September 2003). In May 2005 in Bergen, the Bologna Ministers adopted the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The Commission included it in the Lisbon Agenda for Growth and Jobs (Education and Training 2010 Work programme) in 2004. In April 2008, the Parliament and Council adopted a Recommendation on a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). All Bologna countries are now working on their National Qualifications Frameworks and attempting to integrate the European references provided by the Bologna process and the EU.

The role of ERASMUS in these developments was not limited to the initial launching but also supported several subsequent initiatives. Particularly influential in this respect is the ERASMUS-supported project 'Tuning Educational Structures in Europe' which started in 2001 and still continues. In this project, professors from across Europe define the competences of graduates in a series of subject areas,

including subject specific competences and generic competences such as teamwork and intercultural communication. The Tuning descriptors will serve as an input for the *Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks* (in areas such as law, engineering, arts). The Tuning approach will also be used to define competences in the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO, a feasibility study of OECD).

Also, ERASMUS supports several initiatives that have a potential to become trendsetters for European higher education in the future. The Lifelong Learning Programme supports new developments in the area of transparency and comparability in European higher education, e.g. the pilot projects that test the feasibility of European systems of *classification* (U-map) and *ranking* (U-Multirank) that would do justice to universities' different missions as regards education, research, internationalisation and community outreach. ERASMUS-supported projects will also contribute to setting up a sustainable data collection system on higher education institutions.

The effect of ERASMUS crosses the borders of Europe. There are several examples of how it has inspired countries outside Europe. The Japanese government launched a policy to establish an Asian version of ERASMUS for academic credit transfer and accumulation as from 2009 (Daily Yomiuri Online, 2008) and the ECTS system serves as a model in many countries (in Africa and Asia).

Besides these European level effects, earlier studies suggest some evidence about the direct impact of ERASMUS on national policy developments. According to a stakeholder survey, ERASMUS led to a reflection on domestic internationalisation policies (Brakel et al., 2004). Growing internationalisation activities of both students and higher education institutions (connected both to ERASMUS and other internationalisation policies and programmes) increased the awareness of national governments regarding the importance of internationalisation. ERASMUS has helped to make internationalisation a part of mainstream higher education policy. As a specific example, it has influenced the policy of portability of student financial support and offering additional mobility funds for students within and outside the programme.

The effect of the programme on internationalisation has been particularly strong in the first years of its existence and in countries where internationalisation was not highly developed. In those countries where internationalisation was already high on the agenda of either the government or the higher education institutions (for example Sweden, Norway and UK), the impact of ERASMUS was considerably less (Brakel et al., 2004). However, in these countries ERASMUS contributed to a move towards Europe. For example, in Sweden it meant a move away from prioritising co-operation with the US; in Ireland, the focus before was on other Anglo-Saxon countries; in Portugal, many internationalisation activities were geared towards Latin America; and in Liechtenstein the focus was on their German-speaking neighbours.

ERASMUS has also inspired 'clone programmes or initiatives' at the national level. Some examples of the links between ERASMUS and specific national policies can be identified. Cross-border co-operation policy in The Netherlands, Flanders and a few German states and the NORDPLUS initiative of the Scandinavian countries are examples of such clones (Brakel et al., 2004). ERASMUS has also inspired mobility within the regions of the same country. The ERASMUS BELGICA

programme in Belgium, for example, aims at encouraging the mobility of higher education students between the three communities of Belgium, applying the general principles of the European ERASMUS programme.

In sum, ERASMUS has triggered significant developments on the European scale. One can see that earlier initiatives that grew out of necessity to facilitate mobility, such as a small scale credit system, were gradually taken up as more large-scale organised initiatives, such as harmonisation of higher education systems, a shared qualifications framework and a quality assurance system.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, it is argued that through ERASMUS, the European Union has had quite a considerable effect on higher education in Europe. Some 25 years ago, the programme started as a student exchange initiative. Strictly speaking, it is still functioning within the borders of its original mission and in the limits as prescribed for the European regulation in the education area, i.e. mobility and international cooperation. On the other hand, we do see that its indirect role has been made intensive and wide-spread. For example, the ERASMUS supported Bologna process has made European countries revise their entire degree structure, work towards a more common Qualifications Framework and change considerably the existing approaches to teaching and quality evaluation.

Though ERASMUS is not the ‘mother of internationalisation’ in Europe, it is an interesting case study that illustrates an interplay between transnational exchange, EU-rules (loosely defined), supranational organisations and institutional as well as individual behaviour. Through the programme, the European Commission has promoted transnational exchange in the Member States. As witnessed by university representatives, the regular ERASMUS initiatives, such as student and staff mobility and network development have triggered significant changes in institutions. The developments are primarily related to various aspects of internationalisation, such as facilitating mobility in institutions, improving student services for mobile students, establishing internationalisation policies and international offices, and increasing the number of ‘internationalisation’ staff. But institutions also increased their international visibility and think about their internationalisation strategy as well as the quality of teaching and research. Universities have become significantly more ‘transnational’. University representatives perceive a smaller effect of ERASMUS on curriculum development, teaching styles and research activities, but the indirect effects seem to be much broader.

As universities have become more ‘transnational’, a greater need for supranational governance mechanisms has emerged. To facilitate a smooth mobility of students, higher education systems need to be compatible, educational quality must be transparent, and qualifications need to be comparable. Such needs have triggered major developments in European higher education, such as the Bologna degree reform, the ECTS, the European Qualifications Framework, and changes in quality assurance systems. As a result of these developments we also see new supranational organisations, such as ENQA and European Quality Assurance Register. As predicted by

the conceptual framework of transnational societies, the cycle does not stop here but feeds further transnationalisation. As a result, there will be need for more regulation at the European level and greater roles of supranational organisations.

Whether this will lead to greater legal authority of the EU over (higher) education policies remains to be seen. Although the competencies of the European Union in the higher education sector are defined quite narrowly, its influence on institutions and systems is increasing, predominantly in an indirect way. So far, the indirect steering through stimulating internationalisation has given the EU – through the backdoor – quite some impact and influence on the development of European higher education. Next to ERASMUS, there is a variety of indirect mechanisms by which Europe influences the sector. These include influential programme documents (e.g. Lisbon agenda), prominent funding mechanisms (Framework Programmes and the European Research Council) and rulings of the European Court of Justice. For 25 years; ERASMUS has been the EC's 'flagship' programme in the area of higher education. It is probably the most visible hand in bringing Europe to European universities, but it also triggers 'invisible' processes towards greater Europeanisation of the higher education sector.

REFERENCES

- Barblan, A., Reichert, S., Schotte-Kmoch, M., & Teichler, U. (Eds.). (2000). *Implementing European policies in higher education institutions*. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel (Werkstattberichte 57).
- Beerkens, E. (2008). The emergence and institutionalisation of the European higher education and research area. *European Journal of Education*, 43(4), 407–425.
- Börzel, T. (2003). *How the European Union interacts with its member states*. IHS Political Science Series, No. 93.
- Bracht, O., Engel, C., Janson, K., Over, A., Schomburg, H., & Teichler, U. (2006). *The professional value of ERASMUS mobility*, International Centre for Higher Education Research. INCHER: Kassel. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ERASMUS/evalcareer.pdf>
- Brakel, R., Huisman, J., Luijten-Lub, A., Matissen, M., & Van der Wende, M. (2004). *External evaluation of ERASMUS institutional and national impact*. Final report. Brussels: European Commission. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2005/ERASMUS-inst/erasinstintrep_en.pdf
- Daily Yomiuri Online. (2008). Govt wants 5,000 students, lecturers enrolled in 5 yrs. In *Asian ERASMUS*. <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/world/20080721TDY01305.htm>
- EC-European Commission. (n.d.). The ERASMUS programme. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm
- Huisman, J., & van der Wende, M. (2005). *On cooperation and competition II, Institutional responses to internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation*. ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education. Bonn: Lemmens.
- Kreitz, R., & Teichler, U. (1997). *ERASMUS – teaching staff mobility*. The 1990/91 teachers' view. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel (Werkstattberichte 53). Retrieved from <http://kobra.bibliothek.uni-kassel.de/handle/urn:nbn:de:hebis:34-2006063013817>
- Maassen, P., & Stensaker, B. (forthcoming). The knowledge triangle, European higher education policy logics and policy implications. In *Higher Education*.
- Maiworm, F., Sosa, W., & Teichler, U. (1996). *The context of ERASMUS. A survey of institutional management and infrastructure in support of mobility and co-operation*. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum

BEERKENS AND VOSSENSTEYN

- für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel. Werkstattberichte, Nr. 49; ERASMUS Monographs, Nr. 22.
- Reuvers, S. (2010). *Portability of student support – the residence requirement*. Bachelor thesis, University of Twente, Enschede.
- Souto Otero, M., & McCoshan, A. (2006). *Survey of the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students*. Final Report to the European Commission. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ERASMUS/survey_en.pdf
- Stone Sweet, A., & Sandholtz, W. (1998). Integration, supranational governance, and the institutionalization of the European polity. In W. Sandholtz & A. Stone Sweet (Eds.), *European integration and supranational governance* (pp. 1–26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Teichler, U. (2001). Changes of ERASMUS under umbrella of SOCRATES. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5(3), 201–227. Sage Publications. <http://jsi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/5/3/201>.
- Teichler, U., & Maiworm, F. (1997). *The ERASMUS experience. Major findings of the ERASMUS evaluation research project*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Teichler, U., Gordon, J., & Maiworm, F. (2001). *Socrates 2000 evaluation study*. Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung Universität GH Kassel, Germany. European Institute of Education and Social Policy Paris, France. Gesellschaft für Empirische Studien Kassel, Germany. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2001/soci-expost/soc1xprep_en.pdf
- Vossensteyn, H., Beerkens, M., Cremonini, L., Besançon, B., Focken, N., Leurs, B., et al. (2010). *Improving the participation in the ERASMUS programme*. Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Education and Culture. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Vossensteyn, J. J., Soo, M., Lanzendorf, U., Souto-Otero, M., Buerger, S., Vega, S., et al. (2008). *The impact of ERASMUS on European higher education: Quality, openness and internationalisation*. Final Report by the consortium of CHEPS, INCHER and ECOTEC. Brussels: DG EAC.
- Wächter, B., & Maiworm, F. (2008). *English-taught programmes in European higher education. The picture in 2007*. Bonn: Lemmens (ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education).
- Witte, J. K. (2006). *Change of degrees and degrees of change: Comparing adaptations of European higher education systems in the context of the Bologna process*. Enschede: Center for Higher Education and Policy Studies (CHEPS).
- Zgaga, P. (2004). Report to the Minister of Education of the signatory countries commissioned by the Follow-up Group of the Bologna Process. In BMBF & KMK (Eds.), *Realising the European higher education area: Conference of European Ministers responsible for higher education* (pp. 90–128). 18–19 September 2003, Documentation. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag.