Transformative Journeys: The Impact of International Mobility in Academia

- Teachers
- Students
- University Managers

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CREATIVE THINKING

2025

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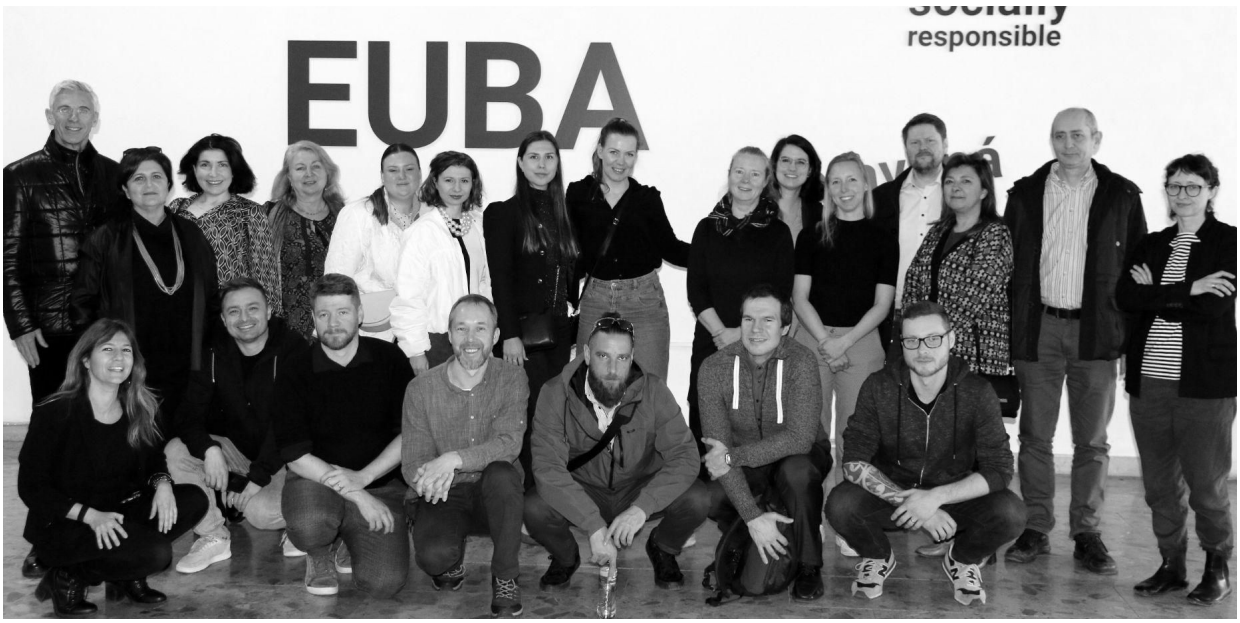


This report offers insight into how international mobility shapes the development of students, academic teachers, and university managers. Based on interviews with representatives of these three groups, the publication explores how international experiences influence attitudes, foster creativity, support innovation, and transform approaches to education and academic work. Readers will learn about the benefits and challenges of mobility, how it is perceived by different stakeholders, and what systemic and institutional changes could enhance its accessibility and effectiveness. A distinctive feature of the report is its presentation of data—special emphasis is placed on the voices of the participants themselves, whose perspectives are shared through direct quotations. The main findings show that while students, teachers, and managers view mobility from different angles, they all recognize its powerful potential as a tool for personal, professional, and institutional growth. This is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand how internationalization is reshaping higher education—from the classroom to university strategy.

Studies report that, for traveling students and researchers, participation in programs like Erasmus+ and study abroad enhances language proficiency, intercultural competence, and employability. Many papers show that mobility supports career advancement through advanced degrees, improved job satisfaction, and expanded professional networks while noting persistent challenges such as language barriers and adaptation difficulties.

At the institutional level, mobile scholars contribute to knowledge transfer, strengthened international collaborations, and—in some cases—greater research productivity. Evidence from bibliometric studies and systematic reviews indicates that returning academics help build local, intangible assets and institutional competitiveness. Several papers also document a shift toward virtual or hybrid mobility in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with accompanying challenges in communication and institutional support.

International academic mobility is a significant component of contemporary higher education, bringing benefits to both individual participants and institutions. Numerous studies (like *Erasmus Impact Study* or *Flash Eurobarometer – Youth on the move*) indicate that **students participation** in programs such as Erasmus+ or study abroad contributes to the development of language skills, intercultural competence, and increased employability. People are more likely to engage in social activities, choose international career paths and continue their education at the master's or doctoral level after studying abroad (Zapotoczna, 2021; Paige et al., 2009). **Academic mobility** also supports career development through the attainment of advanced degrees, increased job satisfaction, and the expansion of professional networks (Przytuła, 2023a; Przytuła, 2023b). At the **institutional level**, mobility fosters knowledge transfer, intensifies international collaboration, and—in some cases—enhances research productivity (Povstyn, 2021; Schiller & Diez, 2012). Returning scholars contribute to building local intangible assets and increasing institutional competitiveness (Netz et al., 2020). However, as noted by Wachowska (2019), the link between mobility and increased co-authorship of scientific publications is not always straightforward.

The literature also highlights challenges associated with mobility, such as language barriers and adaptation difficulties, which may limit the full potential of international experiences (Przytuła, 2023b; Zapotoczna, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new forms of mobility—virtual and hybrid—which, while enabling continued international engagement, also brought additional organizational and technological challenges (Povstyn, 2021).

This report is one of the results of the **CT.Uni: Creative Thinking - Taking an Innovative and STEAM Approach for a Transdisciplinary University** project. The overall goal of the project is to increase the level of transdisciplinarity in universities by developing innovative teaching solutions and supporting students, teachers and managers in developing their divergent, creative and critical thinking, while strengthening cooperation with institutions from the external environment.

Collaborating partners in the CT.uni project include researchers from following universities: University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia (project leader); Bifröst University, Iceland; Dresden University of Technology, Germany; Guarda Polytechnic University, Portugal; Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland; Sapienza University of Rome, Italy; University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava.

The aim of the study presented in this report is to explore the role of international mobility in promoting creativity and innovation in higher education. It focuses on how current mobility practices influence students, academic teachers, and university managers—especially in transdisciplinary contexts—and how these experiences may inspire more creative and innovative approaches in education. The report is based on interviews conducted with three groups: academic teachers, students, and HEI managers responsible for international exchange and university internationalization.

During the interviews, we asked respondents how their international mobility experiences had changed them, hoping to uncover factors that made them feel more innovative or more motivated to adopt creative approaches. Respondents spoke not only about where they went and which program funded their trip, but also about what they learned (or didn't learn), the emotions they experienced, the challenges they faced, and the personal benefits they gained—such as transversal skills or exposure to new cultures and environments. Additionally, university managers described international mobility from the institutional perspective, focusing on how it is managed and integrated within the broader internationalization strategies of their institutions.

Abbreviations Used:

BU – Bifröst University
EUBA – Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave
IPG – Instituto Politécnico da Guarda
STU – Slovenská technická univerzita v Bratislave
SU – Sapienza Università di Roma
TUD – Technische Universität Dresden
UMCS – Uniwersytet Marii Curie Skłodowskiej
UvA – Universiteit van Amsterdam

Method

Among the 24 individuals interviewed, there were 8 academic teachers at various stages of their careers (including junior lecturers, assistant professors, and full professors), 10 students (at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels), and 6 university managers responsible for international mobility. Two of the academic teachers also held organizational roles related to student mobility at their institutions.

To collect research material, interviews were conducted using a prepared interview guide (see Appendix).

Academic teachers discussed their professional and teaching experience, participation in mobility programs, and how these experiences influenced their teaching methods, interactions with students, and professional development.

Students shared information about their field of study, experiences with mobility, the benefits and challenges they encountered, and how these experiences affected their learning, personal growth, and future plans.

University managers were asked about their professional responsibilities, mobility practices at their institutions, their development and challenges, as well as the relationship between mobility and creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., in the context of STEAM).

Teachers

The academic teachers who participated in the study represent a variety of academic disciplines, and some of them, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, also hold organizational roles related to student mobility. They teach at different levels of higher education—from undergraduate to doctoral studies—covering subjects such as biotechnology, sociology, communication, entrepreneurship, e-commerce, paleolimnology, cultural heritage restoration, color in industrial design, and human-centered design. Their teaching practices do not appear to be limited to traditional lecture-based methods. Instead, they apply a variety of teaching approaches, including supervising theses, conducting computer workshops, and supporting students in their projects.

> “However, we mainly focus on tutorials—their content, whether it aligns with the literature, what is discussed in lectures, and the skills we want students to acquire. And there’s also a bit of coaching in the design-related subjects.”
> (UvA, MSc, Lecturer, Future Planet Studies)

> “The modules we offer are not assessed through written exams, but usually through practical work, which is often accompanied by written scientific documentation. This is how exams are conducted and learning objectives are achieved. We generally work with rather small student groups. Depending on the subject, our courses range from fewer than 10 to a maximum of 50 students.”
> (TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

Some of the academic teachers also hold administrative roles, such as coordinating study programs, collaborating with international students and institutions, and participating in international working groups and research centers.

The main selection criterion for the study was prior experience with international mobility, defined as at least one trip abroad lasting longer than one week.

As a result, the group included researchers who had participated in a wide range of international programs and initiatives.

Many of them took advantage of opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ program, both in the form of teaching and training mobility, visiting universities and institutions in countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, and Finland. Some also participated in less typical trips, such as visits to Korea, Albania, and Peru, or summer schools in Asia organized by international university consortia.

These mobility experiences included teaching, attending courses and training sessions, as well as engaging in research collaboration and the development of teaching practices.

Several respondents also mentioned the names of specific programs through which they received financial or organizational support, such as TEMPUS, Pioneer Practices, the ATHENA consortium, or the Baltic University Programme.

Mobility was often initiated individually by the teachers themselves, but it was also supported by universities through the dissemination of information about available opportunities. In some cases, the experiences gained abroad had a direct impact on the development of new courses, laboratories, or teaching methods implemented upon returning to their home institutions.

Teacher Mobility

IPG, professor, biotechnology	Participation in Erasmus+ programs, guest lectures abroad, and professional development through international training courses.
SU, professor, sociology	Mobility experiences in non-European countries (Korea, Albania, Peru), facilitated with the help of the university's international mobility office.
EUBA, docent, marketing	Regular participation in Erasmus+ mobility programs, typically once or twice per academic year.
UvA, Msc, docent, Future Planet Studies	Lecturer at a Summer School in Asia (3 weeks) Delivered courses on design and systems thinking in an international setting with students and faculty from various countries.
STU, PhD. docent, renovation of cultural assets	Participation in the TEMPUS programme, focused on international cooperation in higher education.
UMCS, assistant professor, geography	Research internship within the ATHENA consortium, research methods training, collaboration under Pioneer Practices (Finland), and field courses through the Baltic University Programme A combination of research, training, and fieldwork as part of international academic consortia and initiatives.
TUD, senior research associate, Industrial Designer	General participation in Erasmus+ mobility for teaching or training purposes.
EUBA, associate professor, Business and marketing	Did not speak about her own international mobility, as she participated in the study in her role as a university internationalization manager.

Benefits of mobility according to teachers

The teachers interviewed identified several positive outcomes of their international mobility experiences. Depending on the nature of the mobility—whether it involved teaching abroad, attending training sessions, or engaging in research collaboration—the impact varied in intensity among participants.

Teaching in another country, often to international student groups, was seen as a valuable lesson in **attentiveness**. Cultural diversity prompted teachers to reflect on their usual teaching methods—often for the first time.

> "...when you teach, you notice that students, for example, are different, so you really have to adapt your teaching methods. Right now, mine are naturally tailored to Dutch students, so you really notice those cultural differences—for example, when training a group. You can see it, oh yes, mistakes happen. Some students are more active—like the Dutch or students from Edinburgh or Sydney—while others, like those from Cambodia or maybe this year from Vietnam, are more reserved and less likely to speak up during discussions."
> (UvA, MSc, Lecturer, Future Planet Studies)

Interestingly, differences that shape teaching practices can also be observed without leaving one's own country. A teacher from Germany shared an insightful hypothesis:

> "I believe that at your own university, there is always a certain type of student—and I don't think you even realize it yourself [...]. They have specific skills and learning goals that actually differ [from students at other universities – authors' note]. [...] That's why some things need to be explained differently—or explained at all."
> (TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

According to a Dutch respondent, intercultural encounters prove valuable even after returning home, as they increase awareness of students who, for various reasons, may require a **more personalized and responsive approach**. Her experience leading workshops during a summer school in an Asian country led her to reflect—even when teaching Dutch students—on questions such as: Do all students really have the opportunity to express their opinions? Has everyone received enough attention? This example illustrates that contact with other cultures not only satisfies researchers' personal curiosity but also serves as a practical exercise in **empathy**.

Moreover, not knowing what prior knowledge and skills students bring to the classroom creates uncertainty about what should be taught and what kind of responses to expect. A teacher from Germany pointed out that this can be a valuable lesson in **flexibility**.

> "...of course, you don't know other study programs or curricula, or how students engage, interact, and work there. So you can't respond to that. But I don't think that's a major disadvantage—I'm sure it's balanced out by the benefits. Sometimes it's good not to know everything in advance. I think you just need to be well-prepared and able to respond reflectively. Maybe you'll need to spend the first half hour figuring out what people already know and can do."
> (TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

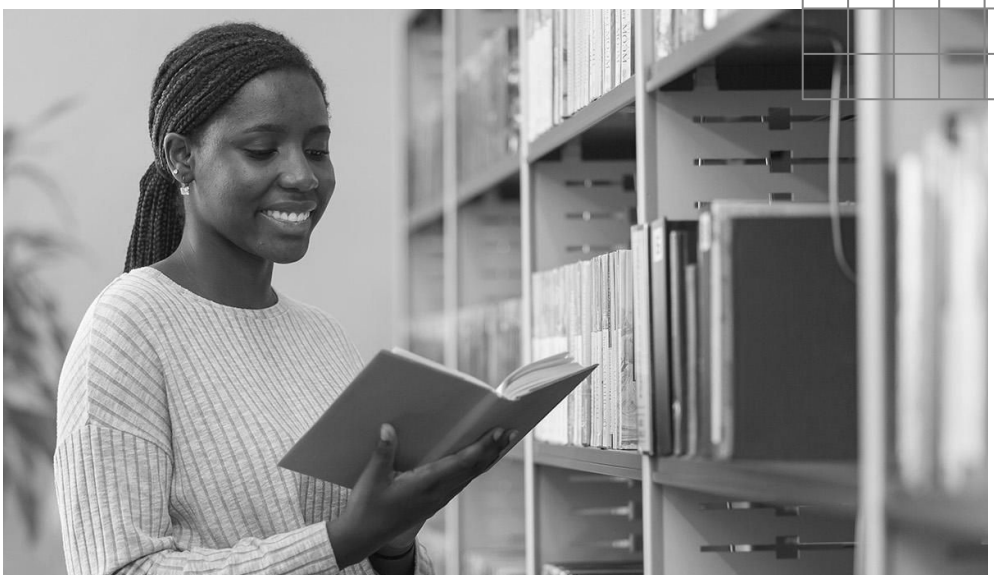
International encounters involve a certain level of effort—not only due to exposure to a different culture, but also because of the need to communicate in a foreign language. Stepping out of one's comfort zone and overcoming challenges together requires activating **deeper levels of creativity**. The teachers interviewed also observed this positive effect of mobility among students:

"...in design studies, we are able to create mixed teams composed of both international students from various countries and Slovak students. This mix alone provokes the need for a creative approach, as ways of thinking often differ significantly depending on people's backgrounds and countries of origin. So, in addition to making compromises, they also have to find a way forward—through collaboration, design processes, or problem-solving. I usually witness a difficult beginning, when they need support, and in most cases, we see a very good outcome—when these obstacles are overcome, they find a common language and become truly creative. In the end, both the results and the collaboration confirm that there has been progress in their creative approach. Some later give us feedback that they participated in competitions, exhibitions, and so on, which means they confirmed their ability to work and think creatively in other contexts as well. That has been my experience in this regard."
(STU, PhD, Docent, Renovation of Cultural Assets)

The respondents' statements suggest that creativity is primarily born out of **relationships and the experience of difference**:

"...for me, creativity comes from relationships—with other people, other groups, other institutions..."
(SU, Professor, Sociology)

"These experiences allow us to exchange ideas and research challenges, as well as to implement new techniques and content into the curriculum. But most importantly, they offer the opportunity to connect with other cultures, organizational structures, and pedagogical trends that can be integrated into our teaching practice. This is of great importance for fostering innovation and openness, which support more creative thinking, curiosity about creative tools, and training in critical thinking."
(IPG, Professor, Biotechnology)



Relationships with people and institutions from other countries **enhance specific teaching skills**. For example, teachers who participated in international mobility programs adopted student engagement methods they had observed during workshops and training sessions.

"...an additional benefit I usually gain from participating in various mobility activities is exposure to new technological tools—like Mentimeter, which we use to create word clouds for student interaction. Or tools for creating mind maps or collaborating visually on a problem. Every time I take part in any mobility, I make a note of these tools and try to apply them—and students love it."
(UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

"...for example, now I try to use certain methods, like mind mapping. So before any activity we plan to do in a seminar, I try to form student groups and encourage them to create a mind map before they start working. Then I ask them to take a step back and look at their ideas from a broader or 'helicopter' perspective, and select a few thoughts that are relevant to the project. I also try to encourage further discussion—not just by giving instructions, but by asking very specific questions that prompt dialogue."
(EUBA, Docent, Marketing)

An interesting consequence of international student exchange, as observed by teachers, is the opportunity—or even necessity—to **condense teaching into compact, multi-day training sessions**, which are rarely used with their own students. This format inherently requires a shift in teaching practices, which, according to the instructors, generally improves the quality of their teaching:

"...during exchanges within the ERASMUS program, but also during teaching assignments, I taught content in 2–3 day blocks that I would normally cover over a much longer period. This means I'm not able to integrate self-study phases as effectively—at least not those extended over a longer time—and I also have to combine my teaching and learning methods in a completely different way. I then need to incorporate more activating elements and include more dynamic activities. I can't give lectures for three days in a row, which I might do during regular weekly classes. Normally, I would start with a lecture and then move on to something more practical. If I want to make things easier for myself, I can send students home and tell them to work on this or that by next week. That doesn't work as well in block teaching [...] and what I came up with and improved during that time can, of course, be taken home. Because what works better in a block format also tends to work relatively well over the course of a semester, and ultimately improves your own teaching. The intensive block format clearly presents the challenge of introducing greater variety in teaching and learning methods, which is also beneficial in other respects."
(TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

International mobility appears to be perceived by the respondents as a catalyst for exploring improved methods of teaching. New didactic techniques not only enhance the quality of education by increasing student engagement, but also seem to open educators up to the possibility of teaching more diverse student groups and beyond their strict disciplines:

"The mobility experience increased my interest in pedagogical training and curriculum development. Throughout my career, I have also participated in various training programs aimed at improving my pedagogical and academic skills and outcomes, including those related to Design Thinking and new methodologies in the biological sciences. This training supports my actual performance as a professor and my ability to tailor classes to the characteristics and interests of students in a given subject, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This is particularly relevant in curricula related to experimental design and science communication, but it also holds great promise for implementing more interactive classroom activities in traditional biological science subjects such as microbiology and nanotechnology. For example, in these course units, some activities—such as weekly challenges (where a company presents a technical challenge for students to solve) and working groups preparing sessions for the community (where different groups work on the same topic but for different target audiences, such as children, adults, or policymakers)—are among the most successful examples of new activities and approaches I have implemented in my teaching practice."
(SU, Professor, Sociology)

International mobility also provides an opportunity to observe **different organizational practices** at foreign universities. Teachers, for example, pointed out differences in how communication with students is handled. One particularly insightful observation came from a scholar based in Lublin:

> "I saw a very precisely prepared instruction manual for those exercises. It seems to me that in our work, we often give fieldwork instructions orally, whereas there, students had a detailed manual explaining how to use each measuring device, what equipment they would be using, and how to prepare for such a trip."
> (UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

The same researcher also highlighted what facilitates quick adaptation to a new environment and effective networking more effective acquisition of external funding through closer collaboration with the local community:

> "It was very well organized. There is a kind of onboarding system for researchers arriving in the Orléans region, coordinated by a supra-university unit that manages the arrival of all international researchers. On the first Thursday of the month, there is a mandatory meeting for all invited researchers under various programs, and I met practically all the researchers in the region... That's right, I was able to benefit from networking... there was also an element of getting to know the city, so it was a very productive time. I made new contacts."
> (UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

Another observation made by this researcher concerned more effective acquisition of external funding through closer collaboration with the local community:

> "...what worked better was the use of funding not from central sources like the equivalent of our National Science Centre, but rather at the regional level. And here, because we applied for local funding, there was a much stronger emphasis on collaboration with the surrounding community and on communicating scientific research results to local audiences. So, this is something that, in my opinion, is not as widespread in our context."
> (UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

The diversity of universities, their internal organization, and study practices allows academic teachers who travel to **shape their research careers in a more conscious and intentional way**:

> "Especially in project-based education, where all schools may look the same from the outside, inside they are completely different—for both students and teachers. Of course, it's also nice to have the opportunity to try it out. But it must be said that in our current university system, it's also important to ask what decisions I make and what career path I choose. It's definitely beneficial to gain experience."
> (TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

For some educators, **international mobility is seen as a professional necessity**—an essential part of developing as a researcher and teacher. One academic who regularly travels to other research centers emphasized that it is not only a way to stay up to date with methods and knowledge in their field, but also an opportunity to engage in valuable collaborations and projects:

> "I value the opportunity to travel and participate in academic visits, especially because of my research area, as there is a future possibility of forming a university consortium and working on joint projects. From my perspective, the teaching effect is somewhat secondary, because during these visits I realized that our education system and teaching processes are at a very good level and are quite similar to those in more developed countries and universities."
> (EUBA, Associate Professor, Marketing)

For one of the interviewed educators, international mobility represented a true **turning point in her future research path**, ultimately leading to the establishment of a laboratory focused on a specialization that is innovative within the Slovak context. It also had a profound impact on the content of student education.

"...it was at the very beginning of my university career, during my doctoral studies. I managed to go abroad and take part in the TEMPUS programme. At that time, I really needed this study stay abroad, which lasted four months, because I couldn't find the courses I needed for my topic. I was the first person from Slovakia who wanted to study color science and apply it to architecture and design, and there were no specialists or courses available locally. I needed an interdisciplinary approach and found a world-renowned expert in Padua, Italy, who agreed to host me. I was able to take courses in the psychology of perception, which complemented what I needed for my research. I also used the opportunity to publish my first truly scientific article in internationally recognized journals in collaboration with local researchers. This practically created the opportunity and conditions to begin developing the content and methods for teaching color at my faculty. So, the roots of everything that is happening now started with my mobility. At first, I turned it into new courses [...]. Later, I founded a color laboratory, so it was a very positive experience... it was about implementing all the knowledge I needed for my work, which I couldn't acquire locally."
(STU, PhD. Associate Professor, Renovation of Cultural Assets)

The professional benefits of international mobility are clearly diverse. However, it is also a form of travel that brings **personal satisfaction**.

> "I love to travel, I love meeting new people, getting to know others, and so on—there are far more advantages than disadvantages."
> (SU, Professor, Sociology)

One of the interviewed educators even stated directly that the pleasure of traveling can enhance the **psychological well-being** of those who travel. Changing one's environment and engaging in conversations with others are activities that help reduce stress:

> …traveling reduces stress and increases happiness, which supports creative thinking. International research and corporate practices show that diverse environments and multicultural experiences foster creativity and innovation."
> (EUBA, Associate Professor, Business and Marketing)

International mobility is perceived as attractive by the respondents, yet **teaching obligations and time constraints** often pose significant barriers.

> "We don't have much free time during the academic year to travel, because we have classes—I also coordinate a course, a study program, and so on. So I have many other administrative responsibilities as well."
> (SU, Professor, Sociology)

> "…you need to travel for at least a week or two to really immerse yourself in the environment and have enough conversations and meetings with international partners to understand their processes, and so on. So it's quite time-consuming, and you have to manage your local responsibilities in order to be able to travel."
> (EUBA, Associate Professor, Marketing)

Longer stays abroad are particularly difficult to arrange, as they often result in **backlogs in teaching duties**. For researchers at HEIs, this challenge is compounded by the difficulty of finding substitutes for highly specialized courses—or the fear that, upon return, the course may no longer be assigned to them.

> "I also have experience with a one-year postdoc [...] but at that time I was exempt from teaching duties, and I know that when I returned [...] 80% of the courses I had prepared and taught didn't come back to me. So it wasn't easy to teach entirely new courses again the following year."
> (UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

For the same researcher, a source of frustration lies in the **difficulty of applying the knowledge gained abroad** at her home institution. This may stem from a common issue: a disconnect between teaching and research, lack of access to appropriate equipment for students, or rigid curriculum structures.

> "My main observation was that fieldwork could be significantly improved. I don't teach any fieldwork courses, so even though I know how to apply what I've learned, I don't have the opportunity. Another challenge is that I often don't have the necessary equipment—like water parameter meters—which I would gladly use. Even during optional field trips with students, I often face equipment shortages and don't really know how to fill those gaps or where to get funding."
> (UMCS, Assistant Professor, Geography)

Another difficulty for some respondents is **poor organization** of the mobility stay or **lack of engagement** from the host institution's staff and students. When teaching or giving lectures, the optional nature of such activities often results in low attendance and limited commitment.

> "...it's often an additional offer for local students. That means you have a few engaged participants, but in the end, everything is quite non-binding, depending on how it's organized. It also depends on how well you've prepared it, and on the partner institution's side—whether participants receive credits for it or not, etc."
> (TUD, Senior Research Associate, Industrial Designer)

In summary, international mobility comes with certain inconveniences, and not every trip is a success. However, for the educators interviewed, these challenges are not seen as reasons to give up on mobility. The group clearly consists of enthusiasts whose experiences have convinced them of the developmental value of such travel. The benefits clearly outweigh the difficulties.

Students

The students represented various disciplines across the social sciences (sociology, economics and management, psychology), life sciences (earth sciences, biology, medicine), and engineering (product design, computer engineering). There were also students enrolled in interdisciplinary programs (biotechnology, Future Planet Studies).

UvA - Future Planet Studies, BA,	Erasmus+ (in Sweden)
UvA – Earth Sciences, MA,	UvA student fund (in Spain)
UMCS – Sociology, BA,	Erasmus+ (in Spain)
STU – Product Design, BA, 1	Erasmus+ (in Germany)
STU – Product Design, BA, 2	Blended Intensive Program - one week course in Germany, Erasmus+ (in Italy)
SU – Social Psychology, Phd	Three month research stay in USA (three universities), summer schools abroad
IPG - Computer Engineering, BA	Erasmus+ (in Italy) 5 months
TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA	Erasmus+ (in Finland) 5 months
BU – Management, BA, 1	Erasmus+ (in Poland)
BU – Management, BA, 2	Erasmus+ (in Poland)

For the students interviewed, international mobility was **overwhelmingly a positive experience**. Some even described it as a unique, transformative adventure.

> "It was definitely one of the most beautiful experiences of my life."
> (UMCS – Sociology, BA, Female)

> "My experience was great overall. It was one of the best parts of my studies. It was truly a wonderful experience. The lecturers were so kind and so different from those in our mechanical engineering program. At that university, the focus was on something completely different—more on community, building competencies and skills, and general rather than specialized knowledge. Because of that, the whole program was very different from mechanical engineering studies at the Technical University in Dresden."
> (TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

Despite the overall satisfaction, students also acknowledged that the **experience could be challenging**. A Computer Engineering student from Portugal, reflecting on her international mobility, began by noting the difficulties involved:

> "I went to Italy for the first semester. It was quite complicated, but in many ways, it helped me grow a lot."
> (IPG – Computer Engineering, BA)

Such reflections were common. Students recognized that overcoming certain difficulties **required them to develop practical skills** that may be taken for granted by older individuals. For this group, international mobility posed a greater challenge than it might for more mature participants. Unsurprisingly, another recurring theme was the importance of organizational and informational support from both the sending and host institutions.

> Organizing the administration was quite complicated, but the support from both universities and the information on the website were good."
> (UvA – Future Planet Studies, BA)

"...I had to organize many practical things myself (which stimulated my independence), but things eventually worked out and were partially funded."
(UvA – Earth Sciences, MA)

"Mobility can be difficult, especially the first time, but it develops your personality and skills."
(SU – Social Psychology, PhD)

"It's also a difficult experience, because I admit the first month was quite depressing for me. [...] Not everyone can always find their place. [...] Not all courses are easy to pass [...] and there's also the stress caused by the change. [...] I did gain some independence, of course, and I know there's some support from the university, especially regarding accommodation."
(UMCS – Sociology, BA)

Uncertainty could also stem from differences in how universities operate. Nevertheless, students generally viewed these differences as interesting and enriching. Since most of their contact with the host institution occurred through **interactions with teachers, students often focused on differences in teaching practices**. One student appreciated how a variety of activities contributed to the final grade in a course:

"...let's say it was divided into different activities. In one course, the lecturer told us to choose a book, and based on that book, we would have meetings—of course, during class time—and discuss it. That counted for about 20% of the grade. Another 30% was for a presentation, then some percentage for attendance, and another part for something else. [...] I really liked that. The lecturer shared their knowledge but also expected us to be active—read something at home, engage. But there was also choice; nothing was imposed, like 'you must read this specific sociologist or that particular book.' [...] I think that really encouraged student engagement."
(UMCS – Sociology, BA)

The above statement suggests that giving students a degree of autonomy while simultaneously requiring independence and engagement can be appreciated by them. A student from Dresden noted that, thanks to her mobility experience, she encountered a **teaching approach that fostered divergent thinking** by allowing students more **freedom**—something she found not only interesting but also personally challenging:

> "The first thing I remember is the difference in how lectures or courses were organized. So in Germany—or maybe especially in production engineering—it's more like: OK, you have a lecture, sometimes you get an assignment, and the lecturer knows the solution, and your task is to find the way to that solution, and that's it. In this course, we were so free to find solutions and innovations, our own ideas. It was very difficult because I experienced my own limitations—my internal limitations."
> (TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

She described a workshop-based course that was a completely new experience for her—one in which the teacher assumed the role of a mentor, giving students the freedom to arrive at their own solutions:

> "For example, in the case of users in robotics, the only thing we were given was: Here is a humanoid robot, and your users are teenagers. Now find your topic—like, how can the robot help with relaxation? How can it help with something else? Whatever comes to mind. We had to decide on the topic as a group, and then we were completely free to design the social interaction. And she was just our mentor. So we had to find a solution ourselves, in the group, and she just supported us. Sometimes she gave us input—some scientific input from academic work, and so on. But that was it. […] We had to present all our solutions—our final solution and our process. So we were very free. […] And then she gave us some creative techniques or methods that helped expand our internal boundaries."
> (TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

In some cases, a smaller amount of material to cover was not perceived as a lowering of academic standards, but rather as an opportunity for **deeper immersion in the subject matter**:

> "...a teaching/learning approach that was initially a bit difficult to understand, but interesting to try. For example, there were significantly fewer topics to study, so we had more time to delve into each one."
> (STU – Product Design, BA)

International mobility required students to be more active and engaged. The higher expectations and inspiring people they encountered led many of them to **see their studies from a new perspective**—through the eyes of others. As a result, they began to recognize more value in what they were doing and started to expect more from themselves and their academic programs.

> "...it was also about the people I met—lecturers full of passion who talked about things that had previously seemed, well, maybe boring to me? But they presented them in such an interesting way that it deepened my desire to grow in the field I'm studying. And also the people who were there—I feel like those who choose to go on Erasmus are hardworking, adventurous, unafraid of challenges, and truly engaged in their field of study."
> (UMCS – Sociology, BA)

Having experienced different teaching methods and access to new content unavailable at their home institutions, students began to see their **educational path as more of a personal choice than a fixed program**. This shift in perspective made them feel more responsible for their education and more future-oriented. A student from Slovakia described feeling more confident and open to experimentation:

> "It taught me that school is an environment that should help you find yourself and determine what you really want to do professionally (in your field), by giving you as many opportunities as possible. It showed me that I should try new things and broaden my horizons, so I can know more and make better decisions about my future career. That's why I wasn't afraid to dive into UX design—because if I don't try it, how will I know it was the wrong choice?"
> (STU – Product Design, BA, 1)

Studying at a different university also gave students insight into how HEIs function within different ecosystems. In several cases, international mobility led students to step **outside their disciplinary boundaries**:

> "…in Germany, there's a strong emphasis on the ecological aspects of products, ease of assembly, and practical experience. Throughout the semester, we were in contact with real companies that helped us develop prototypes and provided information about materials. I also had the chance to take courses from other programs, which were intentionally open to all students to encourage networking and interdisciplinary collaboration. I believe this kind of approach—where students from different fields work together on shared projects—is especially beneficial for designers."
> (STU – Product Design, BA, 2)

> "…My lecturer—or the whole institution—works closely with Finnish startups. They have special lecturers who talked about challenges, innovations, and so on. And it was really great to learn about new things that will emerge in the coming years. Maybe that's something I missed a bit at the Technical University in Dresden. They also told us how they collaborate creatively and use creative problem-solving techniques and similar methods."
> (TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

When asked directly about creativity and innovation as outcomes of mobility, students naturally had slightly less to say than teachers. Nevertheless, like the educators, they believed that the need to function among people from different countries and within unfamiliar institutional environments required **adaptation**. This need for **flexibility was seen as a driver of creativity and innovative problem-solving**.

> "…a completely new environment, totally different from what you're used to, so you have to be creative to deal with all these new things. I also see another aspect: when you enter a new environment (a school), you don't know what to expect, so you usually try harder and push yourself because you don't want to fail. I think that effort goes hand in hand with creativity and innovation."
> (STU – Product Design, BA, 2)

"It was also very international. I worked with, I don't know, people from five, six, seven different countries and cultures. The challenge was finding a way we could collaborate."
(TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

"I think creativity is, in a way, the ability to combine and mix different ideas and experiences into something new. So the more someone has experienced and seen, the better their ability to create and innovate. […] all those exchanges of ideas, changes in context, and breaking out of the social bubbles we live in every day are powerful drivers of change/innovation/creativity."
(STU – Product Design, BA, 1)

One student showed, through specific examples, how the creative skills gained during mobility **shaped their study habits and future academic direction**.

"I think I now work more with virtual notebooks or whiteboards like Mural or Miro. Before going abroad, I already knew these kinds of collaboration tools thanks to my scholarships. But now I experience how helpful they can be in my studies through collaboration with other students. I also changed my thesis topic from production engineering to industrial design engineering. I'd say that's the main part—because from my experience, I'm much more interested in those areas or that sector, rather than production engineering in general. And I also discovered that I am creative. I used to think I wasn't a very creative person. And then I thought: OK, you are. And also, that it's a kind of strength. And now I've experienced that and thought: OK, now I'm brave enough to write my master's thesis in industrial design engineering."
(TUD – Mechanical Engineering, BA)

Erasmus+ programs were also described as inspiring and activating, partly due to financial support. The funding and the free activities organized for participants gave students a sense of financial comfort they might not have experienced at home. In other words, not having to save money or work allowed them to **fully take advantage of the opportunities for personal and academic growth**. For many, Erasmus was also their first solo journey abroad, which encouraged them to build new relationships and develop social skills.

> "…being confronted with other cultures and environments inevitably forces you to be creative and to change. And you can't avoid how many new things enter your life. […] I feel like when you're on a student exchange, you want to make the most of it—you often go to various events offered by the university or Erasmus student associations, which organize trips, workshops, parties… there's really a wide range of activities. There were even mountains nearby, so you could go climbing or take a trip to the sea. So, someone on exchange mainly wants to meet new people. Because usually, you're there alone, sometimes you travel alone."
> (UMCS – Sociology, BA)

Spending extended time with people from other countries also made students less likely to view other nationalities through the lens of stereotypes. A Polish student provided a vivid example of how Erasmus+ can change participants in line with the program's goals:

> "…it changed me a lot—I don't even know where to begin. First of all, in how I view our community as Europeans. I used to have certain assumptions about other nationalities—that Germans are like this, Poles are like that, and Spaniards are something else. And then you're in this international environment, and of course, the differences are there, and sometimes they align with stereotypes, but in reality, you realize that we laugh at the same jokes, we have the same life dilemmas, we're interested in the same things. And even if we have different passions, we share them. […] And I really had this feeling that we're the same people—that the differences aren't as big as we're often led to believe."
> (UMCS – Sociology, BA)

Students generally tended to believe that international mobility would have **an impact on their future**. A PhD student from Italy, whose longest mobility experience was research-focused, expressed views more similar to those of academic staff:

> "I got to know new cultures, opened up to the world, and gained valuable experiences—both professional and personal. I hope this will also influence my methodology and development as a researcher."
> (SU – Social Psychology, PhD)

Although not as frequently as teachers, students also valued mobility as an opportunity for networking—especially when the academic match was strong.

> "…I met many people from my field and managed to establish contacts with them. Perhaps we'll even collaborate in the future. Meeting people from outside my discipline was equally enriching, as I got to know different cultures and religions firsthand—which is a completely different experience than just hearing or reading about them."
> (STU – Product Design, BA, 2)

International mobility can also be disappointing or unproductive. **Organizational issues, lack of engaging courses, poor teaching, or difficulties integrating with other students or overcoming language barriers** can make the experience unsuccessful. While such situations did not occur in the studied group, not all experiences were evaluated entirely positively. A recurring theme was that students praised the social aspects and personal growth while criticizing the academic content.

> "It was a really enjoyable experience. I didn't expect the exchange to be so socially intense—it surprised me a bit. As for the university, the academic requirements were much lower than at home. Instead of final exams, there were 10-question multiple-choice tests and PowerPoint presentations. Still, everything was fairly well organized. […] It was mostly group projects or individual presentations. That was new for me, because I hadn't done that before. It was an interesting experience, but the academic demands were still very low compared to what I'm used to in our education system."
> (BU – Management, BA, 1)

> ...the whole system was a bit chaotic. They used some strange grading system, like 0.33 points for something. There were generally no deadlines—you often didn't know exactly what you were supposed to do. Sometimes you just had to be lucky to find the right classroom. [...] It's a huge difference compared to Iceland."
> (BU – Management, BA, 2)

> "...a lot of personal development (living, studying, and working in a new culture), but in terms of gaining new skills and knowledge, I didn't learn much—the course content wasn't a good fit (I partly knew that before going)."
> (UvA – Future Planet Studies, BA)

A Computer Engineering student from Portugal, who rated her mobility experience the lowest, cited **communication difficulties** as the main reason. For her, creativity and innovation were more about stepping out of her comfort zone and building relationships than about the academic setting:

> "A lot of personal growth, but from an academic point of view, it was basically a disaster—lots of language barrier issues and big differences from what I'm used to in my home country. [...] I think creativity/innovation is something that comes from people, so of course there's something to gain from stepping out of your comfort zone, but it's more about the new people you meet than the place you're in."
> (IPG – Computer Engineering, BA)

Regardless of whether students found the academic aspects of mobility valuable, they strongly emphasized personal development—linking it to self-awareness, courage, and clarity about their goals.

> "I think the opportunity to study abroad should be more widely recommended to students, because many are afraid and don't believe in themselves (including me)—that they can manage in a foreign environment. Even though it can be really hard, I think the benefits outweigh the drawbacks."
> (STU – Product Design, BA, 2)

"...maybe I learned to be a bit more proactive and better prepared before starting courses. [...] I have a feeling that what I learned might change my future. But it's hard to say for sure. Theoretically, I could have gained the same skills/experience without going abroad."
(UvA – Future Planet Studies, BA)

Students generally evaluated their mobility experiences positively, even when some aspects were less successful. Even **difficulties were often reframed as challenges** that contributed to learning how to live independently:

"It was a great opportunity to try living in another country, immerse myself in a different culture, learn the language, and discover new customs, see beautiful nature, and so on. The downside was that at first, I didn't know anyone and had to deal with a lot of paperwork. But that's part of the experience—and it was worth it."
(STU – Product Design, BA, 1)

"The greatest value was making many great connections with other exchange students. We stuck together because we were all new and no one knew what to expect. That made it easy to integrate. I also came to appreciate the education system at Bifröst more—I hadn't realized how different teaching systems can be and how much I missed the clarity and structure I was used to at home."
(BU – Management, BA, 1)

University managers

The category of “mobility managers” includes a diverse group of individuals involved in international mobility at either central or faculty levels within universities. These are people responsible for the mobility of students or researchers—some focus more on educational exchanges, while others are more involved in research mobility. Some deal with mobility by securing funding and coordinating projects, while others are directly engaged in organizing specific trips and providing administrative support. When describing mobility-related issues, managers tend to view them through the lens of specific program regulations. They pay attention to the type of mobility (educational, research, or training), the target group (students, academic staff, or administrative personnel), and the direction of mobility (e.g., within the EU or to non-EU countries). Their perspectives are shaped by the type of mobility they themselves are responsible for. As a result, the picture of mobility presented by managers is highly heterogeneous, reflecting the diverse institutional frameworks in which they operate.

IPG – vice president for internationalization	Directing and overseeing the university's internationalization strategy. Strengthening the university's global presence. Integrating the university into international higher education networks.
TUD – coordinator of the Erasmus+ program (mobility of individuals)	Securing funds from the European Commission for student and staff mobility. Managing budget and reporting. Coordinating and managing agreements with partner universities (approx. 1600 agreements). Supporting outgoing and incoming mobility of students and staff (approx. 450 students and 100 staff annually).
SU – International Mobility Department	Managing mobility of students and professors from outside the EU under the Erasmus+ program and bilateral agreements. Handling incoming and outgoing students. Coordinating administrative processes.
UvA – training coordinator	Planning and coordinating training. Organizing and monitoring training processes. Connecting teams and ensuring smooth collaboration.
UMCS – Center for International Cooperation	Supporting researchers and PhD students in developing international cooperation. Coordinating research mobility (conferences, internships, queries, projects). Managing foreign trips of university staff. Collaborating with other units (e.g., Erasmus Office) on educational and research projects.
STU – coordinator of the Erasmus+ program at the STU Faculty of Architecture and Design (FAD)	Handling mobility of outgoing and incoming students (Erasmus+). Coordinating short-term mobilities (e.g., Blended Intensive Program). Collaborating with partner universities. Limited handling of mobility for teachers and administrative staff.

In terms of responsibilities, it can be stated that the **vast majority of managers are involved in mobility within the Erasmus+ program**. According to the respondents, most mobility—especially student mobility—is carried out through this program.

> "The ERASMUS program is the largest of its kind at the Technical University of Dresden. It is also the area where most student and staff mobility takes place [...] we're doing a good job here and making good use of the opportunities the program offers. At the moment, demand is so high that we don't have enough human resources to meet all the requirements immediately."
> (TUD – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Programme)

> "Student interest is enormous. [...] Erasmus is not as bureaucratically burdensome compared to other scholarship programs."
> (STU – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Program)

When assessing mobility trends, managers commonly observe that the **number of mobilities is high and increasing**. Understandably, they attribute these changes to the development of university units responsible for the internationalization of education and research.

> "Since the initial implementation of these practices, clear trends and policy improvements have been observed. These include increased participation of students and staff in mobility programs, better cooperation with international institutions, and the establishment of more robust support services for participants. Additionally, there has been noticeable improvement in the internationalization of our curriculum and a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches in education and research."
> (EUBA – Associate Professor, Business and Marketing)

> "...we have a university international office that writes central projects, which allows us to secure Erasmus funding. We've never had to reject students due to a lack of funds, which is quite unusual."
> (STU – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Program)

At universities with highly developed student and academic staff mobility, it is difficult to further grow the number of international trips. However, this is not necessarily the case for administrative staff, who are also integral participants in the mobility ecosystem. This is exactly the situation at TUD. **The growing popularity of training trips among administrative staff** aligns with the idea of lifelong learning:

> "The ERASMUS program has been around for a long time. It was established in 1987, and at TUD since 1992. Over the decades, it has continuously evolved. Staff mobility only gained momentum in the last 15 years. Back in 2008, only about 50 staff mobility projects were carried out under the program. These were mainly mobility projects under partnership agreements or teaching activities. Today, a large number of administrative staff at the Technical University of Dresden also participate in training programs abroad. [...] Lifelong education has really gained momentum. Teacher mobility has not decreased—it remains stable."
> (TUD – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Programme)

Research-related mobility, overseen by the manager at UMCS, has also increased over time. This process is linked to new opportunities for external funding and greater institutional efforts to secure such funding:

> "There are now many more sources of external funding. When I joined the university in 2016, there were maybe five international research projects. Now there are over 30. [...] Our researchers are also less afraid of these projects, partly because we have a specialized center that is growing and providing much more support. I remember in 2016, there were three people in the team including me—now there are six full-time positions. So there will definitely be more international projects, and therefore more opportunities to fund mobility beyond UMCS."
> (UMCS – Center for International Cooperation)

Managers, as individuals who deal with mobility on a daily basis, are well positioned to identify a range of **barriers and challenges** faced by universities and individuals wishing to go abroad. The following issues emerged: financial and organizational limitations, lack of central information points or insufficient information policy; differences in ECTS recognition, high cost of living in destination countries, scheduling issues and limited availability of places, inequalities in access to mobility (e.g., family situation, disability).

According to mobility managers, international mobility can be promoted more effectively through specialized **central university units**, which have become a standard organizational solution at many higher education institutions. However, some of managers mentioned about the **lack of awareness** among academic staff and students about the existence or role of these units.

> "In previous years, it sometimes happened that researchers bypassed the structure entirely, not knowing how the university is organized—for example, going directly to the rector and asking for a signature, skipping us entirely [...] so from our side, it's really a matter of unfamiliarity with procedural pathways."
> (UMCS – Center for International Cooperation)

Another manager emphasized the lack of a centralized source of information:

> "I don't think there's a single place where you can find out what other universities offer. There's a lack of a central network or contact point."
> (UvA – Training Coordinator)

One of the key challenges is effectively matching students and teachers with partner universities that offer the most suitable courses, curricula, internships, or research collaboration opportunities, as a lack of proper alignment may lead to reduced satisfaction with the mobility experience, difficulties in recognizing learning outcomes, or limited impact on professional development.

> "Students who go on exchange often have to extend their studies because what they study abroad isn't recognized in their curriculum. There's a trend [...] to adapt curricula and allow for educational mobility without focusing on specific courses. The goal is to create a so-called mobility window, meaning a semester block worth 30 ECTS credits that represents studies abroad. The learning agreement, which parallels specific courses, would no longer be required. Our students don't have a problem with this, but I know that at other schools, it often happens that a student earns 30 ECTS abroad, but only 12 are recognized at home because the courses differ. For a long time, our faculty has believed that we want students to go abroad and study something different than what they have at home. That's our core philosophy—perhaps even our strength."
> (STU – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Program)

Rigid deadlines for mobility approvals can also be a barrier. Opportunities for better-matched exchanges may be missed because funds have already been allocated or selection committees are not in session:

> "One of the biggest challenges and drawbacks I see in our institution's mobility practices is that the application and selection process only takes place twice a year, which is insufficient to respond quickly to collaboration opportunities offered by foreign universities."
> (EUBA – Associate Professor, Business and Marketing)

Managers who work directly with students noted that **fear of dealing with bureaucratic requirements** can discourage them from going abroad.

> "Erasmus is not as bureaucratically burdensome compared to other scholarship programs. In other schemes, you still need to make phone calls—sometimes with foreign coordinators—and fill out many forms and documents. I see that for some students, this is a huge problem—they're not used to handling such basic organizational matters. It's not a problem if a student doesn't have perfect grades, but I see that they can manage in these situations and communicate. It's important not to get discouraged."
> (STU – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Program)

Managers also pointed to **family and personal circumstances** as important factors influencing willingness to participate in international mobility. A manager from Dresden acknowledged the European Commission's efforts to make mobility programs more accessible to people with diverse needs:

> "For example, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities, as well as students or teachers who may want to go abroad with their children. There are some financial incentives that make this possible. […] But I think there's still a small problem. Take funding for stays abroad with children—I don't think it's enough. […] Before I go, I need to make sure my children are well cared for. I need to know what it's like there, whether my children will feel comfortable. It's not enough to just provide funding."
> (TUD – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Programme)

Cultural factors—such as norms around family life and mobility—can also be significant limitations to international mobility:

> "...we're simply very settled in Lublin [...] and for us, it's not the norm to leave this city. Mobility—like having a job in Warsaw while living in Lublin—is something we're not used to at all. That's standard in the West, but there, it's also because of the system: a postdoc has to be mobile, otherwise they won't get a job. If you want to develop academically, you have to write your own grant. So they're trained to write grants right after their PhD. Otherwise, how would they build their career? There's no other path. For them, it's natural. For us, it's not, because we're still a conservative society attached to family traditions. No one really imagines going to the U.S. for a few years after their PhD—which is usually the time when people start families. That's just how it is."
> (UMCS – Center for International Cooperation)

One of the challenges in accessing international mobility is the **cost of mobility** for students who wish to go to countries where the cost of living is significantly higher:

> "When it comes to practical issues: I see that students going to Western Europe, or to Italy, Spain, Portugal, struggle with high living costs—costs that are not covered by the Erasmus scholarship. I know that some countries can support their students from other sources. Unfortunately, we don't have that. I wish this could be changed. Sadly, it's beyond my power. But it is a form of discrimination against students whose parents cannot afford to finance their stay abroad."
> (STU – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

A significant limitation to student mobility is the presence of **language barriers**. Managers have identified a persistent issue: the insufficient number of courses offered in English. As a result, even at universities that enjoy high levels of outgoing mobility among their own students and staff, the number of incoming students could remain relatively low.

> "The number of incoming students is lower than the number of outgoing students. This is partly due to the language barrier and the limited number of English-taught courses offered at TUD. Of course, TUD is not as much of a magnet as Berlin or Munich. But we are working on it and trying to influence this trend through various promotional activities."
> (TUD – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

The potential for increasing international mobility is assessed very differently across universities. This may stem from the fact that some managers describe mobility management at institutions with Erasmus experience dating back to the 1980s (e.g., Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands), while others refer to universities that joined later, particularly from former socialist countries (e.g., Poland, Slovakia, Germany).

In this context, international mobility is also influenced by academic disciplines. Researchers in fields that require specialized equipment and research methods are more inclined to participate in mobility. Therefore, international travel may be more popular at technical universities and in experimental sciences, where observing and using tools is more critical.

> "...for semester stays, the selection procedure takes place twice a year. Students must apply. There have been some changes in the evaluation criteria, but currently we mainly monitor grade averages, especially in Design Studio subjects (note: the core subject in the Architecture and Design programme), which is the most important criterion. Language proficiency is also monitored. These are the main indicators. Unfortunately, we cannot send all students who apply. Student interest is enormous. But the number of contracts and available spots is limited. There's often a competition for the most prestigious, well-known schools."
> (STU – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

> "Institutes that are more internationalized—mainly in the natural and exact sciences—have the most international projects. For example, international projects in the humanities faculty are rare. This is mainly because researchers in those fields don't need as much funding to conduct their research. The need arises when external funding is required, which is often the case in physics, chemistry—fields that require significant investment in equipment and research tools."
> (UMCS – head of the Center for International Cooperation)

According to managers, the popularity of international mobility depends primarily on **systemic solutions** that make it easier to organize. Therefore, the **digitalization of mobility management** (e.g., e-learning, digital agreements) is a key process. Managers noted that the development of ICT has introduced new forms of mobility based on videoconferencing and remote collaboration tools. **The pandemic** experience was undoubtedly a catalyst for these changes.

> "A major current issue in the Erasmus programme is the pan-European digitalization of the programme. This means we must implement certain digital processes (e.g., digital agreements and learning agreements). However, not all prerequisites are equally met in every country or university. For example, each country has different data protection regulations and varying speeds of digitalization. Human resources also differ. [...] This is currently our main focus—it takes up most of our working time. Implementing these digital requirements is not going as smoothly as the European Commission and universities would like."
> (TUD – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

> "...year by year, we've implemented more digital solutions, which have greatly helped us manage the large number of incoming and outgoing students. We now have IT tools that support us in managing incoming students and all procedures aimed at supporting outgoing students in their mobility."
> (SU – International Mobility Department)

New technologies have enabled the introduction of **new forms of international mobility** (e.g., blended mobility programmes), which—due to their flexibility and relatively lower costs—have increased accessibility.

> "...there is now a new Erasmus option—short-term stays, Blended Intensive Programmes. These are quite popular now. Erasmus also includes internships. Graduates often come from our institution, so for them, it's a kind of springboard into practice. It's mainly student-focused. Teacher and administrative staff mobility is also part of my programme, but it's disproportionately low. I've been in this position for two years."
> (STU – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

"...generally, outside the pandemic period—which was obviously unique and shifted mobility online, leading to the emergence of blended mobility—it's worth remembering that virtual mobility now exists. Outside the pandemic, we usually have over 1,000 such mobilities annually for researchers and PhD students. That's 1,000 individual trips—one person may travel multiple times. For example, if several people go to one place, each is counted individually. So it adds up to over 1,000 per year. [...] Every year, I categorize the purposes of these trips—most often conferences, internships, research visits. These are usually related to grants, but not exclusively."
(UMCS – head of the Center for International Cooperation)

An interesting trend in the landscape of international academic mobility is the growing **specialization** of universities in particular forms and objectives of mobility. Some institutions have developed targeted strategies that focus on specific types of participants:

"What we're observing is a growing emphasis on lifelong learning—some institutions in Europe have specialized in administrative staff mobility. For example, in Romania and Malta, special staff weeks are organized around specific lifelong learning topics (e.g., project management or internal communication). This professionalization of international training offers, along with the diversity of providers, has increased significantly. In the past, this was mainly the domain of universities, but now it's partly outsourced to affiliated institutions or independent organizations."
(TUD – coordinator of the Erasmus+ programme)

Managers, as those responsible for the organizational aspects of international mobility, tend to view international mobility from an **institutional perspective**—one that involves implementing projects, training staff, and signing agreements with partner universities. This top-down approach is clearly reflected in the statement of a manager from IPG:

"I lead and oversee strategies and initiatives that enhance IPG's international presence and activities. This position is key to increasing global engagement and ensuring the effective integration of the university into the international community and higher education networks."
(IPG – Vice President for Internationalization)

When asked about the benefits of international mobility, managers generally mention the same advantages as teachers and students. However, some of them articulate these benefits in more abstract terms, drawing on the **formal terminology of internationalization strategies and policy frameworks**:

> "Mobility practices align with the university's broader internationalization strategy, aimed at fostering global competencies among students and staff. The primary goal is to enrich the educational experience by offering opportunities for academic exchange, cultural immersion, and language acquisition. Facilitating collaboration with international partners through mobility programmes enhances research capacity and promotes knowledge exchange. Mobility practices also focus on the professional development of staff and faculty through training, conferences, and teaching exchanges. They encourage intercultural understanding and appreciation through direct engagement with diverse societies and perspectives. Overall, these determinants shape the objectives of mobility practices at our university, aiming to cultivate well-rounded global citizens and contribute to academic and cultural enrichment both locally and internationally."
> (EUBA – Associate Professor, Business and Marketing)

> "There are significant links between mobility practices, such as those facilitated through the Erasmus programme, and the enhancement of creativity and innovation: exposure to diverse perspectives, development of soft skills, collaborative networks, inspiration from new environments, and academic and professional growth. These practices benefit not only the participants but also increase the overall innovative potential of the institutions involved."
> (IPG – Vice President for Internationalization)

Managers who work more closely with students or are involved in teaching often support their views with concrete observations of student development. They note positive changes such as increased motivation, resilience, and self-reliance, which may lead to greater initiative—for example, in applying for further international opportunities:

> “You can really see it in international students. They learn differently, they have a different perspective. For example, in the ‘Sustainable Recycling Society’ programme I lead, the diversity of students significantly enhances the quality of discussions and creativity.”
> (UvA – Training Coordinator)

> “There are students who may not be the top of their class, but the experience abroad can motivate them. They encounter different approaches and leadership styles that may suit them better. This can be a turning point in their careers. Over the years, I’ve observed this change—life resilience, essential life skills. Mobility is very effective in this regard. When students go abroad, they face a different language, customs, and administrative procedures. For example, they have to arrange their own accommodation. These are situations that help develop skills and a more responsible approach to life. And also confidence: despite all the complications, it’s a relatively safe way to grow, as both sending and receiving institutions are involved.”
> (STU – Coordinator of the Erasmus+ Programme)

Only one manager illustrated the positive effects of mobility through the lens of her personal experience. With extensive international experience, she pointed to a concrete institutional solution she adopted after a mobility stay:

> “In my view, every mobility, especially international, strengthens creativity—because you’re exposed to different experiences and see how things function elsewhere. For example, during my major mobility—an internship at the University of Münster—I observed how their administrative structure works. It’s a comprehensive university, but organized differently. One of the ideas I brought back was the concept of a Welcome Center, which we have since implemented at our university.”
> (UMCS – Center for International Cooperation)

Summary & Recommendations

The study was conducted as part of the CT.Uni project and involved three groups: academic teachers, students, and university managers. Its aim was to understand how international mobility influences creativity, innovation, and the personal development of participants.

Teachers emphasized that international experiences transform their approach to teaching, fostering flexibility, empathy, and the adoption of new pedagogical methods. Students viewed mobility as a intensive and transformative experience that enhances independence, openness, and intercultural competence which confirms the results of other studies (Zapotoczna, 2021: 225; Paige et al., 2009). Managers, on the other hand, focused on organizational aspects, internationalization strategies, and systemic barriers such as bureaucracy, lack of centralized information points, and financial constraints.

All respondents agreed that mobility supports creativity, innovation, and the development of soft skills—although each group approached these issues from a different perspective.

The table presents a comparison of the three groups involved in the study—academic teachers, students, and university managers—in terms of their goals, benefits, challenges, perceptions of creativity, and communication styles. Its purpose is to highlight both the differences and the commonalities in their approaches to international mobility, providing a deeper understanding of each group's needs and motivations.

Aspect	Academic Teachers	Students	University Managers
Purpose of Mobility	Development of teaching, research, international collaboration	Personal growth, cultural exposure, new educational experiences	Implementation of internationalization strategy, management of mobility programmes
Benefits	New teaching methods, inspiration, networking, career development	Independence, self-confidence, new friendships, change of perspective	Increase in mobility numbers, institutional development, improved service quality
Challenges	Lack of time, difficulty implementing changes after return, lack of equipment	Language barrier, adaptation stress, low quality of courses at some universities	Bureaucracy, lack of resources, unequal access, absence of central information points
Perception of Creativity	Result of intercultural interactions and reflection on teaching	Result of the need to adapt and collaborate in diverse teams	Result of diversity and exposure to new educational environments
Communication Style	Reflective, based on teaching and research experience	Emotional, personal, often enthusiastic	Formal, strategic, based on the language of programmes and policies

Based on a non-representative study conducted among individuals with international mobility experience, we have formulated a set of recommendations for universities and members of the academic community who are considering going abroad but may feel hesitant or unconvinced.

Recommendations for Universities

- Expand the offer of English-taught courses to attract more international students.
- Make the recognition of learning outcomes more flexible, e.g., by introducing "mobility windows" understood as "... a period of time reserved for international student mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a study programme" (Ferencz, Hauschildt, Garam, 2013).
- Strengthen organizational and informational support—create centralized mobility information points.
- Develop administrative staff mobility as part of a lifelong learning strategy.
- Invest in the digitalization of mobility processes (e.g., e-agreements, management platforms).
- Increase financial support for students going to countries with a higher cost of living.

Recommendations for Teachers, Students and Managers

- For teachers: Treat mobility as an opportunity for both teaching and research development. Implement new methods and share your experience with your team.
- For students: Don't be afraid of challenges—mobility is a chance to discover yourself, gain new skills, and broaden your horizons.
- For managers: Support mobility not only as an administrative duty but as a tool for institutional development. Listen to participants' needs and respond with flexibility.

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Appendix

Interview guide Teachers

- Can you tell me what your job is about? (Info: this is the way to ask about the position and responsibilities of a teacher).
- Are you familiar with mobility practices offered at your institution?
- What was your experience with mobility?
- Have you benefited in any way as a result of using mobility programs? What were the benefits (or disadvantages)?
- Do you think there are any links between mobility practices and creativity/innovation, etc.? (If so, what are they?)
- Can you describe any specific changes in your pedagogical methods or student interactions that resulted from your mobility experiences?

Appendix

Interview guide Students

- Can you tell me what your field of study is?
- Are you familiar with mobility practices offered at your university?
- What was your experience with mobility?
- Have you benefited in any way as a result of using mobility programs? What were the benefits (or disadvantages)?
- Do you think there are any links between mobility practices and creativity/innovation, etc.? (If so, what are they?)
- Do you think you have changed as a student (or changed the way you study, acquire knowledge, work, etc.) as a result of your mobility experience? (In what ways?)
- Do you think this (change) will impact your future?

Appendix

Interview guide University Managers

- Can you tell me what your job is about? (Info: this is the way to ask about the position and responsibilities of a manager).
- Can you provide an overview of the mobility practices at your institution?
- Do you know how many years have these practices been in operation?
- Since the initial implementation of these practices, have you identified any trends or policy improvements?
- Are there any challenges for mobility practices at your institution (or in your country)? What are they?
- What are the determinants and objectives of mobility practices at your university?
- Are there any links between mobility practices and creativity/innovation, etc.? (If so, what are they?)
- Are you familiar with STEAM?
- If so, do you know any examples of interdisciplinary collaborations or mobility projects that incorporate elements of STEAM?