



**Master of Arts Thesis**  
**Euroculture**

**Uppsala University**  
**Palacký University**  
**August 2023**

**Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the  
Future among Euroculture Students**

**A Study on Super-Mobility in the Context of the European Higher Education Area**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carolina Reyes'.



## **MA Programme Euroculture**

### **Declaration**

I, Carolina Reyes Chávez, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future among Euroculture Students. A Study on Super-Mobility in the Context of the European Higher Education Area”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g., ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand how super-mobility affects EMJM students' experiences. This is done by exploring the experiences of Euroculture students, by answering the following research question: Are there differences to find between the reflections on the experiences of Euroculture mobile and super-mobile students, in terms of Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future? In order to answer the research question, in-depth interviews are conducted. For the analysis, the author applies three concepts, one taken from the methodology for the development of the European Higher Education Area, and two that she proposes based on the existing literature on super-mobility in education. The results show that there are significant differences in how students within the same programme get to experience it in relation to the mobility component. They also show both the positive and the more problematic effects that super-mobility has on the students' development in several dimensions.

Keywords: super-mobility; competences; mobility perception; perspective on the future; Euroculture; Erasmus Mundus.

Word count: 24079

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## Introduction

Student mobility in the EU has been seen by the educational policy as a means of knowledge transfer and building of capacities.<sup>1</sup> In the context of pursuing a knowledge-based economy, the EU institutions seem to assume that mobility *per se* leads to a series of positive consequences for the student's development. For the European Commission, studying abroad will foster independence, resilience, autonomy, linguistics ability, intercultural skill, and interest in professional mobility – characteristics thought of as advantages in the labour market.<sup>2</sup> Within the Erasmus+ Programme, mobility is directly linked to the “excellence of European higher education”,<sup>3</sup> and at an individual level, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes (EMJM) are expected to improve the students' employability, key competences, and networking and communication capacities, as well as to “Forge new mind-sets and approaches to academic studies through international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral and intercultural experience; (and) Increase the individual contribution to the knowledge-based economy and society.”<sup>4</sup>

This vision gets supported and encouraged by massive funding which keeps increasing. In 2022, Erasmus +, the programme on “mobility, cooperation in education, training, youth and sport” celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps as part of the celebration, the budget allocated to it

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, ‘7. Student Mobility and the Changing Nature of Education’, in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 136–59.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, ‘4. Mobility Within Mainland Europe’, in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 69–93.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, ‘Erasmus Mundus Action’, Erasmus +. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, accessed 14 March 2023, 1 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/65>.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 6.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, ‘It All Starts Here: 35 Years of Erasmus+’, accessed 1 August 2023, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/35-years-of-erasmus>.



increased to 26 billion euros for the period 2021-2027.<sup>6</sup> The programme's Key Action number 1: Learning mobility of individuals, received the largest budget share: 49%.<sup>7</sup>

The EU's discourse that assumes that education and training are better the more people learn to move, has led to the emergence of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM), a unique kind of programme that places mobility "at the heart of the learning experience."<sup>8</sup> This has implied the development, during the last two decades, of a new type of institutionalised mobility "involving stays in two, three or even four different destinations during the course of a two-year study programme, ending with a double, multiple or, ideally, joint degree."<sup>9</sup>

The EMJM are growing in popularity. In 2021, more than 170 programmes have been available in the Erasmus Mundus catalogue,<sup>10</sup> and approximately 250 EMJM have received EU funding in the last 7 years.<sup>11</sup> In 2021, 70 new programmes applied for funding.<sup>12</sup> The reports on the EMJM don't show figures of how many students have participated in these programmes, yet, it has been recorded that, for them, mobility tends to be perceived as an end goal in itself, becoming a factor that "redefines the education process as being founded not on the content but rather on the medium".<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, these students have expressed to value informal learning and the acquisition of soft skills provided by super-mobility over the academic content of the

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<sup>6</sup> European Commission, Sport Directorate-General for Education Youth, and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022), 20, <https://doi.org/doi/10.2766/635340>.

<sup>7</sup> Commission, Directorate-General for Education, and Culture, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule: Erasmus Mundus Students in the European Higher Education Area', *Mobilities* 17, no. 3 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1971053>.

<sup>9</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission and Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022), [doi/10.2766/635340](https://doi.org/doi/10.2766/635340).

<sup>11</sup> European Commission and European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Erasmus+ Programme, Statistical Factsheets on the Achievements of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (2014-2020)* (Publications Office, 2021), [doi/10.2797/639462](https://doi.org/doi/10.2797/639462).

<sup>12</sup> Publications Office of the European Union, 'Erasmus Mundus, Analysis of the Results of the First 2021-2027 Call (Joint Masters and Design Measures): Erasmus+ Programme.', Website (Publications Office of the European Union, 1 August 2022), <http://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b0a996be-1922-11ed-8fa0-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

<sup>13</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', 217.

Master's programme.<sup>14</sup> The EMJM students compose a new, small, "yet emblematic microcosm of a new European transnational higher education space".<sup>15</sup>

Despite the view that characterises mobility as the condition for excellence in education, the implications of such intensive moving have proved not to be always entirely positive for the students. As the academic literature on educational super-mobility has shown, the process can be "fraught with obstacles, particularly in dealing with feelings of anxiety, loneliness and the sheer exhaustion of relocating and maintaining ties in multiple loci, geographically and virtually, as well as dealing with the many institutional and formal barriers."<sup>16</sup> Students themselves have reflected about their EMJM experiences and pointed out the mental, social and physical costs of this kind of programmes,<sup>17</sup> and even early studies on the Internationalisation of Higher education were already critical about the power structures of knowledge, discrimination, and segregation that students abroad might experience.<sup>18</sup> There it is, in sum, possible to see a contrast between the view of mobility that the EU institutions portray, and what in-depth studies focused on students' experiences have found.

Notwithstanding their growing popularity, the EMJM programmes are understudied. The literature on what has been called "super-mobility" in education has started to develop during the present decade, thus the theoretical framework to understand the implications of this new kind of mobility is still under development. Within the EMJM cosmos, Euroculture is a programme with a particular mobility structure: whereas some programmes have a "basic" model in which all the students start at the same university and then move on together to subsequent universities, Euroculture allows students to start at different universities and then mix and match mobility according to their needs.<sup>19</sup> As a result, whereas some students choose to move as much as possible during the programme (up to 4 times in two years), others decide to move only the minimum amount required. This particular mobility structure makes

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<sup>14</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'.

<sup>15</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 218.

<sup>17</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'.

<sup>18</sup> Brooks and Waters, '7. Student Mobility and the Changing Nature of Education'.

<sup>19</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska.

Euroculture a valuable source of information to explore the impact of the super-mobility phenomenon in different dimensions.

The aim of this study is to understand how super-mobility affects EMJM students' experiences. This will be done by exploring the experiences of Euroculture students, by answering the following research question: Are there differences to find between the reflections on the experiences of Euroculture mobile and super-mobile students, in terms of Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future? To reply to his question, two sub-questions will be addressed: What are the main topics students address when reflecting on their mobility experiences during Euroculture?; and How can mobile and super-mobile reflections be understood in relation to Mobility perception, Competences acquisition, and Perspective on the future?

The technique for the collection of the material for this study will be in-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted with 6 Euroculture students about to graduate when interviewed. The concepts used to analysed the material have been taken from the methodology for the development of the Higher Education Area, and from the existing literature on super-mobility in education.

Being a Euroculture student myself, I've been able to experience both the positive and the more problematic aspects of super-mobility. Hence, the interest in studying this topic. The purpose of conducting this research is not to discard super-mobility's positive impacts but to nourish the understanding of the phenomenon by retrieving the views of people who already lived it, in the hope of acknowledging super-mobility's positive impacts while also helping to detect areas of improvement.

The thesis will be structured as follows:

In Chapter 1, the programme Euroculture and its particular mobility scheme will be introduced. Chapter 2 will be a synthetic exploration of how the super-mobility phenomenon in education has been addressed by the academic literature so far. In Chapter 3 I will present the concepts that will be used to analyse the Euroculture students' experiences, followed by Chapter 4, in which the method used for collecting material and analysis will be explained in detail. This chapter includes a reflection concerning the ethical and methodological challenges that interviewing my classmates involved.

The results of the interviews will be presented in In Chapter 5, in order to answer the research sub-question number one. A qualitative content analysis will be done to process the information obtained through the interviews. This will be followed by the analysis of such material in Chapter 6, conducted through a operationalisation of the chosen concepts. The results of the analysis will be discussed in Chapter 7, followed by reflections on the theoretical and methodological choices made for this study. The thesis concludes with a suggestion of approaches for further research.

## Chapter 1. Euroculture and its distinct mobility scheme

This chapter aims to present Euroculture and its mobility structure, in order to understand the context in which the students' experiences of this study take place. This programme, as well as the rest of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) is a result of the reform of European Higher Education, also known as the Bologna process,<sup>20</sup> within which mobility is one of the main priorities.<sup>21</sup> The evolution of the Bologna Process and the importance it confers to mobility have been extensively addressed by previous Euroculture thesis,<sup>22</sup> and thus will not be developed here. In the following, the programme Euroculture will be described.

The Master of Arts Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context, is the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master that will be the focus of the present research. It's a two-year Master's programme offered by a consortium of eight European universities and four partner universities outside of Europe, located in Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Sweden, Japan, India, Mexico, and the United States.

Concerning the academic content, Euroculture "builds on interdisciplinarity, mobility, and diversity, which it regards to be its main academic strongpoints."<sup>23</sup> The interdisciplinary curricula focused on European studies is designed so that the students acquire during the first semester "understanding of the political, legal, cultural, historical, religious, and economic foundations of a united Europe"<sup>24</sup>, as well as methodological and theoretical training through

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<sup>20</sup> Glory Kubicek, 'Cultural Communication: From Inner Thoughts to Dialogue' (Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts, 2021), 19, [https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel\\_bibtex](https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel_bibtex).

<sup>21</sup> Béline Yaëlle Hermet, 'Multilingualism, Plurilingualism and Language Acquisition: Case Study of the Erasmus Mundus Master in Euroculture' (Sweden, Uppsala University, 2019), <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-394156>.

<sup>22</sup> Faikha Fairuz Firdausi, 'The Constrained Privilege: Will the Tickets Go Full-Fledged? : A Study on Mobility Policies for Non-EU Students within EMJMD Programs' (Uppsala and Krakow, Uppsala University and Jagiellonian University, 2022), <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-487141>; Hermet, 'Multilingualism, Plurilingualism and Language Acquisition'; Kubicek, 'Cultural Communication'.

<sup>23</sup> Marek Neuman and Senka Neuman Stanivuković, 'Teaching European Studies in Times of Complexity: The Case of Euroculture', in *European Studies and Europe: Twenty Years of Euroculture*, ed. Janny de Jong et al. (Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2020), 181.

<sup>24</sup> Neuman and Neuman Stanivuković, 181.

research seminars whose content varies across the universities during the second semester. During the third semester students are expected to develop professional or research skills, for which they can choose between conducting an internship or following additional research training at one of the participating universities, including the ones outside Europe. The fourth semester is devoted to writing the MA thesis.<sup>25</sup>

This structure already allows to see part of how the Euroculture mobility scheme is built. According to Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska's categorisation<sup>26</sup>, this MA programme follows a star model in which "students start at different universities and then mix and match mobility according to their needs."<sup>27</sup> In other words, students choose where to start the programme amongst the participant European universities. For the second semester, they must go to a second university within the consortium, which they are free to choose as well. The third semester is when students choose between following a professional or a research track. Opting for the former, they apply to an internship and move for five months to the country they got a placement in. European students are allowed to get an internship wherever in the world, whereas non-Europeans must remain in Europe. Choosing the research track, students can go to one of the universities of the consortium to follow additional research training. European students are allowed to apply to one of the partner universities in Japan, Mexico, India or the US, whereas non-European students apply only to the European universities. Finally, for the fourth semester, students can choose between going back to their first or second university to write the MA thesis. This model has been labelled as "the most complex and institutionally challenging arrangement (where) student groups are reconstituted throughout the programme in different institutions – as their complex social networks"<sup>28</sup>. In sum, students can tailor their mobility paths according to their preferences. As a result, there is no such thing as a standard mobility path amongst Euroculture students.

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<sup>25</sup> Neuman and Neuman Stanivuković, 'Teaching European Studies in Times of Complexity: The Case of Euroculture'.

<sup>26</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213–23.

<sup>27</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 215.

<sup>28</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 215.

The size of the groups Euroculture students form part of every semester is not standard either. The last published report<sup>29</sup> shows that the number of enrollments per cohort has varied between 80 to 100 through the years, giving as a result groups of no more than 25 students per university each semester. However, being placed according to their preferences, the number of students per university each semester can be unevenly distributed.

Euroculture has been catalogued as an extremely diverse programme in terms of students' disciplinary and cultural backgrounds.<sup>30</sup> According to the Alumni report from 2019, amongst the 462 students enrolled between 2011 and 2016 it's possible to find 56 different nationalities. Being an interdisciplinary programme the students' academic backgrounds present a big diversity as well, including disciplines such as Cultural studies, History, International Relations, European or American Studies, Philosophy, Social Science and Religious Studies, among others.<sup>31</sup>

Euroculture's very free mobility scheme, as well as the choices students make within it, allows the methodological differentiation between mobile and super-mobile students which is one of the cornerstones and points of departure of this research. The differentiation and its implications will be explained in detail in Chapter 4, concerning the methodological considerations. The rich cultural and disciplinary diversity that characterizes the programme's composition will have a determinant impact on the students' experiences. This fact will be addressed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, concerning results, analysis and discussion.

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<sup>29</sup> Elze Wiertz, *Euroculture Alumni Research Report* (University of Groningen, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Wiertz.

<sup>31</sup> Wiertz.

## Chapter 2. Academic literature on educational-super-mobility

The aim of this chapter is to delve into the ways in which super-mobility has been problematised within the academic field. Since the EMJM are very recent programmes, thus little research has been conducted on them, and the opportunities for understanding educational super-mobility are vast and yet to explore. In order to do so, it's necessary to understand the origin of the concept of super-mobility and how it has been applied to the field of international student mobility, specifically in the European context. That will be done in the following.

### Studies from the 2000s and 2010s

#### Student mobility experiences in the European context

The phenomenon of European student mobility is not old. In consequence, the research that has been conducted about it, especially the one addressing the phenomenon from a qualitative approach, is recent. Murphy-Lejeune's work from 2002 might be the first study on "student migration" within Europe, in which the author builds on Simel's concept of Stranger to propose a conceptual framework to analyse different dimensions in the European students' experiences.

Murphy-Lejeune starts by arguing that migration patterns have radically changed in the EU in the last decades, giving place to a novel student migratory context that must be analysed: "Can European students consider themselves as strangers inside Europe or do they promulgate a new way of being in Europe? The new forms of mobility emerging in Europe contribute to new ways of being and thinking about it".<sup>32</sup>

Subsequently, she explains that two broad types of studies have "helped to progress towards a better understanding of European student travellers".<sup>33</sup> The first type are largescale quantitative evaluations, the most complete evaluation of this style the one concerning the Erasmus experiences, surveyed regularly from 1988; and the second type, which "analyses the

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune, *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, Routledge Studies in Anthropology (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Murphy-Lejeune, 41.



experience on the basis of qualitative data, diaries or interviews with students”.<sup>34</sup> Murphy-Lejeune adheres to the latter kind of study, arguing the incentive of “reinstate the user’s voice within a narrative from which individual substance was sometimes missing”.<sup>35</sup> However, she asserts, in this kind of studies data are frequently analysed “without reference to a conceptual background for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena”<sup>36</sup>. Murphy-Lejeune’s framework proposal has been referred often within the academic discussions on educational super-mobility.

Murphy-Lejeune’s call for redeeming the missing users’ voice got attended one decade later in the study “ERASMUS Students between Youth and Adulthood: Analysis of the Biographical Experience”,<sup>37</sup> where Krzaklewska conducted in-depth interviews to explore how students experienced their Erasmus exchange. An element that stands out from this research is the technique used for the data collection. As Krzaklewska stresses, narratives help people to make sense of their past, organise their understanding of the world, and to construct their identity in a certain social context, becoming a tool for self-presentation and for making sense of lived experiences.<sup>38</sup> By revealing the dilemmas students face in their transition to adulthood, and the weight that social structures put on them, Krzaklewska confirmed that a qualitative, in-depth approach can reveal the nuances and details that quantitative studies miss.

### The concept of hypermobility

Today’s concept of educational super-mobility emerged in a different academic context. In 2015, Cohen and Gössling retrieved discussions from several fields, including Cultural geography, Environmental planning, and Leisure studies, in order to explain what they called the “dark side of hypermobility”: through a critical literature review, they juxtaposed what they

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<sup>34</sup> Murphy-Lejeune, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Murphy-Lejeune, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy-Lejeune, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Ewa Krzaklewska, ‘ERASMUS Students between Youth and Adulthood: Analysis of the Biographical Experience’, In: *The ERASMUS Phenomenon – Symbol of a New European Generation?*, With Ben Feyen, Peter Lan, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Krzaklewska.

called a glamorised view of mobility, to its often harmful psychological, physical, emotional and social consequences.<sup>39</sup>

Cohen and Gössling used the term hyper-mobile to refer to an elite of highly mobile individuals with “hypermobile lifestyles, closely but not exclusively linked to the practice of business travel”,<sup>40</sup> and defined glamorization as “the social processes by which something is idealized and made desirable”.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, they argue that in the current liquid modernity, frequent corporeal mobility, moving fast, frequently and freely has become a signifier of social status.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, the authors explore the physiological, psychological and societal consequences of following a hypermobile lifestyle, while underlining the negative consequences glamorized mobility has on the environment. They conclude that whereas the benefits of frequent business and leisure travel are well recognized, its “darker side” remains overlooked,<sup>43</sup> even by the academic literature. Topics addressed by this study have been of capital importance for the development of the academic literature on academic super-mobility.

#### Problematising youth mobility and educational migration

The emergence of various forms of youth mobility in the 2000s and 2010s in Europe gave to a growing corpus of literature in the academic field of youth studies and educational migration. One of the most complete compilations of this trend is *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration*, published in 2021,<sup>44</sup> in which notions such as agency, reflexivity and decision-making are used to understand the phenomenon of international student mobility. Skresfrud’s contribution to the compilation problematises the concept of intercultural learning, arguing that being immersed in a foreign space doesn’t automatically

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<sup>39</sup> Scott A Cohen and Stefan Gössling, ‘A Darker Side of Hypermobility’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 47, no. 8 (2015): 166–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15597124>.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen and Gössling, 1662.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen and Gössling, 1662.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen and Gössling, ‘A Darker Side of Hypermobility’.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen and Gössling, 1669.

<sup>44</sup> David Cairns, *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021).

lead to empathy towards it, and that intercultural skills' advantages should not be taken for granted in the context of student mobility.<sup>45</sup>

### Studies from the present decade: educational super-mobility

One of the first studies analysing Euroculture students' experiences was done by a Euroculture student itself, who wrote the thesis "Cultural Communication: From Inner Thoughts to Dialogue" in 2021.<sup>46</sup> Kubicek used the focus group technique to explore how students in a shared educational experience from diverse cultural backgrounds interact, compare, and share their experiences through conversation. She highlighted the need of exploring the students' experiences from a qualitative approach, and realised the lack of a category to define international students who move several times during the same programme. Furthermore, she concluded that students' experiences are more individualised and personalised than we are normally led to believe: a multiplicity of factors such as family, cultural background, personal goals, personal views, and previous experiences with mobility have an important role in how every student experience and discusses how they lived Euroculture.<sup>47</sup>

In 2021 as well, Czerska-Shaw and Krzalewska articulated one of the first attempts to apply the term hyper-mobility, or super-mobility, to the educational phenomenon of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM).<sup>48</sup> Through focus groups conducted with Euroculture students, they explored the students' experiences in relation to the mobility component of the programme.

Building on Cohen and Gössling's reasoning,<sup>49</sup> they contextualised the EMJM in the context of liquid migration, explaining how that kind of programmes are part of a European mobility imperative. This last one is defined as an institutional discourse that leads young students to

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<sup>45</sup> Thor-André Skrefsrud, 'Why Student Mobility Does Not Automatically Lead to Better Understanding: Reflections on the Concept of Intercultural Learning', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration*, ed. David Cairns (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 63–73, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64235-8\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64235-8_7).

<sup>46</sup> Glory Kubicek, 'Cultural Communication: From Inner Thoughts to Dialogue' (Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts, 2021), [https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel\\_bibtex](https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel_bibtex).

<sup>47</sup> Kubicek.

<sup>48</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213–23.

<sup>49</sup> Cohen and Gössling, 'A Darker Side of Hypermobility'.

chase mobility experiences, as well as making learning through mobility “the undisputed and unique international selling point” of the EMJM.<sup>50</sup>

Czerska-Shaw and Krzalewska defined super-mobile students as follows:

firstly, as one whose educational experience is embedded within mobility, where mobility constitutes the bedrock of the study experience. Secondly, there is anchoring in the consortium of universities itself: mobility takes place within a network wherein additional short duration study trips or intensive programmes organized for participating students further underscore the unified aspect of the course structure. Finally, the mobility itself is an intensive and routinized experience of group mobility to multiple locations within as little as two years.<sup>51</sup>

Then, they problematised how students value informal learning and soft skills acquisition over the academic content of Euroculture. As they explain,

Our results show that institutionalized multiple mobility was the most important reason why the participants of our study chose to partake in an Erasmus Mundus programme. Mobility was not treated as an added value of the programme, but the vector of their experience. This redefines the education process as being founded not on the content but rather on the medium; that is, mobility structures within international consortia.<sup>52</sup>

Their study showcased the obstacles, challenges and costs related to this educative process. As the authors explain, students struggled “particularly in dealing with feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and the sheer exhaustion of relocating and maintaining ties in multiple loci, geographically and virtually, as well as institutional and formal barriers to mobility.”<sup>53</sup>

Czerska-Shaw and Krzalewska’s work is outstanding in the way that highlights several advantages related to the super-mobility experience, mainly related to the acquisition of intercultural competences and non-formal learning, while making evident the multiple physical and psychological costs that come together with the EMJM educative process.

In 2022, the framework to understand educational super-mobility was enhanced.<sup>54</sup> Through focus groups with students from two EMJM programmes, Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska

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<sup>50</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, ‘The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus’, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 4–5.

<sup>52</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, ‘Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule: Erasmus Mundus Students in the European Higher Education Area’, *Mobilities* 17, no. 3 (2022): 432–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1971053>.

went deeper into the research about EMJM students' experiences and focused on the impact of super-mobility on mental health, as well as on the strategies students develop to create a sense of belonging during the two-year, intensive educational experience.

Based on their empirical findings, they proposed the concept of mobility capsule, understood as “both a structure and a particular way of practicing mobility which implies a group experience of being on the go, usually organised within an institutional framework of studies, work or non-formal education programmes.”<sup>55</sup> The elements of this mobility capsule are intensive and constant rush in a condensed period of time, and moving to multiple destinations where the students are enclosed into small groups, often isolated from local populations and other international communities. The mentioned elements are grouped into three categories: speed, routine uprootedness and cosmopolitan social closure, which are subsequently used to analyse how students develop belonging mechanisms.

The belonging mechanisms developed by super-mobile students happen to be anchored in mobility itself,

wherein the rush and routine of movement in itself offers a sense of stability. Place-making is limited to one's personal space and the space of particular districts of the city, and anchoring is further nestled in social ties based in the transnational social space of the international student community.<sup>56</sup>

This combination of intensive dynamics has an enormous impact on students, including normalisation of exhaustion, anxiety, and broader mental-health issues.<sup>57</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska conclude that EMJM programmes take the rush of chasing mobility experiences to a different level, where adrenaline comes together with isolation and social closure. To finalise, they stress how scarce the literature on EMJM programmes is, and call for new frames to describe and explain this novel way of practising educational mobility.

In a different study, published as well in 2022, Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea used the concept of super-mobility to analyse students' trajectories, this time in the broader context of the EU programme Erasmus+.<sup>58</sup> They defined super-mobile trajectories as those of people who

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<sup>55</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 436.

<sup>56</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 443.

<sup>57</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'.

<sup>58</sup> Valentina Cuzzocrea and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion: Understanding Super-Mobility in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00852-6>.

embark in multiple, consecutive educational mobility experiences throughout time, this is, the ones who have completed more than one stay abroad within the Erasmus+program.<sup>59</sup> This is, the definition of super-mobile students in this study differs from the one proposed by Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska: while the latter applied it to describe consecutive mobility within the EMJM programmes,<sup>60</sup> Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea used it to describe repeated mobility experiences within one single, individual educational trajectory.

Differently as well from Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska's, the emphasis of this research is placed on the individual agency and reflexivity people possess, arguing that the self-made, super-mobile subject builds its educational trajectory based on their creativity, adaptability and ambition.<sup>61</sup> They conclude super-mobile students develop spatial reflexivity through time and mobility experiences,

getting familiar with sources, rules, and administration of funding (...) and showing to be increasingly aware of how to use opportunities to give shape to an educational trajectory. In other words, they accumulate mobility capital that constitutes a basis for further geographical movement.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea relate their findings to the notion of the social construction of youth, which implies pressure concerning what young people are socially expected to achieve in a certain timeframe. In this way,

(...) the anticipated time-frame available for educational mobility brings to the fore the ephemeral, evanescent, even fleeting social construction of youth; this is not an ever-lasting phase of life, and some of our respondents who were near to the completion of their educational trajectories started to explore their "final opportunities" for mobility even more fervently.<sup>63</sup>

From Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea's research it's possible to grasp some of the meanings culturally attributed to youth in the European context of the mobility imperative linked to education, derived from the political project of the EU and the "specific vision of the mobile European citizen as a cosmopolitan mobile worker".<sup>64</sup> In other words, the meanings attributed

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<sup>59</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska.

<sup>60</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'.

<sup>61</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion', 2.

<sup>62</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 577.

<sup>63</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 583.

<sup>64</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 572.

to youth in a European context come with certain expectations and social pressure related to moving as much as possible, defining real life and educational trajectories.

In sum, in the last and present decade there has been a development concerning the understanding of the EMJM programmes through the exploration of the students' experiences. The most recent advance is the definition of the concept of "super-mobile" students, as well as a proposal of a theoretical framework to understand super-mobility experiences, yet, the framework is still under development and the possibilities to enhance it are plenty. In the following chapter I'll build on the most recent literature on educational super-mobility, as well as on other sources, to propose three new concepts that might help to understand better the educational super-mobility phenomenon.

## Chapter 3. Analysing super-mobile experiences: Mobility perception, Competences, and Perspective on the future

In this chapter I will present the concepts that will be used to analyse the Euroculture students' experiences. As it was explained in the previous chapter, the existing framework used to analyse super-mobile educational experiences is extremely recent and still under development. I therefore build on three main sources: the existent literature about academic super-mobility,<sup>65</sup> the methodology for the modernization of higher education in Europe<sup>66</sup>, and the educational policy of the European Union<sup>67</sup>, in order to propose three concepts to understand the super-mobility phenomena: Mobility perception, Competences, and Perspective on the future. The concepts will be explained below.

### Mobility perception

Student mobility in the EU has been seen by the educational policy as a means of knowledge transfer and building of capacities.<sup>68</sup> In the context of pursuing a knowledge-based economy, the EU institutions seem to assume that mobility *per se* leads to a series of positive consequences for the student's development. For the European Commission, studying abroad will foster independence, resilience, autonomy, linguistics ability, intercultural skill, and

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<sup>65</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213–23; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'; Valentina Cuzzocrea and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion: Understanding Super-Mobility in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00852-6>.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Wagenaar, 'Reform! Tuning the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning.' (Dissertation, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2019); Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase 1* (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> European Commission, 'Erasmus Mundus Action', Erasmus+. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, accessed 14 March 2023, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/65>.

<sup>68</sup> Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, '7. Student Mobility and the Changing Nature of Education', in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 136–59.



interest in professional mobility – characteristics thought of as advantages in the labour market.<sup>69</sup> Within the Erasmus+ Programme, mobility is directly linked to the “excellence of European higher education”,<sup>70</sup> and at an individual level, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes (EMJM) are expected to:

- Improve the employability of participating students,
- Improve key competences and skills of students;
- Forge new mind-sets and approaches to academic studies through international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral and intercultural experience;
- Enhance networking and communication capacities of the students;
- Increase the individual contribution to the knowledge-based economy and society.<sup>71</sup>
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Regarding the EMJM students themselves, mobility tends to be perceived as an end goal in itself, becoming a factor that “redefines the education process as being founded not on the content but rather on the medium”.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, these students have expressed to value informal learning and the acquisition of soft skills provided by super-mobility over the academic content of the Master’s programme.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, the implications of such intensive mobility can be rather complex, and not always entirely positive for all the students enrolling in EMJM programmes. As the academic literature on educational super-mobility has shown, the process can be “fraught with obstacles, particularly in dealing with feelings of anxiety, loneliness and the sheer exhaustion of relocating and maintaining ties in multiple loci, geographically and virtually, as well as dealing with the many institutional and formal barriers.”<sup>74</sup> Students themselves have reflected about their EMJM experiences and pointed out the mental, social and physical costs of this kind of

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<sup>69</sup> Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, ‘4. Mobility Within Mainland Europe’, in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 69–93.

<sup>70</sup> European Commission, ‘Erasmus Mundus Action’, Erasmus+. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, accessed 14 March 2023, 1 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/65>.

<sup>71</sup> European Commission, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Czerna-Shaw and Krzaklewska, ‘The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus’, 217.

<sup>73</sup> Czerna-Shaw and Krzaklewska, ‘The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus’.

<sup>74</sup> Czerna-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 218.

programmes,<sup>75</sup> and even early studies on the Internationalisation of Higher education were already critical about the power structures of knowledge, discrimination, and segregation that students abroad might experience.<sup>76</sup> There it is, in sum, possible to see a contrast between the image of mobility and super-mobility that the institutions portray, and what in-depth studies focused on students' experiences have found.

One of the aims of the present research is to explore that contrast through the Euroculture students' experiences, for which I'll propose the concept of *mobility perception*. Perception is defined as "An idea, a belief or an image you have as a result of how you see or understand something; the way you notice things, especially with the senses; the ability to understand the true nature of something"<sup>77</sup>. Mobility perception will therefore be understood as the way in which students see and understand mobility after having experienced it, with an emphasis on the difference from how they perceived it in the past.

## Competences

The Euroculture programme was designed according to the TUNING methodology, developed to understand curricula and to make them comparable.<sup>78</sup> This methodology, part of the Bologna Process for the creation of a European Higher Education Area,<sup>79</sup> enables implementing curricula offered jointly by two or more institutions, allowing them to reach the desired outcomes of the programme while respecting each university's academic culture.<sup>80</sup> In order to achieve this, a syllabus based on Learning Outcomes and Competences is of capital importance.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'.

<sup>76</sup> Brooks and Waters, '7. Student Mobility and the Changing Nature of Education'.

<sup>77</sup> 'Perception', Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed 24 July 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/perception?q=perception>.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Wagenaar, 'Euroculture: A Response to an Identified Need', in *European Studies and Europe: Twenty Years of Euroculture*, ed. Janny de Jong et al. (Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2020), 143–61.

<sup>79</sup> 'European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process', accessed 2 June 2023, <https://www.ehea.info/>.

<sup>80</sup> González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase 1*.

<sup>81</sup> There are other crucial concepts for the TUNING methodology: The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Student-centered approach of learning. See Wagenaar, 'Reform! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.', 2019.

Wagenaar explains that both concepts of Learning Outcomes and Competences have acquired a central role in the current debate about higher education, and their link to education remains contested,<sup>82</sup> however, the TUNING methodology chose them as its language of communication with stakeholders. According to the TUNING Academy, Learning Outcomes are

a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes indicate the level of competence that is intended and should be achieved. They are in other words the specifications of the results and outcomes of a learning process. [...] Learning outcomes are designed by academic staff, preferably involving student representatives.<sup>83</sup>

While Learning Outcomes have an academic-staff- centered approach, Competences are centered on the student's learning processes and should be understood as a "combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities."<sup>84</sup> The TUNING Academy chose a holistic interpretation of competences,<sup>85</sup> where they

cover the whole spectrum of capabilities from pure theoretical and methodological knowledge to vocational knowledge/insight and from research abilities to practical abilities [...] Competences are formed during the process of learning by the student in succeeding course units or modules and are assessed at different stages. Competences are therefore owned by the student/learner.<sup>86</sup>

There are three types of generic competences to which every programme should pay attention to:

- *Instrumental competences*, which include cognitive abilities: the capacity to understand and manipulate ideas and thoughts; methodological capacities to manipulate the environment: organising time and strategies of learning, making decisions or solving problems; technological skills related to the use of technological devices, computing and information management skills; and linguistic skills such as oral and written communication or knowledge of a second language.

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<sup>82</sup> Robert Wagenaar, 'Competences and Learning Outcomes: A Panacea for Understanding the (New) Role of Higher Education?', in *Reform! Tuning the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning*. (Spain: International Tuning Academy, 2019), 191–212.

<sup>83</sup> Wagenaar, 'Reform! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.', 2019, 207–8.

<sup>84</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe II. Universities' Contribution to the Bologna Process*. (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2005), 32.

<sup>85</sup> Wagenaar, 'Reform! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.', 2019, 200.

<sup>86</sup> Wagenaar, 207.

- *Interpersonal competences*: individual abilities relating to the capacity to express one's own feelings, critical and self-critical abilities; social skills relating to interpersonal skills or team-work or the expression of social or ethical commitment. These tend to favour processes of social interaction and of co-operation.
- *Systemic competences*: those skills and abilities concerning whole systems. They suppose a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge that allows one to see how the parts of a whole relate and come together, These capacities include the ability to plan changes so as to make improvements in whole systems and to design new systems. Systemic competences require as a base the prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences.<sup>87</sup>

There are also specialised competences according to different academic disciplines.<sup>88</sup> The specific competences for the Euroculture programme are based on Tuning Sectorial Qualifications Framework for Humanities and include:

Ability to put theoretical knowledge in practice; application of appropriate management skills, such as leadership, decision-making, motivation to work effectively in a multicultural/transnational setting; project management in a multicultural environment; productive participation in group work in and international/multicultural group; and capability to learn from and respond accurately to unexpected developments, taking these into account to accommodate and develop suitable strategies accordingly.<sup>89</sup>

For the present research, one of the most relevant characteristics of the notion of competences is their holistic character. As can be seen in the list above, they are conceptualised not only as things that students should be able to do after finishing their programmes, but also include ways of seeing, approaching, and getting involved with specific environments and situations. This notion will be central when analysing the experiences of Euroculture students.

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<sup>87</sup> González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase I*, 70–74.

<sup>88</sup> González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe II. Universities' Contribution to the Bologna Process.*; González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase I*.

<sup>89</sup> Euroculture Consortium, 'Teaching and Examination Regulations MA Euroculture', in *Master Degree Programme Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context. Self-Evaluation Report for the Accreditation Procedure under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EHEA)* (University of Groningen, 2019), 5. The complete list of learning outcomes and competences for the Euroculture programme can be found in the Annexes section of this research.

A second important characteristic of competences is their interpretative and flexible content, which will be crucial for understanding how Euroculture students perceive their competences acquisition in relation to super-mobility. As Wagenaar explains, the terminology and definitions for the TUNING methodology are based on an agreement on interpretation, have evolved over time, and most probably will keep doing so.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, for understanding the acquisition of competences in relation to mobility it's necessary to acknowledge that it's possible to learn in many different ways, and not necessarily inside of a classroom. In this regard, the existent research on Erasmus students has already highlighted that while "Education happens through a finite, compacted time, learning occurs throughout a multiplicity of spaces"<sup>91</sup>, and in this convergence of layers, "mobility becomes a tool for learning, both in a traditional academic sense and also in terms of self-development and reflection"<sup>92</sup>. Additionally, Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska observed that super-mobile students incorporated "a geographical dimension into their transition to adulthood",<sup>93</sup> while realising their maturation process and critically evaluating their change of attitudes at the same time.

### Perspective on the Future

Important as it is in the discourse of the EU, one should expect that super-mobility has impacted not only people's experiences but also their future projects. That lead to the following question: to what extent mobility is present in the future life projects of these students, and in what ways?

In Uneasy belonging, Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska found three main dimensions in which Euroculture students get to experience the super-mobility aspect of the Master's programme: movement, places and people.<sup>94</sup> In all these dimensions it's possible to observe their

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<sup>90</sup> Wagenaar, 'Reform! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.', 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion', 4.

<sup>92</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule: Erasmus Mundus Students in the European Higher Education Area', *Mobilities*, no. 3 (2022): 432–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1971053>.

respondents reflected somehow about their future, for instance, in relation to the knowledge they acquired:

I'm overwhelmed by the feeling of knowing something new, and maybe being able to do something with it. Finding maybe also my path through it. It's difficult [to express]. It's really changing me and my plans. I don't know how, but I know that the knowledge I have here, it's very important for my future. [female, EU citizen, 1st year]<sup>95</sup>

The notion of future is also present when the respondents spoke about handling social relations throughout the programme. They indicated feeling excluded from the dynamics of the Erasmus exchange students, whose stay abroad was more seen as a period of leisure, in comparison to them, the Euroculture students, who expressed investing important resources in their careers. In Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska's words, "It becomes clear that super-mobility programmes like Erasmus Mundus are a sort of post-Erasmus stage in the transition into adulthood, where mobility is taken more seriously as a ticket to future career paths."<sup>96</sup>

The reflections about the future appeared also when students were not able to insert themselves into the local culture.<sup>97</sup> In this case, feelings of anxiety come to the fore:

The excitement got slowly turned around, because I started to feel a bit lonely, so I had a lot of expectations, but then it went down a bit. And the question of what are you going to do comes in, it's not that present in the first year, but in the second year it is, and with doing the research you have a lot of time to contemplate this question. So I had some issues with that. [male, EU citizen, 2nd year].<sup>98</sup>

Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska's findings lead to the need of exploring the notion of feelings about the future more in-depth, as well as the ways super-mobility can impact it. In order to do that, I hereby propose the concept of *perspective on the future*.

Perspective's definition is:

a particular attitude towards something; a way of thinking about something; the art of creating an effect of depth and distance in a picture by representing people and things that are far away as

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<sup>95</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 440.

<sup>96</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 441.

<sup>97</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'.

<sup>98</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 442.

being smaller than those that are nearer the front; a view, especially one in which you can see far into the distance.<sup>99</sup>

Based on this, perspective on the future will be understood in this research as the way in which students view the future, in a holistic way. This includes feelings about themselves and their future careers, prospects for settling down, and how they picture themselves in the immediate and medium term.

The concept of Perception on the future, as well as Competences and Mobility perception will be used in Chapter 6 to analyse the Euroculture students' experiences. A detailed explanation of how the analysis will be done will be presented in the following chapter, concerning the methodological considerations.

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<sup>99</sup> 'Perspective', Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed 24 July 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/perspective?q=perspective>.

## Chapter 4. Methodology

As previously stated, this study aims to understand how super-mobility affects the EMJM students' experiences, through the main research question: are there differences to find between the reflections on the experiences of Euroculture mobile and super-mobile students, in terms of Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future? In order to answer it, it's necessary to pose two sub-questions: what are the main topics students raise when asked to reflect on their mobility experiences during Euroculture?; and How do mobile and super-mobile reflections can be understood in relation to Mobility perception, Competences acquisition, and Perspective on the future? In consequence, the method will consist of two parts: a first qualitative stage involving the data collection, followed by a descriptive and thematic systematisation of the results; and a second phase, qualitative as well, concerning the analysis of the material through the application of the selected concepts described in Chapter 3. In the following I'll address the method used for this study, starting with a description of the collected material.

### Material

The approach of this study was derived from the literature on student mobility presented in Chapter 2. As showcased by Murphy-Lejeune's pioneer study, as opposed to the largescale quantitative evaluations used for reporting on student exchange experiences, a qualitative approach allows to retrieve the students' voice in order to acquire a rich and nuanced understanding of the student mobility phenomenon.<sup>100</sup>

The chosen qualitative technique for the data collection for this study is semi-structured interviews. The election of this technique was done almost since the beginning of the research. Experiencing super-mobility myself led me to wonder about how other students faced the

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<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune, *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers*, Routledge Studies in Anthropology (London: Routledge, 2002).



different stages of this educational experience, thus, it was clear I wanted to delve as deep as possible into other students' experiences and their meanings. In-depth interviews are a technique used when wanting "to collect detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth"<sup>101</sup>, thus, an advantageous way to explore students' experiences.

From the types of in-depth interviews, the semi-structured ones allow flexibility during the process of interviewing, as well as "opportunities to adapt questions, change order, or ask extra unplanned questions to explore and clarify the interviewee's responses."<sup>102</sup> This technique involves a questionnaire schedule with broad topics to be covered plus some indicative questions for each topic. Given the vast variety of options they have when designing their mobility paths during the programme, therefore the lack of homogeneity in their experiences, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable method. Additionally, this kind of interview provides a relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information, giving both interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to feel comfortable having a guided conversation about a topic.<sup>103</sup> Finally, this technique consisted of an innovative way to approach the object of study: although Euroculture students' experiences had already been analysed through focus groups,<sup>104</sup> semi-structured interviews remained an unexplored technique in this field.

#### Criteria for selecting interviewees: the distinction between mobile and super-mobile students

Defining a profile of Euroculture students to interview proved to be challenging from the beginning, a fact derived in part from the novelty of the mobility structure inherent to the EMJM programmes. The difficulty of fitting this new kind of mobility in an already-defined

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<sup>101</sup> Carolyn Boyce and Palena Neale, *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*, vol. 2, Pathfinder International Tool Series. Monitoring and Evaluation (Pathfinder International, 2006), 3.

<sup>102</sup> Mark Elliot et al., 'Semi-Structured Interview', in *A Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191816826.001.0001/acref-9780191816826-e-0373>.

<sup>103</sup> Boyce and Neale, *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*.

<sup>104</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule: Erasmus Mundus Students in the European Higher Education Area', *Mobilities* 17, no. 3 (2022): 432–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1971053>; Glory Kubicek, 'Cultural Communication: From Inner Thoughts to Dialogue' (Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Arts, 2021), [https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel\\_bibtex](https://theses.cz/id/8vy82p/?lang=en#panel_bibtex).

category has been already addressed by Kubicek,<sup>105</sup> who in 2021 realised that international students are usually catalogued within two categories: the ones that go on exchange, and the ones that study abroad for the whole duration of their programmes. There is, therefore, no definition for students doing programmes such as EMJMD. The same struggle was faced by Fairuz Firdausi when trying to categorize non-European students in the framework of EMJM, finding that the definitions of mobile students are outdated and don't represent the current situation of multiple mobilities within the same programme. This lack of a definition, she argues, led to Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska to propose the definition of super-mobile students in 2021.<sup>106</sup>

Even within the literature on academic super-mobility, the definition of super-mobile students has not been homogeneous: while Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska used it to describe mobility within the two-year span of the EMJM programmes,<sup>107</sup> Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea utilised it to categorise repeated mobility experiences through the years within one single, individual educational trajectory.<sup>108</sup>

As explained in Chapter 1, Euroculture's mobility structure confers the students with plenty of freedom to design their mobility tracks: whereas the only mandatory switch of university occurs between semesters one and two, students can choose whether or not to move for their third and fourth semesters. In consequence, whilst some of them get to move up to four times within two years (including moving to the country of their first university), others move only once or twice. This led me to pose a methodological distinction to explore different types of students' experiences. In this study, super-mobile students are the ones who chose to move as much as possible during the programme, whilst mobile are the ones who decided to spend most of the semesters in the same city. The distinction between mobile and super-mobile students within the same programme is only possible thanks to Euroculture's mobility

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<sup>105</sup> Kubicek, 'Cultural Communication'.

<sup>106</sup> Faikha Fairuz Firdausi, 'The Constrained Privilege: Will the Tickets Go Full-Fledged?: A Study on Mobility Policies for Non-EU Students within EMJMD Programs' (Uppsala and Krakow, Uppsala University and Jagiellonian University, 2022), <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-487141>.

<sup>107</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213–23.

<sup>108</sup> Valentina Cuzzocrea and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion: Understanding Super-Mobility in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00852-6>.

scheme, and it was the base for the selection of interviewees. The implications of this methodological distinction will be addressed in Chapter 7, concerning the discussion of the results.

Additionally, as explained as well in Chapter 1, even when Euroculture is composed of European and non-European students, the former have the most freedom to choose where to go during the programme: whilst non-Europeans must remain in the continent, Europeans can go overseas for the internship semester. Based on this, I decided to interview European students only, a choice that will be discussed as well in Chapter 7.

Finally, interviewing students who were about to finalise their programme was neither the obvious nor the only option for this research. Exploring graduates' views had interesting possibilities since they have already been through the process of getting inserted into the professional field, therefore their perspective on how the mobility aspect of the programme impacted their personal and professional development could be wider. Nevertheless, focusing only on current students presented several advantages. People about to graduate are moving through a decisive period in life, a transition stage to adulthood,<sup>109</sup> and about to insert themselves in the job market. Thus, exploring the concepts of mobility perception, competences and perspective on the future was thought to be particularly enriching.

#### A note about ethics and positionality: on interviewing one's classmates

Being a Euroculture student myself, there were some methodological challenges I had to face. Being very close to the research topic and interviewees had both advantages and disadvantages. Interviewing my classmates, some of them closer to me than others, and some of them present during some stages of the research design resulted to be a somewhat controversial topic. Was it ethical? Would I be biased towards them, or them towards me? Would they answer in the interviews what they thought I wanted to hear?

Sociologist Jennifer Platt has reflected on the implications of interviewing one's peers, arguing that there's no use in pretending that the relationship between the researcher and the "object of study" is purely instrumental.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the discussion about pure objectivity in sciences

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<sup>109</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska.

<sup>110</sup> Jennifer Platt, 'On Interviewing One's Peers', *The British Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1981): 75–91, <https://doi.org/10/bzw7q2>.

has been largely addressed by disciplines such as the Philosophy of Science, Anthropology, and History of Ideas, and it's not the aim of this research to address them. What can be valuable is accounting for Platt's argument about how sharing a group membership with an interviewee can have certain downsides but also several advantages.<sup>111</sup> She mentions the delicate situation of asking for sensitive information from someone with whom the researcher will share spaces of daily life afterward. The present study, however, didn't deal with extremely sensitive topics. Moreover, being involved in the mobility processes of some of them allowed me to be empathic with their feelings, concerns, achievements, and joys, and conferred the interviews an atmosphere of confidence, equity, and safety for sharing views and opinions. As it happens, I asked my classmates to reflect on their mobility experiences, and I was surprised by how deep they went sometimes into their feelings, and how critical they were about their experiences. All in all, to ensure objectivity as much as possible, the potential interviewees were selected from a carefully designed profile that considered their mobility choices, and the questionnaire for the interviews emerged from a thorough review of the literature on super-mobility presented in Chapter 2.

### The interviewing process

Being a Euroculture student myself allowed me the possibility to reach personally (either in person or by electronic means) to the potential interviewees, to whom I explained the purpose of this research and asked for consent in written form about being interviewed. A total of six interviews were conducted, three with mobile students and three with super-mobile ones. Two of the interviews were held in presence while the remaining ones were conducted online (via Zoom). The interviewing time was of one hour on average per person. The interviews were transcribed manually.

### Systematisation of the results

To process and analyse the answers provided by the students, two main steps were followed. The first one was a qualitative content analysis, defined as a “qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”.<sup>112</sup> Through this method, multiple topics were identified and condensed into categories, based on inference and interpretation. In order to do this, the

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<sup>111</sup> Platt.

<sup>112</sup> Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, ‘Qualitative Analysis of Content’, *Human Brain Mapping*, no. 30 (2005): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbm.20661>.

answers of the students were transformed into units of analysis, namely sentences and keywords aimed to synthesise the main ideas provided by the participants.<sup>113</sup> This is presented in the appendices section, in the form of charts. The themes, exemplified with quotes from the students are presented in Chapter 5, regarding the results of the study. When presenting these results, as well as in the appendices, all participants' names were switched to gender-neutral names to ensure anonymity. Other identity markers such as places of origin, ethnicity, and names of cities or places were equally masked.

### Analysis: Operationalisation of the concepts

The processed students' answers were analysed by applying the concepts selected in Chapter 3. For this, the concepts were operationalised into specific questions that were directed to the material. The questions are as follows:

For the concept of Mobility perception: What are the elements of the mobility image that students had when starting the programme and when about to finish it? Are differences to find between the perception of mobile and super-mobile students?<sup>114</sup>

For the concept of Competences: can the competences discussed by the students be understood as instrumental, interpersonal or systemic, or a combination? Are there any differences in the kind of skills acquired by mobile and super-mobile students?<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Zhang and Wildemuth, 'Qualitative Analysis of Content'.

<sup>114</sup> Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, '7. Student Mobility and the Changing Nature of Education', in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 136–59; Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters, '4. Mobility Within Mainland Europe', in *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 69–93; European Commission, 'Erasmus Mundus Action', Erasmus +. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, accessed 14 March 2023, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/65>; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'; 'Perception', Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed 24 July 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/perception?q=perception>.

<sup>115</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe II. Universities' Contribution to the Bologna Process*. (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2005); Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase I* (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2003); Robert Wagenaar, 'Competences and Learning Outcomes: A Panacea for Understanding the (New) Role of Higher Education?', in *Reform! Tuning the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning*. (Spain: International Tuning Academy, 2019), 191–212; 'European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process', accessed 2 June 2023, <https://www.ehea.info/>; Robert Wagenaar, 'Euroculture: A Response to an Identified Need', in *European Studies and Europe: Twenty Years of Euroculture*, ed. Janny de Jong et al. (Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2020), 143–61; Euroculture Consortium, 'Teaching and Examination Regulations MA Euroculture', in *Master Degree Programme Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context. Self-Evaluation Report for the Accreditation Procedure under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint*

For the concept of Perspective on the future: what are the elements of the future perspectives of students? Is there a difference to find between how and to what extent mobile and super-mobile students expect to keep moving in the future?<sup>116</sup>

These questions were used to guide the analysis of the results derived from the interviews. Both the results and analysis will be presented in the following chapters: Chapter 5. Results, and Chapter 6. Analysis.

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*Programmes (EHEA)* (University of Groningen, 2019); Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, ‘Erasmus Students’ Motivations in Motion’.

<sup>116</sup> Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, ‘Erasmus Students’ Motivations in Motion’; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, ‘Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule’; ‘Perspective’, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, accessed 24 July 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/perspective?q=perspective>.

## Chapter 5. Results

In this chapter I'll take an empirical approach to present the main themes the participants addressed when interviewed. This will answer the research sub-question number one: what are the main topics students address when reflecting on their mobility experiences during Euroculture?

### The participants

The interviewed group was composed of five women and one man, which statistically reflects the general composition of the programme.<sup>117</sup> The participants were mostly 24 years old when interviewed, except for two of them, aged 26 and 27. The nationalities of all the participants were different, but won't be made explicit here for anonymisation purposes. Suffice it to say that they are all European.<sup>118</sup>

Concerning the educational background, the field of International Relations was predominant among the participants. Only two students hold a different title, one in Media Studies, and the other in Liberal Arts and Sciences. Regarding occupation, two mobile students combined studying with one or multiple jobs. Super-mobile students were either working or volunteering for the Euroculture's student magazine while coursing the programme. One student was focusing only on the Master's. Finally, concerning previous mobility experiences, most of the participants moved to a different city or country for studying their Bachelor's, and all of them did one or two exchanges abroad during that period.

### Set of questions number 1

The main questions asked in this part of the interview were the following: Do you think that changing continuously from one university to another impacts the students' development? How did you imagine these two years of programme were going to be? What do you think now about that image you had? Was it different than the reality you experienced? Would you change

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<sup>117</sup> Elze Wiertz, *Euroculture Alumni Research Report* (University of Groningen, 2019).

<sup>118</sup> The criteria for the choice of participants have been made explicit in chapter 4.

something about this last year and a half if you had the chance? As a result, students reflected about moving, the practical challenges moving implies, the different academic systems they experienced, social implications, and academic and general impressions about the programme.

### Mobility expectations, academic differences and practical challenges

The mobility part fulfilled the expectations of most of the mobile students. Choosing to move only once, and having experience with it in the past, they knew what moving was going to be like in general terms. Arbor expresses:

I thought it would be really fun to study with people from outside of my own country. I mean, when I studied here basically everyone was from here, and then during my Bachelor's I did an exchange programme. I was there for a year, which was really fun, because you experienced how other universities thought... So one of the motivations for applying to the programme was to see how it is to study in a country outside my own, cause I really enjoyed it the first time during my Bachelor's.

Super-mobile students expressed not having too many expectations about the programme, but wanting to travel since they already knew they enjoy moving. To this were added the expectations about the content and structure of the programme itself. As Wren depicts:

I only knew that I wanted to travel. Like, I wanted to learn, I wanted to do a Master's, but I really wanted to grow, and when I came across this Master's I was like, "Wait, so I'll be able to change universities, to travel, and I still get a really good academic background", so I thought "ok, this is really cool".

Another important topic for both mobile and super-mobile students was the one about the practical challenges, within which getting housing proved to have a central role, mainly among super-mobile students. As Wren expresses:

And then, this Master's is everything for personal development because, like, small tasks, you need to look for accommodation in different countries... Then go alone to a new country and start a life.

Another example of practical challenges can be seen when Wren asserts:

I fully enjoy having a routine, but for this Master's you also need to be able to say "ok, so for 2 years probably, I'm not going to have a routine, and it's fine". So it's a continuous pushing yourself, like, "ok, this is strange, and is fine", because is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, let's say, so yeah, I think this Master's is everything about development. I think that I have learned a lot academically but most of all personally.



On a different note, experiencing different academic systems was something all the students reflected on. Most of the mobile students expressed being shocked about how different the systems were. As Arbor states:

I would have wanted to know how different the education would be in different countries. In my two universities is like night and day... The programme at the second university felt way more structured, and the courses were very practical.

On the same topic, super-mobile student Wren says:

Yeah, it impacts at all levels. Focusing on the academic part, changing university means adapting to different education systems, different ways of understanding knowledge, let's say; different professors. So in the end I've learnt a lot because of all the different perspectives and approaches.

Finally, two super-mobile students expressed that academic learning might be negatively affected by moving that often. As Tatum's words showcase:

In the academic way, I would say not so much. The quality of academic learning is probably negatively affected by this frequent mobility, because it's not continuous learning.

When speaking about the academic impressions of the programme, one student of each group concluded having realised that the programme was not the best fit for them. An example is when Tatum says:

I would probably change the programme for a different one... because for me the academic side was the most important, I just wanted to learn more in terms of actual knowledge focused on the EU. So that I would change, because the things that we were learning during the first semester I already knew them from my Bachelor's.

### Social and personal implications

Only super-mobile students reflected on the social implications of the programme. Two out of three students expressed disappointment with having small groups in each university, and difficulty interacting with the local community. In Tatum's words:

I thought there would be bigger groups per country, so I was kind of disappointed...Changing continuously is not ideal socially. You don't connect that much with people, and when you are starting to connect you need to leave.

Regarding this, Azul expressed:

I used to think it was more negative, but I actually think it's fine. On the one hand I think it would be great to connect with local students, on the other I'm also like "Yeah, but I'm here also temporarily so..." And I do have good friends who are internationals, so like, why would it be bad?

In a different way, Wren said:

(...) and then you meet a group of friends but you know that you are going to make another group of friends, and you end up with a lot of groups... I kind of pictured how it was going to be, but it has overcome all possible expectations. I had imagined a little bit, but it's way better, honestly.

On a different topic, students from both groups reflected on the personal implications the programme had on them, and all of them said different things. An example is when mobile student Ellis observes:

Maybe...somebody could have told me that I will enter the adult life, cause I was not aware of that haha. And also somebody could have told us that we will mostly be on our own in some cities and universities in general, like here, we have a really good coordinator, but most of the times we are just on our own.

Another example is when super-mobile student Azul declares:

I think when I started the programme I was focused on a more bureaucratic EU career than I am now, cause now I'm a bit more like...all over the place haha, whereas I started out with a more clear vision, and now I'm more like "Aaawh!!"

Moreover, students replied in several ways to whether they would have done anything differently during the past couple of years. Whilst two super-mobile students said they would do a different internship, or would choose a different university to start the programme, one mobile-student expressed the wish of having stressed less and enjoyed more. Finally, students from both groups said to have become aware of the difficult aspects that come with moving. In Wren's words:

I could have never thought about these kind of experiences that come together with doing a Master's outside. So yeah, I was not expecting bad things, obviously, but things happened, and that's normal, but because of being on your own, away from your family, those can be big things, but you find a way to get over them.

Wren continues:

So for instance, when I arrived here I was homeless. I had been looking for accommodation for months, and I arrived here without having a house. So, obviously when I started the programme I was not thinking about starting to study without having a house... And of course I was disappointed, because it was the beginning, I should have been having the best time of my life, and I was enjoying the city but I was also telling myself "Ok, go out with your friends, but you also need to be stuck to the computer, cause if there's any advertisement you need to be the first one replying", so I had not expected that. So that's also the thing about this Master's, that you become really strong, because now I think about it and I literally arrived in this country alone, without knowing anyone, and without a house, and I managed.

## Set of questions number 2

The main questions of this section were the following: Do you consider your sensibility towards different cultures was affected in the last couple of years? How would you describe yourself now, compared to the person who started the programme? Do you feel you forged skills to interact in any environment?

### Classmates from all across the world

A topic all the students reflected on is the one about having people from all across the world as classmates. This was, certainly, something about all agreed to have been impacted by, in different ways. Two mobile students particularly highlighted having had so much group work with people of different nationalities. Arbor expresses:

I never studied with people from so many different cultures. In my second university especially, we had this project where we started a platform... and when you brainstorm, you realise that everyone has completely different opinions on like "what is new", so even on basic questions it could be really fascinating and fun... So that has been probably, in my opinion, the best part of the programme, to meet people from different cultures, and it's really fun to see people from outside of Europe, especially when you are doing European studies.

On the same topic, Darian said:

I feel like Euroculture in the last 2 years where even more that, even more people from like really all across the world, from different continents, and, again, a lot of group work, so I feel like you just naturally learn a lot more about where people are coming from, people's different viewpoints.

Moreover, students from both groups expressed having modified the impression they had about their own culture through contact with the one of others, as well as having gained sensitivity towards cultural differences. In Azul's words:

I think I've become more sensitive, but I don't know if it's just the Master's or if it's general other things in life as well. I've become more sensitive towards cultural differences, in a sense that I feel I've become a lot less assuming of what other people know and what other people want and what other people think, and I've become a better listener.

Finally, super-mobile student Tatum declared multiculturalism is the biggest contribution of the programme:

I met so many people from all across the world and I would have not met them if I had done a normal Master's in my home country...It's also a great contribution to my growth outside of the professionally...That's the biggest contribution of this program for me, to be honest. The multiculturalism, like, meeting, and working in teams of multiple nationalities, like that's what I learnt a lot, and what I was expecting to actually learn was more about the knowledge about the EU, but I found that we are learning a lot of things that I already learnt during my Bachelor's, so

like, from the knowledge side I didn't learn much new...but from this soft skills, multiculturality, yeah, very profitable.

### The internship semester

All the students put particular emphasis on how the third semester impacted them, this is, the one in which they did an internship. Students from both groups agreed to have gained professional skills. An example is when mobile student Ellis says:

I learnt new ways to approach research or studying in general from different countries... I learnt how to do research, how to be more specific, and also how to deal with the anxiety while working on a research... and I also learnt how to deal with criticism (because) meeting a lot of professors and students from everywhere helps you to get rid of the kind of attitude "I'm the smartest person for this topic".

Students from both groups reflected on the impact on a professional, social and personal level.

As mobile student Darian shows:

I think it has contributed to my social skills just by being...so focused on like group work, so focused on...presentations, so focused on sort of interacting with lecturers, amm, in a different field than I used to work in before. (...)For my Research internship I was able to go to an academic conference, so both professional and social skills I think that really helped in learning how to network a little bit more in the field of academia, but it was more like the past 5 years of my life where I felt like I really got more confident and more secure as a person, as compared to before.

On the same note, super-mobile student Azul expresses:

Compared to 2 years ago...well...my frontal lobe has developed, first of all, haha. I would like to say I'm more sure of myself but...then, again, my internship brought all of my self-confidence down, but I think I can now rebuild better and stronger. (...) I've grown professionally...in the internship I think I did learn that if I get a job I hate, I'll quit. Like, I need to quit sooner and faster, and I need to follow my gut feeling, cause I know in my gut that if it's not the right choice for me, it's not probably going to be the right choice for me!

Finally, students from both groups said the internship to have affected how they view their future careers. In Arbor's words:

I wasn't really sure where would this programme take me, because it's kind of broad, like "Culture, Society, Identity", it's basically everything (...) So I wasn't really sure where I would end up...but I feel like the programme has helped me to gain some insight into different parts of the European Union, I learnt a lot from the practical courses, and also the internship, which is probably the semester I learnt the most from, because then you really have to work with the European Union... So I think I have a better sense of direction now.

## Social life and international friendships

Students from both groups said they became more sociable thanks to the programme. Mobile student Ellis reflects:

I became more sociable, I was very introverted before (but) meeting people from a lot of places pushed me to be more extroverted, otherwise I would not interact with them and I won't find out that much about them and their culture (...) I actually feel happier. I think that's part of the growing up. The person I was 2 years ago, that person wouldn't be happy to know that we are now both introverted and extroverted, and we can mix up both of those skills.

On the other hand, super-mobile student Wren expressed:

(...) even with relationships, this idea of meeting three or four groups of people in two years, in another moment I would have felt that it was a lot, and now I'm ok with that (...) And also being able to make different groups of friends and still be in contact with all the people that you are not seeing, so yeah. I think that the Master's forces you to be social.

Finally, super-mobile student Azul reflected:

Social skills... I think now I'm more explicit about myself to my friends. So I'll be more like "Hey, I'm not a texter, but when I'm in the same city as you, I'll text you and we'll hang out, so even if I don't text you for months, know that we're still friends".

## How you are now, compared to how you were before

Both mobile and super-mobile students declared having gained self-confidence and independence throughout the last couple of years. An example is when mobile student Ellis says:

(The programme) gave me a positive opinion about moving around, moving abroad, and that I can do it and I can be confident about moving even to countries that I have no connection at all with.

Another example is when mobile student Darian asserts:

And then, just the student environment, it kind of all built into a situation where I feel quite comfortable in what my interests are, who I am as a person, what my experiences are, and I feel like I can talk to people in all kind of environments, with the skills and the knowledge that I have built. Now I feel like everything I do has sort of a purpose, which is very deep hehe. I'm doing things for reasons, not just like, making a decision just because I don't know what else to do, which was the case before.

On the super-mobile part, Tatum expressed:

It's not easy, especially when you need to pack your life for 5 months, and in some cases for 2 years no? haha. I learnt that I can live with very little. I don't have many things and I feel that it's enough... It made me, I would say, humble, you know? And appreciate the things I have in my luggage, hehe cause they are travelling with me.

Lastly, super-mobile student Wren says:

I am way more independent. I am really, really independent now. I have learnt to manage by myself, and things that always had scared me, now they don't scare me that much. This idea of arriving in a country absolutely alone, without knowing anything, obviously is not like, something I'm loving madly, not yet, but I don't feel uncomfortable with these kinds of situations anymore.

### Set of questions number 3

The main questions asked in this part of the interview were the following: What do you expect to be doing within 5 years from now? Would you feel like moving around? Would you take a job abroad? What would you like to be doing in some 10 years? Do you think the programme influenced your expectations about the future?

#### Short-term vision

All students see themselves getting a stable job in the short term and improving in their careers. Within mobile students, only one would like to have a permanent place to live and a family lifestyle in the following five years. On the other hand, two out of three super-mobile students want to start building a career as soon as possible. Additionally, all the students are open to keep moving in the short term. Whereas one of the mobile students said to be ok with moving as long as it works with the desired family lifestyle, the remaining ones expressed the will and even excitement to keep doing so, although they would prefer to stay longer in one place. In Ellis' words:

And of course I don't wanna choose a place right now when I'm 24 and just stay there for the rest of my life. I like the excitement, you know? This Master programme gave us excitement of moving abroad and I want to keep that... after this Master programme I think I'm open to everything. I mean, I would like to stay here for at least another year. But if not, then I would like to...move somewhere and maybe stay there for 2 years. I'm a bit tired of moving all around, all the time.

On a different topic, students reflected on their plans to keep moving. Concerning the super-mobile students, all of them expect to do so. However, they agreed with the mobile students about wanting to stay for longer in the same place. In Azul's words:

Oh, I will always be moving and travelling, cause that's the way I was raised, there's no way in which I wouldn't, both for fun and work. I do think I'll stay in one place for longer tho, slightly. Like 5 years in one place, you know? and then move again.

Finally, Wren says:

I know that I don't want to go back home now, because I love my country, I value it more now that I'm outside because I miss it ...but to be honest I know that the working conditions there are

not ok...I would love to work outside for many years and once I have created this career, go back home.

Wren concludes:

I also accept that after the Master's is not going to be easy to settle down...I'm ok if I still have to move 3 times in the following 3 years, but I would like to get to this point where I can finally stay steady. You know? I have enjoyed this Master's so much, but now I'm ready for settling down a little bit.

### Mid-term vision

On a different topic, when it comes to what they would like to be doing in 10 years, there's an overall uncertainty, however, most of the students expressed the wish of being settled. Mobile student Ellis said:

To improve in my career, still be happy...I would like to be really satisfied with my job still, and to settle down somewhere in a city and not anymore move around that much. But I'm really not so sure.

There were additional reflections on the desired jobs students want to do in the long term.

Super-mobile student Tatum said:

In 10 years I still would like to work in the EU institutions, hopefully in some higher position. Honestly, my dream would be working for a very specific institution, but that's a very difficult institution to get into. So maybe in 10 years I'll make it to that point.

### Expectations after Euroculture

Finally, students reflected on their expectations after Euroculture. Mobile student Arbor expressed:

The internship gave some insight about what kind of work I can do with this background, so it gave me some insight on how the future might look, like which jobs you can do.

Super-mobile student Azul observed:

(My expectations about the future) have become more fluid and flexible. They are much more open now than they were before, cause before I was around a lot of people who were very much like "Master's, get the job". Whereas now I've met so many more people who have had different life paths and different non-linear paths, career-wise, so that's kind of fun. Whereas a lot of my friends at home finished the Master's and now they are trying to get into trainee programmes and stuff like that, and I'm like, you knooow, I'm not in a hurry actually. So I think I am in less of a rush. I mean, I'm still in a rush to like, see and do everything, but in less of a rush of like start a formal adult life, settle.

On a different note, one student in each group said to feel very confident about finding a job.

Super-mobile student Wren expressed:

I think the programme gives us reasons since the beginning to hope for the best...And I think that it's true... Obviously we'll have to make an effort, but I really think we are well prepared thanks to this Master's in every way, in the academic part but also in the personal one.

Finally, mobile student Darian said:

It kind of reaffirms that this is a good programme to go forward with, and that is a good basis of knowledge and skills to have for the future, in like many different sectors, like cultural, NGOs, EU institutions, UN institutions, academia, it really helps you be like, "ok, I feel like I'm not going to be completely jobless" haha. I will find something with the skills I earned with this programme.



## Chapter 6. Analysis

This chapter aims to answer the research sub-question number two: How can mobile and super-mobile reflections be understood in relation to Mobility perception, Competences acquisition, and Perspective on the future? This will be done by analysing the material in the light of the selected concepts (described in Chapter 3), and replying to the questions proposed in the operationalization model (presented in Chapter 4).

### Mobility perception

Mobility perception has been defined in Chapter 3 as the way in which students see and understand mobility after having experienced it, with an emphasis on the difference from how they perceived it in the past. The first question directed to the material will be the following: What are the elements of the mobility image that students had when starting the programme and when about to finish it? Are differences to find between the perception of mobile and super-mobile students?

### Elements of Mobility Perception when starting Euroculture

Neither mobile nor super-mobile students expressed many reflections about how they felt about mobility when starting the programme. In sum, the perception both groups had was similar: all the participants had done study exchanges abroad in the past, which they found enjoyable. Thus, all of them showed confidence in that the experience was going to be good, cool, exciting and fun. One difference, however, is that mobile students showed more certainty about what the mobility aspect of the programme was going to be like, and to what extent it was going to affect them, whereas super-mobile students expressed mainly “having no expectations” but “a wish to leave” and the desire to travel. In any case, both groups expressed having had expectations about the academic content of the programme.

### Elements of mobility perception when about to graduate

#### The hazards of constant moving

When speaking about how they think of mobility when about to graduate, both mobile and super-mobile students expressed having become aware of the difficulties that come with moving often. An example is when mobile student Darian reflects:

I think there's obviously pros and cons to it, like, it impacts you definitely positively in the sense that it makes you more resilient to stress and having to re-root your life if you go all in with the Euroculture experience, like move continents and have internships, and organise housing, I think that definitely makes you a great sort of project manager, and I think it definitely help you develop as a person, and makes you more independent...but then I feel like you never really arrive anywhere, or there's a risk that you never really arrive anywhere.

There is, however, a difference between mobile and super-mobile students. Whereas the former most expressed the mobility aspect of the programme lived up to their expectations, super-mobile students agreed on having felt stress and disappointment during the experience, especially when organising housing.

Super-mobile students also showed themselves tired of moving that often, since all of them expressed the wish of staying still after the programme. One of them asserted that moving every year instead of every five months would make more sense, and two of the agreed that now the idea of “having a proper room” sounds amazing and appealing. Finally, two super-mobile students expressed very clearly how they think moving that often impacts people: even when they enjoyed it, not everyone experiences mobility in the same way, and moving that often is not always the best for everyone’s mental health. In Wren’s words:

All of us have struggled in one point or another, and it totally depends a lot on your personality how this mobility influences you. I think it's difficult to picture it before, and the way it influences one person or another, like, for me everything is good, but then I hear people with bad stories related to the Master's, all this mobility has been just too much for them, and it's crazy how the same experience has been experienced in such different ways by 2 different people. I think it's good to speak about it, to say "Hey, let's speak about what is mobility like", because maybe not everything is necessarily good, and that's also ok... Because if 60 out of 80 that we are, are saying how incredible this is, and nobody else is speaking about the bad part, maybe you can feel really lost, so I think it's good to have this kind of conversations.

Azul confirms:

Moving is not always the best for everyone's mental health. I do think people suffered. In my second university I could notice that couple of us were...not thriving, and probably also part of it was due to all the moving. When I went to my second uni, the day before I was like "I don't want to move again". The only move that was not hard was going to the country of the internship, cause I already had friends there, I already knew people and the city.

### Mobility and academic learning

Another element present in the reflections of both groups was the one of academic learning in relation to mobility. All the students showed different opinions: from feeling the programme

was unstructured at certain universities, to have had their academic expectations fulfilled, and even realising that the programme turned out to be not the best fit for them.

Two super-mobile students agreed that academic learning is probably negatively affected by such frequent mobility due to the lack of continuity, and that matching up different academic systems can be hard. The third student instead found that changing continuously of academic systems was nourishing due to the necessity of adapting to different perspectives and approaches. In sum, there wasn't a unanimous opinion among super-mobile students about whether academic learning gets affected positively or negatively by frequent mobility.

A more shared idea, nonetheless, was that all the experiences throughout the programme, including the academic learning, could have changed depending on the chosen universities. The opinion of the quality of academic content was therefore more related to how each university manages the programme, than to the mobility aspect.

### The personal and social spheres

Students reflected on the impact of moving in a more personal dimension. Here, mobile students reflected mostly about emotions and feelings related to moving, such as a mix of anxiety and happiness regarding changing location. A student said to have found being abroad gave them more time for themselves, and another one said to have felt that "they had a life again" when going back to their first country.

Super-mobile students, differently, expressed mostly impressions of the impact that moving often caused on their social life. The most common view was to have experienced difficulties with interacting with locals, as well as feeling like not becoming part of the local community. They also asserted having felt disappointed by the small size of groups per country. Moreover, they expressed how changing groups often impacted them. The three of them have a different attitude towards this. Tatum expresses:

Yeah...(socially) is not ideal because you don't connect that much...because more people are coming and you forget them, you know, it's too many people at some point, and before you actually connect a lot then you need to leave!

Azul has a different impression of it:

I used to think it was more negative, but I actually think it's fine. On the one hand I think it would be great to connect with local students, on the other I'm also like "Yeah, but I'm here also

temporarily so..." And I do have good friends who are internationals, so like, why would it be bad?

Finally, Wren asserts:

(...) and then you meet a group of friends but you know that you are going to make another group of friends, and you end up with a lot of groups... I kind of pictured how it was going to be, but it has overcome all possible expectations. I had imagined a little bit, but is way better, honestly.

In sum, the elements of the mobility perception of both mobile and super-mobile students when starting the programme were reduced to the excitement and academic expectations about the programme. When about to finish Euroculture, more elements came to the fore: the difficulties related to the practical challenges of moving often, mainly getting housing; feelings of stress, tiredness and disappointment, especially amongst super-mobile students; and reflections about the impact of moving often for students' mental health.

Additionally, the mobility perception of both groups of students includes the element of reflection on academic learning. It was more common here to find reflections amongst super-mobile students about how academic learning gets affected by constant moving, however, there was no consensus about whether it gets affected positively or negatively. A more important factor seems to be how the programme is managed by each university of the consortium.

Finally, students incorporated a reflection on a personal dimension. Here, while mobile students addressed feelings and emotions related to changing location and being abroad, super-mobile students reflected mostly on a social dimension. It's clear that the social aspect plays an important role in how super-mobile students experience the programme, and all of them agreed to have found it challenging, however, there was again no consensus on whether mobility has a positive or negative impact on it.

## Competences

Competences are defined as "a combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities",<sup>119</sup> this is, they cover "the whole spectrum of capabilities from pure theoretical and methodological knowledge to vocational knowledge/insight and from research abilities to practical abilities".<sup>120</sup> Competences are divided into three main categories: Instrumental,

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<sup>119</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe II. Universities' Contribution to the Bologna Process*. (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2005), 32.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Wagenaar, 'Reform! Tuning the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning.' (Dissertation, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2019), 207.

referring to the capacity of manipulating ideas and solving problems; Interpersonal, which involve skill such as communication, self-analysis, and ethical commitment. They normally favour social interaction and cooperation; and Systemic, understood as the ability of discern how the parts of a whole come together, hence being able to improve and design new systems.<sup>121</sup> The second question directed to the material will be the following: can the competences discussed by the students be understood as instrumental, interpersonal or systemic, or a combination? Are there any differences in the kind of skills acquired by mobile and super-mobile students?

### Cultural awareness

The competence students underlined the most was what some of them called cultural awareness, derived from meeting and working with classmates from all around the globe. Both mobile and super-mobile students highlighted this as the best characteristic of the programme and asserted to have acquired, thanks to it, realisation of different opinions and views, plus more sensitivity and open mind towards cultural differences. This competence is, therefore, mainly interpersonal. An example is when Arbor expresses:

I think the programme in itself is an excellent opportunity for students from both around Europe and outside Europe, to really try the education system of different universities in Europe. You can really get to see differences and similarities. It's a really good opportunity to learn more than just education itself. You learn a lot from the experience, just moving around and fixing and trying to find accommodation, you always learn a lot when you come to a new country you don't know anything about and you just have to adapt. Like, I remember a lot when you asked me how to do the bins. It's such a good way to see that here is very different, I mean, if you have never been here before of course you don't know, and it's always good to have someone to ask stuff like that, but it's a really good way to try to remember that there are cultural differences and that we are all the same, basically. But it serves as a reminder to me that it's not easy to come here if you don't know what's going on.

Cultural awareness is also reflected in a professional dimension. An example is when Darian reflects:

Choosing to go abroad and put myself into this position where I'm not in my home country, I think that definitely made me more open and more, sort of patient as well, it made me more chill, cause you know? Everyone comes from a different place and a different academic environment that they are used to, that they grew up with, so I was just like, 'I'll accept that not everyone is the same way and everyone has sort of different expectations, different ways of working', so I think it makes you more, yeah, just open to interactions like that.

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<sup>121</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase I* (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2003).

Additionally, mobile and super-mobile students asserted having been able to look at their own culture from a different angle and having changed their views about it. Due to the critical and self-critical abilities this involves, this can be regarded as an interpersonal competence as well, as it can be seen in Wren's words:

First of all, it has changed my views about my own country, my culture, because for example...When I started the programme and started to hear non-English native speakers, speaking in English, I was like "I don't want to speak in front of you". Like, my English is average, and back home no one told me that my English is average. I have been lied all my life... And then, I don't know, in other things like in Education, (I realised that) so many countries are encouraging people to study and giving them money, so I was like "What is my country doing"?

Wren continues:

I've learnt to, in order to judge a culture, or not to judge, but in order to create pictures in your mind of how people are, or cultures are, you need go through them. You cannot just create them because of what you see in the news or whatever...You need to be there. And once you are in contact, and you have your own reasons, then ok, create the picture or whatever you want.

Getting rid of stereotypes, according to the definition of interpersonal competences, can favour processes of social interaction and cooperation, which is reflected as well in Ellis words:

If you like I'm more open-minded about other cultures, and I'm more open to incorporate them into my daily life (...) I think this Master's made me more curious, because when you talk to people from very different cultures, some cultures that I was never even thinking of before, it made me really like...culturally aware of things. And I think it actually made me think on a global level.

Finally, systemic competences "suppose a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge that allows one to see how the parts of a whole relate and come together."<sup>122</sup> Thus, understanding, being more sensitive, and "knowing that we are all the same", this is, being culturally aware and considering all cultures part of the globe can be considered, in sum, a systemic competence.

### Social skills

One mobile student declared to have modified the way of relating to people, derived from the intense multicultural contact. In Ellis words:

I became more sociable, I was very introverted before (but) meeting people from a lot of places pushed me to be more extroverted, otherwise I would not interact with them and I won't find out that much about them and their culture.

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<sup>122</sup> González and Wagenaar, 74.

The capacity of expressing one's own feelings and of being self-critical is a property of interpersonal competences<sup>123</sup>, which can be seen in how Ellis continues the reflection:

I actually feel happier. I think that's part of the growing up. The person I was 2 years ago, that person wouldn't be happy to know that we are now both introverted and extroverted, and we can mix up both of those skills.

This interpersonal capacity of self-reflection is expressed as well in how Azul views their social skills:

I think now I'm more "pick and choose" about my friends, cause I made so many connections over the years, and now I'm more explicit about myself to my friends, so I'll be more like 'Hey, I'm not a texter, but when I'm in the same city as you, I'll text you and we'll hang out, so even if I don't text you for months, know that we're still friends'.

Instrumental competences include the capacity to organise time and strategies, making use of technological devices, and linguistic skills such as oral and written communication.<sup>124</sup> Learning how to communicate with friends in an international context, plus the self-awareness showcased, can thus be regarded as a mixture between an instrumental and an interpersonal competence. This mixture is present as well when Wren reflects:

This idea of meeting three or four groups of people in two years, in another moment I would have felt that it was a lot, and now I'm ok with that (...) And also being able to make different groups of friends and still be in contact with all the people that you are not seeing, so yeah. I think that the Master's forces you to be social.

In sum, in the case of social skills, it's possible to see that mobile and super-mobile students reflected about different types of competences. Whereas mobile students reflected mostly about interpersonal competences, super-mobile students' observations show a combination of interpersonal and instrumental ones.

### Different forms of knowledge

Instrumental competences include the cognitive ability to understand and manipulate ideas and thoughts, as well as methodological capacities.<sup>125</sup> Being Euroculture an academic programme, is not surprising that most of the students declared having improved their research and academic skills. In how they reflected on it, it's possible to observe a multiplicity of instrumental competences, like when Arbor says:

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<sup>123</sup> González and Wagenaar, 71.

<sup>124</sup> González and Wagenaar, 70.

<sup>125</sup> González and Wagenaar, 70.

I mean, I've definitely improved my skills in how to conduct research. Especially doing the paper for the Intensive Programme I learnt a lot regarding methodology, and I kind of learnt a new way of researching something which I haven't done before, I had a really good supervisor as well.

Similarly, Wren expresses:

Focusing on the academic part, changing university means adapting to different education systems, different ways of understanding knowledge, let's say. Different professors. So in the end I've learnt a lot because of all the different perspectives and approaches.

Moreover, being in contact with different ways of approaching knowledge can lead to a remarkable mixture of interpersonal and instrumental competences, possible to observe in Ellis words:

About research, I learnt a lot how to be more specific, and also how to deal with the anxiety while working on a research. Because before I was like, either having the kind of thoughts of "ah, I don't care", you know? this very nonchalant behaviour, or "Omg, I'm very stressed, I don't know anything, I don't know how I'll do this ". But then I started easing up these emotions, and now I'm very focused. (...) I also learnt how to deal with criticism, cause meeting a lot of professors and students from everywhere helps you to get rid of the kind of attitude "I'm the smartest person for this topic", so I think this programme grounded me a lot.

In sum, instrumental competences are present in the reflections of both groups of students, regardless of how many times they moved, and very related to the academic aspect of the programme. In some cases, these instrumental competences can be mixed with interpersonal ones.

#### Personal growth. Sense of direction and resilience

Personal growth is the dimension in which is possible to see the bigger differences between mobile and super-mobile students due to the kind of competences they reflected on. Mobile students expressed to have acquired a sense of direction during the last couple of years, as Arbor's words show:

I wasn't really sure where would this programme take me (...) I learnt a lot from the practical courses, and also the internship, which is probably the semester I learnt the most from, because then you really have to work with the European Union, so I think I have a better sense of direction now.

Competences involve a combination of knowledge and understanding that "cover the whole spectrum of capabilities from pure theoretical and methodological knowledge to vocational knowledge/insight"<sup>126</sup>, however, the expressed sense of direction is not easy to categorize. Whereas the interpersonal competences include the capacity of self-analysis, the instrumental

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<sup>126</sup> Wagenaar, 'Reform! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe.', 207.



ones involve the ability to manipulate ideas and thoughts, and the systemic ones include “the ability to plan changes so as to make improvements in whole systems and to design new systems.”<sup>127</sup> Arbor’s reflection certainly shows self-analysis, plus the impulse to use the acquired knowledge and experience to make current and future decisions. This leads to conclude there’s definitely a mixture of instrumental and interpersonal skills, which perhaps leads to a systemic competence.

This gets clearer when observing Darian’s statements:

I really wanted to figure out what to do next, and now I know, so that's a thing that really evolved in the past two years... And then, just the student environment, it kind of all built into a situation where I feel quite comfortable in what my interests are, who I am as a person, what my experiences are, and I feel like I can talk to people in all kind of environments, with the skills and the knowledge that I have built. Now I feel like everything I do has sort of a purpose, which is very deep, hehe. I'm doing things for reasons, not just like, making a decision just because I don't know what else to do, which was the case before.

The reflection shows not only the capability of self-analysis and instrumental use of the acquired knowledge and skills, but also “a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge that allows one to see how the parts of a whole relate and come together.”<sup>128</sup> In other words, Darien’s observation shows a deployment of systemic competences, which per definition “require as a base the prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences”<sup>129</sup>

On a different topic, more than a sense of direction, super-mobile students expressed to have changed in several ways due to the challenges derived from moving constantly, which they often related to the notion of personal development, as Tatum expresses:

About personal development I would say a lot, of course. You change a lot as a person, because if you stayed in one place there would not be challenges you'd be learning from.

When reflecting on different challenges, super-mobile students expressed a mixture of difficulties to overcome and how that impacted them at a personal level. This can be seen in Azul’s words:

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<sup>127</sup> González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase 1*, 71.

<sup>128</sup> González and Wagenaar, 71.

<sup>129</sup> González and Wagenaar, 71.

Compared to 2 years ago...well...my frontal lobe has developed, first of all, haha. I would like to say I'm more sure of myself but...then, again, my internship brought all of my self-confidence down, but I think I can now rebuild better and stronger.

Resilience is defined as “the ability to become strong, happy, or successful again after a difficult situation or event”<sup>130</sup>. It has also been defined as “the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc; (and) the ability of a substance to return to its original shape after it has been bent, stretched or pressed”<sup>131</sup>. In Azul’s observation it’s possible to see the elements of self-reflection and strength, that now form part of an interpersonal competence. Another example of resilience is when Wren reflects:

And then when I was in my second country, on the 1st of June a lot of things happened, basically I was kicked out of my house from one day to the other. So suddenly I was again without a house in the middle of the exams week with a lot of problems, there were these huge bodyguards in the house because there was this married couple that was breaking up, so we and the house were in the middle, basically. Again, without a house, my computer got broke the same day, so I was like “It’s exams week, I don’t have a house, I don’t have a computer”, but still I was like “I can manage, I can manage” And I managed. (...) like, you need to manage, you don’t have other choice. Or yeah, you can cry, but if you don’t have a house you can cry on the street! It’s better to cry inside a house. Try to get a house and then you cry.

In cases like this one, resilience showcases not only interpersonal competence but instrumental, in the way that students have had to understand and manipulate ideas in order to manipulate situations, organising strategies and making decisions in order to solve problems.<sup>132</sup> This mixture involves, additionally, the interpersonal capacity of self-criticism and expression of the own’s feelings, for instance, when Tatum asserts:

Yeah, it's not easy especially when you need to pack your life for 5 months, and in some cases for 2 years no? haha. I learnt that I can live with very little. I don't have many things and I feel that it's enough... It made me, I would say, humble, you know? And appreciate the things I have in my luggage, hehe, cause they are travelling with me.

Another example is when Wren states:

I am way more independent. I am really, really independent now. I have learnt to manage by myself, and things that always had scared me, now they don't scare me that much. (...) And also I ...kind of value myself more now, exactly because of that, because of everything I have done. Because now that I think about it, arriving here, I was homeless, I fixed it. The thing in my second

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Resilience’, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/resilience>.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Resilience’, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/resilience?q=resilience>.

<sup>132</sup> González and Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase 1*.

country, I fixed it. I went to the other side of the world, I got over it. So I have also learnt to value these kind of things, and now I give myself more credibility with that.

Finally, resilience's mix of interpersonal and instrumental competences gets expressed when students show themselves confident about possessing the necessary skills to strategize, make decisions and solve problems, as Wren's words showcase:

I trust myself more. I'm able to debate and to think critically, like, I don't just get information and accept it, I try to realise if it's ok or not, if it's true or not. And I think that now I'm good at solving problems.

### Perspective on the future

Perspective on the future will be understood in this research as the way in which students view the future, in a holistic way. This includes feelings about themselves and their future careers, prospects for settling down, and how they picture themselves in the immediate and medium term. The question directed to the material regarding this concept will be the following: what are the elements of the future perspectives of students? Is there a difference to find between how and to what extent mobile and super-mobile students expect to keep moving in the future?

### Life and work in the short term

Mobile students' views for the short term were mainly about how they picture themselves professionally. The most common elements to find in their views are the ones of getting a stable job, working in what they like and giving one step forward in their careers. Concerning mobility, the most common attitude is being open and even excited about keep moving, but staying longer in one place, as Ellis' observation reflects:

After this Master programme I think I'm open to everything. I mean, I would like to stay here for at least another year. But if not, then I would like to...move somewhere and maybe stay there for 2 years. I'm a bit tired of moving all around, all the time.

Super-mobile students reflected mainly in professional terms as well. The most shared view is starting to build a career as soon as possible by doing internships. This vision entails the intention to keep moving, even while wishing the opposite, which can be seen in Wren's words:

Yeah, it's kind of too much now haha, I would like to calm down and settle a bit, which I really think it's still not happening for me in a short-term view. I mean, because I don't know what's gonna happen, like, if you take another internship for 5 months then like, you still need to move somewhere for 5 months, and then you need to think "Where am I going next?"

Wren confirms:

I also accept that after the Master's is not gonna be easy to settle down...I'm ok if I still have to move 3 times in the following 3 years, but I would like to get to this point where I can finally stay steady, you know? I have enjoyed this Master so much, but now I'm ready for settling down a little bit.

Super-mobile students' perspective includes as well, in the immediate term, resting of moving and then moving again, yet staying longer in the same place, like when Azul says:

I know I don't want to go serious until 2024. Like, right after the programme I want to take it chill for a bit. (...) Oh, I will always be moving and travelling, cause that's the way I was raised, there's no way in which I wouldn't, both for fun and work. I do think I'll stay in one place for longer tho, slightly. Like 5 years in one place, you know? and then move again.

### Life and work in the medium term

A vision for the mid-term future became somewhat blurred for both mobile and super-mobile students. Reflecting mainly professionally, the mobile students' most common view is to keep improving in their careers. When it comes to settling down, however, visions differed. Whereas some want to have a family lifestyle, including a permanent place to live, others expressed the wish of settling down but not forever, and to stay living abroad. In Darian's words:

I feel like I don't want to settle there already. There are so many other cities to see, and countries to see, potentially (...) but I would like to stay living abroad as well, I think it's a really nice way to live, and sort of appreciate home a little bit more every time you come back.

Mobile students expressed not wanting to move around too often in the mid-term, as Ellis says:

In 10 years? I don't know...Improve in my career, still be happy...I would like to be really satisfied with my job still, and to settle down somewhere in a city and not any more move around that much. But I'm really not so sure.

Super-mobile students' views differed as well. Whereas some expressed the wish of settling down in the medium term, others expressed a clearer wish to have a mobile lifestyle. An example of the latter is when Tatum says:

Haha, 10 years?! I don't know. Let's wait. Like, right now I'd move far away but in 10 years, if I was more settled down already...then perhaps 1 year in Alaska would be like "mmm, not really" (...) But in 10 years I still would like to work in the EU institutions. Honestly, my dream would be working for this institution where you can actually be sent to work abroad for like 3 years or so. And then you need to come back for a certain amount of time and maybe be sent to another country, that would be pretty cool.

Examples of wishing to settle down were accompanied by the wish of figuring out what they want and continue enjoying life, like when Wren says:

I really want to think that by that moment I'll already have like a job that is my job, that by that moment I will have figured out what is that I really want to do, and also I really hope that by that moment I really enjoy my life, just as I do now.

### Feelings towards the future

Mobile students mainly expressed feeling confident about their steps after Euroculture and how the future might look. Ellis reflects:

*(Euroculture) influenced me a lot in the way that...I should be confident about the things that I want, I shouldn't doubt myself that I'm gonna get the job, and I'm gonna be good for a job, or this and that. I think it made me very confident about how I should see my future.*

On the same topic, Darian asserts:

*It kind of reaffirms that (Euroculture) it's a good basis of knowledge and skills to have for the future, in like many different sectors, like cultural, NGOs, EU institutions, UN institutions, academia, like it really helps you be like, "ok, I feel like I'm not gonna be completely jobless", haha, "I will find something with the skills I earned with this programme."*

Concerning super-mobile students, opinions were more divided. On the one hand, the feeling of certainty about future steps was present as well, as Wren's reflection showcases:

I think the programme gives us reasons since the beginning to hope for the best (...) and I think that it's true... Obviously I'm not expecting I finish my thesis and suddenly someone is knocking at my door telling me "Hey, a job". We'll have to make an effort, but I really think we are well prepared thanks to this Master's in every way, in the academic part but also in the personal one.

However, Tatum's vision is more sceptical:

Especially after my internship I know that my life outside the academic life is not going to be as pink as I imagined it, especially the work that I want to do is very difficult to achieve (...) So maybe in 10 years I'll make it to that point.

Finally, Azul observed:

My expectations for the future have become more fluid and flexible. They are much more open now than they were before, cause I think before I was around a lot of people who were very much like "Master's, get the job". Whereas now I've met so many more people who have had different life paths and different non-linear paths career-wise, so that's kind of fun (..) Whereas a lot of my friends at home finished the Master's and now they are trying to get into trainee programmes and stuff like that, and I'm like, "you knooow?", I'm not in a hurry actually. So I think I am in less of a rush. I mean, I'm still in a rush to like, see and do everything, but in less of a rush of like start a formal adult life, settle.

In sum, the elements of perspective on the future of mobile and super-mobile students were mainly related to professional development. In the short-term, mobile students expect to get a stable job, work in what they like and improve their careers. They also showcased openness and excitement about keep moving, as well as wanting, in most cases, to stay living abroad. Super-mobile students, on their part, see themselves mainly moving constantly in order to build

a career, yet staying longer in one place, and, above all, rest from moving right after the programme. In the medium term, mobile students picture themselves improving in their careers and mainly living abroad, but moving around less, while super-mobile students desire mainly a mobile lifestyle, yet staying in the same place for some 3 years or more, and then moving again. Finally, most mobile students expressed feeling confident about the future due to the skills acquired during the MA programme. Super-mobile students' feelings showed a mixture of certainty, scepticism, openness and flexibility. The results of this analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7. Discussion

In this chapter the results of the analysis will be discussed in relation to the theories of this study and the literature presented in Chapter 2. The aim is to answer the main research question: are there differences to find between the reflections on the experiences of Euroculture mobile and super-mobile students, in terms of Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future? Additionally, I'll reflect on the theoretical and methodological choices for this research. I will conclude by suggesting approaches for further research.

### Discussion of results

The most evident difference between how mobile and super-mobile students reflected on their Euroculture experience was related to socialising. This topic was very present in the reflections of super-mobile students, who described the social part of the programme as challenging and uprooting. These assertions confirm Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska's findings, where they observed that super-mobility comes with the cost of being enclosed in a transnational bubble.<sup>133</sup> In this regard, the size of the groups per semester, especially when they are formed by very few people, seems to play an important role in how students experience the programme concerning the social dimension. In terms of competences, super-mobile students appear to have gained in ability to handle several groups of international friendships through different means.

Another considerable difference is that super-mobile students expressed that academic learning might be negatively affected by such constant moving. Yet, the analysis showed the opposite. The instrumental competences gained through academic learning don't get affected by how often students moved. Concerning this, it seems to be way more important how each university handles the programme, as well as how well-structured the programme is in each institution.

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<sup>133</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule: Erasmus Mundus Students in the European Higher Education Area', *Mobilities* 17, no. 3 (2022): 432–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1971053>.

The heterogeneity in this last regard could be considered an area of improvement of the programme, and of the EMJM programmes in general.

Finally, one of the most striking differences is that moving often seems to have repercussions in the sense of direction people acquired. Whereas mobile students appear to have developed a somewhat clearer view of what steps to take after Euroculture, super-mobile students seemed to be more focused on how the challenges related to moving often affected them. Yet, the latter seem to have gained resilience after going often through challenging situations.

On the other hand, there were topics in which both groups of students agreed completely, one of them being having become aware of the difficulties that come together with moving that often. This vision is certainly different than the one of idealised mobility posed by the EU's discourse.<sup>134</sup> Here, a difference in terms of mobility perception is that super-mobile students expressed having felt stress and disappointment, especially when organising housing.

Another topic in which both groups of students agreed is the big impact that having classmates from all across the world had on them. As Wiertz asserted, "This melting pot of cultures and academic backgrounds can be very beneficial to the course units taught in the programme, because each student offers a unique perspective."<sup>135</sup> Given the students' reflections, it's safe to say that this, the multicultural groups, is one of the main assets of Euroculture. This was confirmed by the analysis, which showed that students expressed having acquired what it can be called cultural awareness, a mainly interpersonal skill. This competence got reflected in openness, sensitivity towards different cultures, and empathy. In this regard, Skrefsrud's argument about Intercultural learning becomes relevant, in the way that he stresses that studying abroad doesn't lead necessarily to developing empathy towards different cultures.<sup>136</sup> In the case of Euroculture, what seems to be the key to success is not only studying abroad but having such a varied composition per cohort. It seems safe to say this can be regarded as one of the biggest assets of the programme.

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<sup>134</sup> European Commission, 'Erasmus Mundus Action', Erasmus +. EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, accessed 14 March 2023, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/65>.

<sup>135</sup> Elze Wiertz, *Euroculture Alumni Research Report* (University of Groningen, 2019), 33.

<sup>136</sup> Thor-André Skrefsrud, 'Why Student Mobility Does Not Automatically Lead to Better Understanding: Reflections on the Concept of Intercultural Learning', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration*, ed. David Cairns (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 63–73, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64235-8\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64235-8_7).



One more topic all students showed agreement on is the importance of the Internship semester. The effect got reflected in terms of competences and perspective on the future, since it makes students confront professional life, having clear repercussions on how they picture their future in the short term. This can be regarded as another considerable asset of the programme.

In terms of perspective on the future, a difference between both groups of students is that mobile students expressed openness and excitement to keep moving, whilst all super-mobile students declared wishing to take a break from moving right after the programme. This might be related to feeling tired of moving that often, as the students themselves pointed it out during the interviews.

Notwithstanding, tired as they are, super-mobile students intend to keep moving in the short term for professional purposes. This might reflect what Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska characterised as the mobility imperative, related to the EU's vision of the European, cosmopolitan mobile worker.<sup>137</sup> This might also be related to Cuzzocrea's reflections about the social construction of youth.<sup>138</sup> In other words, what means to be young in a European context comes with certain expectations and social pressure related to moving as much as possible. This might be confirmed by the striking fact that all students expressed the wish of staying longer in one place in the future, in their own words, for some three years and then moving again. Being a non-European student, I find striking the facility with which my European counterparts express the intention of having an international lifestyle, namely moving through different countries and settling down away from their home country. Would this happen with equal facility when students from other continents reflect on perspectives on the future? Is this a reflection of the European vision of the cosmopolitan mobile worker,<sup>139</sup> or there are many more elements involved? The subject is open to debate.

Finally, it's necessary to underline how specific this educational super-mobility is, which becomes evident when thinking about the original context in which the term hypermobility was

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<sup>137</sup> Karolina Czerska-Shaw and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility and Educational Migration* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), 213–23.

<sup>138</sup> Valentina Cuzzocrea and Ewa Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion: Understanding Super-Mobility in Higher Education', *Higher Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00852-6>.

<sup>139</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'.

applied, that is, in the one of business travel and leisure travel.<sup>140</sup> Differently, super-mobility in the educational context of the European Higher Education Area has very clear and specific goals, namely, the expected learning outcomes of each EMJM. In this regard, a specific element of this kind of super-mobility is the key role that universities play during the students' journeys. Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska expressed it as follows:

“Like a racing-car pit crew, university programmes need to prepare students for their next mobility as soon as they arrive at their first, while providing support structures for the various side-effects of super-mobility, including anxiety, culture shock and broader mental health issues.”<sup>141</sup>

Accordingly, the programme management at a consortium level becomes an important point of support for the students, as well as the administrative support provided by each university. This turned out to be a capital element defining how students experienced the mobility part of the programme. An example is when super-mobile student Wren expresses:

At the end of the day, my experience in Euroculture has been as it has been because of the universities I chose, and because of these groups of people. If I had been with different classmates it would have been different, the same if I had been to different universities. For example, when I was being kicked out of my house during my second semester, my coordinators helped me so much. Maybe in a different uni it wouldn't have been the same, and maybe at some point I even would have end up giving up or something.

The institutional support, thus, it's one of the central aspects to make this educational experience a successful one, yet Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska pointed out how the access to this support can be, in some cases, unevenly distributed,<sup>142</sup> fact that has been confirmed by some students. In consequence, the heterogeneity in the programme concerning the support given to students by each university with practical, organisational and bureaucratic matters can be considered an area of improvement of Euroculture and of the EMJM programmes in general.

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<sup>140</sup> Scott A Cohen and Stefan Gössling, 'A Darker Side of Hypermobility', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 47, no. 8 (2015): 166–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15597124>.

<sup>141</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule', 443.

<sup>142</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'.

## Theoretical and methodological considerations

The first thing that needs to be addressed is the approach of this study, namely departing from concepts to analyse experiences. This approach was selected taking into consideration the very recent development of a framework to understand super-mobility in education. This study aimed to broaden the way in which this phenomenon can be studied. To do that, I selected concepts departing from the existing literature on the topic, as well as from how the EMJM programmes are conceptualised by the European Commission. Due to the EU's idealised image of mobility, explained in Chapter 3, it seemed important to question whether the quality of learning is better if students move more. On the other hand, super-mobility in education has a very specific purpose, namely, every EMJM's curricula are designed to achieve specific educational goals: in the case of Euroculture, a series of skills, learning outcomes and competences mainly derived from intercultural experiences.<sup>143</sup> As explained in Chapter 3, the notion of competences is central for the development of a curricula that can be used by a consortium of universities in order to deliver a joint programme.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, as showcased in previous literature and explained in Chapter 3, students tend to place more value in the soft skills they gained through mobility, rather than on the academic content of the programme.<sup>145</sup> For the aforementioned reasons, the notion of Competences was selected as one of the analytical tools for the present study.

Using the notion of competences for the analysis of the material proved to be challenging. In the first place, it resulted difficult to make an analytical distinction among the kind of competences reflected on the students' reflections. As shown by several students, one single competence can get reflected in the personal, social or professional dimension, or in all of them. In the second place, it must be acknowledged that assigning a type of competence to the experience expressed by the students was an interpretative process. Even when I followed the

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<sup>143</sup> Euroculture Consortium, *Master Degree Programme Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context. Self-Evaluation Report for the Accreditation Procedure under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EHEA)* (University of Groningen, 2019).

<sup>144</sup> Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures In Europe. Final Report. Pilot Project-Phase I* (Bilbao: University of Deusto and University of Groningen, 2003); Robert Wagenaar, 'Competences and Learning Outcomes: A Panacea for Understanding the (New) Role of Higher Education?', in *Reform! Tuning the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe: A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning*. (Spain: International Tuning Academy, 2019), 191–212.

<sup>145</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'.

definitions of the concepts provided in Chapter 3 as closely as I could, the criteria to assign one category or another is very related to my view as a researcher, thus subject to debate.

The two remaining concepts selected for the analysis -mobility perception and perspective on the future- were proposed as a result of the exploration of existing literature on the topic, conducted in the initial stage of this study. Mobility perception was mainly derived from the EU's discourse on educational policy related to mobility,<sup>146</sup> whereas perspective on the future arose from what Czerska-Shaw, Krzaklewska and Cuzzocrea found in their respective studies.<sup>147</sup> My own observations and experience as a Euroculture student played a role as well in choosing these concepts.

Mobility perception and perspective on the future are being used for the first time in this study to understand students' experiences, therefore they are in a very descriptive, exploratory stage, and their definitions are not close to being as developed as the one of competences. That's why, in Chapter 6, the analysis conducted in the section of competences resulted more extensive and nuanced than the one on the other two concepts.

Yet, using mobility perception and perspective on the future for the analysis, in combination with competences, allowed to grasp the personal growth reflected in the students' observations (explained in Chapters 5 and 6): in how students reflected on their experiences it's possible to see how aware they are of their maturation process, as well as how they project to use the acquired competences for their future plans. This finding may be put in conversation with Cohen and Gössling, and with Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska: when bringing to the fore the "darker side of hypermobility" they had a very clear and valuable purpose, this is, to make a balance with the institutional discourse of glorified mobility.<sup>148</sup> Yet, if the results of this study are any indication, the intakes students got from experiencing Euroculture are not only a "golden ticket to succeed in a fast-changing and diversified labour market",<sup>149</sup> but something way more valuable and enriching at the personal level, which was reflected on student's

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<sup>146</sup> European Commission, 'The Erasmus+ Programme Guide. Version 2.', Publications Office of the European Union., 2022, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/4199>; European Commission, 'Erasmus Mundus Action'.

<sup>147</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus'; Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'Uneasy Belonging in the Mobility Capsule'; Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska, 'Erasmus Students' Motivations in Motion'.

<sup>148</sup> Cohen and Gössling, 'A Darker Side of Hypermobility', 1674.

<sup>149</sup> Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 'The Super-Mobile Student: Global Educational Trajectories in Erasmus Mundus', 3.

observations about gaining self-confidence, independence, a sense of direction, as well as in the interpersonal competence of resilience.

Finally, it's necessary to discuss the methodological choice of differentiating mobile from super-mobile students within the same programme (Chapter 4). Even when departing from the fact that some students move as much as possible during the programme whilst some do it only in the minimum amount required, decisions and pathways are always different. Wiertz asserted this when she said that "With students from 56 different countries which have different ages and studied different subjects before being admitted to the programme, no two Euroculture students are the same".<sup>150</sup> The same could be said about the individual mobility tracks: even within the mobile or super-mobile group, there are students who started Euroculture in the country they already lived at, students who moved for their first semester, students who did their internship in the same country than their first and fourth semester, but on a different city, and so on. This leads to the question: what makes a mobile or super-mobile student to be so? The categorisation can still be improved and refined in more detail.

Among my participants there were a couple of students for whom Euroculture did not represent a significant lifestyle change, either because they were already used to moving very often -in the student's words, "that's how I was raised"- or because they had been already settled for a long time in the city where they carried out three out of four semesters of the programme. In these two extreme cases, in contrast to those students for whom studying the programme entailed major changes, it is hard to discern what learning and changes were specifically caused by Euroculture.

This last consideration leads to reflection on the technique used for gathering the material, namely in-depth interviews. Even while they proved to be especially enriching when exploring the subtleties of the students' experiences, they were very time-consuming. In consequence, not many interviews could be conducted in the timeframe set for this study, hence, it's necessary to acknowledge the feelings students expressed about Euroculture don't reflect the ones of all the students in the cohort. This is, certainly, one of the limitations of this study.

In-depth interviews, however, allow a nuanced view of the phenomenon to be explored (Chapter 4). In this way, they made it possible to acquire a detailed vision of what the Euroculture experience meant for the students, as well as of the negative and positive

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<sup>150</sup> Wiertz, *Euroculture Alumni Research Report*, 33.

implications of it. Therefore, this study aims to add to the attempts to correct the imbalanced discourse that glorifies mobility by highlighting the negative aspects of super-mobility, but also underlining its positive implications for students' development. This study, hopefully, was critical enough to delve into both ends of the scale.

### Further research

Whatever the strengths of this study, it only shows what people think about their experiences while still being part of the programme. Notwithstanding, several of them are only about to start building a professional career. In this way, interviewing Alumni could have brought a different perspective on the results of the study: one of people who, through experience outside the academic life, has acquired a clearer and sharper picture of how much the programme impacted different dimensions of their development. In other words, further research could address both students' and graduates' experiences to nourish the existent understanding of the super-mobility phenomenon.

Additionally, it has not gone unnoticed, both through this study and through my own experience during Euroculture, how important and decisive is the role played by the staff, from coordinators to directors and teachers, in making the experience as enriching and smooth as possible. Yet, how the programme is managed at a consortium level, as well as the enormous effort involved in coordinating, running and teaching such a complex programme, has been so far missed by the existing literature. Future research could focus on exploring the elements that make this kind of programmes possible at the institutional level, and the implications this has for directors, coordinators and teachers. This would broaden our limited, current understanding of the super-mobility phenomenon in higher education.

## Conclusion

Departing from the EU's discourse that assumes that mobility *per se* leads to a series of advantages for the students, as well as from the very recent and little existing literature on super-mobility in education, this study aimed to understand how super-mobility affects the EMJM students' experiences. The main research question was the following: Are there differences to find between the reflections on the experiences of Euroculture mobile and super-mobile students, in terms of Mobility Perception, Competences, and Perspective on the Future? In order to answer it, two sub-questions were posed:

1. What are the main topics students address when reflecting on their mobility experiences during Euroculture?
2. How can mobile and super-mobile reflections be understood in relation to Mobility perception, Competences acquisition, and Perspective on the future?

The questions were answered by conducting in-depth interviews with Euroculture students about to graduate. Then, a qualitative content analysis was implemented to process the material obtained, followed by an analysis conducted by applying the selected concepts: Mobility perception, Competences, and Perspective on the future. While the concept of Competences was taken from the methodology for the development of the European Higher Education Area, Mobility perception and perspective on the future were derived from the existing literature on super-mobility in education. The concepts were operationalised into an analytical model and applied to the material.

The results are the following:

- The most evident difference between how mobile and super-mobile students reflected on their Euroculture experience was related to socialising. While the former did not reflect on it, the topic was very present in the reflections of the latter, who described the social part of the programme as challenging and uprooting. In terms of competences,

they appear to have gained in ability to handle several groups of international friendships through different means.

- Super-mobile students expressed that academic learning might be negatively affected by such constant moving. Yet, the analysis showed the opposite. The instrumental competences gained through academic learning don't get affected by how often students moved. It seems to be way more important how each university handles the programme, and how well-structured the programme is in each institution. The heterogeneity in this last regard could be considered an area of improvement of Euroculture and of the EMJM programmes in general.
- Moving often seems to have repercussions in the sense of direction people acquired. Whereas mobile students appear to have developed a somewhat clearer view of what steps to take after the programme, super-mobile students seem to be more focused on how the challenges related to moving often affected them. Yet, the latter appear to have gained resilience after going through challenging situations often.
- In terms of mobility perception, super-mobile students expressed having felt, among other things, stress and disappointment, especially when organising housing.
- Having classmates from all over the world had a big impact on all the students, who expressed having acquired what it can be called cultural awareness, a mainly interpersonal skill. This competence got reflected in openness, sensitivity towards different cultures, and empathy. Having such a varied composition per cohort can be regarded as one of the biggest assets of Euroculture.
- The Internship semester impacted all students in terms of competences and perspective on the future. This can be regarded as another considerable asset of the programme.
- Almost all students intend to keep living abroad in the short and middle term. Super-mobile students, despite being tired of moving constantly, intend to keep doing so for professional purposes. The reasons behind this intention could be related to the social construction of youth in the European context, which places certain expectations and



social pressure on young people concerning moving as much as possible. It could also be a reflection of the European vision of the cosmopolitan mobile worker. The subject is open to debate.

- Finally, the students' reflections showed that the programme management is a capital element defining how they experience it. Institutional support is one of the central aspects to make the Euroculture experience successful. The heterogeneity concerning the support given to students by each university with practical, organisational and bureaucratic matters can be considered an area of improvement of Euroculture and of the EMJM programmes in general.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Results

### Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 1

Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 1									
		About moving	Practical challenges	Academic systems	Social implications	Academic impressions	I would...	Personal reflections	General impressions
Mobile students	Arbor	Mobility lived up to my expectations	It did not affect me too much because I already had accomodation	Shocked by different academic systems		Some things of the programme met my expectations, others not / I imagined more practical courses		Being abroad gave me time for myself	
		I already knew it was going to be fun		Unstructured courses at first university, better structure and courses at my second university		The programme didn't suit me academically			
	Ellis	Anxiety / Motivation / Excitement		Expected stricter/heavier workload, but I'm glad it was not the case			I would stress less, enjoy more	The programme meant starting adult life	I became aware of the difficulties of it
	Darian	I had my mobility clear	I tried to avoid the bureaucratic hazle	Aware of different academic systems					It went well, but fast!  Pros: resilience, project management, personal development, independence. Cons: Risk of never arriving anywhere, probably negative for students' development
Super-mobile students	Azul	I didn't have too many expectations, just wanted to leave	I enjoy the administrative part, but it was too much	Hard to match up academic systems	We don't become part of the local community, which is fine since I'm here only temporarily	Academic expectations fulfilled	I would do a different internship	I started with a clearer vision of what I wanted to do in the future, whereas now I'm like aaah!	
		Moving gives you freedom since you get detached from cultural expectations			It's hard to keep in touch with your international friends				
	Tatum	Moving is cool	Challenges lead to personal development	Academic learning negatively affected by moving that often	Moving that often is not ideal, socially / Disappointed of small groups	The programme didn't suit me academically / The academic content in semester one was extremely basic	I'd chose a different first university		
	Wren	Moving is cool / I wanted to travel and learn The programme pushes you / Not having a routine for 2 years	Personal development: Accomodation / Go alone and start a life	Adapting to different education systems / Learning from different perspectives	Several groups of friends in a very short time! / It overcame my expectations			I was full of stereotypes	Aware of negative things, which are normal / Disappointed of starting homeless

## Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 2

Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 2					
		Multicultural groupwork	The internship semester	Social life and friends groups	Personal reflections
Mobile students	Arbor	Fascinating and fun. Especially valuable when you are doing European studies	I have a better sense of direction thanks to the academic content and the internship	I improved my social skills cause I had the opportunity to do so	You learn a lot from the experience of coming to a new country and having to adapt.
	Ellis	When people tells you about their cultures you are happier, because you learn a lot	I changed my idea about what to do next	This programme pushed me to be more sociable / I'm happy to have aquired that skill	I'm more focused
		I'm more culturally aware / I think in a global level / Open to incorporate different cultures in my daily life	New ways of studying and researching / Internship helped with professional skills		I'm confident about moving to different countries
			Learning to deal with anxiety, stress and criticism		I finally understand this culture better / I'm learning the language
	Darian	I'm more patient and open to other views I've looked at my own culture from a different angle	Internship and group work helped with social and professional skills		Now I know what to do next / I feel secure, confident, I do things with a purpose I'm getting more and more used to this culture / I feel at home
Super-mobile students	Azul	Sensitive towards cultural differences / Less assuming / Better listener	Internship brought my self-confidence down, but now I can rebuild better and stronger / I need to trust myself more	Now I'm more explicit about myself to my friends	
	Tatum	Multiculturalism, that is, meeting people from all across the world is the biggest contribution of this programme	The internship opened my eyes. It's not going to be easy get the job I want!		I learnt I can live with very little / Packing my life for the next five months made me humble
	Wren	It changed my views about my own country and culture / It made me realise the huge gap between my country and other countries in Europe		Now I'm ok with changing groups of friends often, and I'm learning to keep in touch with all of them	I'm fully independent now / I'm more self-confident / I developed critical thinking, now I'm good at solving problems
		I learnt that I cannot judge a culture until I have been there		Meeting people from different cultures improved my social skills / I had to create relationships in English	I'm not scared of starting from scratch in a new country

Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 3

Themes addressed by students. Set of questions 3					
		5 years	Open to keep moving?	10 years	Expectations after Euroculture
Mobile students	Arbor	Steady job / Permanent place to live / Family lifestyle One step further professionally	Open to move, but it has to work with the desired lifestyle	Steady job / Permanent place to live / Family lifestyle	The internship provided me insight on how the future might look
	Ellis	Stable job Working in what I like	Open and excited to keep moving, but staying longer in one place	Not sure Happy / Improving in my career / Settled	I should be confident about the future
	Darian	One step further in my career Living in a bigger city	Different city / Different working environment I hope to stay living abroad	Outside of academia / Working for a public institution	I'm confident about finding a job
	Azul	Chilling after the programme Working in Brussels and travelling Fun work environment	Sure of keep moving, but staying longer in one place	No rush about building a career	My expectations became more fluid and flexible
Super-mobile students	Tatum	Start building a career as soon as possible	I'd like to settle down a bit, but I know I'll perhaps need to move every five months while I do internships	Working for the EU institution I want Moving every certain years is part of my dream job	The internship opened my eyes, I became more realistic and skeptical
	Wren	Doing internships and start working as soon as possible Getting work experience to figure out what I want	Ok with moving, but wishing to settle down / Going back home when I have built a career I'd like to stay where I am now, or in this area	Settled down / Knowing what I want / Enjoying life	I feel well prepared personally and professionally, I'm confident about the future



## Appendix 2. Analysis

### Elements of mobility perception of mobile and super-mobile students

Elements of mobility perception when starting Euroculture		
	Mobile students	Super-mobile students
	Fun	Not too many expectations, just wanted to leave
	I had my mobility clear	Exciting and cool
	Excitement about the first semester	I wanted to travel, I wanted to grow
	Expectations about the content of the programme	Expectations about the content of the programme
Elements of mobility perception when about to graduate		
	Mobile students	Super-mobile students
The hazards of constant moving	There are pros and cons of moving that much	I'm aware of the negative things that come with moving, which are normal
	I became aware of the difficulties of moving	Disappointed of starting homeless
	Accommodation is key	Moving every year would make more sense
	Mobility lived up to my expectations	It's hard packing life for five months / The idea of having my own room now sounds amazing
	No major things went wrong, but it passed fast!	Not everyone experiences mobility in the same way
The personal and social spheres	Mobility causes mixed emotions	Moving that often is not always the best for everyone's mental health
	Being abroad gave me time for myself	Because of moving that much we don't become part of the local community, which is ok, but it can be hard.
	I felt I had a life when I came back	Disappointed of small groups / Socially is not ideal / Difficult to interact with locals
Mobility and academic learning	The courses felt messy	Socially it overcame expectations. It's way better
		Academic expectations were fulfilled / or not
		Academic learning is negatively affected by such frequent mobility
		It can be hard matching up the academic systems
		Changing academic system continuously pushes you to adapt to different perspectives and approaches

## Competences. Mobile and super-mobile students

Competence types:			
I = Instrumental			
IP = Inter personal			
S = Systemic			
Cultural awareness			
Mobile students	Competence type	Super-mobile students	Competence type
Realising different opinions and views thanks to group work	IP	I've become more sensitive towards cultural differences / I'm less assuming, and a better listener	IP
I'm aware of cultural differences and similarities, and I've realised we are all the same.	IP	Meeting and working with people from all across the world is the biggest contribution of this programme.	IP
Having group work with people from all across the world made me open, patient and more chill	IP	Having friends from all over the world changed my views about my own country and culture / Gaps between my country and other countries in Europe	IP
I could look at my own culture from a different angle.	IP	I've learnt I can't judge a culture unless I've been there	IP
I'm more open minded to incorporate different cultures into my daily life	IP		
Group work has been good for my social and professional skills	IP		
I finally can understand this culture better, also because I'm learning the language.	IP+I		
It made me culturally aware / It made me think on a global level	S		
Social skills			
Mobile students	Competence type	Super-mobile students	Competence type
I became more sociable / this programme pushed me to be extroverted / I'm happy to have that skill now.	IP	Social skills: now I'm more explicit about myself to my friends / I've learnt to keep in contact with all the groups of friends I've made	IP+I
Different forms of knowledge			
Mobile students	Competence type	Super-mobile students	Competence type
Improving skills on how to conduct research	I	Adapting to different education systems made me learnt different perspectives and approaches of understanding knowledge	I
I learnt new ways to approach research and studying in general from different countries.	I		
I learnt how to be more specific when researching, and how to deal with criticism and anxiety	IP+I		
Personal growth-Sense of direction and Resilience			
Mobile students	Competence type	Super-mobile students	Competence type
I learnt a lot, I have a better sense of direction now	IP	A lot of personal development: you change a lot as a person thanks to the challenges	IP
I figured out what to do next	S	Personal development: small tasks: find accommodation, go alone to a new country and start a life	IP+I
The whole environment led me to feel comfortable and confident of who I am, the things I do, and how I do them / Now I do things with a purpose	I+S	The programme pushes you to not having a routine within 2 years, which is fine	IP+I
		I learnt that I can live with very little / It made me humble and to appreciate the things I travel with	IP+I
		The internship brought my self-confidence down / I can rebuild better and stronger / I learnt I need to trust myself more	IP
		I am really independent now	IP
		I value myself more / I give myself more credibility	IP
		I trust myself more, I got critical thinking, I'm good at solving problems	IP+I
		I'm more realistic about the working life / Internship made me more realistic and skeptical	IP

## Perspectives on the future of mobile and super-mobile students

Perspectives on the Future in the short term		
	Mobile students	Super-mobile students
Life and work	Steady job / Permanent place to live / Family lifestyle	Start building a career as soon as possible
	Stable job	Doing internships and start working as soon as possible / Figuring out what I want
	Working in what I like	Working in Brussels and travelling
	One step further professionally Working for some institution	
Mobility	Living in a bigger city	Working abroad / Going back home when I have built a career
	Open to move, but it has to work with the lifestyle I want	Moving for working is part of my dream job
	Open and excited to keep moving, but staying longer in a same place	Open to move, but I need a fun work environment Settling down but not forever
Resting of moving		Chilling after the programme
		I'm ok with moving, but I wish I could settle down a little bit / I want to stay here
Perspectives on the future in the medium term		
	Mobile students	Super-mobile students
Life, work, and moving	Steady job / Permanent place to live / Family lifestyle	Not sure about moving if I am already settled / Working for the EU institution I want
	Happy / Improving in my career / Settling down / Not sure	Settled down / Knowing what I want / Enjoying life as much as I enjoy it now
	Settling down but not forever	I don't like to think that far in advance / I have no rush for building a career
	Different city / Different working environment I hope to stay living abroad	
Expectations after Euroculture		
	Mobile students	Super-mobile students
	I have insight on how the future might look	I became sceptical about the future
	I think I should be confident about how I see my future	I'm confident about the future
	I'm confident about finding a job	I have no rush for settling / My expectations became more fluid and flexible