

EU's Erasmus ICM Policy: A Global Diffusion of Practices in Higher Education

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Introduction

- Higher education systems are deeply ingrained in the nation and function at both local and global scales. Switching between multiple scales can create advantageous conditions. Universities and scholars leverage their worldwide recognition and resources to strengthen their position at both the national and local levels, and vice versa. (Marginson, 2024).
- Universities' worldwide efforts to create space seemed to align well with national political and policy objectives (Marginson, 2024).
- Ideological trends, political tensions, and shifts in the balance of power in the world all have an impact on higher education institutions and systems (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023).
- Global diffusion of practices in higher education can be perceived as a power relation dominated by powerful parties (Marginson, 2022).
- The field of geopolitics is perceived as either **promoting or impeding the process** of internationalizing higher education (Oleksiyyenko, 2023)

Introduction

- The crucial part played by the EU in preserving world wealth and peace through bolstering bilateral and multilateral alliances and advocating for **democracy, human rights, and the rule of law on a worldwide scale** (Ferreira-Pereira & Mourato Pinto, 2021).
- The autonomous application of **EU soft power instruments**, like the Erasmus+ Programme, has allowed higher education to create its own dynamic (Ferreira-Pereira & Mourato Pinto, 2021).
- Erasmus International Credit Mobility (ICM) initiated in 2014 may be one of the implications of such a geopolitical diffusion of practices!
- The EU Commission allocates around 200m euros for ICM to Erasmus program countries annually in the new period, which aims to cooperate and conduct mobilities with non-Erasmus program countries.

Introduction

- EU Commission sets specific geo-political priorities and uses a geographical grouping scale that divides them into 14 groups (Erasmus Program Guide, 2024).

Third countries not associated to the Programme

Western Balkans (Region 1) Albania, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Kosovo²⁶, Montenegro

Neighbourhood East (Region 2) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Territory of **Ukraine** as recognised by international law

South-Mediterranean countries (Region 3) Algeria, Egypt, Israel²⁸, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, **Palestine**, Syria³⁰, Tunisia

Region 5 Asia a) Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Laos, **Malaysia**, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam b) High income countries and territories³²: Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan, Republic of Korea, Macao, Singapore and Taiwan

Region 9 Sub-Saharan Africa: **South Africa**,

Region 10 Latin America : Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, **Chile**, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela

Aim & Method

The study aims to comprehend how universities in non-EU partner countries perceive Erasmus ICM and how power is balanced within the cooperation process.



Six international office staff/faculty members from six countries involved in Erasmus ICM in **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Malaysia, South Africa, Chile, and Palestine** have been interviewed through semi-structured questions.

Analysis

Four main themes:

- **Current Situation & Knowledge** about Erasmus ICM Policy
- **Rationale** to take part in Erasmus ICM
- **Relationship** with EU partners (coordinators)
- **Perceived impact** of the Erasmus ICM program

P1- Participant 1

Participant Countries

BH: Bosnia Herzegovina

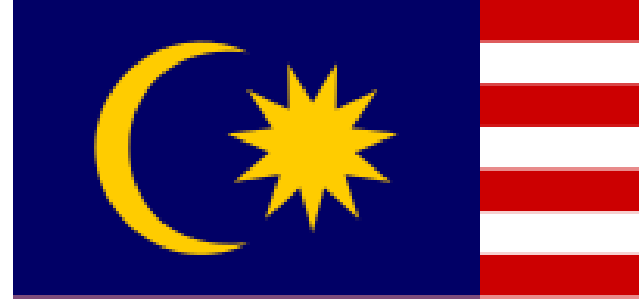
M: Malaysia

P: Palestine

U: Ukraine

SA: South Africa

C: Chile



Current Situation & Knowledge

'First of all, it is **funded**, they have been secured' (P1-B&H)

'Have partnerships except Scandinavian countries, except Sweden, except Finland. **Netherlands, Belgium looks** and they are not interested in having partnerships with us because. **For some reason, I mean they they did not want to.**(P1-B&H)

'Erasmus has **different topics for different** regions...they focus for example on renewable energy or something like that (P2-M)

'In this Erasmus credit mobility, there are some regional priorities for some regions, for some specific countries, and also now there are also some **specific priorities for Ukraine because of the war**' (P3-U)

'During these two years that we have the war on our territory, we have more and more academic mobility support for our students and staff. And thanks to this opportunity, our **students stay safe.**' (P3-U)

'I knew nothing about it until we were approached by our partner'(P5-SA)

'At first, it was all related to agreements, so we were just trying to sign this agreement ...Our idea is not to lose scholar tips, so we are always monitoring these **scholarships.** (P6-C)

Current Situation & Knowledge

Participants are more interested in micro-level rather than macro-level policy of the EU / Erasmus Programme.

-Geopolitical reflection

As P1-BH states, some countries do not want to set up partnerships 'for some reason'. Marginson's (2024) argument of 'the influence of nativism' can be the reason for that situation. In the Netherlands, both public figures and universities have advocated for a limit on the number of students arriving from other countries. Similarly, in Denmark in 2021, concerns about local-national sentiments led to a decrease in the number of students (Marginson, 2024)

-Insufficient knowledge

-Funding/scholarship opportunity

Rationale

'It means everything now . we are making a **marketing campaign** ...we are promoting the university.' (P1-BH)

'And in general working on **internationalization**, expanding the overall picture, I mean of the university in a global sense, it is, it is recognized through the **core documents of the university**. This is all defined in our strategic plan' (P1-BH)

'the reason is basically that our university would like to be **well known**.' (P2-M)

'our students have to be in **safe conditions**...So we try to organize academic mobility as more as European countries could give us the places the main priority now.' (P3-U)

'our institution sees the Erasmus Plus progress for staff and students **as the first part of another project**.' (P3-U)

'we are **looking for anything** to support our students and the staff.' (P4-P)

'I don't know if you have the a similar style of **of performance management** and and targets in your institution, but with us one of the things that we are encouraged to do is the quality assurance process' (P5-SA)

'Well, to be honest, I think that the **scholarships**. So I mean that that's the main reason. I mean it's very important for us to have this, this agreement because sometimes it's the only way that our students can go abroad, our staff.' (P6-C)

'Our university also wants to globalize everything and they they want to be involved in this in this case. In these areas, sometimes we don't have the money to do it. So I would say that they 100% support this' (P6-C)

Rationale

- Strategic plan
- Marketing
- Performance indicators
- International Reputation
- Internationalization
- Funding

- First step of the next move

- A safe place
- Anything to support students

Neoliberal governance and management viewed higher education as a competitive market where institutions were treated as businesses. Education and research were considered quasi-commodities, and academic labor became focused on performance (2024b)

Student mobility, scientific collaboration, and university partnerships are all examples of cross-border relationships that can enrich global and international practices (Marginson, 2022).

‘the current geopolitical environment include events and processes such as global pandemics, political movements, and territorial conflict’ (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023).

Relationship

'I personally **do not believe** that we are like **underestimated** or anything like that.' (P1-BH)

'we are not complaining. We are just maybe looking to things that can be improved. But since we also are trying to understand that. **Not everything is also in our hands** .' (P1-BH)

'they are **cutting the budget**, they are not, let's say, flying, or paying for stuff.' (P1-BH)

'it depends on what subject or what field we are talking about the some field the the may affect the process because for example engineering we have some credit we need to follow... it depends on the division' (P2-M)

'You see that our situation is not typical... in such case, we only have outcoming mobility, not incoming. **we are thankful** for this opportunity. ... safe conditions for our students and staff.' (P3-U)

'...satisfied with this at all because these documents **force managers** to make their decision.' (P4-P)

'If you know in Palestine that we **can't travel from Palestine to any country directly**, we have to go to Jordan, then to go to any country. So it is about **the travel budget**. For us, it is nothing.' (P4-P)

'I would not go so far as to call it an imbalance. I think generally the way this is set up is very symmetrical. It's very mutual.' (P5-SA)

'Think that we can receive **a little bit of money that we can**, but we have signed some agreements with that and we have tried to sign like they send us another document to sign and say like yeah we're going to give you money, but it hasn't happened.' (P6-C)

Relationship

Balanced:

‘symmetrical’ (P5)

‘documentation/standards’

Imbalanced :

Negative

‘cutting/insufficient budget’ (P1,P4,P6), ‘local implications’ (P2),

Positive

‘outgoing instead of incoming’ (P3)

‘in higher education and research, cross-border activity can be configured to benefit all the parties, provided that relations are conducted on the basis of equality of respect’ (Marginson, 2018)

*‘A principal aspect of the flat global science network...building universities and science capacity in emerging countries, in a win-win framework, a powerful example of **the common good norms of equality, solidarity and the broad building of human agency**’ (Marginson, 2018)*

Perceived Impact

‘Enhance the **academic reputation**. **This** means collaboration with an internationally recognized institution... In general, can contribute to the internationalization of education.’ (P1-BH)

‘It has an **impact at the national level as well**, yeah. Because they also measured it for our university. How? How many collaborations with international partners?’ (P2-M)

‘I am not sure if I can talk about this or not because of our exceptional situation. We as Palestinians are keen to participate in these international programs to be part of the international institutions and to deliver our message to the world’ (P4-P)

‘South African institutions having this interaction and this relationship with institutions in the global North and you know far away from Africa is going to be beneficial to us. There’s lots of mutual learning.’ (P5-SA)

‘Exchanges enrich our university community because they expose students to a variety of cultures. They cultivate communication skills and cultural awareness. Which are essential for today’s for our today **international marketplace** and also.’ (P6-C)

Perceived Impact

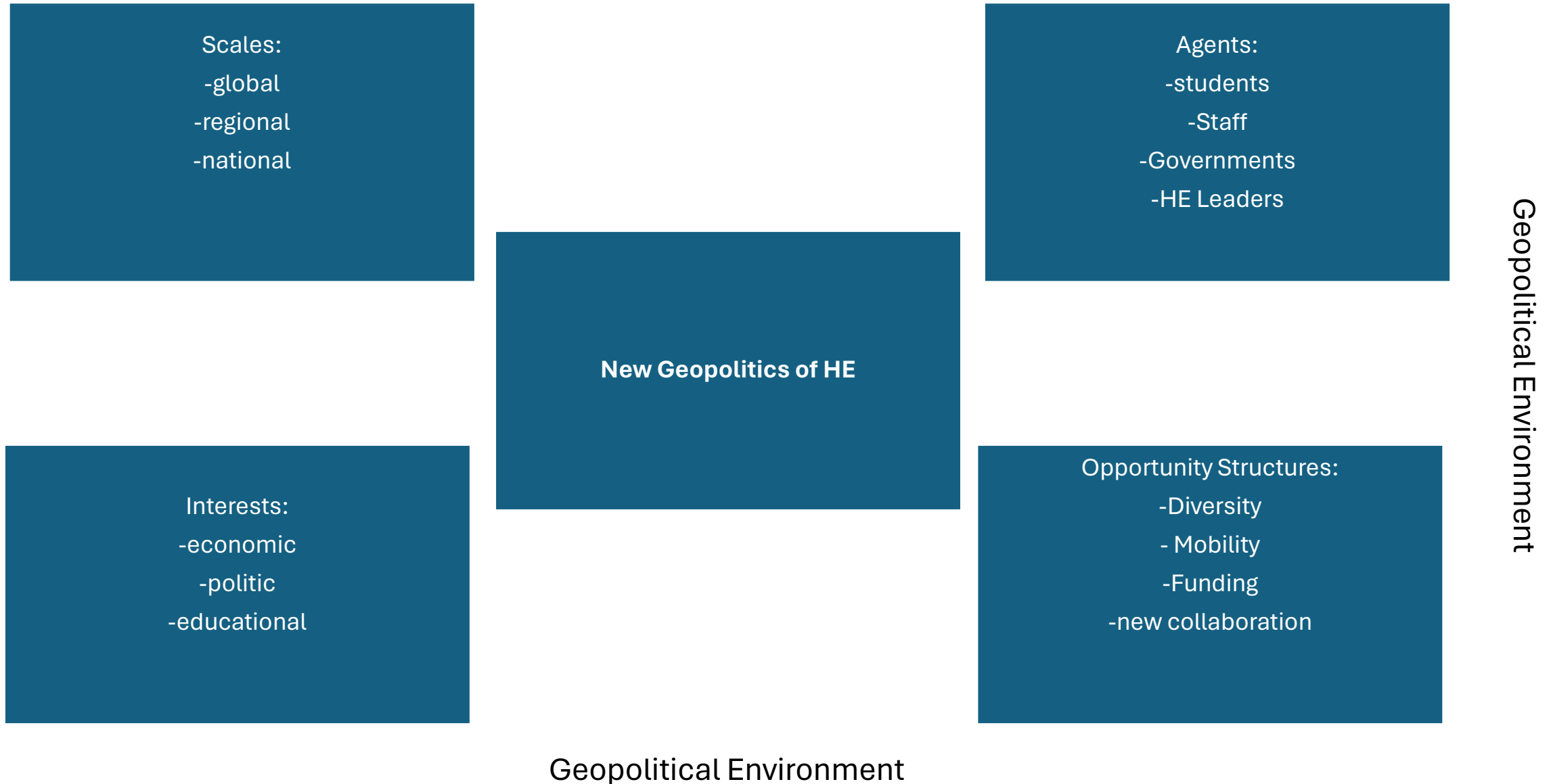
- Internationalization
- Reputation
- Performance
- International market place

- National Identity
- Cultural diversity

Both rulers and people have adopted the rhetoric of the knowledge-based economy and incorporated it into their own political projects, which are focused on the state and nationalism. This has resulted in the development of distinct geopolitical affinities and subjectivities (Koch, 2014)

Now geo-politics threatens to undermine the autonomy of science, lock it into national silos, weaken or fragment the global system (Marginson, 2024b)

SAIOS FRAMEWORK (Moscowitz&Sabzaliava, 2023)



Conclusions

- Participants lack interest in the macro-level policies of the European Union.
- The primary motivations for engaging in the program are predominantly of an external nature.
- The process of Erasmus ICM implications is characterized by a power imbalance.
- The perceived impact encompasses both neo-liberal rhetoric and national concerns.
- Territorial conflicts redefine the role of geopolitics in higher education.

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