



Internationalisation
in Higher Education
for Society

>>> The Erasmus experience in secondary schools (IES)

#IHES project

I confess, I have been on an Erasmus experience (and I would do it again)

University students give presentations to secondary-school pupils about the Erasmus experience and other university-student mobility programmes. They visit classrooms in secondary schools, particularly where the Erasmus students involved in this activity used to study. It is one hour per session and the project took place in the academic year 2021-2022. It was organised by the OFES-URV Student Office, section of promotion, students and admission and the I-Center Section for Mobility (out/mentors). The project team handed out participation certificates for the Erasmus students.

1 WHAT IS THE GOAL OR REASON FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT?

IHES project directly addresses 2 SDGs: SDG4 Quality education and SDG10 Reduced inequalities. The direct impacts are clearly defined:

- Greater future demand for mobility places during higher education.
- Improved internationalising synergies between different levels of the educational system.
- Possible extension of the activity to university open days.

Furthermore, the goals are different for the actor and the target group. For the actors, the project tries to give young people an understanding of individual international experiences, and to transmit the experience of international mobility and spread it in the social and cultural environment of secondary-school pupils. For the pupils, the aim is to improve cultural and geographical knowledge, i.e. local information, to overcome fears and break down geographical and cultural barriers, and to encourage self-confidence.

2 WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES?

The target group are students from the first year of higher secondary education or from the last year of secondary education. Both groups were selected because they were in the age group of 14-16 years old and next they were supposed to decide if they want to follow their studies in the higher education. This slot can relate to a situation where one can plant the seed of internationalisation.

It was initially decided not to involve the last year of higher secondary education because it is a very stressful academic year with a short academic calendar arranged in order to prepare for the exams to access a university.



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WHO ARE YOUR PARTNERS AT YOUR UNIVERSITY?

The actor group are the last year URV's outgoing Erasmus and MOU students who were interested in explaining and sharing their experience abroad with young people at their own secondary schools, if possible.

From the URV' International Centre we launched a call followed by an on-line selection process including an application form, motivation letter and self-made short video. All of these provided the IHES' URV team with the tools to assess the students and make a selection with the aim that students were able to communicate, in a positive way, their international experience friendly and easily.

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HOW CAN YOU REALISE SUCH ACTIVITIES?

After speaking with the IHES Olomuc Lab about activities related to their flourishing UPOL secondary school experience, and with our highly satisfactory collaboration with schools within the Smile project, the URV felt inspired to look for new ways to interact more deeply with secondary schools while adding the internationalization factor.

With the Catalonia IHES lab coordinator we met with student's office (OFES) technical officers who work directly with secondary schools. Together we talked about what could be the smart and smooth options to develop with secondary schools in the framework of IHES. Finally, it was decided, during the IHES training sessions at the URV on July 21, when the participants created, nurtured and compiled the future IHES lab activities, taking them further and being capable of putting the viable ones into practice.

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WHAT ARE THE MOST RELEVANT ENABLERS OF THIS PROJECT AND HOW DID YOU CONVINC THEM TO PARTICIPATE?

There are two enablers. On one hand, our own university colleagues, and on the other hand, the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya. In this case, the URV' student service (OFES) was our key service because it works directly with higher schools, bringing URV to the secondary education. OFES acted as a valid representative of the URV and became our best 'calling card' to reach the regional secondary schools. The Education Department of the region was always a very proactive agent and encouraged us to use our own network of contacts. They gave us a direct support and provided advise to all direction bodies with the secondary school network. In both cases we only needed to explain the idea and to encourage them to find how to strengthen and stretch the internationalisation university experience to the schools. And it worked from the beginning. They embraced the proposal, bringing added values and competitiveness to the very final activity.



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WHAT WERE THE MAIN OBSTACLES YOU ENCOUNTERED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

A key issue is to raise awareness among primary and secondary school pupils related to international experiences and opportunities connected with local university students.

It was easy to find students interested in sharing their experience, but it was necessary to encourage them to do the presentation in person because it was quite complex to match timetables between schools and students.

The key of the issue was to match this experience presentation, so each party had to do their best to be flexible.

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WHAT WERE THE KEY "DO'S AND DON'T'S" THAT YOU LEARNED WHILE SETTING UP AND RUNNING THIS PROJECT?

Do's:

- Establish the role for everyone
- Try to follow the plan
- Be realistic with timelines and agenda
- Trust in your colleagues
- Do not ignore different situations
- Track progress
- Share information

Don't's:

- Ignore cultural and social differences
- Take your eye off the scope
- Forget to recognise the efforts
- Make assumptions and not to ask
- Forget to listen
- Ignore bad news
- Do not burn bridges
- Underestimate anything during the activity development