

Session: Building bridges between Erasmus Students and local communities

Aim of session: 1) HEIs have a better understanding of why volunteering during Erasmus Exchanges are important, 2) HEIs get better understanding and interest of the project SocialErasmus, 3) HEIs have a frame of reference on what can be done in their institutions, 4) HEIs feed into the results of the SocialErasmus project.

Material needed: PowerPoint presentation, red and green sheets of paper.

Time of session: 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Description of session: This session focuses on the SocialErasmus project, run by the Erasmus Student Network. The project aims at overcoming the gap between international students and their local communities, by encouraging the students to do local volunteering. The arguably best example of local volunteering is through school workshops, or “Erasmus in Schools”.

The facilitator introduces the project SocialErasmus. See the PowerPoint presentation. He/she then hands out the green/red sheets of papers to each participant, asking them to raise the green paper when they agree with a statement and the red ones if they disagree. He/she then reads out the following statements:

- How many of you have heard of the concept of SocialErasmus before?
- How many work on SocialErasmus and Erasmus in School activities?
- How many of you do activities in curriculum where volunteering is involved?
- Do you believe it is important for students to engage in volunteering/activities during their studies

Additional question: We see there is a lot of green in the room, is there someone who would like to introduce something that you do in your University? This is followed by a few personal testimonies from participants.

The participants split up into groups with 5-6 participants in each and discuss why/if it is important for universities to engage in these types of activities. They are asked to identify arguments in favour/against.

The facilitator then walks around the room and asks the participants to summarise the arguments. Answers typically center around the following:

- Community service learning
- Integration
- Internationalization
- Non-formal learning
- Learning outcomes.

Next, the participants are asked to reflect on the situation in their own universities and to what extent it is feasible to promote these kinds of activities there. They are asked to individually identify opportunities and threats:

Opportunities:

- What types of framework can be done? How could you fit this in your universities?
- What type of framework could you envision in your universities?
- What type of recognition would be possible?

Threats:

- What are possible bottlenecks are you expecting?

Finally, the participants move into the first groups of 5-6 participants, in which they are asked to present one solution and one drawback. The next group can then add a new problem/solution.

The facilitator then summarises and wraps it up, and tell the participants where they can find more information about what has been discussed.

Other notes: More information about the project can be found at <https://esn.org/socialerasmus>.

More useful information about community engagement for students can be found at this page: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-through-community-engagement/>. It is useful to share this with the participants, if possible before the session starts, so that they have a chance to read up on the concept in advance.