



A Counselling Model for the Promoting Career Development of Erasmus Mobility Participants

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author IAJ designed the study, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author VD managed the analyses of the study and the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is the elaboration and expert assessment of a counselling model to develop and support the careers of Erasmus mobility participants. EU funded student mobility programmes significantly contribute to the development of a European identity for young people, however, the link between learning mobility and career has been little explored as yet. This paper is written as a research paper. The field study was conducted at the University of Latvia. This is the first study in Latvia that explores the application and pertinence of career counselling in Erasmus student mobility.

The lessons learned through the study of available support for Erasmus mobility participants confirm that students require career counselling to:

- consciously choose mobility as a career development initiative, raising the return on investment of time and resources,
- be able to submit more convincing applications to potential placement providers,
- better recognize and articulate the experience and knowledge acquired during the mobility

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experience and effectively reflect these to potential traineeship, scholarships or employment providers, or when applying for their next education program. The counselling model created for the development and support of the careers of Erasmus mobility participants elaborated within this paper can serve as an instrument for the evaluation and improvement of career guidance services.

Keywords: Career counseling; learning mobility; counselling model.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literary Review

European funded student mobility programmes have been in existence since 1987 with the objective of strengthening the European identity, thus promoting solidarity among European citizens [1]. In the context of the global economic crisis and the unprecedented high rate of youth unemployment in Europe, the European Commission emphasizes mobility as a factor promoting the careers of students [2]. However, the link between mobility and career has not been studied extensively [3].

In Latvia student mobility as such has not attracted the interest of researchers, rather it has been studied as an aspect of internationalisation within higher education [4,5]. In the rest of Europe student mobility has been studied in some detail, with attention focussing on:

- Mobility support needs [6-9];
- Psychological support [10-13] or examining specific aspects of Erasmus mobility for students in various fields:
 - Nursing [14-17];
 - Economics [18,19] and engineering [20].

Studies also reflect the experience of various countries in organizing mobility activities [21-29]. Research is generally focussed more on the academic benefits of mobility or on the academic readiness of students for mobility. Until now, only one study has examined the role of career counselling for the support of student mobility [30].

1.2 Historical Context

While there is evidence of student mobility from the beginnings of university development in Europe [31], in contemporary Europe, university student mobility is not motivated solely by personal aims of the individual. Since the late 1980's considerable changes in economic, social

and political structures of many countries which can altogether be termed globalisation have created a general wave of migration, with the majority of migrants being women [32]. As a response to globalization, during this time period the European Community launched its first student mobility programme with the objective of creating a "European identity" among students [1].

In June 1987 the European Community established the Erasmus programme for the support of student mobility. In the initial stages of the programme there were only 11 participating countries, nevertheless in the first year of activity 3,244 students had already participated in study mobility. The Erasmus programme throughout its existence has undergone several reorganizations. In 1995 the Erasmus student mobility programme was merged with the education development programme Socrates. This led to increased cooperation among higher education providers and allowed for staff mobility and various other projects [33]. In 2007 with the aim to increase cooperation among the academic, vocational and adult education sectors, as well as to optimize administrative costs of European education programmes in the face of economic crisis, the education programmes for the different sectors were merged into one unified Lifelong Learning Programme for the EU planning period 2007-2013. During the next wave of optimisation in 2013, the EU Education and Culture Committee took the decision to merge the Lifelong Learning programme with international education programmes Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Edulink, Alfa and Bilateral programmes as well as with the Youth in Action programme for the new programming period 2014-2020, thereby establishing a single integrated Erasmus+ programme with three main lines of support: Learning Mobility for Individuals, Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices and Support for Policy Reform [34]. What may come as a surprise is the fact that through all these iterations of European education programmes, career guidance has not been included as a theme pertinent to the support of university

student mobility in decisions establishing the programme.

1.3 Career Theories within the Context of Erasmus Mobility

As noted by the United Kingdom's National Guidance Research Forum, a career practitioner's practice will always display the career guidance theories the practitioner subscribes to, regardless of whether the practitioner recognizes the impact of theory on his or her work or not [35].

In analyzing the career aspects of Erasmus mobility, one can observe P. Blau's and K. Roberts' Opportunity theory [36- 38] in action – those young people who come from socioeconomically advantaged families with a higher education background are more often represented among Erasmus student mobility participants [2]. However, as stated by S. Puukari [30], the links between mobility and career are as yet little researched – in most cases students receive support for adaptation to culture, academic environment and study methods, but not for the conscious inclusion of mobility in one's career plan.

The opinion expressed by respondents to the Erasmus Impact Study's survey [2] that the mobility experience they have undergone is related to career, although the initial choice of their mobility activity may not have directly and consciously been related to career planning, coincides with M. Savickas' Career construction theory [39], where an individual having specific professional interests and personal psychosocial adaptation strategies tends to interpret life events, giving them a coherent meaning, thereby creating their career story or narrative.

The authors find that S. Fukuyama's (C. Фукуяма) theory of vocational guidance [39,41] is useful when developing career guidance initiatives for supporting Erasmus student mobility. The theory emphasizes the ability to choose work that matches the individual's needs and interests, goals and physical capacity. A significant aspect is the enjoyment of work. According to S. Fukuyama, individuals make rational choices based on self-assessment, knowledge about occupations and work trials. Research on the choices that students make regarding mobility indicates that, without the benefit of career guidance, students base their choices more on emotional categories [8,7].

Without career guidance, the elements of conscious choice put forward by S. Fukuyama (self-knowledge of individual characteristics, knowledge about occupational characteristics, assessment of relevance of individual characteristics to occupational requirements, practical experience in contact with various occupations) remain undiscovered by individuals.

1.4 Research Objective

In order to increase the career impact of Erasmus mobility and the effectiveness of career counselling within this process, research was undertaken to develop a counselling model for promoting and supporting the career development of Erasmus mobility participants.

2. METHODOLOGY

The model was developed in 2015 within the framework of master's degree studies in the field of education at the Latvian University of Agriculture. The field study took place at the University of Latvia (LU) which was selected as the largest university in the country with the highest number of Erasmus mobility participants.

The other deciding factor was the existence of a career centre within the structure of LU Student Services (the LUCC). The LUCC has experience unparalleled in Latvia in providing career guidance to university students. LU is the first higher education provider in Latvia to begin offering career services to students following the reinstatement of Latvian independence, and it also avails of the longest standing uninterrupted career guidance experience in the education sector there.

The functions of the LUCC are to support and promote the personal growth of LU students and the employment of its graduates, as well as to provide students with career guidance activities: a counselling system, labour market information, careers education and communication with employers. Their target audience: LU students, graduates, potential students, LU employees and employers.

Field research was done in the form of in-depth partially structured interviews of representatives of the Micro-systems identified in the proposed Mobility counselling model. Responses were classified into categories reflecting the type and timing of provided and perceived mobility support. Within the context of master's studies

this model was also subjected to an expert assessment poll.

Five experts participated in the expert survey of the model. The results of the expert survey were analysed, using the Friedman test. The objective for applying the Friedman test was to see if there was a statistically verifiable correlation among the opinions of the experts surveyed – were they or were they not in agreement concerning the efficacy of the proposed counselling model.

3. RESULTS

Within her assessment of the Latvian career guidance system, I. Jaunzeme [42] concludes that students do not often use career guidance services due to a lack of awareness concerning what the services contain and what are the benefits. If we examine the chart depicting available careers services (Fig. 1), we can see that although a CV database, job vacancies listing, and training placement offers are mentioned, it is not clearly indicated that these services are available within the context of student mobility support.

This is compounded by the fact that the information provided by the International Office and by the majority of Faculty Erasmus coordinators does not refer to assistance available at the university's Career centre. Table 1 contains structured information on the involvement of LU units in arranging Erasmus

mobility and in providing information to mobility participants. Here we see what kind of information and mobility support is provided by the university's International office, faculty Erasmus coordinators, and also how the LUCC is involved.

The section on Erasmus mobility of the LU website does not contain any links to the information provided by the LUCC. However, the LUCC section of the LU website *does* contain links to the Erasmus mobility section. It also contains suggestions for finding training placements abroad and traineeship offers from host partners abroad. However, the links to traineeship offers abroad provided by the LUCC are located within the text without the addition of any images, symbols or graphic elements that could help students better find what they're looking for among the various traineeship offers [43].

3.1 Development of the Model

The model, which was developed based on the extensive experience of the authors through self-reflection, is a synthesis of the theoretical and empirical findings of the research. The framework of the model – the Macro system, Exosystem, Mesosystem and Microsystem and the relationships among these elements are conceptually based on U. Bronfenbrenner's theory of Human Ecological Development [45,46]. *Participants of the Microsystem* are

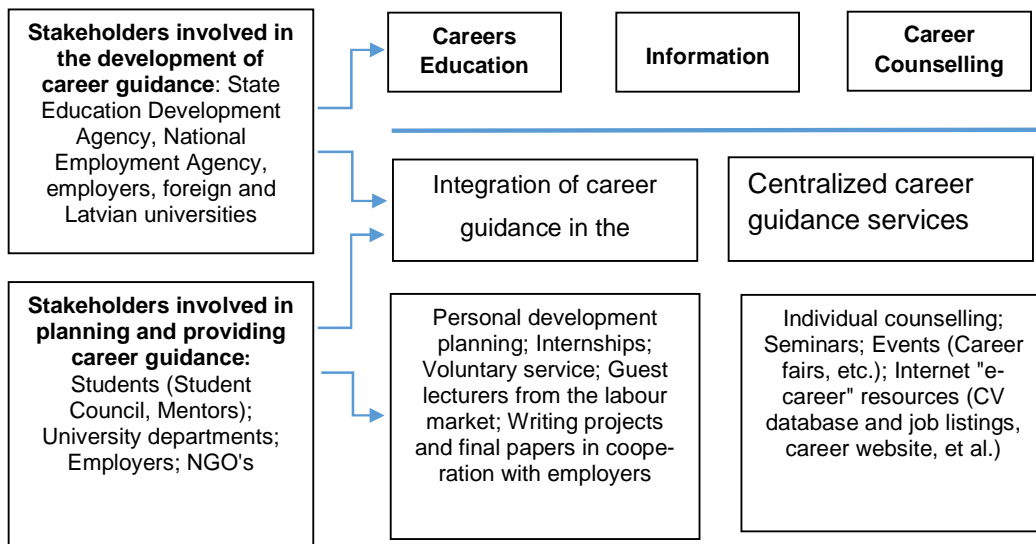


Fig. 1. Career guidance model at the University of Latvia [42]

Table 1. Providers of information on Erasmus mobility at LU

LU unit	Information on Erasmus study mobility	Information on Erasmus placements
International Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General conditions • Financial conditions • Application procedures • Pre-departure activities • Student responsibilities upon arrival at the host university • Procedures for amending the study agreement • Report forms and submission procedures • File of frequently used forms • Recognition of learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General conditions • Financial conditions • Application procedures, general requirements • Pre-departure activities • Trainee duties during the placement • Follow-up of the Erasmus placement • File of frequently used forms
Faculty Erasmus coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application and selection procedures at faculty level • Bilateral agreements with foreign universities • Choice of courses • Signature and amendments of the study agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application and selection procedures at faculty level • Information on host partners abroad for traineeships (if there are any)
Career centre	No specific information on Erasmus study mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on procedures for applying to the Erasmus placement programme • Links to contact details for faculty Erasmus coordinators • Suggestions on finding training placements abroad • Traineeship offers abroad – useful links

(Adapted by the authors from [44])

representatives of the groups which respondents interviewed in the course of this research have named as having a role in providing mobility support (Fig. 2). The Mesosystem refers to interactions among the Microsystems, which can also be called the counselling relationships. The Exosystem is the environment in which the student mobility counselling takes place. The Macrosystem is the broader framework which determines conditions for student mobility within the Erasmus programme. *Student mobility support needs* have been compiled from education theories [4,7,8] and from mobility counselling cases found outside of Latvia [9,11, 47,48]. The *counselling structure* is based on elements taken from the Euroguidance Mobility Advice Handbook specifically the model for guidance before, during and after a stay abroad [34].

3.2 Expert Survey

The objective of the expert survey is to survey the opinions of experienced career counsellors and student mobility promoters concerning the

model developed by the authors and to thereby assess its usefulness. The authors required an external evaluation about the extent the model promotes career development of student mobility participants, whether the macro, exo-, meso- and microsystems proposed within the model represent the mobility counselling context, whether the model includes all stakeholders involved in student mobility counselling, whether the methodology is relevant and sufficient to promote student mobility and whether the methodology is relevant and sufficient to promote student career development. The expert survey for assessing the model developed by the authors was conducted according to the methodology developed by Professor L. Pēks of the Latvia University of Agriculture Institute of Education and Home Economics [49].

In order to conduct the expert survey, a questionnaire was drafted in Latvian in which the experts were asked to assess five statements concerning the mobility counselling model on a scale of five points: completely disagree, partially

disagree, neither agree nor disagree, partially agree, completely agree. Taking into account the very small population of experts in Latvia who have a sufficient knowledge of both career counselling and Erasmus student mobility and potential links between the two, the questionnaire was not piloted by a separate expert group. All five of the experts surveyed have many years of work experience covering international project management, Erasmus student mobility, and career guidance for youth; three of the experts have participated in the "Academia" network for

mobility of European career counsellors and one expert is a EURES network international mobility counsellor [50].

The assessment criteria were evaluated on a five-point scale. In the data table the criteria are represented by the numbers 1-5, with 5 being equivalent to the statement "completely agree" and 1 being equivalent to the statement "completely disagree". In Table 2 the experts are represented by the code "nX", where "1X" refers to expert number 1, and so on.

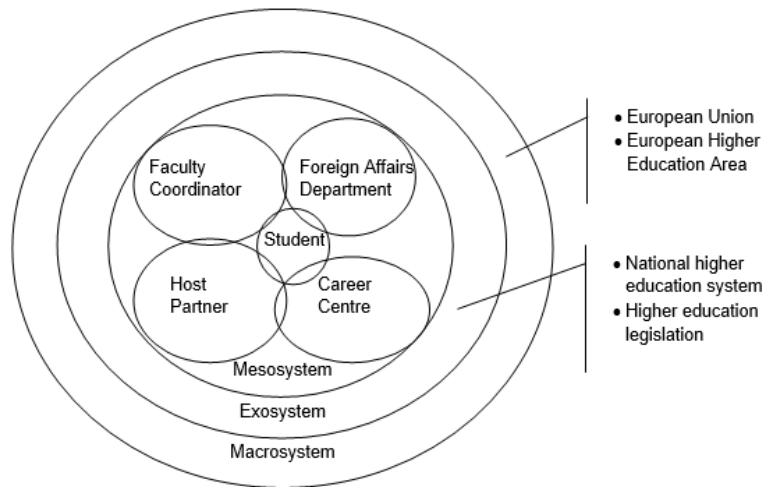


Fig. 2. Mobility counselling ecosystem at LU [51]

Table 2. Assessment criteria

No.	Assessment criteria	1X	2X	3X	4X	5X	Σ	Min	Max	A	Me	Mo
1	The model developed by the authors promotes career development of student mobility participants.	4	5	5	5	5	<u>24</u>	4	5	1	5	5
2	The macro, exo, meso and microsystems proposed within the model represent the student mobility counselling context.	2	5	5	5	5	<u>22</u>	2	5	3	5	5
3	The model includes all stakeholders involved in student mobility counselling.	5	5	5	5	5	<u>25</u>	5	5	0	5	5
4	The methodology is relevant and sufficient to promote student mobility.	5	5	5	5	5	<u>25</u>	5	5	0	5	5
5	The methodology is relevant and sufficient to promote student career development.	5	4	5	5	5	<u>24</u>	4	5	1	5	5
Σ	the sum	<u>21</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>25</u>						
Min	the minimum value	2	4	5	5	5						
Max	the maximum value	5	5	5	5	5						
A	the amplitude	3	1	0	0	0						
Me	median	5	5	5	5	5						
Mo	moda	5	5	5	5	5						

From the sum of the expert assessments (Σ), it can be seen that three out of five experts (experts 3X through 5X) completely agree with all of the evaluation statements. Upon examining the assessments made by expert 1X, it is evident that expert 1X partially agrees with the first evaluation statement and partially disagrees with the second statement, however, expert 1X completely agrees with the remaining statements. An examination of the amplitude (A) of expert 1X's assessments shows that it is the largest among the experts.

The following remarks and suggestions for improvement of the model were received from the experts (the author's comments follow each of the expert suggestions):

- Expert 1.X: *The career counsellor and psychologist at (the university represented by the expert) are not involved in student mobility. In order for the career counsellor to be able to help, she would have to have complete knowledge of the Erasmus programme, the foreign partners and the courses on offer.*

When the expert was informed that in the ideal situation, this level of knowledge would be a feature of cooperation between the career counsellor and the International Affairs Office, the expert did not amend the assessment, expressing doubts that the career counsellor would be interested in obtaining such detailed information on the Erasmus programme.

- Expert 1.X: *In place of "Erasmus student network (ESN)" it might be better to put "students who have already participated in the Erasmus exchange programme", because they are the ones who are best able to help and motivate their peers. The ESN is more for providing support to incoming rather than outgoing students.*

The model was developed, based on the experience of LU and the activities of the ESN at LU. Based on the expert's comment, it can be understood that the role of the ESN may vary, depending on the institution.

- Expert 2.X: *The model promotes the career development of student mobility participants under the condition that students receive information on requirements for applying for mobility and their career development needs are*

assessed sufficiently in advance of the Erasmus application deadline.

The authors are in complete agreement with the expert's remark. It is precisely when students make ill-considered decisions on their participation in mobility, based on some superficial motivation or relying on chance, that students are prevented from acquiring the kind of mobility experience that they would recognize as an organic element of their career development.

- Expert 2.X: *The methodology, in my opinion, does not in itself promote career development. Development is promoted by methods tailored to each student in each individual case.*

This remark reflects the expert's interpretation of the terms "methodology" and "method". In the authors' interpretation, methodology includes methods which, as the expert states, are to be tailored to each student in each individual case.

- In evaluating the statement "The model reflects all stakeholders included in the mobility counselling process" with the assessment "partially agree", Expert 2X recommended that *the students who have already acquired Erasmus experience should be involved as mentors here in Latvia before departure. This is because the foreign partner often paints a rosy picture, but in reality the circumstances may be very modest.*

The initial assessment of "partly agree" was revised to "completely agree" after receiving the explanation that the model already includes the "Erasmus student network". However, the author notes that this is the second case when experts were confused by the term "Erasmus student network".

- Expert 5X: *initially I thought a little about the points 1 and 5 – whether to fully agree, but if prior to the mobility of students, the career counsellor is able to orient them also in the context of the needs of the labour market, then I agree.*

Given that one of the University's career counselling objectives is to help the student find their place in the labour market, it can be assumed that the expert is satisfied, and the assessment of the "completely agree" can remain in force.

Reviewing the expert survey according to the evaluation criteria, it becomes apparent that out of the five statements, all experts agree fully with two statements:

1. The model includes all stakeholders involved in student mobility counselling.
2. The methodology is relevant and sufficient to promote student mobility.

The study put forward the following hypothesis. H_0 : a relationship exists among the various experts' ratings. $(H)_1$: there is no relationship among the different expert evaluations. Expert poll data were processed with the SPSS programme using the Friedman test. The following results were obtained (Table 3).

Table 3. Friedman test, results of the inferential statistics

Indicators	Obtained value
(N)	5
Criterion for Chi-squared ⁻²	2.462
χ (Chi-square)	
Degrees of freedom (df)	4
p-value (Asymp. SIG.)	0.652

Since $\chi^2 = 2.462 < \chi^2_{0.05; 4} = 9.49$, while $p - \text{value} = 0,652 > \alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) can be accepted and it can be concluded that *there is a consensus* among the expert opinions.

Given that two of the experts had doubts about the roles and functions of the *Erasmus Student Network* element of the proposed micro-system, it was decided to rename this item *former Erasmus students* to be unambiguous in wording. In order to include the support role performed by former Erasmus students the model's *methods* section was updated the text *support of former Erasmus students - peer mentoring*. The corrections made within the model is underlined and with bolded. The adjusted model was added to this article (Fig. 3).

Thus, the opinion of experts can be interpreted as supporting that:

- The model promotes student mobility participant career development;
- The macro-, exo- meso-and micro-systems proposed by the model characterize student mobility counselling context;
- The model reflects all the interested parties involved in the process of student mobility counselling;

- The proposed methodology is appropriate and sufficient to promote mobility of students and
- The proposed methodology is appropriate and sufficient to encourage student career development.

4. DISCUSSION

The large majority of current student mobility research does not include career support as an essential support factor [7,2], or does not consider it at all [14-29]. Emphasis is placed on psychological support [10-13] and on cultural adaptation [52-59]. Unlike their foreign counterparts, University of Latvia students rarely use psychological support and even consider themselves ready for mobility, without specific activities for intercultural skills development.

The author I.A. Jansone's seven years of experience, providing information during micro-counselling sessions at the annual national education exhibition "Skola" and also the remote counselling of young people on study opportunities abroad and Erasmus mobility reveals three trends among young people in Latvia:

- young people, when considering their choice of university, want to study abroad, but are not sure about their goals;
- for the vast majority the obstacle to foreign studies is a lack of financial resources and
- with few exceptions, young people are convinced that they will be able to use English to study in Europe.

During the empirical research performed at University of Latvia the observed trends were confirmed, through speaking with students about their experiences and collecting commonly heard complaints from both the students and the support providers. If the experiences of students in other countries demonstrate certain similarities with trends identified in Latvia – they also face the obstacle of insufficient financial resources and they are also confident that will be able to study English, then Latvian students show a more pronounced need for career support in clarifying their career objectives than students in other countries. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that career guidance is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Latvian educational system [42]. However, Finnish researcher S. Puukari recognizes that career aspects of student mobility are little researched [30].

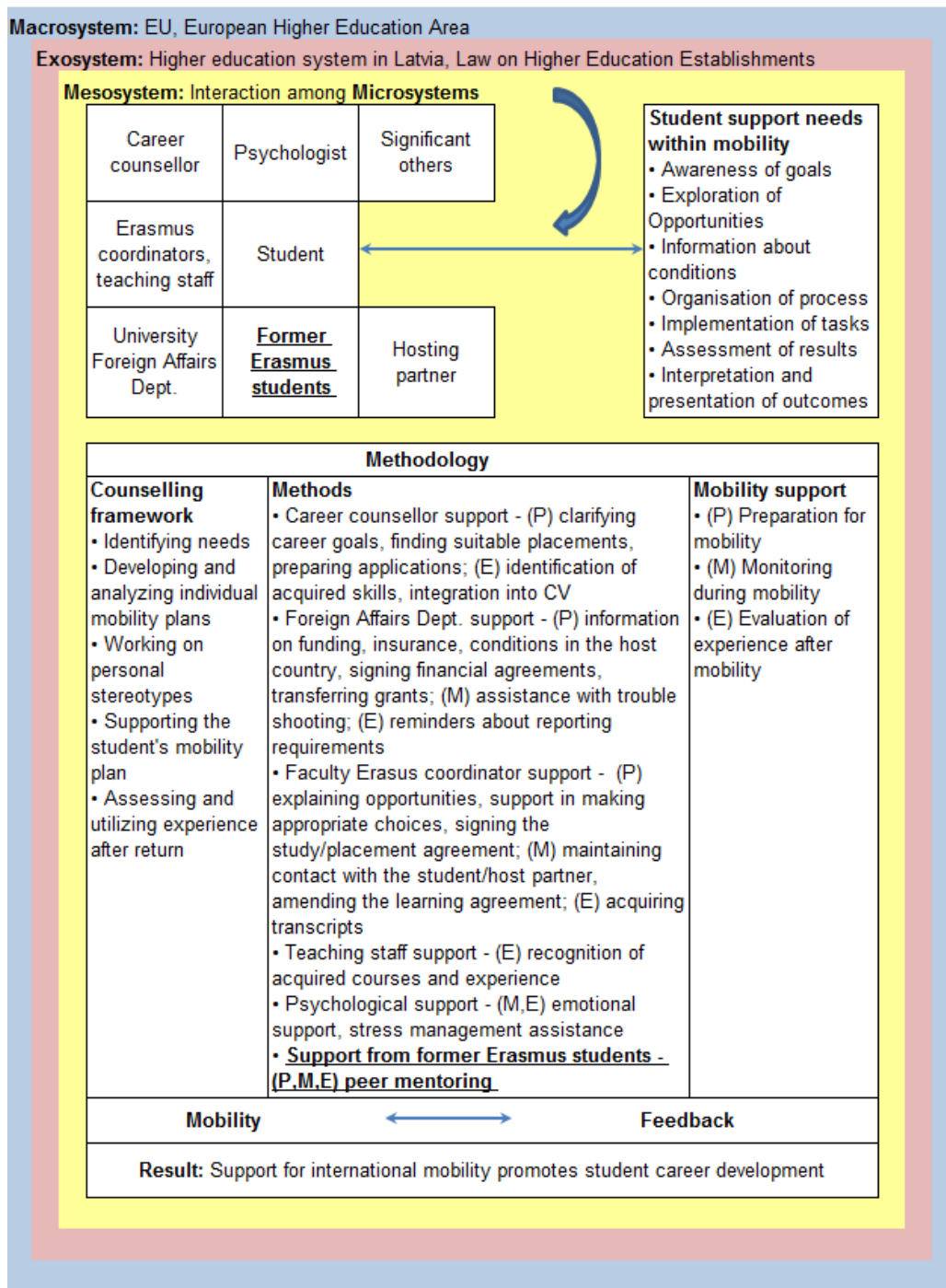


Fig. 3. Counselling model for promoting career development of Erasmus mobility participants

Erasmus mobility activities are available to Bachelor level students from the second year of studies when information on opportunities for mobility is frequently provided. This is based on the premise that first year students have too little experience to be ready for mobility. However,

according to the author's opinion, which coincides well with the comments received during the expert poll, clarification of career goals should happen in sufficient time to enable the choice of mobility to become part of a student's career plans. Students who want to use Erasmus

mobility during their undergraduate studies should, at the latest during their first year at university, determine their career goals and the mobility objectives resulting from them, to be able to prepare properly. Language skills learning, in particular, takes time and information seeking skills needed for mobility would also be useful in the general process of study.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The European Union's original objective for establishing the Erasmus student mobility programme is the development of a European identity; with the creation of the European Higher Education Area and after the global economic crisis, student mobility has become linked to the promotion of employability.

Mobility of students as an aspect of university internationalization has been studied by many authors: D. Blūma [4], A. Rauhvargers [5], B. Bartram [6,7], S. Doyle [8], L.W. Eggens [9], G. Bradley [10], B. Dilek [11], M. Patron [12], N. Stanley & J. Manthorpe [13], I.D. Bravo & R. Camats [21], V. Kerklaan & G. Moreira [22], I. Kougias & L. Seremeti [23], F. Mizikaci [24], R.D. Osborne [25], D.G. Pietro [26], S. Robert [27], B. Rohstock [28], J. Wiers-Jenssen [29], etc. In general, research is focused more on the academic benefits of mobility or on student academic readiness for mobility, but only one author, S. Puukari [30], has examined the role of career guidance for student mobility support. Career guidance researchers in Europe have put forward adaptation within different contexts as the main educational aspect of student mobility, placing emphasis on intercultural counselling.

At the University of Latvia (the Latvian higher education institution with the widest Erasmus student mobility and career guidance experience) cooperation on Erasmus student mobility issues did not take place between the Latvian University Career Centre (LUKC) and university faculties until 2014, possibly due to a lack of information or understanding of LUKC services provided. Information about LUKC services is currently not well integrated within the information on Erasmus student mobility provided by the LU Department of Foreign Affairs.

Student mobility advice in Latvia can be visualized as a human developmental ecosystem where the student interacts with faculty, the Department of Foreign Affairs, foreign partners and the career centre. The interactions are

influenced by the ecosystem in which they occur (the Latvian higher education system) and the macrosystem, which represents the broader context (EU common higher education area).

The lessons learned through the research of available support for Erasmus mobility participants confirm that students require career counselling to:

- Consciously choose mobility as a career development initiative, raising the return on investment of time and resources;
- Be able to submit more convincing applications to potential placement providers and
- Better recognize and articulate the experience and knowledge acquired during the mobility experience and effectively reflect these to potential traineeship, scholarships or employment providers, or when applying for their next education program.

If the career centre is cut off from communication with the rest of student mobility ecosystem, students find it harder to choose appropriate mobility activities to further their career goals and students lack information and support for finding placement opportunities, as well as the ability to reflect skills acquired during mobility in their resume and cover letter. The model developed by the authors of the study allows guidance counsellors to provide scientifically based mobility support in cooperation with other mobility support providers.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

The case of the University of Latvia is not applicable to all Latvian higher education institutions because of an essential condition: not every university in Latvia employs career counsellors [42]. Many universities in other countries are also in this situation. However, the need demonstrated by students for career guidance in the context of mobility support is an additional argument in favour of establishing career counsellor posts at universities.

It would be most welcome if the proposed mobility counselling model could be tested by universities in other countries both in the context of Erasmus+ mobility and other mobility schemes.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Both authors hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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