

65 YEARS OF
THE EUROPEAN
CULTURAL
FOUNDATION STORIES
OF
(1954-2019)

EUROPE

ERASMUS: GENESIS OF A PROGRAMME (SINCE 1973)

LORE GABLIER 2019

ERASMUS is undoubtedly one of the most famous European programmes, and many would say even one of the most successful innovations in recent European history. Few people, however, know that its name not only refers to the Dutch humanist, who for many represents a key figure in European culture, but that it is at the same time an acronym for European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. Similarly, only few people know the complete genealogy of ERASMUS, which is more complex than the story told in official history books and can actually be traced back long before the official launch of the programme in 1987.

Although education had surfaced as a recurring topic in European discussions and notably within the European Cultural Foundation, for instance with Fred Polak's future plans * [p.224], Frits Philips' suggestions for mobility * [p.088] and Raghavan N. Iyer's admonitions at the Congress in Brussels * [p.092], things only really started falling into place for European education in 1973. That year, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, marking the first in a series of enlargements leading up to 2013, when Croatia became the European Union's newest member.

In 1973, Raymond Georis was appointed Secretary General of the European Cultural Foundation, after serving as Director of the Plan Europe 2000 * [p.135] project 'Educating Man for the 21st Century' for six years. 1973 also

* FOUNDING FOUNDATIONS
WHO'S AFRAID OF CULTURE?
* EDUCATION & THE ELITE

WHO'S IN CHARGE?
DEMOCRACY & SUSTAINABILITY
* MOBILITY & MIGRATION

WHERE IS ELSEWHERE?
EUROPE & ANXIETY
IMAGINARIES OF THE FUTURE

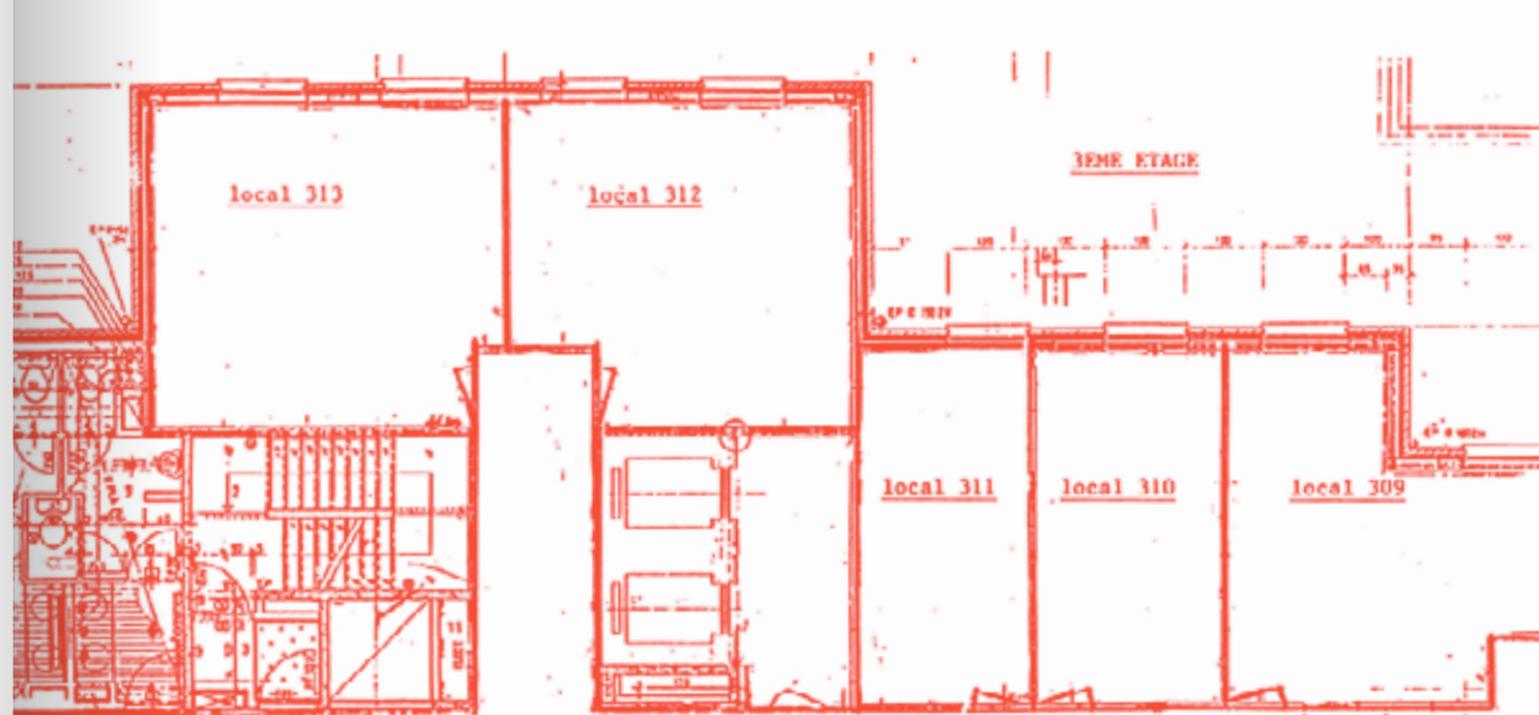
marked the creation of a department for education and youth policy within the European Commission, headed at the time by Ralf Dahrendorf, also Chairman of the Foundation's German national committee. The direction of the new department was entrusted to Hywel Ceri Jones, who brought to Brussels the idea of integrated study abroad in other academic fields than foreign languages – a landmark feature of the University of Sussex where he had previously worked.

It was in their new respective roles that Jones and Georis met for the first time that very same year of 1973, at the request of the former, who was then seeking collaboration with the European Cultural Foundation. Meanwhile, Ladislav Čerych – an expert on higher education policy and former senior staff member at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – had accepted Georis' invitation to join the Foundation's team in Amsterdam. Together, they were discussing the establishment of an Institute of Education in Paris, which opened its doors two years later, in 1975, under Čerych's leadership. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Commission of the European Communities had a very limited mandate in educational affairs, which until today has remained primarily a national responsibility. Nonetheless, a first Action Programme was adopted in the mid-1970s to boost European cooperation in this field and the Commission was keen to launch the pilot initiatives foreseen at European level in close cooperation with suitably qualified organisations.

The European Cultural Foundation's new institute, led by Čerych in Paris, proved to be a potential partner whose independence and expertise – notably acquired thanks to the research on education developed as part of Plan Europe 2000 * [p.135] and a landmark study conducted by the institute on strategies for study abroad in Europe – would be key. With the financial support of the Commission, two pilot projects for inter-university cooperation and student mobility – the Joint Study Programmes (JSP) and Short Study Visits schemes – were initiated in the different member countries starting in 1976. The organisation and execution of these projects were entrusted to the European Cultural Foundation, via its Institute of Education, initially in



View of the first building that housed the ERASMUS Bureau, on Rue d'Arlon in Brussels.



Blueprint of the third floor of the ERASMUS offices, Rue Montoyer in Brussels, the largest building to house ERASMUS under the Foundation's administration.

Paris and then from 1980 via its Brussels office. From May 1982, this was called the Office for Cooperation in Education (OCE).

Between 1976 and 1986, over 500 universities worked together in the framework of the Joint Study Programmes, exchanging staff and building the necessary trust for student exchanges, which were also initiated, albeit on a modest scale, during the 'JSP' Scheme. As acknowledged by everyone centrally involved in its later development, the immediate success of ERASMUS was due in no small measure to these first ten years of experience. After the official launch of ERASMUS in 1987, the European Cultural Foundation continued to be closely involved in its implementation and development. The responsibility for the central operations office of the programme, the 'ERASMUS Bureau', was entrusted to the Foundation until 1995.

This was not the European Cultural Foundation's only contribution to the development of EU-sponsored cooperation in the education field. For a decade and a half up to the mid-1990s, the Foundation also provided the framework for the Brussels-based European Unit of EURYDICE, the Education Information Network of the European Community, led by Luce Pépin. And when the Iron Curtain was finally lifted, it was the European Cooperation Fund (forerunner of the European Foundations Centre and today's Network of Foundations – NEF) initiated by the Foundation which was given the task of assisting the Commission in the launch and implementation of the EU's vitally important TEMPUS programme for the support of higher education cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe led by Lesley Wilson. Together, these years of close collaboration with the European Commission constitute an innovative and highly productive example of public-private partnership at European level in the area of education.

But the story of ERASMUS would not be complete without taking a look back at the context in which it was launched. As leader of the European Cultural Foundation's team responsible for running the Joint Study Programmes scheme and director of the ERASMUS Bureau during the first five years of the programme, Alan Smith was one of the key figures in this ERASMUS story.

In an address delivered at the Schuman Student Congress in The Hague in 2018 (of which we reproduce an excerpt in the following pages), he emphasised that ERAS-

MUS was born at a time when Europe was facing economic stagnation and widespread 'eurosclerosis'. In this situation, the French socialist and new Commission President Jacques Delors seized the opportunity to reinforce the single market as a strategy to bring the Union together. But of course, Europe could not just be an economic project. A cultural dimension to it was also key. Somehow, ERASMUS served both purposes. On the one hand, it was instrumental in preparing a new elite that would enhance the single market. On the other hand, by enabling a much larger number of citizens – and especially young people – to cross national borders, it would help promote mutual understanding, the acceptance of diversity as a resource rather than a threat, and thereby contribute to the emergence of a united and truly European society.

MESSAGES FROM ERASMUS FOR EUROPEAN STRATEGY

ALAN SMITH
2018

ERASMUS was born at a time when Europe was emerging from crisis: Mrs. Thatcher's call "I want my money back" had been putting a brake on progress with integration in many areas; a period of economic stagnation had befallen several Member States; and 'Euro-sclerosis' had characterised the situation at European level for years.

The key factor in overcoming this, once the British problem had been solved, was Jacques Delors' strategy for com-

pleting the Single Market in a specific time-frame, which caused a strong surge in European negotiations and had an amazing galvanising and re-motivation effect on the European institutions' staff. Every department wanted to be in on the act – education included, and rightly so! But people don't fall in love with a Single Market. It was clearly recognised that alongside the bold step forward in the economic sphere, what was needed was also an equally bold strategy to encour-

age people to identify more with Europe. The Citizens' Europe idea was born, and ERASMUS was its centrepiece.

That was no coincidence, because ERASMUS fulfilled both requirements: it addressed the economic goal, by contributing to the production of the European 'human resources' (to use that rather dehumanised expression) which the Single Market would need in order to fulfil its potential, but at the same time it was the ideal agent for encouraging

people everywhere to become actively involved in Europe and to experience its benefits at first hand.

To digress for a moment, there is by the way a strong parallel with Robert Schuman here: While on the one hand he placed coal mining and steel production – the basic commodities for war as well as peaceful development and thus the most basic national interests – at the heart of the Europe he wanted to build, he recognised at the same time that this would not be enough. Europe, he said, “cannot and must not remain an economic and technical enterprise: it needs a soul.” Jean Monnet even went a step further and is quoted as saying that if he had to do it again he would start with culture. I think he would have been wrong. It is precisely by placing the essential national economic interests – at that time coal and steel – at the heart of the European project that it became possible to overcome the false dichotomy between national and European interest.

In my view this double approach – ensuring that the European strategy for overcoming problems is also in the best national interest (and not just for some countries but for all), while at the same time promoting direct citizen involvement in Europe – is the only one that will lead to the long-term viability of the Union.

The *outcomes* of ERASMUS also have a strong tale to tell in the broader European story book. There are many and I will not enumerate them in detail: for the students, the improvement in their professional prospects but also their personal enrichment and development; for the universities, more and stronger international links, spin-off effects on research collaboration, a more stimulating campus, more professionalised international services; for industry and national governments, a pool of young and dynamic professionals trained in and with a European perspective; and for the European Union, all of these benefits combined plus the contribution ERASMUS makes to the emergence of a truly European society. That is not just an empty piece of rhetoric: the participants in ERASMUS are proven to have a far higher than average incidence of life partners from a different country than their own, and the Commission’s statisticians have calculated that at least one million ‘ERASMUS

babies’ have resulted from the programme. That is what I call a very tangible outcome of European cooperation!

The point in this enumeration is not to vaunt the success of ERASMUS, but rather to point out that all the stakeholders in ERASMUS are seeing positive outcomes from the programme from their point of view, and are therefore keen to continue backing it further. That is an important message for the design of future European programmes.

Conclusions for the future

I would like to leave you with some parting thoughts concerning the future, and what the ERASMUS experience tells us in this regard. There are two thoughts in particular that I would like to share with you.

The first is that – fine though it is to support the mobility of students – that is not nearly an ambitious enough goal. Higher education is a sector with a strong tradition of international cooperation, and the people involved in it, staff and students alike, certainly tend to be more pro-European than the populace as a whole. We need to extend the benefits of ERASMUS to the whole of the education and training sector on a really large scale (to schools, to vocational training, to adult education), to give a major boost to youth and sport activities at the European level, and to launch new programmes enabling the population at large to get involved. The Citizens’ Europe, the building of partnerships and friendships in civil society across national borders, needs to become a reality rather than just a slogan. The cost would still be microscopic compared with the EU’s large spending sectors, and every euro invested in it will bring far higher social, political and also economic dividends in terms of the enhanced sense of identification with Europe I have been talking about.

The second conclusion for the future is that this is an agenda not just for the current ‘powers-that-be’ but also and in particular a rallying call for the younger generation, especially students. To put it bluntly, it is up to you to fight for your common future. When French President Emmanuel Macron sought a symbolic stage for delivering his speech setting out his vision for Europe, he chose the Sorbonne. That is not a coincidence.



‘ERASMUS: What’s that?’ Student enquirers keep ERASMUS Bureau staff busy at the Salon de l’Etudiant in Brussels soon after the programme’s launch.

All hands on deck at the Office for Cooperation (OCE): Jean-François Lahou (left), Guy Van Overstraeten (centre) and a student helper hard at work on the preparations for the Brussels Conference in late 1985, which preceded the launch of the European Commission’s proposal for the ERASMUS Programme.

