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ERASMUS

A brief historical review of the history of our network / reflection on the best part of my professional life

By reflecting the history of our network, I am also looking back to the best part of my professional life. Since I had been involved right from the start in 1987 ERASMUS was an essential part of my professional life. Building the programme meant a lot of work, but it was a very inspiring and exciting process that gave me a lot of pleasure and also generated sustainable relation- and even long-lasting friendships.

The ERASMUS programme is named after the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, known as an opponent of dogmatism, who lived and worked in many places in Europe to expand his knowledge and gain new insights. ERASMUS is also the acronym for: **E**uropean **R**egion **A**ction **S**cheme for the **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents.

Before I come to the exchange activities within the Konstanz network, I would like to say a few words about the history of Erasmus:

In the early years of European Integration – between the early 1950s and 1968 – there weren't any relevant activities in the field of education. In that time the governments of the European member states were mainly focused on strengthening their economies. European Cooperation meant in the first place to intensify economic cooperation.

The situation changed towards the end of the 1960s, when a certain need for community activities in the field of education was realised. But there was no consensus on how

common actions should be organised.

In 1976 the education ministers agreed on some principles of cooperation and ratified the first community action plan on education. But this first proposal was a **non-binding resolution**, just containing some ideas about how to generate closer relations between education systems in Europe or how to educate the children of migrant workers. A legal basis for institutionalised cooperation at the Community level was still missing.

It wasn't before the second half of the 1980s that the member states of the European Community began to cooperate with education programmes on an institutional basis. In May 1987 the European Community started its first educational cooperation programme COMETT (Community programme for Education and Training for Technology) in order to support the cooperation between universities and industrial companies.

Only a month later (June 1987) the ERASMUS Programme was established. The independent **network structure** of Erasmus existed until 1994. In 1995 the six educational programmes were merged into two programmes: SOCRATES for education and LEONARDO for vocational training.. Erasmus was now one programme under the roof of Socrates. But it was and is still the programme for higher education. With the start of Socrates (Socrates I 1995-1999, Socrates II 2000-2006) **the old network structure ended** and the universities have to deal with separate agreements.

And last but perhaps not least the commission starts 2007 (till 2013) with a new idea: The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) , the LLP **is the single european umbrella** for education and training programmes and has four sub-programmes COMENIUS for schools, LEONARDO for vocational education and training, GRUNDTVIG for adult education and **ERASMUS for higher education. Erasmus is mainly** a European student exchange programme and it forms the major part of the **LLP**.

In my opinion, Erasmus is really one of the best ideas coming out of the Brussels administration.

In the first year of Erasmus in 1987/88, Brussels received 629 applications, but only 158 Inter-University-Cooperation-Programmes were selected. It was a serious selection process

and the application procedure was quite difficult and not easy also not in the following years.

The budget was 1.1 million ECU. (ECU had been the artificial European currency. It was used as the unit of account of the European Community before the introduction of the Euro in 1999).

In this first ERASMUS-year 3.244 European students could be convinced to go abroad; among them 925 British, 895 French and 649 German students. Already in the second year of the Erasmus-Programme in 1988/89 9.914 students went abroad and another year later there were 19.456!

As you can see, right from the start the Erasmus project was very successful. And I am convinced that this success was because of your commitment as coordinators and motivators. It was you who filled the programme with life. Without your committed work the Erasmus-Programme wouldn't be what it is today.

The major aim of the first rounds of Erasmus was to put student mobility in Europe on a broader basis and therefore to provide financial and administrative support. Until that point there existed only a few student exchange programmes of several foundations and national agencies, which were out of reach for most of the students. And there was the one or the other agreement between selected European and even American universities that mainly based upon the private contacts of some lecturers.

The ICP NL 1108 in Public Administration was the first Erasmus Network my department at the University of Konstanz was engaged in. It had been initiated in 1988 by both the departments of public administration of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and the University of Leiden. The first partners in this network were: Aarhus, Copenhagen.

Konstanz, Bologna, Leuven and Rotterdam/Leiden.

At this point I would like to thank my dear colleague Hanns-Friedrich Lorenz, who unfortunately died only shortly after he retired. It was him who convinced me to take the job and take over the responsibility for Erasmus within our department.

At this point you should remember that 20 years ago the European University landscape was not like it is today. The Bologna-Process brought the European universities more together, but in the late 1980s the differences were still enormous. Therefore one of our main tasks was to find a common sense about standards and rules.

First it was necessary to agree upon a number of general principles for the exchange activities:

Each participating institution approximately sends as many students into the network as it is willing and able to receive from other institutions.

Students do not pay tuition fees at the host university

The exchange will be organized in 'blocks' of one semester (5-6 months).

(Even today the organization of the academic year in higher education varies between the member states of the EU. We have strictly organized countries like Germany or Italy with fixed dates for all institutions and we have countries like France or Scotland with a great institutional autonomy. All periods of teaching activities, holidays and examination periods are fixed by the institutions. It is not easy for a student to plan the stay abroad if he/she has to combine the time table of the home university with the timetable of the host university

Therefore we agreed upon the possibility that students might combine semester programmes into a one-year-stay abroad. In any case students profit the most if they can

stay a whole year at the host university.

The exchange within the network is based upon the principles of **full credit** or compensation within the students home program for the educational activities (course work, directed research, internship) undertaken at the member institution.

To agree upon these principles was a very difficult process. The Coordinators had to convince their teaching colleagues, that lessons at other universities were the same standard or at least comparable to their own. Above all, we had to create lists to compare and transfer grades. As you can imagine, the differences here were (and sometimes still are) enormous.

Today there exist Learning Agreements, Transcripts of records, ECTS ,manuals of good practise for students and staff and other helpful documents. But that's what we had to develop first.It was our task as coordinators to convince our universities to take over the institutional responsibility for language training programmes, for cultural orientation programmes, for the integration of foreign students, for the general guidance and supervision of visiting students and – very important too – for foreign students housing facilities.

The first exchange of students in this PA-network took place in the spring semester of 1989 by exchanging a total of about 30 students. Since then several other universities have joined the network and for example in 1994/95 we had reaches a total number of 350 exchange students.

The highest priority in these first years was to promote and support student exchange. Everything else, like the exchange of teaching staff, summer-schools, intensive courses, curriculum development or double degrees has come later.

In this early years our department have had two european exchange contacts :one with the

IEP Grenoble and one with the Kingston Polytechnic in London. With the Erasmus programme we had the chance to formalise these rather informal contacts and continue them on an institutional basis. Together the Universities of Konstanz, Madrid, Grenoble and Kingston successfully applied for the ICP F 1114 - Public Administration and Political Science. This network was coordinated by Grenoble.

Those applications really meant quite a lot of work: many meetings on the weekends and endless discussions and debates until late in the night to find the right wording. Keep in mind that communication by the time wasn't as easy as today. We didn't have electronic mails; we didn't even have personal computers in every office.

A few years later a third ICP (A 2020-International Relations and European Integration) was founded between the universities of Konstanz, Salzburg, Bordeaux, Pavia und Konstanz that was coordinated by Salzburg.

In the Rotterdam network for the first time we send students abroad in the academic year 1988/89. Were would the students would like to go? Would they want go anyway? Most of our students who studied political science or public administration at the University of Konstanz came from little towns nearby. They weren't really what we would call "globetrotters". Would they want to study in Madrid or Limerick?

After Brussels had approved our ICP-Application the most difficult part was to create the matrix. We had to negotiate who would send how many students where. Incoming und outgoing numbers had to be equivalent. If you wanted to send 10 students abroad you had to be able to receive 10 students. Of course some universities were more popular than others. Places at famous universities like Konstanz or Rotterdam were very wanted whilst smaller and less recognized universities like Messina had some difficulties to sell their places. So creating the Matrix sometimes was like being on a market or even an oriental bazaar. It was not easy to negotiate a stable and equally balanced Matrix that took into account the wishes of every partner. But the Matrix was quite flexible. By the time you had

to decide which student to send where, you could still call your colleague and ask if it was able to change: “Do you need your place in Barcelona? If you give it to me, I could offer you a place in Stockholm instead.” Of course this was only possible if you personally knew your colleagues at the partner universities. That was one reason why we needed the annual meetings and the individual trips to partner universities.

In the beginning of ERASMUS our department was only partner in the ICP-Programmes. This means not a lot of administrative work. But only two years later, the political science department of the University of Messina had applied for an ICP with 18 participating universities. In 1989/90 we established the **ICP 1210** European Studies and International Relations, later known as the Konstanz-Network or sometimes even “Monica’s Network”. The first coordinator Karin Bruns from the Political Science Department of the University of Messina wanted to give up the responsibility for the network in 1992 and the whole group of coordinators voted for me as the new main coordinator. At this moment I was not able to realize how much work it would be to coordinate such a big network. Everything I did for the Erasmus at this time I had to do in addition to my ordinary work as a dean assistant and a teacher.

Thanks to the very committed coordinators at our partner universities our ICP soon became a much acknowledged network. In the end we had 40 participating partner universities within the network. Of course we had the usual difficulties in the beginning: like poor language preparation for the students at the sending universities or no or too less language courses at the receiving universities of the incoming students, problems with affordable student accommodation, inappropriate service structure for the foreign students or lack of transfer systems for grades and therefore problems with the mutual recognition of courses.

Continuously we were able to eliminate those problems.

And we further developed the criteria to select our students. The Partner universities should

not only consider the academic career of the students but also take into account their social capabilities (Sozialkompetenz). **All our exchange students should be ambassadors of their home countries.**

Through our commitment the administrations of our Universities finally realised how important it is to invest in foreign relations and stable partnerships with other European universities. We managed our universities to provide own resources for programme-management, social integration and academic care for our guest students.

And even – I think we can state that without any scruple – our activities in the ICP 1210 contributed significant to the further development of our disciplines Political Science and Public Administration.

We not only continuously extended the in our view important student exchange within Europe, we also thought about ways and possibilities to equalize contents of standard courses, like for instance the Introduction into international relations. For further adjustment we then created a three year “Curriculum Development Programme”. Together with the universities of Angers, Konstanz, Huddersfield, Pavia und Tampere we tried to develop a common Bachelor- and even Master programme in international relations. Unfortunately we were not able to realise this project. At the time (in the middle of the 1990s) there were far too many bureaucratic and administrative hurdles for integrated BA/MA-degrees at the European Community level that we couldn't get over.

Under the roof of the new programme SOCRATES we gave it a second and even a third try. Socrates opened the opportunity to develop a common curriculum on beginner's and middle level that later could be transferred into integrated BA/MA-degrees. We believed that the European university scene would stay in motion and that one day another European

university structure would be possible. The European Commission sponsored the new CDI-Project „European Integration and international studies with applied languages“ by the universities of Konstanz, Angers, Gothenborg, Huddersfield und Pavia for three years. And the university of Angers was in charge to manage the CDI-Project “Cinema and Culture in Europe” with which we had made another attempt to develop integrated study programmes.

We also tried to extend the exchange of teaching staff, so that not only the students who were able go on exchange could profit from the knowledge of our partner universities.

When in 1995 the old Erasmus network structure was removed, the partner of the former Konstanz-network (1210 in Political science and Public Administration) decided on their last annual conference in Gothenburg **to keep our connections alive**. We decided that we would try to continue our Erasmus-network in existence as an unofficial network.

We called it „Socrates Inter-University Cooperation Program in Public Administration, International Studies and Political Science“. Like before I was in charge of it.

Since then we continue to meet once a year in an annual conference to discuss relevant questions, to share our experiences, to intensify our personal contacts or to get to know new colleagues and to discover common activities.

Until the year 2003 the meetings were organised by Konstanz – each time in cooperation with the host university. Unfortunately we then didn't have a central budget anymore. But at that time the success of our first meeting with representatives from 24 European partner universities had proven that our network also worked without a central budget from Brussels.

Since I wanted to retire on the 1st of April 2004, Ingfrid Schütz-Müller from the University of Vienna then took over the responsibility for our network.

Beside the current Erasmus topics we always discuss a subject which extends across the

disciplines : 2002 in Lyon European educational systems, 2003 in Konstanz Quality assurance in higher education in Germany, the topic 2004 in Ljubljana was Erasmus Mundus.r.

Today around 90 percent of the European universities take part in ERASMUS, that means more than 3100 higher education institutions in 31 countries are involved in this **flagship**. **Since it started in 1987 around 1.9 million students have participated in the European Exchange programme.**

Few, if any, programmes launched by the European Union have had a similar Europe-wide reach.

In the just running 2007-13 Lifelong learning period the total budget should exceed over 1% of the Community budget, compared to only 0.1% in 1987.

Mobility is important for personal development and employability! Mobility fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. Mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area.

The Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 countries of the Bologna process convened in Leuven four weeks ago (end of April 2009) agreed upon the aim that in 2020 at least 20 percent of the European students have had a study or training period abroad.

Our annual meetings are still a fine opportunity to meet other coordinators, to share the logistic experiences and to discuss current problems. They are a good and efficient way to communicate with each other and last but not least they are a fine possibility to make friends.

I hope that you will go ahead with Erasmus and open up the chance of this great experience in intercultural learning for as many students as possible.

Keep the challenge of ERASMUS alive!

It has always been a pleasure to work with you -

Thank you