REAL VIRTUAL ERASMUS (REVE): HOW TO BROADEN THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE BY OFFERING VIRTUAL MOBILITY

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In the last decades, student and teacher exchange programmes in Europe got established firmly throughout a series of procedures that make it easier to put mobility into practice between higher education institutions. The ERASMUS programme is the most active exchange programme and nowadays more than 2000 European higher education institutions are participating in it. The harmonisation of academic degree standards and quality assurance procedures across Europe as a key component of the 1999's Bologna Agreement clearly facilitates learners' and teachers' mobility and consequently also has a strong impact on the success of the ERASMUS programme. Student and teacher mobility in general is becoming increasingly important for educational policy makers and universities and other higher education institutions.

The REVE (Real Virtual Erasmus) project, coordinated by EuroPACE, is aimed at enhancing the impact and efficiency of traditional Erasmus programmes through the set-up and support of mainstream virtual Erasmus activities in the European Higher Education Area.

Virtual Erasmus can include both taking courses abroad while staying at the home university and vice-versa and/or complementing the existing physical Erasmus exchange programmes with virtual preparatory and follow-up activities. Virtual ERASMUS is not intended to substitute physical ERASMUS, although it can offer exchange opportunities for those unable to participate in traditional ERASMUS. Students get access to an international community of learners, academics and experts far beyond the own campus or geographical area, and hence to a wide linguistic and cultural diversity. However, teachers and educational support staff experience that the necessary technical, pedagogical and organizational support services are missing. At the same time there is a lack of concrete scenarios, models and implementation procedures, as best practice examples for implementing Virtual Mobility. Unlike physical mobility supported by the ERASMUS programme, there is no regulation and hence no official recognition foreseen yet for virtual ERASMUS. Therefore, Virtual Mobility programmes still remain a challenge for both students and teachers.

The REVE project thus addresses a hot topic in the higher education world. In order to show its advantages and to maximize its effect in a sustainable way, the project starts from concrete cases, i.e. real courses in mainstream higher education, where Virtual Mobility activities are added, enriching the more traditional learning activities.

The main output of the REVE project is the Manual on Virtual Mobility (http://reve.europace.org/drupal). This online publication has the aim to introduce Virtual Mobility with all its aspects and advantages to teachers in higher education, to support them while implementing this new way of mobility in their course and thus giving students the opportunity to broaden their learning experience. Therefore the manual includes practical examples of virtual Erasmus courses with best practices, information on working collaboration models and implementation procedures including aspects such as localisation, accreditation and agreements.

The aim is not only to provide information, but also to offer concrete solutions and guidelines for different pitfalls and difficulties that may arise. Being online the manual offers greater access to students and teachers all over Europe and sparks further discussion and sharing own experiences with others.
Through continuous input from the BEST student organisation as a partner in the REVE project and more specifically via several BEST symposia organised during the project it was possible to gather the student perspectives on Virtual Mobility and to take into account their findings and remarks when writing the manual. In that way the manual promotes e-learning as a component of the wider student experience and helps students to better understand the benefits of ‘virtual Erasmus’ as an enrichment of or a substitute for ‘traditional Erasmus’. Nevertheless teachers are the main target group for the manual as without them implementing the virtual Erasmus courses there will be no virtual Erasmus. The manual offers teachers, but also trainers, training managers, curriculum developers and higher education institutions in general guidelines for a more effective integration of ICT in the educational offer on a technical, pedagogical and organisational level within a network of universities.

During the presentation we will show how the REVE project addresses the topic of virtual Erasmus, what the benefits of virtual Erasmus are for students and teachers and some of the key issues that teachers need to solve before really being able to implement Virtual Mobility into their course, e.g. accreditation and credit transfer, agreements and localisation. The more elaborated version of this presentation is to be found in the online manual.

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REFERENCES


