



Spain's role in International Student Mobility with Latin America as a strategic tool to strengthen EU–LAC relations

Master's Thesis



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Abstract

This thesis examines International Student Mobility (ISM) within the framework of bi-regional relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with a particular focus on Spain's role as a bridging country. It seeks to identify the main challenges faced by ISM programmes that have limited their effectiveness in fostering closer ties between these regions. Moreover, the study explores how Spain's position contributes to strengthening intergovernmental relations through academic mobility programmes involving LAC students.

To this end, a qualitative methodology based on interviews with former participants in these programmes was adopted. The findings indicate that a turbulent sociopolitical environment in the countries of origin, together with the search for better professional opportunities, acted as key push factors driving students to study abroad. At the same time, several pull factors influenced their decisions, including the opportunity to improve language skills and gain a broader, more global perspective. Owing to Ibero-American cultural links and relatively accessible administrative procedures, Spain emerged as the most attractive destination. The analysis further reveals that participation in these programmes improved students' perceptions of both Spain and the EU, providing a more nuanced understanding of the region that they were able to share with their local communities, thereby contributing to stronger transnational ties.

The thesis argues that ISM constitutes an effective soft power tool that the EU can employ to engage with LAC students through Spain and to foster bi-regional networks, a strategy that is particularly relevant in a context where emerging actors such as China and Russia are increasing their presence in the region. Nevertheless, this approach also entails challenges, including the risk of brain drain and the disproportionate concentration of LAC students in Spain. In this regard, organisations such as the Erasmus Student Network and the EU-LAC Foundation play an important role in encouraging interest in Latin America and the Caribbean across all EU Member States and in promoting a more balanced distribution of student mobility.

Overall, this research contributes to the literature on the internationalisation of higher education by offering insights into mobility programmes between Spain, Latin America and the Caribbean, and by highlighting their potential as a EU strategy for strengthening relations with the region in an increasingly complex global context.

Keywords: International Student Mobility, EU-LAC relations, Spain, Ibero-America, student migration, intercultural exchange, educational diplomacy, transnational networks.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical Background.....	3
2.1. EU-LAC relations.....	3
2.2. Spain as a mediator in EU-LAC relations	7
2.3. International Student Mobility (ISM).....	12
2.3.1. Origins of International Student Mobility (ISM).....	13
2.3.2. EU-LAC Student Mobility: Challenges and Improvement Suggestions.....	14
a. Institutional framework.....	15
b. Financial constraints	16
c. Access to information	17
d. Academic colonialism.....	18
e. Student segregation and discrimination	19
f. Impact of the programmes.....	20
3. Methodology.....	22
4. Results.....	25
4.1. Motivations to study abroad	25
a. Escape socioeconomic difficulties.....	25
b. Improving language skills.....	26
c. Gain an intercultural perspective	26
d. Access job market	27
4.2. Perceptions of the EU	28
4.3. Perceptions of Spain	29
4.4. Challenges of International Student Mobility.....	32
4.5. Improvements of International Student Mobility	36
5. Discussion and Conclusion.....	36
6. References.....	46
Appendix A: Alumni interviews	55
Part 1: English translated interview script.....	55
Part 2: Spanish original interview script.....	55
Part 3: English-translated transcription of the interviews.....	56
1. Interview Sebastián (29, Brazil)	56
2. Interview Carlos (36, Peru).....	64
3. Interview María (33, Cuba)	72
4. Interview Daniel (28, Colombia).....	78
Part 4: Spanish original transcription of the interviews.....	83
1. Entrevista Sebastián (29, Brasil).....	83
2. Entrevista Carlos (36, Perú).....	91
3. Entrevista María (33, Cuba)	100

4. Entrevista Daniel (28, Colombia).....	108
Appendix B: Interview with Martina Bo, ESN’s Liaison Officer for the Americas 2023-2025	113
Part 1: English translation of the script.....	113
Part 2: Spanish original interview script.....	113
Part 3: English-translated transcription of the interview	114
Part 4: Spanish original transcription of the interview	119

1. Introduction

The benefits of International Student Mobility have been long discussed ever since they started to become a mainstream phenomenon by the XX century, when they were used as a diplomacy tool to bring nations together during Cold War times (Beylur, 2020). However, this tradition dates back to the Renaissance, when the Grand Tour gained popularity between typically young European high-class men, who set off on a journey through the continent as a learning method when they reached adulthood (Zelazko, 2025). Some of the most notable benefits of these academic abroad experiences are personal and professional growth, intercultural and language skills, and the acquisition of an international perspective (Valls-Figuera, 2023: 12).

Despite these assets, ISM also receives criticism due to the high costs they generate, which do not always correspond to long-term impact but rather stay on an individual experience for self-growth. However, the potential of academic mobility in creating connections across members of different cultures makes student mobility an ideal tool to be applied in the field of international relations. In fact, the EU is aware of these advantages and uses it as a soft power tool to attract international students and improve its reputation as an academic referent. This justifies the high budget, €5 billion for the 2025 period, allocated to finance institutions offering academic mobility (Erasmus +, 2024).

In terms of cultural closeness, Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions that most connects with EU values. This relationship, although reflects dark episodes of a colonial past, led to the creation of close ties that remain to this day and allowed to establish partnerships in terms of economic agreements, political alliances, social initiatives and other cooperating mechanisms. Although the EU has historically been, along with the USA, the main LAC partner, recent geopolitical changes positioned emerging actors such as China in the top investors in the region (Ayuso, 2025). This can be detrimental for EU's global position, since a partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean grants access to key raw materials for a sustainable energetic and digital transition (Ibid). Nevertheless, this extractivistic trend, characteristic of the traditional EU diplomatic strategy towards Latin America and the Caribbean, is exactly what is allowing new investors to get closer to the LAC region, since they opt for an approach based on regional development.

As a result, it is key for the EU to update its traditional strategy with LAC by adapting to this region's needs and preferences. This new approach should also consider a revision of migration

policies, which play a key role in EU-LAC partnership, which is a human centred relation. In addition, talent mobility between these regions can also contribute to face the current labour shortage triggered by the demographical crisis in the EU. However, there is a lack of consensus on this topic across EU Member States, since each of them has a different approach. In this context, student mobility emerges as an excellent soft power tool to allow human circulation.

Spain is a fundamental actor in this task due to the strong historical, cultural and linguistic links with Latin America and the Caribbean, which explains the considerations of this country in the obtention of residence permits to members of so-called Ibero-America (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.[b]). This term refers to the community formed of Spain, Portugal and the Latin American states that used to be part of these empires during colonisation times. As it can be observed, the fact that this term includes these two European countries makes it useful to talk about the shared language and cultural heritage between these nations, in opposition to Latin America and the Caribbean, which only includes those nations geographically included in this continent. One last term related to the above mentioned is Spanish America, which only refers to those Spanish speaking countries in the American continent, thereby excluding countries like Brazil, whose official country differs from Spanish, as well as European countries due to their geographical location (Méndez, n.d.).

The distinction between these concepts helps clarify the scope of this paper, which focuses on the following research questions. First, it seeks to identify the main weaknesses of international student mobility that have limited the ability of previous programmes to fully realise their potential as diplomatic tools for bringing nations closer. Building on this analysis, the study then examines how Spain's role can be leveraged to strengthen EU-LAC relations through international student mobility. For this purpose, the Literature Review will first explore the characteristics of this relationship, as well as the the role that Spain plays in it. Next, the origins of International Student Mobility will be explained in order to understand its current state and the peculiarities of programmes between the EU and the LAC region. Moving on to the research methods, a qualitative methodology will be implemented with the purpose of including real experiences from LAC students in Spain that participated in a mobility programme in the past. Through semi-structured interviews, their testimonies will give insights into the motivations that encouraged them to study abroad, the changes in their perceptions of Spain and the EU before and after the mobility took place, as well as identified challenges and improvements of ISM. An additional contribution from Erasmus Student Network's Liaison Officer for the

Americas, Martina Bo, will further explain the efforts that such institutions are making to keep promoting academic collaboration between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean. This research highlights the potential of Ibero-American student networks to reinforce the traditional EU-LAC partnership and make sure it meets the conditions to create a renewed alliance able to face global challenges.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. EU-LAC relations

To talk about EU-LAC relations, it is necessary to start by talking about the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation of the Latin American continent between the 15th and the 19th century (Gardini, 2021: 2). Although many set this process as the beginning of one of the most important cultural encounters in history, it also involved unrecoverable losses in the cultural heritage of native populations due to the oppression techniques used to take control over the Latin American territory. The major one is the demographic loss: almost a century after colonisation began, the indigenous population had decreased by 90 %, mainly due to hard labour, slavery, and diseases brought by European colonisers, which were mortal to Latin American natives owing to genetic isolation over centuries (Cuervo, 2016: 140). In a lesser extent, wars and battles, which many times were encouraged by colonisers to get war captives (2016: 126), also contributed to this demographic loss. Since the human resources provided by the Spanish colonisers were not always sufficient to conquer territories, they imported Black slaves from Africa and allied with specific tribes in exchange for protection. This gave rise to rivalries among tribes and a new social division in which natives, Black people and *mestizos* were regarded as inferior in contrast to the creoles, who were descendants of the colonisers (Ricaute & Ricaute, 2015: 123).

This massacre was accompanied by cruel treatment, including torture techniques intended to subjugate indigenous people and prevent them from rebelling against the colonisers by psychologically breaking them (Cuervo, 2016: 116). Along with the generational trauma that this meant for local communities, there were other consequences that still last to this day. During the colonisation process, Spanish culture, language, and religion were imposed upon indigenous cultures (Ibid: 141), becoming the basis of Latin American culture today (Ibid: 106). However, this also entailed the devaluation or even eradication of native cultures, which were regarded as primitive, wild, and unworthy, in spite of which the Spanish conquerors appropriated their traditional objects, treasures and wealth (Ibid: 120). This European

superiority complex still affects knowledge production today, with discourse produced in the Western world dominating the rest.

After centuries of oppression, independence movements in the European continent reached the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, motivating former colonies to rebel against the Spanish Crown. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, Spain lost all its colonies, which became independent states with their own institutions and legal capacity to decide which model would rule their country. However, despite the independence that most LAC countries gained in the 19th century, they kept trading with the European continent to compensate the loss of markets in their colonial homelands (Gardini, 2021: 3). This continuous collaboration aligned the values of both regions, making them matching partners in different scopes.

Nevertheless, this relationship experienced several ups and downs depending on the circumstances surrounding each continent. In the sixties, shortly after the establishment of the European Economic Community, diplomatic relations began with LAC, although not as a priority area from today's EU (Vigil, 2013: 288). However, after the democratic transition in several LAC countries (Gardini, 2021: 6) and the integration of Spain and Portugal to the EU in 1986 (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006: 127), an official cooperation strategy with this territory was designed. Initially, the main interest in a EU-LAC collaboration was commercial, but this focus was expanded to politics, economy and development cooperation during the Rio Summit in 1999, where representatives of Latin American and EU countries met to establish a strategic partnership (European Commission et al., 2002: 7).

Nowadays, the EU and LAC still cooperate in different ways and regional scopes. Firstly, the objectives of the political dimension are an improved inter-institutional dialogue between both regions, promotion of democracy and human rights, and fighting against organised crime to advocate for global security (Ibid) through mechanisms like EL PAcCTO or COPOLAD. Political cooperation can take place through summits, such as the EU–CELAC Summits that replaced the EU–LAC ones since 2010, or the parliamentary diplomacy, like the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) (Kraft et al., 2024).

Economical agreements are also “a deeply political instrument that, by advancing dialogue and cooperation, would seal a strategic alliance between two regions”, as stated by Josep Borrell, former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Borrell, 2022). These agreements can take place with individual countries or on a sub-regional level,

like the partnership with the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) since 1983, that allowed for an elimination of tariffs and access to market (Kraft et al., 2024). In the Caribbean region, the EU has an economic partnership agreement with CARIFORUM since 2008 (Ibid), and with the Central American Common Market since 1985 (European Commission et al., 2002). Regarding South America, the EU-Mercosur agreement is the most outstanding one. Although the negotiations started at the end of the 20th century, the global agreement was only reached in December 2024, and it still has to be approved by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament (Bortoletto, 2025).

Through the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, the EU implements various programmes to foster innovation and development in the LAC region in sustainability, such as EUROCLIMA, technological transition through the EU–LAC Digital Alliance, social progress, as exemplified by the Inclusive Societies Programme, and public health (European Commission, n.d.). Nevertheless, there has been some criticism regarding the “risk of replicating extractivist logics and prioritising Europe’s strategic interests over those of LAC” (Ayuso, 2025). For this reason, it is important to ensure an ethical approach that takes into account the regional needs and preferences of Latin America and the Caribbean to avoid a Eurocentric approach (Ibid).

Moving on to the cultural, educational, and social aspect, the goals in this field are related to the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of diversity and access to education (European Commission et al., 2002). Among the different strategies to promote collaboration in terms of education, the role of mobility programmes between the EU and the LAC region must be highlighted. One of the first projects is the ALFA Programme, launched in 1994, and consisted of three stages during which different agreements between European and Latin American universities were established. Later on, to fill in gaps in ALFA, the ALBAN programme operated between 2003 and 2010 to allow more than 2000 Latin American postgraduate students to complete their studies in Europe (Vigil, 2013: 289). Most recently, in 2014, the arrival of the Erasmus + programme allowed ALFA to concentrate on academic and institutional management while advancing policies and reforms aimed at aligning education systems in Latin America (Vigil, 2013: 290).

Erasmus + is the “EU programme for education, training, youth and sport”. Its main occupation is the financing of academic mobility programmes between the Member States and the rest of the world, which includes the LAC region. Specifically, as of 2023, 1.400 projects with LAC

allowed the mobility of 15.207 students and university staff. This project also offers Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM), which combine at least three different universities in three countries for the same Master programme. Between 2014 and 2022, 29 different Latin American universities participated as full members of EMJM, and more than 3.000 Latin American nationals have been granted a scholarship to take part in this project. Within this period, the Erasmus + programme also offered 110 capacity-building projects between EU Member States and LAC countries to modernise higher education institutions (European Commission, 2023).

The success of this project can be explained by the homogeneity in the European education system, which allows for an easy recognition of courses after the mobility. This is the result of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, which established a common European Area of Higher Education. Apart from facilitating mobility at a European level, this reform “also provides a forum for dialogue with neighbouring countries regarding higher education reforms and questions related to shared academic principles” (European Commission, 2022). Efforts have been made to export this model of education homogenisation to other regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean.

On 2000, the Paris Ministerial Conference laid the foundations of a EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education (Zgaga, 2006:53), which could improve the education quality in the region, enhance mobility at a regional and international level, and allow cooperation between the Global North and South (Ibid:55). In spite of these benefits, the imposition of the Bologna process over other regions has also received some criticism since it could perpetuate imperialist dynamics similar to those experienced during the colonisation of the Americas (Hartmann, 2008).

A major attempt to harmonise education systems between Europe and Latin America was the Tuning-Latin America project (2004–2007), based on the Tuning-Europe one that followed the Bologna Process. This initiative focused on establishing common reference points based on the competences that degree programmes should develop in students (Beneitone et al., 2007: 15). The rise in academic and professional mobility driven by globalisation and internationalisation required Latin American higher education institutions to be prepared in order to avoid falling behind other world regions, which justifies the need for this project (González et al., 2004: 152). The integration of educational policies across Latin American states would then facilitate the recognition of professional competences, enabling easier employment within the region

and, at the same time, supporting international migration to Europe and other parts of the world (Ibid: 156).

The implementation of this homogenising reform is being monitored by actors such as the EU-LAC Foundation (Lazzari, 2020: 57), an international organisation created in 2010 and composed of the EU through its institutions, its Member States and the CELAC states (EU-LAC Foundation, n.d.[a]). However, the establishment of a Common Area of Higher Education in LAC is considerably being delayed by the unique regional characteristics of each country, which are challenging to address in the absence of a unified political framework analogous to the European Union in the region (Beneitone et al., 2007: 19–20). Nevertheless, Tuning-Latin America achieved other results that contributed to the better integration and collaboration of the states within the region. Some examples are the implementation of competences-based curricula in Latin American universities, as well as the creation of higher education networks (Ibid: 303–304).

In spite of all these successful collaborations, changes in recent years have newly affected EU-LAC relations, pointing out at a need for a new approach. Some of the main challenges are the current conflicts within the European territory such as Brexit and the war in Ukraine, international issues such as the global pandemic of 2020 and climate change, and emerging investors in LAC, especially China and Russia (Gardini, 2021: 7). China's growing presence in Latin America and the Caribbean is reflected in initiatives such as the inauguration of the Chancay mega-port in Peru, Colombia's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative, Argentina under President Milei's renewed rapprochement with Beijing, and the Brazil–China agreement to foster investment (Malamud et al., 2025). In the case of Russia, its influence is particularly evident in Nicaragua and Venezuela, and is further reinforced through extensive disinformation strategies used as a powerful instrument of propaganda aimed at legitimising the invasion of Ukraine while undermining the European Union (Ibid). As a result, initiatives such as Global Gateway are some of EU's strategies to regain its position as a global actor with international partners that, in the case of the LAC region, grant access to key raw materials for a sustainable energetic transition (Ayuso, 2025). In this rapprochement strategy, Spain plays a key role, as will be explained below.

2.2. Spain as a mediator in EU-LAC relations

As previously mentioned, Spain was one of the main countries involved in the colonisation in the LAC region, and after the Treaty of Tordesillas, they obtained control over most of the

continent (McKenna, 2024). However, the decline of the Spanish and Portuguese royal powers initiated several Latin American independence movements that made Spain lose its colonies (Mücke, 2022). Nevertheless, Spanish presence in those territories did not disappear; rather, between 1880 and 1930, 3.5 million people migrated from Spain to Latin America and the Caribbean motivated by a desire to find economic prosperity (Sallé & Van den Eynde, 2009: 14). The fact that these territories were former colonies, added to the lack of a language barrier, made the LAC region the most attractive destination for those looking for an uncomplicated new beginning to overcome difficulties in their homeland.

Although the Great Depression in the 1930s stopped the migration, it was still the main exile route to escape Franco's dictatorial regime after Spanish Civil War (Ministerio de Cultura, n.d.). A new wave of economic migration took place again in the 1960s, but this time to neighbouring European countries (Sallé & Van den Eynde, 2009: 33). However, the economic privatisation lived during the dictatorship led to a decline of Spain's international exposure. After the end of the dictatorship and during the democratic transition, there was a need to regain Spain's international position, which led to closer ties with Latin America. Their shared common language and religion made it the perfect partner to support Spain externally (Papaioannou, 2017). In addition, many Latin American countries were also going through a democratisation process to overcome dictatorial regimes (Youngs, 2000: 112). As a proof of this reengagement between Spain and its former colonies, Adolfo Suárez announced the Ibero-American cooperation guidelines in 1977: "the idea of a linkage related to common historical roots; the idea of a bridge between the Americas and Europe; and Spanish support for the regional integration processes" (Ayuso, 2014: 112).

As a result, the democratic transition transformed Spain in an attractive country with no need for overseas migration, which radically decreased in the 1970s (Gil, 2010: 95). This prosperity did not only attract former migrants returning to their home country but also international immigrants, especially from Latin America, North-Africa and, later on, Eastern European countries like Romania (Kleiner-Liebau, 2009: 80). This transformed Spain from a country of emigration to an immigration one in just a few decades (Ibid). However, the diplomatic relations between Spain and Latin America faced a crisis during the 1990s due to the integration of East European countries in the Union, conflicts in Central Africa and the Middle East (Ayuso, 2014: 118). Since then, this relationship fluctuated depending on the political situation

and the influence of the EU, which led to difficulties for Spain and Latin America to reach agreement in matters such as immigration and trade (Ibid: 127).

This issue was especially important because, by 2001, foreign residents in Spain already exceeded one million (Carreras & Tafunell, 2005: 94), from which Latin Americans were the largest group (Ayuso & Pinyol, 2010: 14). Although, in a global scale, USA keeps being the first country where most migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean concentrate, Spain is the immediate second, which is striking “considering the size of its economy compared to the United States or the rest of Europe and is clearly due to historical and linguistic causes” (IDB & OECD, 2021: 28). However, this rapid growth abruptly stopped in 2008 due to the financial crisis that affected many of the sectors occupied by migrant workers (Olmo, 2024). A new migration wave began in 2015 as a result of the refugee crisis due to which many international migrants and asylum seekers chose Europe, especially Spain, to escape humanitarian crises and look for better living opportunities. As a consequence, by 2019 Spain became the second country with the highest share of asylum applications from the LAC region, only after the U.S. globally (IDB & OECD, 2021: 30).

The arrival of immigrants to Spain, mainly Latin Americans, has not stopped since, and it even lived a new upturn in 2022 as a result of Ukraine’s conflict with Russia, which affected many European countries. However, Spain’s low dependence in Russian oil made its economy significantly outperform other traditionally stronger European economies (Olmo, 2024). This contributed to the pull effect for immigrants in 2022, the year with most migratory balance since 2014 (Ibid), which could be surpassed in 2025 as a result of Trump’s re-election.

This new administration’s deportation politics might increase the number of Latin American migrants in Spain again (Malamud et al., 2025). Proof of this are the main nationalities of immigrants during the third quarter of 2025, with nationals from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Argentina in the top 10. This led to an increase in Spanish population due to the “number of people born abroad”, which “was greater than that of Spanish nationality, due to the processes of acquiring Spanish citizenship” (INE, 2025), according to data from the National Statistics Institute. The ease of entering the Spanish job market, particularly for LAC nationals, further strengthens this trend, especially in light of this economic uncertainty that could arise in the region as a result of Trump’s tariff war (Rojas-Suarez & Albe, 2025). The rise in Latin American migration to Spain could be mutually advantageous for EU-LAC relations, since it provides Europe a unique opportunity to establish itself as the principal partner of the LAC

region. As a result, the growing influence of emerging actors like China and Russia can be counterbalanced, while also benefiting from the contributions of a readily available workforce (Ibid).

This migration trend since the 1990s has strengthened diplomatic ties between Spain and LAC and transformed the cooperation strategy from paternalistic to more horizontal (Youngs, 2000: 118). Thanks to this, it was possible to overcome the “anti-Hispanic speech based on colonial heritage” spread by Latin American leftist and populist politicians (Ayuso, 2014: 127). Nevertheless, there are still many challenges that Spain should work on in order to achieve a true balanced relation with LAC, such as the traditional trend to homogenise the Latin American continent. Currently, this is being addressed through a bilateralisation of the diplomatic relations and a more individualised understanding of the region (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.[a]). As an example, the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID) promotes several horizontal programmes with the LAC region, focusing on areas such as democracy, environment, and support for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities (AECID, 2025). In addition, Spain also cooperates with regional organisations like the Central America Integration System (SICA), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and with multilateral organisms like the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) or the Pacific Alliance.

In the education field, there are several Spain-based organisations that promote Ibero-American cooperation, that is, between LAC countries, Spain and Portugal. The General Secretary of Ibero-American States, SEGIB in Spanish, was created in 2005 as an institution comprised of 22 members with the purpose of organising the Ibero-American summits and conferences. The SEGIB also advocates cooperation within the region in different strategic areas including social inclusion, knowledge, gender equality, sustainability and innovation, among others. Cooperation in the education area is coordinated by the Ibero-American Knowledge Space, where the Campus Iberoamérica project stands out. Launched in 2014, it is a regional framework for academic mobility that seeks to promote equity, align higher education systems, improve youth employment, and turn academic research into business innovation (SEGIB, n.d.).

The Organisation of Ibero-American States, OEI in Spanish, is an organisation that comprises all Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in America and Europe, which results in 23

members. Their goal is to create a cooperation network in the Ibero-American region to achieve development in different areas: education, science, culture, languages, human rights, multilateralism and digitalisation. In the area of education, the OEI launched in 2019 the strategy “Ibero-American University 2030” to establish a common framework for higher education in the region. At the same time, this would help to enhance mobility in the region, since it only offers 1.14 % of academic exchanges globally, making it the second region with the least mobility (OEI, n.d.). With this in mind, the OEI collaborates in the organisation of programmes such as the Paulo Freire and the PIMA, as well as providing guidelines for academic mobility. Furthermore, this strategy also seeks to improve the level of internationalisation of higher education in Ibero-America by revising the existing practices of several institutions (Ibid).

The OEI, along with other international organisms and agencies in Latin America and Spain, supports the work of the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, RIACES in Spanish. Established in 2003, this is a collaboration mechanism between the university systems in the region to create an intellectual and human exchange network (RIACES, n.d.). A similar institution is AIESAD, with focus on distance learning across 14 Ibero-American countries and 35 higher education centres. It was established in 1980 as a tool for the knowledge democratisation on distance higher education (AIESAD, n.d.). Some examples of the projects carried out by this association are regular meetings attended by their members, and virtual discussions on distance higher education (CONVED). In addition, the Ibero-American University Postgraduate Association (AUIP) seeks to strengthen postgraduate education in Ibero-America by promoting mutual recognition of studies, academic exchange, joint programmes and research, knowledge dissemination, cultural preservation, innovation, and quality assurance (AUIP, n.d.).

Finally, the Carolina Foundation is another important actor in the promotion of cultural relations in Ibero-America since 2000, as part of the Spanish cooperation system. Their main focus is the granting of postgraduate and doctorate scholarships for Ibero-American students and professors, as well as offering seminars, workshops, summer courses, and research initiatives (Fundación Carolina, n.d.). A report conducted between 2018 and 2022 showed the positive impact of the scholarship programme of the Foundation. Among the results retrieved, the report revealed that 80% of scholarship recipients were able to expand their contact network, strengthening thus the community of academic Ibero-American professionals.

Moreover, 98% of interviewees stated that the programme allowed them to have access to key training for their professional development that they could not have obtained in their home countries (Fundación Carolina, 2022: 3–4).

As it can be observed, Spain is a close partner of the LAC region, which makes this country the perfect mediator of EU-LAC relations. In fact, Spain's awareness of its strategic role in LAC was one of the bargaining objects used to request membership to the European Union in 1986 (Naab, 2010: 1), giving place to a three-actor relationship where different interests intersect and overlap. For Spain's part, the country takes advantage of its respected position in LAC to interfere in the economy and politics of the region, as well as to enjoy a privileged position in the EU (Ibid: 4). The latter, in turn, sees Spain as a strategic mediator between both continents that could help getting access to raw materials, exporting manufactured goods, regulating migration flows and obtaining control over political conflicts overseas (European Union External Action, 2021). For LAC, on the other hand, a partnership with Europe is especially beneficial in the field of culture and education, promotion of democracy and equality, and environmental protection (Latinobarómetro, 2021). As it can be observed, this tridimensional relationship provides a situation where all participants can contribute to benefit from each other. A soft power tool to make this possible is ISM, as will be explained below.

2.3. International Student Mobility

International Student Mobility is the term given to the flow of students who move to other countries in order to receive a partial or total education there (Dewey, 2021). ISM can hence be understood as one of the tools to implement internationalisation at higher education (De Wit, 2010: 10). Internationalisation, for its part, can be defined as “a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2008: 22). Today, the push for internationalisation in higher education reflects a world where information has become a key source of power. For information to move freely across countries, international cooperation is essential, and education plays a central role in creating common frameworks that foster mutual understanding (Dewey, 2021). However, ISM is not a new phenomenon originated by globalisation but rather has a long history that dates back centuries. Thus, the following section will explain the origins of ISM in order to understand its importance nowadays.

2.3.1. Origins of International Student Mobility

It could be argued that ISM originated in the Middle Ages, when those who did not want to go through the compulsory military service decided to study abroad instead (Giovine, 2019: 168). As a result, it was common for students and lecturers in the 15th century Europe to travel across countries to gain and spread knowledge, which was mainly made possible through Latin as a vernacular language (Ibid). In addition, this student mobility also took place between the big empires of the time and their colonies, as it is the case between Spain and Latin America (Ibid).

Following the colonisation process, universities were established in the new continent following the model of those in Europe. This “responded to the need to evangelise and [...] to link the colonies culturally to the empire and to provide adequate professional training to the civil servants needed by the colonial, civil, and ecclesiastical bureaucracy” (De Wit et al., 2005: 342). The imposition of European culture increased its reputation as a reference point for knowledge acquisition, attracting members of the colonial elites (Ibid: 343).

On the 18th century, after the appearance of the nation-state concept, ISM stopped being exclusive for the highest spheres and extended towards a more general public. Although the wars in the 19th century slowed down this process due to the rise in nationalism and security concerns, it was resumed after the end of the Second World War (Giovine, 2019: 168). During the Cold War, scholarships to study abroad were offered by the main powers to use them as political tools to spread ideological messages against their rivals (Beylur, 2020). At this period, ISM was also used as a diplomacy strategy to train global leaders and strengthen links with international partners (De Wit et al., 2005: 343), such as the Fullbright Programme promoted by the United States of America since 1946 (Galán-Muros et al., 2024: 2).

This set the beginning of ISM as a tool to provide international prestige to a state and thus increase its soft power, leading to competition between universities to attract students (Beylur, 2020). As argued by Hans de Wit, “internationalisation has become an indicator for quality in higher education” (2010: 5). However, most international students in OECD countries originate from higher socio-economic settings in comparatively well-resourced countries, suggesting that ISM still reflects a financial disparity that privileges elite participation rather than ensuring access for all (OECD, 2025: 4). In addition, there is an imbalance in the flow of students between sending and receiving countries, giving place to a unidirectional flow of students from South to North (Camino, 2017: 15). This form of academic colonialism reflects the gap in the

epistemological centre, which remains concentrated in the Global North, while the Global South is relegated to the periphery.

Proof of this is offered by OECD's 2025 report, which revealed that the main countries that receive and send international students remain the same in recent years. While the favourite destinations for international students are the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Canada, and France; Chinese and Indian nationals alone represent 30% of abroad students. The main reasons for this destination choice are "renowned universities, post-graduation work opportunities and strong international networks" in the first set of countries. Nevertheless, countries like Japan, the Netherlands, Türkiye and South Korea are emerging as hosting countries (OECD, 2025).

This unidirectional trend is also observed in the case of Spain and Latin America. A recent survey conducted by Keystone Education Group revealed that, for international students from the LAC region, Spain is the fourth most popular destination (2022). Thus, it is not surprising that most foreign students in Spain come from that region, specifically 83.115 in total (Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, 2024b). In contrast, Latin American countries are only chosen by 6 % Spanish students abroad, who mainly stay in Europe (Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, 2024a). This trend can be explained by several reasons. First, the adaptation process is easier in a country with a shared history and cultural links as a result of a colonial past (Camino, 2017: 7), which justifies the high amount of LAC nationals choosing Spain as their destination. However, for Spanish students, simplified procedures within the EU make it easier for them to remain within the Union, while studying overseas entails more complex requirements such as visas. In addition, there is a long tradition of knowledge exchange in Europe, exemplified by historical trade routes and scholarly pilgrimages. Today, this tradition continues through the widespread popularity of the Erasmus programme.

2.3.2. EU-LAC Student Mobility: Challenges and Improvement Suggestions

Previous in this paper, a selection of institutions and programmes was offered in order to provide an overview of the state of bi-regional cooperation in higher education between the LAC region and the EU, most often represented by Spain and Portugal. As it could be observed, the number of initiatives is considerable, yet this does not necessarily result in effective cooperation. The main reason lies in the list of challenges that emerge when attempting to

establish common ground for an inter-regional academic network. Some of these challenges will be outlined below, together with recommendations for addressing them.

a. Institutional framework

The first challenge of EU–LAC mobility programmes emerges at the preliminary stage, as the excessive paperwork discourages many potential candidates from applying even before the mobility begins. Specifically, challenges in the institutional framework include different entry requirements for each university, recognition of credits and degree, and visa obtention that LAC nationals need to enter the EU (Dayo et al, 2022: 5). This problem claims the need for a programme “as little bureaucratic and as transparent as possible” (Zgaga, 2006: 60) and for measures that facilitate the recognition of qualifications. Although some advances have been made in recent years, bureaucracy of international mobility is still a long process, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, “where lack of trust, transparency, uniformity and comparability” prevents the existence of “a unified credit system such as the European ECTS model of credit recognition” (Bo, 2024: 12).

As a result, there is a need for structural changes in the Spanish university system to improve student mobility towards and from Latin America. Differences in the credit and degree recognition system in each region makes it difficult for graduated nationals from Latin America and the Caribbean to practice their profession in Spain. This was the case for hundreds of Psychology graduates from Argentina, Venezuela and other countries, who migrated to Spain to work after the Ministry announced a possible homologation of their titles. However, the Bologna process restricted the titles that could be homologated, and Psychology was not among them, so the only way to enter the profession was through a qualifying master’s degree in a Spanish university (Stegmann, 2022). This case, apart from discriminating professionals because of their nationality, is a disadvantage for European economy, affected by the lack of young workforce. Spain, due to the high number of migrants from LAC it receives, can act as an intermediary to homologate the titles of these professionals, who could then work in other EU Member States due to the freedom of movement for labor in the Union.

Some other measures to face this problem are, on the one hand, including the LAC region in the European Qualifications Framework to facilitate comparability of national qualifications, and, on the other, establishing a joint EU-LAC agency to harmonise higher education standards and improve credit recognition frameworks (Dayo et al., 2022: 10–11). Some existing examples are the already mentioned RIACES, along with the Ibero-American System for

Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES) and the Qualifications Framework for Central American Higher Education (MCESCA). In addition, a Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean was launched by UNESCO IESALC in 2019. Although not all the countries in CELAC have signed the convention yet, this mechanism has the potential of promoting internationalisation of higher education in the region (Bo, 2024: 12-13).

b. Financial constraints

However, this measure might not be enough to facilitate access to these programmes, since the major problem has to do with financial constraints, which reflects the inequalities in access to education caused by socioeconomic factors (Giovine, 2019: 179). This may also be explained by the trend of ISM to occur primarily at the postgraduate level, where middle and upper-class students are more strongly represented than those from lower-income groups (Ibid: 182). In addition, differences in the level of development between LAC and the EU makes it difficult for students from the former region to adapt to the cost of living of the later, noticeably higher than their home countries (Dayo et al., 2022: 6).

Although this problem can be faced by a strong scholarship system, there is a high demand that makes this financing source hard to get. For example, in the 2025 edition of the Carolina Foundation's scholarship programme, 100,771 applications were received for a total of 739 awards offered, amounting to 51.5 applicants per place (Fundación Carolina, 2025). This perpetuates the idea that ISM is mainly directed to the elites, as exemplified by ALBAN. One of the requirements of this programme required candidates to co-finance 25% of the project, which is not affordable for some potential participants, especially those coming from backgrounds with economic difficulties (Vigil, 2013: 296).

A possible measure to fight this problem could be conducting independent selection processes that classify countries based on their degree of development and particular needs (Ibid). Thus, participants facing socioeconomic difficulties could be prioritised through the establishment of quotas based on sex, nationality, country of destination, or field of study (Ibid: 294). This way, ISM would acquire a more inclusive dimension that ensures equal access to student mobility (Valls-Figuera, 2023: 12), rather than reproducing elitist dynamics. The success that this measure could have in fighting unequal access to ISM is exemplified by some OECD countries, where "students from low-income countries make up more than 5 % of the total international student income". This is the case of Brazil, France, Germany, Portugal and Türkiye, whose

governments implement public policies to facilitate the access of nationals from underdeveloped countries (OECD, 2025: 4–5).

c. Access to information

In addition, difficulties in accessing information to ISM related matters like available scholarships, deadlines, credit recognition, *etc.*, is another challenge that interested candidates face when applying to a programme. The main reason is the lack of a unified website where interested candidates can find all the resources they need to plan their mobility. In contrast, they need to navigate through several webpages or ask personally, which can provide contradicting information. Furthermore, ISM is still a phenomenon that only reaches a small number of students in Latin America and the Caribbean. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) reveal that LAC was the region with the least outbound international student mobility rate between 2012 and 2021 (Galán-Muros et al., 2024: 3). However, “it would motivate more students to study in Europe if they would get information on specific details on the effects of the Bologna-Process within Europe and for national education systems in Europe and the advantages of joint degree programs” (Zgaga, 2006: 60).

Thus, the creation of “a widely promoted and carefully administered Internet portal” (European Commission: DG EAC, 2006: 15) that compiles all the relevant information for student mobility in LAC and in Europe respectively could make application processes smoother and thus increase the flow of students traveling between the regions. In the study “Perceptions of European higher education in third countries”, most participants declared that this platform should provide information on “scholarships from individual universities, Member States or from the EU, living costs and tuition fees, rankings of universities by quality of education, and suitable course programmes” (Ibid: 214). On a lesser extent, they also expressed interest in “finding information on visa and admission requirements”. Moreover, this information should be issued by a clear sender in order to convey reliability, which was another concern expressed by the respondents (Ibid: 234).

In addition, it would also facilitate the process to use the potential of alumni networks through which students from different programmes can help each other using their own experience (Dayo et al., 2022: 10). Some existing examples are Erasmus + Student and Alumni Alliance (ESAA), the Erasmus Mundus Alliance (EMA) and The Alumni Portal project. The latter, developed by the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD), is a platform resembling a social network, centred on the Erasmus experiences and professional trajectories of its

graduates (Azevedo et al., 2012). The portal combined two components: an Erasmus Information System, which provided students with the necessary resources and applications to participate in the programme, and a Job Opportunity Information System, which enabled the university to track the professional paths of its alumni (Ibid). By integrating support for student mobility with tools to facilitate employment opportunities, the portal offered a dual function that could serve as a valuable model for developing similar networks open to mobility students on a global scale, as the original initiative was limited to UTAD students.

d. Academic colonialism

However, some of these measures might imply taking aspects of EU's education system to Latin America, which might not take into consideration this region's peculiarities, thus perpetuating the cultural imposition dynamic lived during the colonisation. The differences between the way of understanding education in Europe and in LAC makes a regional approach necessary, for instance by recognising the importance that civil society, as well as teachers and students' unions, have in the organisation of education in LAC (Bo, 2024: 13). Otherwise, Europe will be on an advantage in the internationalisation of higher education.

Proof of this is the already mentioned unidirectional flow of international students: only 7 % of the total international students choose this region as their destination, many of which are LAC nationals themselves. This reflects the growing intra-regional student mobility in recent years, from 24 % in 2000 to 43 % in 2020. In contrast, Europe and North America host 74 % of LAC international students (Pedró & Chacón, 2024: 14). This is an obstacle to improve the degree of internationalisation of universities in the region, which is probably the reason why there is only one Latin American university in the 100 top global universities in the QS World University Ranking 2026, specifically the University of Buenos Aires in the 84th place (QS, 2025).

It would thus be very beneficial for LAC universities to promote policies that attract international students and, this way, include some countries from the Global South in the top ISM destinations to make it more diverse and balanced. As already mentioned, 41 % of international students in 2020 was concentrated in only 5 countries, which represents a concentration increase of 46.4 % compared to 2010 (Pedró & Chacón, 2024: 10). This is especially worrying in the case of small countries like Spain, who hosted more than a third of ALBAN scholarships beneficiaries during the active period of the programme, between 2003 and 2010 (Vigil, 2013: 297). This can be easily explained by the already mentioned cultural

and historical links between this country and LAC. Nevertheless, this over-concentration prevents other EU Member States from also being able to establish links with the region and hence reinforcing EU-LAC relations as a whole.

e. Student segregation and discrimination

An additional problem entailed by the unidirectional flow of students between Global North and South is the segregation of international students from local ones. This can give rise to discriminatory dynamics, whereby local students evaluate their foreign counterparts through stereotypes often inaccurate, as they lack the direct experience and knowledge that living in those countries would provide.

In the case of Spain, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination (CEDRE) published a report that reflects the experiences lived by members of ethnic minorities in the country. Although discrimination against Native Americans is not as evident within Spanish society as it is towards other groups such as the Romani, Arabs and North Africans (CEDRE, 2025: 209), this can be linked to the phenomenon of “European passing”. This helps to explain why white Latin Americans constitute the least discriminated migrant community in Spain (Ibid). Testimonies from Latin American students interviewed in Madrid support this finding, including the case of a student who also holds Italian nationality and another who stated that she was not a direct target of discrimination due to her whiteness (Muñoz & de Lataillade, 2023). Nevertheless, it is predominantly white Latin American women who report experiencing cases of sexual violence (CEDRE, 2025: 219).

In contrast, in the field of education, Native and Afro-descendant Latin Americans are the groups most affected by discrimination (Ibid: 86). A possible explanation is the high concentration of minority ethnic groups in certain Spanish schools, which fosters segregation and ghettoisation in this context. This dynamic often functions as a protective mechanism promoted by families themselves, as a way of shielding their children from rejection by locals (Ibid: 217). Moreover, although there is no linguistic barrier between Latin Americans and Spaniards, dialectal differences frequently give rise to discriminatory situations in the classroom, where Latin American accents are mocked or not understood, despite being variations of the same language (Muñoz & de Lataillade, 2023).

Student mobility between Spain and Latin America and the Caribbean offers an effective way to overcome racial discrimination, since it promotes intercultural encounters that fight

stereotypes and prejudices. For this reason, it could be very beneficial to balance the flow of students so that the number of Spanish students traveling to the LAC region increases. A study conducted among Latin American students in Barcelona about the benefits of ISM revealed that they became “more capable of understanding cultural differences and that they are more accepting of them”, developing thus intercultural competences (Valls-Figuera, 2023: 7). As a result, it is very likely that this could also be the case for Spanish students, proving the need for more promotion of mobility programmes that send them to LAC.

f. Impact of the programmes

Even if ISM was able to overcome all these difficulties, the question of the impact and transcendence of these programmes in the development of Latin America arises. Much of the criticism directed at ISM concerns the lack of alignment between the resources it requires and its actual contributions to the region’s development. A possible explanation for this is the absence of a “Latin American dream”, a shared vision of regional globalisation and the political will to strengthen the region’s international presence (Riveros, 2005: 32). The consequence is that “universities do not count on a political mandate to produce changes in the academic structure” (Ibid).

In addition, the low public financing in universities puts pressure on them to seek private funding, giving place to Latin America and the Caribbean being the region with the most privatisation in higher education, along with Meridional Asia (Atairo et al., 2022: 263). This is a consequence of the increase in students in the region between 2010 and 2017, which forced governments to resort to private entities through scholarships and credits to answer the growing demand in higher education (Ibid). Although these methods allow students with economic difficulties access higher education, it also leads to a “for-profit higher education system” in Latin America, where teaching and business is more valued at universities than research, relegated to the background (Riveros, 200: 33). This education model also makes it difficult to start a standardising reform that promotes easier degree and credit recognition and hence ISM, both within and outside LAC.

As discussed, universities lack the competences to operate effectively at a national level, which undermines their credibility as representatives of the entire higher education system (Vigil, 2013: 303). Consequently, international student mobility in Latin America could be strengthened if institutions with governmental influence were involved in the administration and organisation of these programmes. In such a scenario, they would be able to negotiate with

national actors without the constraints of limited competences or doubts regarding their institutional authority (Ibid).

Furthermore, most programmes do not implement follow-up monitoring of scholarship recipients, so they are unable to assess whether these programmes had a determining role in shaping young professional's careers and whether they encouraged the initiation of projects with a regional impact. Consequently, in many cases ISM misses the opportunity to go beyond individual scholarships and use the potential of these programmes to increase international cooperation and development (Vigil, 2013: 301). This could be solved by exploring "students' perceptions about international mobility once the experience is completed" and focusing also on longer programmes instead of just credit mobility programmes of less than one year (Valls-Figuera, 2023: 2).

Moreover, this could help to assess whether there is a correlation between ISM and the so-called brain drain phenomenon. This concept is often used to refer to "emigrations of scholars and professionals from the Third World countries", which can be detrimental for their economies since they cannot recover the inversion made on the education of these professionals (Brandi, 2006). Nevertheless, it could be argued that ISM can encourage students to contribute to the development of their home countries. Proof of this is that students typically engage with regional development projects in their local community to implement social structures observed in the destination country (Valls-Figuera, 2023: 8).

A tool to explore participants' views on mobility are the already mentioned Alumni networks, such as the UTAD Alumni Portal, whose Job Opportunity Information System can "give answers to understand if the Erasmus mobility really has an impact on professional life" (Azevedo et al., 2012). Another source of information are surveys, such as the one conducted yearly by Erasmus Student Network (ESN) among former and potential participants of the European mobility programme, or the Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey, directed to former students of an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree. Both surveys aim at analysing the personal, professional and academic impact of the different programmes in the participants. Surveys monitoring mobility programmes are valuable tools for demonstrating the role of ISM in shaping the future trajectories of young professionals, as well as its broader contribution to national development through enhanced employment opportunities, international cooperation, and circulation of knowledge and skills through transnational networks.

Despite the significant number of surveys about student mobility in Europe, there are not that many studies conducted among Latin American students in Spain, which will hence be the focus group of this research. The following section will explain in more detail the methodology used for this purpose.

3. Methodology

In order to identify the current state and impact of EU-LAC student mobility, a qualitative methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews was conducted. The sample consisted of four former abroad students in Spain, each of them from a different LAC country to include different perspectives: Brazil, Peru, Cuba and Colombia. The informants, three men and a woman, were in their late twenties- mid thirties, so they took part in a mobility programme around the same period. This allowed for a more homogeneous interpretation of the results, since there were common factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that influenced the participants' experience, as will be mentioned in the discussion section.

Also with this homogeneity purpose, three of the informants participated in the same mobility programme. Specifically, they took part in the Erasmus Mundus Master “Latin America and Europe in a Global World”, shortly known as LAGLOBE. As other EMJMs, LAGLOBE takes part in three universities, each of which is located in a different country and therefore teach in the national language: Universidad de Salamanca (Spain), Stockholms Universitet (Sweden) and Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (France) (LAGLOBE, n.d.). The other participant did not take part in a mobility as such but rather enrolled as a full-degree master student in International Relations at the Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI), issued by the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the Barcelona University and the Pompeu Fabra University (UAB, 2025).

The following table summarises the details of each informant in order to provide an overview of their personal context that allows for a better interpretation of their contributions (see Table 1 below). Participants' names have been anonymised in order to create a safe environment in their interviews that allowed them to share their experiences with more freedom.

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age	Programme	Study period	Current occupation
Sebastián	Brazil	29	LAGLOBE (Salamanca, Stockholm and Paris)	2022-2024	PhD in Political Sciences (Barcelona)
Carlos	Peru	36	International Relations (Barcelona)	2022-2024	Freelance projects in communication assistance (Brussels)
María	Cuba	33	LAGLOBE (Salamanca, Stockholm and Paris)	2021-2023	Communications and Public Relations Officer at the EU-LAC Foundation (Hamburg)
Daniel	Colombia	28	LAGLOBE (Salamanca, Stockholm and Paris)	2020-2022	Programme executive in a think tank about European politics (Brussels)

Table 1: Interview sample. Source: Own compilation.

The research instrument employed were semi-structured interviews about different aspects of their mobility experience to identify improvements with regards to previous studies, new or persisting challenges, and improvement suggestions. During the interviews, some questions were slightly modified to conduct them in a more natural and smooth way. The interviews were conducted online in October 2025, since each informant was in a different city: Brussels, Hamburg and Barcelona. They were conducted in Spanish, the mother tongue of all participants except for Sebastián, who could also speak it in a proficient way¹.

The reason behind this chosen method is the main role of international students in mobility programmes, since their first-hand experience is key to understand them from the inside. As suggested by Martina Bo in her report, “investing in the inclusion of youth (particularly exchange alumni) in the cooperation framework between the EU, Latin America and the

¹The script and transcriptions of the interviews with the alumni, as well as the translated version of both texts into English, can be found in Appendix A at the end of this paper.

Caribbean is imperative for a successful bi-regional collaboration” (Bo, 2024: 27). In addition, the fact that all chosen informants already finished their mobility programme provided them a better perspective of their experience to understand its impact on their future career and personal growth. As a result, this study contributes to the assessment of the impact of ISM programmes through qualitative data that offer deeper and accurate insights on alumni’s experience and complement the results yielded by polls such as the already mentioned ESN survey or the Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Survey. Martina Bo’s expertise as the Erasmus Student Network’s Liaison Officer for the Americas 2023-2025 led to the inclusion of her participation in this study. Thus, the testimonies offered by the four alumni are complemented by her inside view on the current ISM challenges and the strategies that her institution, ESN, is carrying out to overcome them. A semi-structured set of questions was also used for her interview².

However, this methodology has some limitations that must be mentioned and taken into account when interpreting the results retrieved by the interviews. To begin with, all four interviewed students were part of the EU-LAC Foundation Alumni Network, which comprises former participants of the internship programme of this organisation. As a result, they all had an academic background in the field of international relations since, as already mentioned, this organisation is in charge of the bi-regional cooperation between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean. This can bias their perception of the mobility programme as a necessary tool to bring cultures together, which might not be so obvious for students of other disciplines.

In addition, the courses about the EU included in LAGLOBE might also alter the views that students from this programme have of the Union, as will be mentioned in the Discussion Section. Finally, the fact that all interviewees took part in a mobility programme around the same period, that is, between 2020 and 2024, reduces the scope of this investigation to only international students within this short timeframe. This might differ from the experience of previous generations, as was acknowledged by Carlos:

“I think it’s hard for me to distinguish what things are specific to my personal experience and what things belong to the current era. Because I came now, I don’t know

²The script and transcriptions of the interviews with Martina Bo, as well as the translated version of both texts into English, can be found in Appendix B at the end of this paper.

what migrating to Spain or Europe was like 5 or 10 years ago. I only know what it was like 2 or 3 years ago, and now” (Carlos, 00:34:16).

Thus, the perceptions represented by this paper’s informants might not apply to the average Latin American or Caribbean student in Europe, who does not necessarily possess advanced knowledge in EU-LAC diplomacy. It would have been useful to include the testimony of students from other fields and programmes such as Paulo Freire, PIMA or the Carolina Foundation. The results of this investigation could also have been improved if students within a longer timeframe had been selected. Thus, a broader perspective could have served to reflect the change in the perceptions of academic mobility throughout different time periods, depending on the specific global events taking place at that time. However, due to difficulties in contacting participants for the interviews, it was only possible to include EU-LAC Foundation Alumni within the above-mentioned period in the investigation. It would thus be interesting for future research to investigate the impact of academic mobility on students of other promotions and programmes. After conducting the interviews, the testimonies were transcribed and closely analysed to identify patterns and categories, as will be discussed below. Once the details and limitations of the methodology have been explained, it is now possible to analyse the obtained data.

4. Results

4.1. Motivations to study abroad

The first open question asked to the participants explored the motivations to study abroad in order to understand their academic and personal context and how this influenced their decision.

a. Escape socioeconomic difficulties

It is interesting to notice that all interviewees mentioned the socioeconomic difficulties in their countries of origin as a strong push factor that, in some cases, forced them to look for study options abroad, especially for those pursuing an international career. This is the case of Sebastián, who shared that, for him “it was a shock to go back to Brazil and have Bolsonaro’s government there, with few scholarship opportunities, few research opportunities and, on top of that, a massive climate of persecution of left-wing academics” (Sebastián, 00:07:32). Carlos had a similar opinion, since he stated that “going back to Peru would be like taking a step back”. María also commented that she decided to study abroad because in Cuba “there are international relations programmes, but with a very Cuban-oriented focus and not the kind of

international outlook I wanted” (María, 00:01:54). In addition, Daniel expressed that he preferred studying abroad than relocating to another city within his own country:

“[...] in Cali there aren’t many options. I would have had to move to Bogotá, but then I thought, ‘Well, if I’m going to leave Cali or Bogotá, I’d rather go somewhere further away, somewhere more interesting and more specific.’ So that’s why I went to the Netherlands first” (Daniel, 00:01:26).

Moreover, they also highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this crisis, leading to an even stronger pressure to migrate, as illustrated by María’s case:

“[...] when I decided to look for a Master’s, it was 2020, just after the pandemic, and it was already clear that Cuba was heading into an even more severe economic and socio-political crisis” (María, 00:01:54).

b. Improving language skills

In addition to the limited options available in their home states, there were several other factors that motivated these students to pursue their studies abroad. Improving language skills was one of the most frequently mentioned reasons for pursuing an international mobility programme. This was the reason that motivated Sebastián to study the master’s programme in LAGLOBE instead of Global Studies, which he also had been offered:

“[...] it involved a semester in Bratislava, in Poland, which would be really tough, and the second year would be in Vienna. And what was good about it is that it was a Master’s in International Relations, but in the end the countries appealed to me less, especially Poland, and the fact that I wanted to be in a totally multilingual environment, because in Vienna and Poland I would only speak English. [...]. I think that if I’d chosen to go to Poland and Vienna, I’d definitely have had more difficulty integrating socially and understanding how things worked there academically as well” (Sebastián, 00:14:03).

c. Gain an intercultural perspective

The desire to gain an intercultural perspective seemed to be one of the interviewees’ main motivations to study abroad, as well as the possibility of meeting people from different nationalities, as shared by María:

“Personally, as an international student, you meet people from so many parts of the world [...]. It was extremely enriching. And today, most of my closest friends, apart from lifelong childhood friends, are the ones I met during the Master’s. They truly become friends for life” (María, 00:16:50).

Studying abroad is thus viewed by them as a way to gain knowledge about different cultures and world perceptions, as Daniel commented: “When I lived in Spain, I could understand European and Spanish stereotypes better, I understood how Europeans view Spain and how Spaniards view Europeans” (Daniel, 00:06:47).

d. Access job market

Another major reason to pursue an international mobility programme are the benefits that this experience provides for entering the labour market, as Carlos explained when talking about the motivations behind his decision to study in Spain:

“The general idea is that the educational level is higher in Spain than in Latin America, in concrete terms and in terms of reputation. What you study there tends to have deeper perspectives, especially in fields like international relations. There’s also the reputation factor: if I go back to Peru, Argentina, Chile and apply for jobs with a master’s from Spain, it immediately gives you more prestige, more opportunities, like a chain reaction” (Carlos, 00:15:16).

María also stated that “my current professional career is 100 percent the result of my master’s degree” (María, 00:16:50). Martina Bo’s contribution further confirms this fact, since she referred to data from the European Commission according to which “students who participate in mobility have 23 % lower risk of unemployment” (Martina, 00:14:32). She also referred to the annual survey conducted by the Erasmus Mundus Association, which revealed that studying abroad leads to the acquisition of “highly valued skills: project management, flexibility, additional languages, and soft skills such as open-mindedness, curiosity, and a willingness to build networks even with people who think differently or come from different backgrounds” (Martina, 00:14:32). Carlos’ testimony illustrates the way these competences are acquired:

“The biggest skill you develop when migrating is resilience, tools for all aspects of life, not just career or education, but for managing your own problems and all the emotional frustration you face” (Carlos, 00:25:32).

4.2. Perceptions of the EU

Since this paper has the goal of understanding how mobility programmes can be used to improve diplomatic relations between the EU and LAC countries, interviewees were asked to explain what their impressions of the Union were before their study abroad experience and how they changed afterwards.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify that, due to the informants' expertise in EU politics as a result of their field of studies, they all possessed knowledge of the Union before their mobility programme. In addition, all of them mentioned having visited several European countries as tourists before moving there for their studies. This is reflected in María's interview: "I knew the EU's institutional setup very well, and I had already travelled to many European countries (...). I had experience both with the countries and with the EU institutions. So again, my expectations were based on real knowledge" (María, 00:12:09).

This being said, it is possible to observe that, based on their testimonies, the EU enjoys a good reputation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some reasons behind this are that "the academic level is very high", that "Europe is a point of encounter, a hub at the international level" (Carlos, 00:10:53), or that it has "good intentions, trying to build a strong, solid bloc with leadership in important issues: human rights, environmental matters, democracy" (Carlos, 00:15:16). María also emphasised the benefits of living in the EU, which are especially appreciated when coming from outside the Union:

"I've always had a positive opinion of the EU, thinking of the benefits it gives its citizens (...). When you come from another part of the world, you're very aware of how much of a privilege these benefits are, freedom of movement, free circulation of goods and people. Here people take it completely for granted" (María, 00:12:09).

This can lead to an idealised vision of the Union, as Carlos shared:

"From Latin America, people idealise Europe, or when they see someone they know who moved to Europe, they think 'wow, they're doing so well over there.' But often it's hard, even with all the privileges one may have, because many people don't even have the chance to leave" (Carlos, 00:25:32).

However, Sebastián had a more elitist perception of the EU before his mobility programme: "at the beginning I thought that the opportunities to study here in Europe were only

opportunities for people who had a lot of money” (Sebastián, 00:05:45). Nevertheless, this changed after his experience, as he was able to discover scholarship opportunities in the EU, leading to an improved perception of an inclusive region where students from vulnerable backgrounds can also access higher education. For Carlos, his experience provided him with a more global vision to better understand EU’s inner functioning:

“You see the difficulties, how certain problems have crept in and are hard to remove, like having openly anti-democratic actors inside EU institutions and not knowing how to deal with them (...). So my perception didn’t become negative, I still value Spain and the EU, but being inside, you see the difficulties” (Carlos, 00:18:46).

Daniel, in contrast, did not express having a particularly mind-opening change of perceptions during his experience:

“Mainly because my master’s was about the EU, Latin America, Spain and all that, I understood Spain’s role in EU–Latin America relations better at a political level. But in terms of everyday life, not much changed, it was more academic knowledge that expanded” (Daniel, 0:07:51).

Although the informants’ opinions are diverse, they all show a positive image of the EU that was either confirmed or completed after their experience, even if problems such as democracy crisis became part of the picture as well. It is thus easy to understand the reasons why they chose this region for their study abroad programme. However, this does not explain why, out of 27 countries in the Union, they specifically chose Spain. For this reason, the next question of the interview had the intention of shedding some light on this question.

4.3. Perceptions of Spain

As it could be expected, all informants mentioned the cultural closeness as one of the defining factors to move to the country, since this is an aspect that makes the adaptation process easier. Daniel, for example, considers Spain “a mix between Europe and Latin America, it’s European, but at the same time life is more relaxed, more pleasant” (Daniel, 00:03:27). The fact that there exist established communities of Latin Americans is also a pull factor for LAC migrants, as explained by Carlos: “I chose Spain because I felt it was culturally closer, because of the language. I also had friends already living in Barcelona, and when you study migration, you realise that pre-existing migrants shape future ones (Carlos, 00:10:53).

He also acknowledged that migrating to Spain was an easy process since “Spain is easier to stay in legally, with certain advantages for Latin Americans” (Carlos, 00:10:53), to which he added that “Spain is like the gateway to Europe, as if it were our arrival airport” (Carlos, 00:28:59). This openness towards migrants from the LAC region and the cultural similarities play thus an essential role in the adaptation process.

The lack of a language barrier also facilitates integration, as Daniel shared: “I like Spain a lot. Because of the language, it’s easier” (Daniel, 00:02:40). However, this creates a contradiction with his desire of improving language skills, which he and other interviewees mentioned as one of the motivations of studying abroad: “For the Master’s, I wanted a very specific programme at very good universities, in another language, to practise languages and meet people” (Daniel, 00:01:26). As a result, choosing an English programme, as was the case of all informants, allowed them to practice a foreign language without giving up on the smoother integration process that this cultural closeness ensures. This is reflected in Carlos’ testimony:

“So it was the balance: a place I knew wouldn’t be too hard to settle in, but at the same time with an international window where I could study global affairs surrounded by people from everywhere. I found that extremely enriching” (Carlos, 00:10:53).

Another pull factor that attracted these alumni to Spain is the country’s education model, described by María as “very similar to the Cuban one, which is still a bit old-fashioned. It has that style of many modules in one semester, many lectures where the professor speaks for two hours, and then many written assignments” (María, 00:10:22). Daniel also highlighted the amount of lessons and study load, which he considers positive aspects, contrary to some of his classmates’ perceptions, who considered it excessive:

“Personally, I enjoyed it because I like having classes and listening, but some people didn’t like it as much because they prefer writing essays and fewer lectures. But for me, it was great. I thought the professors were very good, everything was well coordinated” (Daniel, 00:11:22).

Sebastián also expressed admiration towards the horizontality in the Spanish academic field and the possibility to create networks with researchers from Latin America:

“Spain seems to me to have a kind of openness towards Latin America that is really good. And for me all the academics they have, the research centres on Latin America,

there are a lot of people who are also very well-read on the Latin American side. Those topics are very important; there are Spaniards and Latin Americans who've been working in Spain for a long time" (Sebastián, 00:17:08)

However, there are still some differences on the education system between these two regions, such as the age gap mentioned by Carlos:

"Many Latin Americans study master's programmes when they're older, 28 to 35, after having solid careers in their countries. Sometimes they have stable jobs, financial security, maybe a car, and moving here means sacrificing a bit and starting again at a lower level" (Carlos, 00:28:59).

Moreover, some interviewees also expressed negative thoughts about being a migrant in Spain, such as experiencing discrimination for coming from another country. Daniel, for example, expressed discomfort when Spaniards pointed out at his nationality after hearing him speak: "Here in Brussels, everyone is international and everyone speaks English, so it doesn't matter. But in Spain it's like, 'Ah, you're Colombian', just from hearing one word" (Daniel, 00:03:27). Other experiences include encountering racist symbols in public spaces, as Carlos described:

"Thankfully, I haven't experienced any serious incidents of discrimination, more like something continually present under the surface. For me it felt strange, for example, simply arriving in Spain, taking the metro, and seeing swastikas painted on the walls" (Carlos, 00:34:16).

María, on her side, perceived a conservative and even colonial attitude from some teachers:

"I did have, of course, some conservative professors, and you could tell that their approach to Latin American issues came from a colonial perspective, like we were still in the 16th century. But again, I didn't feel personally discriminated against; it was simply that my professor was a white, conservative Castilian man in his fifties" (María, 00:23:39).

She could also notice unsolved postcolonial conflicts in the way some Spanish refuse to accept the cultural closeness with Latin Americans and vice-versa: "Some Spaniards don't like admitting it, and some Latin Americans neither, but yes, they're very similar" (María, 00:10:22). This reflects the reality for LAC migrants in Spain, some of which still experience

a latent tension and a certain degree of rejection from locals, despite the cultural closeness already mentioned.

Nevertheless, all informants reported having a relatively positive experience in the country, in comparison to what happens to Brazilians living in Portugal, as shared by Sebastián:

“I’m not going to Portugal because Portugal really is a country where we Brazilians have a lot of problems with xenophobia. A lot, a lot, a lot, really. I went there as a tourist, I didn’t even live there. As soon as you open your mouth and they hear your Brazilian accent, they discriminate against you and treat you very badly” (Sebastián, 00:17:08).

In addition, residing within the country allowed them to understand its particularities better and improve their perceptions, as illustrated by Daniel’s experience:

“I met loads of Spaniards, and I had a Spanish boyfriend, I met his family... so I developed a nicer opinion of Spaniards. Although I already had a fairly neutral opinion from living there and from my professors, I think it became more positive” (Daniel, 00:05:49).

Carlos was also able to observe the challenges faced by the country:

“In daily life you learn a lot about Spain, its complexities, it’s not a perfectly resolved country, starting from questions of identity, of ‘what are we as a country?’ and everything that means. Politically, it’s full of tensions. In the end I realised Spain isn’t that different from many things I saw in Latin America” (Carlos, 00:18:46).

With the purpose of improving international students’ experience, identifying and addressing challenges surrounding ISM is necessary. For this reason, informants were asked to share some negative aspects encountered during their mobility.

4.4. Challenges of International Student Mobility

Although informants were generally satisfied with their overall experience, they mentioned some difficulties related to bureaucracy and financial issues. Regarding the first aspect, they referred to the procedure of acquiring travel and residence permits, which can become very lengthy and frustrating due to the amount of paperwork it entails, as Carlos explained:

“[...] there are still bureaucratic difficulties, like trying to book an appointment for certain immigration procedures, which is almost impossible. [...]. And sometimes, when you need to go to the police to get your national ID or passport, you notice in their expressions that they’re not thrilled about giving you an ID or passport” (Carlos, 00:37:09).

Nevertheless, Marías’ testimony contrasts with Carlos’ one: “In my case, all my legal processes were tied mostly to Spain, and I never had any issues, apart from delays. But I always had all my documents perfectly in order, and my best friend, who lives in Spain, works in immigration” (María, 00:18:42). In addition, since it is a well-known problem, institutions such as ESN are working to address it, as shared by Martina Bo:

“It is unbelievable that in 2025 a student with an acceptance letter can still be unable to study abroad because the host country will not grant the visa. A possible solution would be a specific Erasmus student visa. ESN is doing advocacy work on this, trying to convince EU institutions and Member States, although visas remain a national and sensitive issue” (Martina, 00:18:23).

The interviews also showed that the financial barrier is another major problem within ISM, making it elitist and inaccessible to many, regardless of their socioeconomic status:

“Not everyone who accesses these programmes has money, people like me go on scholarships, but to win those scholarships you must have studied at a certain level. And in Latin America, that usually requires being at least lower-middle class. If your whole family is working class, it’s harder” (María, 00:24:55).

This is another area where ESN is intervening, as shared by Martina Bo: “We are now approaching the end of the current Erasmus+ funding cycle, ending in 2027, and discussions for the next one are beginning. We are pushing for increased funding” (Martina, 00:18:23). The housing crisis adds up to this problem, as Daniel also expressed regarding his experience with Salamanca’s University: “They basically didn’t recommend the university accommodation because it was more for year-long students. So for housing, they didn’t help much” (Daniel, 00:09:02). Carlos’ testimony further reinforces that “being a student in Europe is expensive and demanding [...]. Sometimes you live in horrible flats and pay a fortune” (Carlos, 00:18:46).

The alumni of LAGLOBE Master's degree also mentioned some difficulties that, although refer exclusively to this programme, can be applied to other EMJM degrees. Some of the issues they mentioned are the lack of "administrative coordination between the universities", "issuing the diploma", "grade equivalence" (María, 00:26:51) and curricular continuity (María, 00:29:24). Sebastián also mentioned that "there are lots of classes in that first year" (00:25:07), which was also acknowledged by Daniel, although for him it was something positive.

In addition, informants also mentioned some problems that they did not personally encounter but affect International Student Mobility as a whole. To begin with, María referred to the brain drain problem during her interview:

"I was conscious of all that, but also very aware that programmes like Erasmus Mundus, or Erasmus generally, are designed from an extremely Eurocentric perspective and are, in many ways, a soft power tool. [...]. The idea is often: 'We'll train people who will take that knowledge back to their home country'. But in many cases, it is also producing talent for the EU labour market" (María, 00:12:09).

In order to discover ways to fight this, Martina Bo was asked to give examples of measures to face this problem, to which she answered the following:

"Erasmus+ is designed as a temporary mobility programme. You study abroad, but when you finish, the idea is that you return to your home country. This is its great strength: you go back with a suitcase full of skills, friendships, and contacts, which you can then use to strengthen your local community. [...]. So it's a kind of virtuous cycle, before mobility, during mobility, and continuing after mobility" (Martina, 00:11:12).

Another major challenge that affects ISM was mentioned by Daniel, and it has to do with the hyperfocus on Spain as a destination country for Latin American students, which reduces the general level of interest for this region across the whole EU:

"I think in general it would be interesting to have more mobility between Latin America and countries that aren't the obvious ones. Spain is the most obvious country. But, for example, Poland is huge, Romania as well, countries with excellent universities. The problem is that these countries don't really care about Latin America politically. For example, now that Josep Borrell is no longer High Representative, no one here seems to care about Latin America. So it would be good to encourage exchanges with non-

obvious countries, to strengthen the culture of seeing Latin America as important, economically, diplomatically, culturally” (Daniel, 00:18:26).

Once again, Martina Bo was asked to share some of the measures that ESN is making to increase popularity of other EU countries among LAC mobility students, which include “the Erasmus Generation Portal, where each EU country has its own dedicated page containing details, testimonials from students who studied there, and information on scholarship and funding opportunities”, the promotion events “especially in countries that are not close to them in terms of language, culture or tradition” and the “Buddy Programme”, where an international student can connect with a local one that helps with the adaptation process (Martina, 00:03:18).

Despite these efforts, testimonies like Sebastián’s one demonstrate that cultural and linguistic closeness keep playing a fundamental role when choosing the destination country:

“The Nordic countries pay you really well, you live really well, but at the same time it’s very difficult to integrate culturally. [...]. Germany, I liked, and there are always lots of opportunities, but I don’t speak German, so there’d be the effort of really learning German [...]. Italy adds positive points because, in the end, I think Southern Europe is already very, very different [...], in social terms your life changes a lot [...]. Also, in Italy there aren’t that many scholarship opportunities. [...]. I really like French and, above all, France in terms of cultural offer, but French academia, I thought, has a very specific and very inward-looking model that I really dislike, very hierarchical and very rigid in the end” (Sebastián, 00:17:08).

Moving on to a more administrative problem, certificate and competence recognition can explain that “Latin America is a region with the lowest percentage of intra-regional mobility in the world” (Martina. 00:07:37). However, this is a widespread problem in Europe as well:

“In fact, in Europe the problem is even bigger because all EU countries signed the Bologna Process, which obliges them to recognise degrees and credits. Yet the European Commission’s data show that the EU average recognition rate is only 75–80%” (Martina, 00:18:23).

Despite these challenges, the interviews also revealed some advances in International Student Mobility with regards to previous studies, as will be mentioned below.

4.5. Improvements of International Student Mobility

As detailed in Section 2.3.2. about the Challenges of ISM, access to information was one of the first that arises, since it prevented many students from being aware of studying abroad opportunities. One of the improvement suggestions previously mentioned in this paper was the creation of an internet portal comprising all relevant information regarding academic mobility. This has become a reality thanks to organisations such as Erasmus Student Network and the above-mentioned Erasmus Generation Portal. This, along with on-site promotion events, enabled students like Sebastián to find information about scholarships for international students in Europe:

“When I went on exchange, little by little I started discovering other possibilities to study here in Europe: what scholarships existed, how I had to apply, where they were. And in the end I discovered that I actually had a good profile for those scholarships” (Sebastián, 00:05:45).

Furthermore, digitalisation played a key role in the promotion of ISM, as well as in bureaucracy processes such as registration, residence and travel permits, as expressed by Carlos: “Fortunately, now everything is online, and if they reject something, they have to justify it clearly” (Carlos, 00:37:09).

While modest in scale, these advancements offer optimism for the future of ISM. They illustrate that, through collaborative efforts and initiatives from influential institutions like ESN, seemingly impossible challenges can indeed be addressed and resolved.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Once the results yielded by the interviews have been reviewed, it is possible to take the analysis one step further to find an answer to the research questions posed in the Introduction Section of this paper. These questions explored, on the one hand, measures to overcome the limitations that prevented previous international mobility programmes from succeeding, and, on the other, the potential of study programs between Spain and Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategy to strengthen EU-LAC relations. This section will also compare the obtained results with previous research findings, such as those mentioned in the Literature Review.

Among all the results yielded by the interviews, one that especially stands out is the vital role of Spain as a bridge between the EU and LAC. As mentioned by the interviewees, the

similarities in culture, social habits, language and education model, as well as a shared history, attracts many Latin American and Caribbean students. For many of them, staying in their home countries is not a possibility given the intricate political and socioeconomic circumstances that affect the region. As a result, it is not surprising that Spain is one of the main hosting countries for asylum seekers from the LAC region in 2019 (IDB & OECD, 2021: 30), and the second EU country that received the most first-time asylum applications from international refugees (Dell'Anna & Can Yilmaz, 2025).

When escaping a difficult situation, a welcoming country like Spain becomes a highly appealing option for LAC nationals. Spain offers several opportunities for a smooth adaptation, such as work permits and access to nationality after two years of residence (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.[b]), and the absence of a language barrier between Spain and Spanish America further reinforces this appeal. As previously noted, this does not imply any incompatibility with the motivation to practise foreign languages, as initiatives such as the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programmes take place in at least three countries and are therefore multilingual.

However, the range of languages informants were interested in learning did not vary much apart from English and French, while other widely spoken European languages like German received significantly less attention, and minority languages like Polish were largely overlooked. This trend suggests a strong preference for languages perceived as having greater international prestige, leaving other important European languages in a secondary position within their academic and professional aspirations. This reflects the language market of the EU, dominated mostly by English, French, and Spanish (Eurostat, 2022).

Regarding the interviewees' interest in learning about different cultures to gain a more global perspective, it is worth noticing that most of them already had multiple academic experiences outside their country of origin prior to their mobility programme. This, added to their field of study in international relations, encouraged them to pursue opportunities that would broaden their understanding of different realities and global perspectives, thereby reinforcing the value they placed on international education. This is exemplified by the different internships done by the interviewees in several international organisation such the Organisation of the American States, the EU-LAC Foundation and the EU Delegation in Ecuador.

As interviewees acknowledged, residing within the Union allowed them for a deeper understanding of this region's particularities. This, in turn, positively shapes how the EU is perceived beyond its borders, as it helps project an image that more accurately reflects its reality, including its nuances. Thus, mobility programmes can be used as a soft power strategy to attract international professionals to the EU, where demographic changes such as aging population is leading to a lack of qualified workforce that can be tackled through migration (Council of the EU, 2024). In this sense, ISM still works as a diplomacy tool to get closer to other nations and international actors, as it was the case for the already mentioned Fulbright Programme.

Mobility programmes can also increase interest for the relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, as proven by the fact that all interviewees carried out an internship at the EU-LAC Foundation. The role of this organisation must be highlighted, since it efficiently contributes to the creation of bi-regional academic networks for knowledge transfer. Among the several initiatives they carry out, databases stand out, since they comprise cooperating projects between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean. One example is *Vademecum*, which “includes projects in areas such as education, environment, health, and development” (EU-LAC Foundation, n.d.[c]). More specifically, the *Higher Education Matrix* focuses on collaboration in terms of the establishment of a common area of education, which would allow for an easier recognition of degrees and competences, internationalisation of LAC universities and implementation of mobility programmes (EU-LAC Foundation, n.d.[b]).

Nevertheless, as previous initiatives such as Tuning-Latin America (Beneitone et al., 2007) and the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education (Zgaga, 2006: 53) have demonstrated, implementing such a homogenising reform presents several obstacles, including developing a standard model, addressing regional needs, and considering implementation costs. This is especially challenging considering the public financing problem that affects many universities in the LAC region, which leads to high levels of privatisation. As a result, research tends to be deprioritised, which shapes the academic landscape and limits opportunities for scholars. This also reflects broader shortcomings within Latin American education, leading many students to feel compelled to seek better prospects in other countries such as Spain. The cultural closeness between these regions explains similar preferences in teaching and learning styles, giving place to a similar academic system.

Nevertheless, small differences such as the age gap mentioned by Carlos can lead to difficulties in the adaptation and integration process, generating segregation from local students. To address these challenges, programmes could incorporate measures such as tailored orientation sessions and flexible programme structures that adapt to students with work experience and value their practical knowledge. Additional suggestions to facilitate student integration include promoting mixed-age group activities and providing a wider range of social activities that appeal to students across age groups and backgrounds. This approach may help minimise the perception of sacrifice that older LAC postgraduate students associate with pursuing a master's degree in Spain.

In addition, it could be interesting for Spain to adapt its education model to attract a broader range of international students beyond Latin America and the Caribbean, which would contribute to greater diversity within universities. This would also reinforce Spain's role as a 'gateway to the EU', as creating academic spaces where LAC students can interact not only with Spaniards but also with students from other EU Member States may encourage them to consider opportunities elsewhere in the Union. In the long term, this could help build a pool of qualified professionals willing and able to respond to the workforce shortages currently affecting several European countries.

Some suggestions to attract more international students to Spain include offering more English-taught programmes and implementing a more individual learning model where students can have more independence self-organising their assignments and exams. However, this suggestion should not be interpreted as an elimination of the current model, since testimonies like Daniel's one revealed that many students value it positively. Rather, both models should coexist so that students can choose the one that adapts more to their learning needs and preferences. This could help to attract more full-degree international students to Spanish universities, where the number participants from short-term mobility programmes like Erasmus is significantly higher, unlike in other EU states like Germany, France and the Netherlands (Ferro, 2025).

As it has been shown, Spain has a key role attracting LAC students, some of which stay in the EU, such as Carlos, who is currently working in Brussels, or María, in Hamburg, thereby strengthening bi-regional ties. Although this can lead to a brain drain situation, many of these professionals are still contributing to their local communities, as illustrated by Carlos' future career ambitions in Brussels:

“[...] my goal is to consolidate myself in Europe, without abandoning Latin America, of course. I'd like to work on cooperation or Latin American specialisation, because here in Europe there are institutions and political groups that always focus on Latin America” (Carlos, 00:28:59).

In addition, Martina Bo referred to the results obtained by the XV ESNsurvey, conducted in 2023 among different types of mobility students (Erasmus Student Network AISBL, 2024). One of the key findings revealed that mobility students became active citizens with intention of voting in favour of human rights, sustainability, European identity, and integration, among other multilateral topics. In fact, this survey proves that academic mobility increases the sense of both EU and global citizenship among international students, although there has been a decrease in student's civic engagement with local communities during mobility, making it difficult for ISM to make a significant impact (Ibid, 110).

To face this problem, the XV ESNsurvey proposed to transform students into “active drivers of societal change” by encouraging them to participate actively in their societies and “ensuring that mobility experiences leave a lasting impact” (Ibid: 128). This, as Martina Bo further stated, leads to regional development and international cooperation through the creation of closer bi-regional ties:

“Student mobility, especially through the Erasmus+ programme, has the power to create links and bridges between the two regions, particularly from the bottom up. This happens through students and academic or administrative staff who go abroad to train and then return to their home countries with a suitcase full of new skills, new networks and contacts. Ultimately, they enrich society through this ‘suitcase’ brought back by international students” (Martina, 00:01:51).

All these initiatives contribute to the rapprochement of nations and consequently, cultures, which can be useful in fighting racism and xenophobia. Such attitudes often arise from a lack of awareness regarding alternative perspectives on the world, stemming from insufficient interaction with individuals from different regions. In fact, this was one of the measures proposed by the Spanish Committee on the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination, mentioned in the Literature Review. In their report, they recommend fostering more intercultural interactions where individuals from diverse backgrounds can be empowered and are offered opportunities to engage with one another (CEDRE, 2025: 205).

Although this report revealed that Native Americans are the migrant group that faces the least discrimination in Spain (CEDRE, 2025: 209), the informants in this paper still mentioned instances of racism perceived in the country, while also showing an awareness of the distinction between being an international student and a migrant:

“From my aunt, though, I had heard some negative opinions, that Spaniards can be a bit racist towards everyone, but also towards Latin Americans. It didn’t bother me much because I was part of a group of students from all over the world” (Daniel, 00:03:27).

Following Daniel’s testimony, his discomfort when people point at his Colombian accent is similar to the discrimination that many children from Latin American migrants experience in Spanish schools because of dialect differences (Muñoz & de Lataillade, 2023). This shows that, although efforts have been made to move beyond postcolonial attitudes, it is still possible to perceive tensions rooted in the resentment many Latin Americans feel towards the prohibition or loss of their indigenous cultures, resulting from the imposition of Spanish culture during the colonisation of the continent. Consequently, continuing to promote intercultural encounters between Latin Americans and Spaniards is important for easing postcolonial tensions. These interactions help create shared experiences, encourage mutual understanding, and gradually build new links that reflect a more balanced and respectful relationship. In this way, they can contribute to shaping a new chapter of shared history between both regions.

However, the unbalanced migration flow between LAC and Europe poses an additional challenge, as the low rate of incoming student mobility to Latin America can create an uneven dynamic and prevent the region from gaining international prestige in terms of education. As suggested by Martina Bo in her report about the current state of EU-LAC collaboration, “the flows from Latin America and the Caribbean to Europe compared to the flow from Europe to CELAC countries are much higher” (Bo, 2024:13). Additional proof of this imbalance is the shortage of studies about European students in Latin America and the Caribbean. This lack of balance may place local students in a comparatively advantageous position, while international students are expected to adapt to the host culture, reinforcing subtle power differences in academic and social interactions. In addition, “CELAC students mainly target France, Germany and Spain” (Ibid), which concentrates the level of interest for LAC matters in these countries rather than across the whole EU, as mentioned by Daniel during his interview (00:18:26).

This is allowing new investors like China and Russia build closer ties with the Latin America and Caribbean region, hence weakening the EU-LAC partnership. As a result, it is necessary to keep addressing the over-concentration of LAC students in Spain, which already negatively impacted EU-LAC mobility programmes like ALBAN. Since the responsibility for one third of the students rested solely in Spain, the overall feasibility of the programme was reduced (Vigil, 2013: 297). Although promoting other EU countries among LAC students could be a measure to face this problem, interviews revealed that the lack of transnational communities and linguistic connection makes other countries unattractive.

Additional factors that influence students' decision on the destination country include the academic level of the universities and available funding options (Bo, 2024: 13), since scholarships alone appear insufficient to address the financial challenges faced by students. This is primarily due to the stringent eligibility criteria and the intense competition associated with obtaining these awards, as it was the case for those offered by the Carolina Foundation, already mentioned in the Literature Review (Fundación Carolina, 2025). Students mostly affected by this problem come from vulnerable backgrounds, since they do not have enough funds to access international mobility programmes. To stop this, the scholarship system should consider reserving a number of spots for these students to ensure that ISM is inclusive and leaves no one behind, regardless of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, *etc.* (Vigil, 2013: 294).

Added to this problem is the difficulty to find an accommodation. This poses further difficulties due to persistent shortages in many European metropolitan areas, where increasing demand among university students challenges the capacity of cities to meet housing needs. Although this issue is not directly connected to the topic of this paper, it should be mentioned due to its relation with the above-mentioned challenges of ISM. Along with this, there are other matters that also fall outside the scope of this paper but still deserve further research. For instance, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on International Student Mobility should be also investigated to identify its impact in the choice to study abroad, as it was the case for this research's informants. Another issue worth analysing is the discrimination experienced by Brazilian migrants in Portugal, as noted by Sebastián. While xenophobia is a global phenomenon affecting many countries with high migration rates, the case of Portugal is particularly striking given its cultural closeness with Brazil. This suggests that unresolved

postcolonial attitudes persist, and in some cases may even be more pronounced than those observed in Spain.

To conclude this discussion on a more positive note, it is important to highlight the improvements of International Student Mobility identified through the interviews. As stated by interviewees, the programme application and registration process was relatively easy. However, this finding must be interpreted carefully, since most interviewees were enrolled in an EMJM, where universities are in charge of registering the students, but this might differ in other cases such as full-degree international students. This can also be due to personal reasons, such as María's self-organising skills and her personal contacts (00:18:42).

Finally, the role of alumni networks has been demonstrated to significantly enhance the visibility and appeal of academic mobility, as well as to enable the analysis of the impact of studying abroad. This research can serve as additional evidence of this success, where the contribution of members of the EU-LAC Foundation Alumni network was key to understand their experiences as international students in Spain. As their testimonies prove, the impact of studying abroad was very beneficial at both an individual and international level. On the one hand, participants were able to develop personal growth skills and to pursue a professional career in the field of international relations. On the other, it is exactly their occupation in this field what contributes to the regional development of Latin America and the Caribbean through a strengthening of diplomatic ties with the EU. These advances also serve as proof that, while challenges remain, overcoming them is possible, offering optimism for a more accessible and inclusive International Student Mobility in the future.

However, the selection of participants entailed some limitations, starting by the lack of homogeneity in the informants' mobility programme and study period. The chosen sample also has some shortcomings in terms of representativeness, since only one woman was interviewed, and only four LAC nationalities are included. As a result, this research's findings are not exhaustive enough to be applied to students from the whole region, since research conducted between members of other countries might have yielded different results due to regional particularities. It could also have been interesting to compare alumni's testimonies to those of students that have not had an international academic experience yet or are currently enrolled in a mobility programme. Nevertheless, data protection policies made it difficult for universities to provide the contact details of these students, which explains that only alumni were interviewed. This was compensated by asking them about their perceptions before and after the

mobility took place. For these reasons, this paper can be considered a small contribution to understand the long-term benefits of ISM but should by no means be taken as an attempt to represent the realities of all LAC students.

After this discussion of results, it is possible to conclude that Spain meets the ideal conditions to act as the main EU-LAC partnership intermediary. In order to compete with emerging global investors also interested in the LAC region, this three-actor alliance should focus on the key role of soft power strategies like student mobility programmes. This paper has proven some of the benefits of this initiative, mainly strengthening this bi-regional relationship by building transnational academic networks. These are not only limited to serve as mere diplomatic tools to bring nations closer and find global partners, but can also contribute to regional development by promoting knowledge transfer and academic and scientific cooperation. This would give rise to a more horizontal relationship that moves beyond former colonial dynamics, replacing one-sided benefits with genuinely mutual advantages. Moreover, fostering intercultural encounters helps counter feelings of superiority that can lead to discrimination and rejection of migrants. These attitudes overlook the essential role migration plays in the EU labour market, where migrants are key contributors in addressing workforce shortages. In words of the Spanish Minister for Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, Elma Saiz, “The Spanish migration model generates shared prosperity, and we are not alone in saying this: our migration policy is recognised in Europe and beyond as an example of balance, efficiency and humanity” (La Moncloa, 2025).

However, achieving success will require significant effort to improve International Student Mobility, as further work remains necessary. Among the areas that need attention, some that particularly stand out are the retention of Latin American professionals in Europe, bureaucratic difficulties to get residence permits and certificate recognitions, unbalanced student migration flow between LAC and the EU, discrimination based on ethnicity and country of origin, and the financial barrier that still prevents many potential students from accessing ISM.

Some recommendations to face these issues were offered by Martina Bo, whose contribution as ESN Liaison Officer for the Americas gave an overview of the current state of academic collaboration between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. As she explained, ESN contributes to the strengthening of these relations by promoting intercultural activities, creating academic networks through mobility students that share their acquired knowledge with their local communities, and fostering a stronger scholarship system that allows a more inclusive

access to mobility programmes. In addition, Martina insisted on the importance of taking students' opinions into consideration when debating about the future of ISM, since they are, along with academic staff, the main actors that make academic collaboration possible:

“How many panels do we see about the future of education or Erasmus where no students are present? It is essential that young people have a seat at the table” (Martina, 00:22:33).

Bearing this in mind, this research was based on the contributions of alumni from postgraduate mobility programmes, whose experiences were essential to characterise the reality of mobility schemes between Latin America and the Caribbean and the EU, particularly Spain. Only through such joint initiatives can global challenges be effectively addressed, making it essential for both regions to further harness their shared values, cultural closeness, and common goals. In this context, student mobility plays a crucial role in strengthening bi-regional ties, with Spain acting as a key bridge between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. Together, these efforts can uphold multilateralism at a time when the prioritisation of national interests is becoming the norm.

6. References

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Appendix A: Alumni interviews

Part 1: English translated interview script

- Inform about
 - Thesis' topic
 - Use of personal data for investigation purposes only
 - Recording of the interview
- Demographic questions
 - Study period
 - Mobility programme
 - Study field
 - Current occupation
 - Age
- Open-ended questions
 1. What were your motivations to apply for a mobility programme?
 2. What made you choose Spain over other countries?
 3. What was your opinion on Spain before the mobility took place? And after?
 4. What was your opinion on the EU before the mobility took place? And after?
 5. How was the application process for the mobility programme?
 6. Were your expectations met after the mobility programme?
 7. What did the mobility programme provide you?
 8. Were there any negative aspects of the mobility? Bureaucracy, discrimination, access to information, *etc.*
 9. What direction did your professional career take after graduation?
 10. What are some aspects of the mobility that you would improve?

Part 2: Spanish original interview script

- Informar sobre:
 - Tema de la tesis
 - Uso de datos para uso exclusivo de la investigación
 - Grabación de entrevista
- Preguntas demográficas:
 - Periodo de estudios
 - Programa de movilidad

- Área de estudios
- Cargo actual
- Edad:
- Preguntas abiertas:
 1. ¿Qué te motivó a estudiar fuera de tu país?
 2. ¿Por qué elegiste España como destino de estudios?
 3. ¿Qué percepciones tenías de España antes de empezar el programa de movilidad
¿Y después?
 4. ¿Y sobre la UE?
 5. ¿Cómo fue el proceso de solicitud para el programa de movilidad?
 6. ¿Se cumplieron tus expectativas respecto al programa de estudios en España?
 7. ¿Qué te aportó la experiencia?
 8. ¿Hubo alguna experiencia negativa dentro de tu estancia? Burocracia, discriminación, acceso a información, *etc.*
 9. ¿Qué dirección tomó tu carrera profesional después del programa de movilidad?
 10. ¿Qué aspectos de la movilidad mejorarías?

Part 3: English-translated transcription of the interviews

1. Interview Sebastián (29, Brazil)

00:00:22 Interviewer

Well, first I wanted to ask you for some more concrete details: in what period were you in Spain? In which year?

00:00:32 Sebastián

As a student?

00:00:34 Interviewer

Yes.

00:00:34 Sebastián

As a student, well, to be honest, I did one of those Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees, one of those master's where you get a double degree. So, the master's I did had a semester in Salamanca, so I did one semester in Salamanca, it was the second semester of 2022.

Some of my classmates later went back to Spain to do their dissertation because, theoretically, in the last semester we had to go to the university where we were doing the thesis. I did my thesis in Stockholm, so I didn't go back to Spain, but I was there for the first semester in

Salamanca and then, well, now I work here in Spain in a research institute and I'm doing my PhD as well.

00:01:26 Interviewer

Right, ok, that's also super interesting. So after defending your thesis in Stockholm, did you go back to Brazil or did you stay directly in Spain?

00:01:42 Sebastián

No, I went back to Brazil. I'd finished the thesis and then I had a few months until I found something, and then, well, I got a job as a research assistant and, well, I worked in that research centre and then the PhD came up.

00:01:58 Interviewer

Right, and what is the PhD in, if I can ask?

00:02:02 Sebastián

In Political Science, I'm still in the same field.

00:02:04 Interviewer

Right, I also wanted to ask which is your home university, the one you went from to Salamanca, or well, the only thing is that of course you did this joint degree, Salamanca, Stockholm, and there are three universities, right?

00:02:33 Sebastián

Exactly, I did it in Salamanca, Stockholm, Stockholm University, and at the Sorbonne in France. But my undergraduate degree I did in Brazil, at the University of São Paulo.

00:03:08 Interviewer

Great, and what was the Master's you did in Spain, Stockholm and France about?

00:03:20 Sebastián

Let's say it was Latin American Studies. So, for example, in Salamanca we were at the Institute of Ibero-America, when we went to Stockholm we were at the Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies, and at the Sorbonne we were at the Institute of Advanced Latin American Studies.

00:05:16 Interviewer

Well, I was going to ask your age now, just for the demographic part.

00:05:22 Sebastián

Twenty-nine.

00:05:38 Interviewer

And I wanted to ask first, what motivated you to study outside your country, Brazil?

00:05:45 Sebastián

Very good question, very good question. But I think there were mainly two things at the time. The first is that before I went to Europe to study, I had also gone to Europe during my undergraduate studies as part of an exchange at Sciences Po in France, and from that exchange, at the beginning I thought that the opportunities to study here in Europe were only opportunities for people who had a lot of money. When I went on exchange, little by little I started discovering other possibilities to study here in Europe: what scholarships existed, how I had to apply, where they were. And in the end I discovered that I actually had a good profile for those scholarships. Because at first I thought, you have to be a genius, you have to be Malala, you have to have loads of money, right? And, well, when I went to France, bit by bit, talking with lecturers, with other exchange students, I started talking to them, looking up more things on the internet, and I ended up making this huge, huge spreadsheet of what scholarship opportunities I had and which ones I had the best chance for. And when I went back to Brazil, in 2020, I said, maybe it's not a bad idea. Above all because, and that's where the second reason comes in, so the first one is that I discovered it was possible to study.

00:07:32 Sebastián

The second reason is that at that time Bolsonaro's government was in power, and honestly for me it was quite a shock to go back to Brazil, especially because I'd been at Sciences Po, which is a school where presidents and the high French state bureaucracy come from, and for me it was a shock to go back to Brazil and have Bolsonaro's government there, with few scholarship opportunities, few research opportunities and, on top of that, a massive climate of persecution of left-wing academics. And I always compared it to the environment in France, and when people were told that I'd studied in France, they were always like, "Wow, he studied at Sciences Po." So, let's say, that climate in Brazil, the lack of funding opportunities, that low social prestige of academics at that time, made me say, "You know what, I'm going back to Europe." But I'll only go back to Europe if I get a Master's scholarship.

So I went back to Brazil shortly before the pandemic, I finished my undergraduate degree, and I stayed a year doing what in Brazil is called licenciatura, but it's not exactly the same as here; it's more like a teaching qualification, you know? You have classes in the Faculty of Education so that you can teach, in my case Sociology.

00:09:06 Sebastián

Because the degree I did in Brazil is called Social Sciences, but in Brazil there is no separate degree in Political Science, Sociology or Anthropology. What you have is just the degree in Social Sciences. So if you want to be a political scientist you have to do the degree in Social Sciences. If you want to be a sociologist, the same, and an anthropologist as well. So I finished

the teaching qualification there. But the teaching qualification is only for Sociology, because in our school curriculum we only have what would be... here in Spain I don't know if it's still like that, but it's when you're around 14 to 17 years old, more or less. So in upper secondary school at that time you had Sociology as a subject.

00:09:54 Sebastián

So I did the teaching qualification in 2021 to teach Sociology, and then in 2022 I was applying for lots of scholarships, and in 2022 I was accepted for two of those Erasmus Joint Master's Degrees, but I liked the one in Latin American Studies much more, so I went for that one.

00:10:21 Interviewer

Great, that's really interesting actually. I'm really glad you discovered all those scholarships. It's true, I imagine that going from somewhere in Latin America to Spain must feel like, oh my God, that's something only the elites can afford, so thank goodness there are scholarships.

00:10:41 Sebastián

Yes, totally. And besides, when I was at Sciences Po it was really crazy because, to be honest, I didn't really like asking my classmates who they were, because the more I knew about them, the more I realised how elite they were, not only in economic terms but also in political terms. Because, for instance, one of my classmates was... I was there exactly the year, and we got on really well, but I studied with Sofia Petro, Petro's daughter. And I didn't even know who she was, I only found out by chance when I was talking to a Colombian friend and he said to me, "But you know that her father is going to be the next president of Colombia, right? But have you ever noticed her surname?"

00:11:31 Sebastián

So, my classmates were a bit like that. In the end, I kind of didn't want to know too much about who they were because, exactly, they were very elite people, not just in economic terms but also in political terms.

00:11:52 Interviewer

Right, ok. I was going to ask, so you chose the Master's, it's a Master's, right? The Latin American Studies one.

00:12:00 Sebastián

Exactly, it's an Erasmus Mundus.

00:12:04 Interviewer

Did you choose it more for the subject or for the countries, for example Spain or Stockholm? I mean, what drew your attention to the programme?

00:12:18 Sebastián

When I chose that programme, honestly, I was applying for loads of scholarships in different places in Europe at the same time. It was that I wanted to come to Europe, not to a specific country, but because there were lots of very good scholarships in Europe. So I applied for the UK, Italy, Germany, the DAAD scholarships, I was a finalist, but then I wasn't selected to go to Magdeburg. So I almost went to Germany in the end, but what held me back in some cases was that I didn't speak German.

00:12:59 Sebastián

In the case of the Erasmus Mundus scholarships, I got two, and then I had the chance to choose between Latin American Studies and another one that was only in Global Studies, International Relations. The other one I got on the waiting list; the Latin American Studies one I got straight away. But in the end I did have the opportunity to choose between the two, and what I liked about my programme was that we had the chance to do one semester in each language. I really liked that, especially because at that time I was thinking of sitting the entrance exam for the diplomatic service in Brazil, and they required three foreign languages besides Portuguese: English, French and Spanish.

00:14:03 Sebastián

Now they only require two foreign languages, so you can choose between Spanish and French, but at that time I was thinking, well, if at some point I want to prepare for the diplomatic exam, maybe it's good to have experience in each of the countries, or at least an academic experience with each of those languages. And the other Master's, the Global Studies one, did appeal to me a lot, I really liked the programme, but the thing is that it involved a semester in Bratislava, in Poland, which would be really tough, and the second year would be in Vienna. And what was good about it is that it was a Master's in International Relations, but in the end the countries appealed to me less, especially Poland, and the fact that I wanted to be in a totally multilingual environment, because in Vienna and Poland I would only speak English.

I thought the Vienna part would be very good because I'd studied German for about a year and a half and I thought, well, maybe this is the moment to go back to it and really learn it properly. But then I thought, ok, the opportunity cost might be too high, because at the same time I'd be giving up the opportunity to be studying academically at a very good level not only to communicate, but at an academic level, to be writing in those languages. So that was what ultimately motivated me, and I also knew that it would be easier socially to make friends, to deal with lecturers as well. I think that if I'd chosen to go to Poland and Vienna, I'd definitely have had more difficulty integrating socially and understanding how things worked there academically as well.

00:16:44 Interviewer

And regarding difficulties in general, did you have any there? Well, I'm going to ask you more about Spain because that's what my thesis is about, but you can also tell me about the other countries if you like. I mean, within academic mobility and also life in the city, did you have any difficulties?

00:17:08 Sebastián

Look, I come from São Paulo, which is an enormous, huge city with 12 million people, and if you add the metropolitan area you get about 20 million. So when I went to Salamanca, Salamanca felt like a village to me because it only had 150,000 people. By Spanish standards it's not that small, but by my Brazilian standard it's small. So adapting to the city, zero problems, everything seemed very easy. I lived about 50 metres from the Plaza Mayor in Salamanca, which I loved. And to be very honest with you, in the end I don't think I had any problems integrating socially there. The experience in Salamanca, and by extension in Spain, was so good that it really influenced my decision to come back to Spain now, to work and do the PhD.

When I went back to Brazil, after finishing the Master's I was thinking, do I go back to Europe, do I do something here, what do I do with my life? I'd already got a job which was good, in research at the University of São Paulo. They paid me well for Brazilian standards, in euros it's not much, I had a research project up and running, but I was always thinking, "OK, if something comes up in Europe, maybe a job offer in an international organisation or a think tank or a university, a PhD opportunity, maybe I'll go. But I'll only go if it's to a place I really like, I won't go just anywhere." And then I sort of started crossing off options. The Nordic countries pay you really well, you live really well, but at the same time it's very difficult to integrate culturally. I lived in Sweden and Sweden is like *The Truman Show*. Everything works, everyone is beautiful, everyone is rich, but then it's very hard to actually connect with people. So I said, right, the Nordics pay well, but better not.

Germany I liked, and there are always lots of opportunities, but I don't speak German, so there'd be the effort of really learning German and many of the opportunities, well... I was a bit limited by that, you know? Because for some positions they already required German.

In Italy it's the same, and Italy adds positive points because, in the end, I think Southern Europe is already very, very different in terms of... Well, you're Spanish and you live in Germany, so you'll definitely understand me, in social terms your life changes a lot when you're in Germany or Sweden or the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. Also, in Italy there aren't that many scholarship opportunities.

France, I really liked living there, and I really like French and, above all, France in terms of cultural offer, but French academia, I thought, has a very specific and very inward-looking model that I really dislike, very hierarchical and very rigid in the end.

So in the end I was left with Portugal and Spain, and Portugal, I mean, I'm not going. I'm not going to Portugal because Portugal really is a country where we Brazilians have a lot of problems with xenophobia. A lot, a lot, a lot, really. I went there as a tourist, I didn't even live there. As soon as you open your mouth and they hear your Brazilian accent, they discriminate against you and treat you very badly. My ex-girlfriend lived there, she told me some of her experiences, and when I went to visit her we also had some bad experiences as a couple there, so Portugal is difficult.

Well, Spain was left and I said, wow, hang on, I like Spain. Spain seems to me to have a kind of openness towards Latin America that is really good. And for me all the academics they have, the research centres on Latin America, there are a lot of people who are also very well-read on the Latin American side. Those topics are very important; there are Spaniards and Latin Americans who've been working in Spain for a long time. So Spain is really very good, especially because it seemed to fit very well with my aspirations and expectations in terms of living standards. I mean, you don't earn a lot, it's true, salaries are lower, you don't get paid that well, but I like the way people live, it seems easier to make friends here. From the master's I have some friends who are Spanish and I get on really well with them. So Spain seems to tick all the boxes, you know? So I said, right, perfect. Let's see what opportunities there are in Spain.

And then the opportunity came up at IBEI, which is the centre where I work today. They do a lot of things there with the foundation. I work at IBEI and at the same time I'm doing the PhD at Pompeu Fabra University. So in the end it was kind of that, I said, "Wow, I like Spain so much that it seems to me that the cultural barriers are lower." Of course there's always the whole issue of immigration bureaucracy, paperwork and all that, but after having lived in France for a year... You know what? Spaniards complain about their bureaucracy but compared to Germany with the Anmeldung and everything you have to do, everything is much easier here.

00:24:47 Interviewer

So, in general, with the bureaucracy, not so much nationality and so on, but more regarding your Erasmus Joint Degree programme itself, how was the process of applying, looking for information and all that?

00:25:07 Sebastián

I've been telling you about the programme but I forgot to tell you its name, it was called "LA Globe: Latin America–Europe in a Global World" if you want to look it up. In the end I didn't have any problems with the university. Honestly, everything in Salamanca was very good, and what's more, academically, the semester I liked the most in the Master's was by far the Salamanca semester. It was a very good semester, very intense, with lots going on, but I liked the classes, and the lecturers were genuinely experts in their fields. We had lots of classes with visiting lecturers who were almost always from Latin America, and some of them were really important, really top-level people. So yeah, I really liked that, people who were genuinely important in their fields in Latin America and who were also well-known here, and they wrote lots of articles together with the lecturers here. The lecturers here were also very active on the other side. So I really enjoyed the experience at the Institute of Ibero-America in Salamanca. Academically, I didn't have any problem. In the end we had lots of classes and lots of assignments, but I think that's... and the history lecturer told us once, "In the end the Master's in Salamanca is a research Master's, so it lasts two years, but it's designed so that you only have classes in the first year." So you have loads of classes in the first year and in the second year you dedicate yourself only to the thesis, but there are lots of classes in that first year. That might be my only criticism, but I liked all the classes.

In terms of bureaucracy, I had more problems with the administrative bureaucracy, the visa and so on, but I think everybody has that. In the end, I had some problems, but they gave me a one-year visa, I didn't even have to apply for a visa to go to Stockholm afterwards. So honestly my experience in Spain was very, very, very positive, and that's why I came back.

00:27:40 Interviewer

Great, well I'm glad it went well for you. You've already told me about the direction your professional career took after the mobility programme, but I wanted to ask again how it was then. So, you did your undergraduate degree, then this Master's, and then in Brazil you looked for job offers and straight to Spain, or did you have anything in between?

00:28:13 Sebastián

No, in between I did have a few months that were kind of a sabbatical, doing some odd jobs to have a bit of money as well, but nothing full-time. And when I got something full-time, it was almost at the same time as I got something here in Spain, so I left it very quickly, because it was incredible luck. I'd just started in the other research job and I'd already got the chance to do the PhD and the job in Barcelona. And then I started all the paperwork again to go back to Spain. So I went back to Brazil in September, and I came back to Spain... I already knew I'd been selected for that job vacancy at IBEI at the beginning of March or the end of February, I

don't remember. And then, because of the visa paperwork and everything, I only came back to Spain at the end of May.

00:29:29 Interviewer

And the internship, did you do it during the Master's?

00:29:38 Sebastián

Yes, I did it during the Master's.

00:29:41 Interviewer

As a professional placement.

00:29:43 Sebastián

Exactly. It's strange because in the end in our Master's we could either do a research stay or an internship, and I had decided to do fieldwork in Argentina because I was studying the foreign policy of Brazil and Argentina. So I went to Argentina to talk to people, to diplomats, to some academics, and I spent a few months there, about two and a half months more or less. But while I was in Argentina, I also applied to EU-LAC and I said, well, let's see how it goes. And then I was selected and I thought, right, I'm going to do the internship as well because it'll definitely open doors for me and, in fact, it did. And it was really good. The experience at the EU-LAC Foundation was also one of those things that I look back on and always say, "Wow, okay, I made the right decision going to Hamburg." Because it wasn't easy either, in 2024 I was living in four countries at the same time, a bit in France, a bit in Argentina, a bit in Germany, then I went back to France and then back to Brazil, so it was tough, it was quite difficult actually, but it was worth it, the internship was an excellent experience.

2. Interview Carlos (36, Peru)

00:03:50 Interviewer

First of all, when were you in Spain, or during which period?

00:03:56 Carlos

I arrived in Spain in September 2022. I came to study for a master's in international relations in Barcelona, at an institute called IBEL, the Barcelona Institute for International Studies, which is connected to Pompeu Fabra University and a few other universities. It was supposed to be one year, roughly from September 2022 until May or June. But in reality, I ended up extending it because I was working remotely a bit at the same time, and when you want to do an internship and all that you need to remain enrolled as a student.

So in the end it was really a two-year master's: from September 2022 until, I think, May or June 2024.

00:05:08 Interviewer

Can I ask about your undergraduate degree, the degree you did before the master's?

00:05:18 Carlos

Yes. My undergraduate degree is in Social Sciences with a focus on Journalism. My background is mainly journalism. I'm Peruvian by birth, but I lived in Argentina for several years, studying my undergraduate degree there and working for a few years. Then I returned to Peru, and later I went to Spain to do the master's.

00:05:45 Interviewer

That's cool, you travelled quite a lot too.

00:05:50 Carlos

Yes, a bit. That also helped me face this second process with a bit more resilience, so to speak.

00:06:00 Interviewer

Yes, and it is also a big challenge, to be honest.

00:06:11 Carlos

Yes, adapting in terms of paperwork, emotionally... because in the end you're leaving behind a whole life and starting from zero in a new place, and migration often comes with many challenges.

00:06:30 Interviewer

It's definitely a challenge. Another student told me yesterday that in one year he lived in four different countries. I don't know how he managed that.

00:06:42 Carlos

I don't know how people do it, especially Europeans, who seem so used to this. Wherever I go I meet people who tell me: "I'm from France, but I'm studying in Italy, and now I'm doing Erasmus in Belgium..." And I reach a point where I just can't, my head can't take any more.

00:07:04 Interviewer

Honestly, yes.

So you came to study the whole master's, but it wasn't through Erasmus Mundus, Fundación Carolina, or anything like that?

00:07:16 Carlos

Well, I did apply to things, but in the end I wasn't selected. And I already knew I really wanted to study. It happened right in the post-pandemic moment when the job I had came to an end. I worked in political communication for a politician, and his term finished. So the pandemic had just ended, and I had always wanted to study something in Spain or Europe, the idea had always

been there. And I thought: this is the moment; if I don't do it now, it will be difficult later. So I started the whole process.

I studied for two years and after that I stayed on, trying to establish myself. As you said, studying is often a way of putting a foot in the door somewhere. For me it worked like that too. And because I studied International Relations, a field that is literally global, I thought: "If I go back to Peru after this, it will feel like going a step backwards." So I thought: let's see which doors open. And that's how things unfolded.

The period afterwards has been using those steps to say, "Alright, I'll apply to this, apply to that..."

I did an internship with the Organisation of American States, from Barcelona, remotely. Then I did an internship at the EU-LAC Foundation. And now I've come to Brussels because my girlfriend, whom I met in Barcelona during the master's, got an internship at the European Commission.

I applied for one at the European Parliament; I made it onto the shortlist, but in the end they didn't select me. We said: let's go anyway, because this is the centre of everything. So we came here to give it a try, like a new migration process, in my case the second one.

00:10:29 Interviewer

Yes, ok. So I wanted to ask: what motivated you to study in Europe?

00:10:53 Carlos

To be honest, I think I always had the idea of studying something in Europe. Then life happened, I started working, I focused on what I was doing in Argentina, and the idea faded a bit. But I picked it up again when the pandemic ended.

Why Europe? Well, the academic level is very high. Studying here is climbing upwards academically. Also, gaining a new perspective, Europe is a point of encounter, a hub at the international level. And that's also why I chose the master's I chose. I tried to balance things. I chose Spain because I felt it was culturally closer, because of the language. I also had friends already living in Barcelona, and when you study migration, you realise that pre-existing migrants shape future ones, it's very common. But at the same time, the master's I chose was in English. And when I researched it, I saw it wasn't just a Spanish-speaking environment with people from Latin America and Spain, it attracted people from all over the world: Asia, North America, Egypt, Turkey.

So it was the balance: a place I knew wouldn't be too hard to settle in, but at the same time with an international window where I could study global affairs surrounded by people from

everywhere. I found that extremely enriching. And that's more or less how I ended up choosing that city and that programme.

I've met people who come from really distant regions and say: "I'm going to Poland, I'm going to Sweden," and they study there. In my case I tried to balance the two things: having friends who could help me at the beginning, knowing Spain is easier to stay in legally, with certain advantages for Latin Americans, and combining that with a genuinely international master's.

00:14:54 Interviewer

And what opinions did you have of Spain before going?

00:15:16 Carlos

Well, I had always had a good opinion of Spain. I had been only once, briefly, about a week in Madrid and a week in Barcelona, as a tourist. I also had Spanish friends from before moving. There were some things that turned out to be a bit different regarding education. The general idea is that the educational level is higher in Spain than in Latin America, in concrete terms and in terms of reputation. What you study there tends to have deeper perspectives, especially in fields like international relations. There's also the reputation factor: if I go back to Peru, Argentina, Chile and apply for jobs with a master's from Spain, it immediately gives you more prestige, more opportunities, like a chain reaction. Just like someone coming to Spain with a degree from the UK gains prestige, that was my perception of Spain.

As for the European Union, I also had a positive perception. Despite its problems, I always saw the European project as having good intentions, trying to build a strong, solid bloc with leadership in important issues: human rights, environmental matters, democracy. But being here, you start to see the nuances and difficulties. And the times now are very different from what they were years ago.

00:18:30 Interviewer

Ok. Do you think the expectations you had before studying in Spain and Europe were fulfilled afterwards?

00:18:46 Carlos

Yes, they were fulfilled. I'm very happy with my time in Spain and with this new life in general. For me, as I said, it opened a new professional and personal chapter. I'm in a new stage now, trying to carve out a space in an entirely new market, which can be hard to break into.

I'm very happy to have studied in Spain. I feel my expectations were met: studying a good master's, sharing with an international community, the relative ease of being in Spain regarding migration matters...

Things I had seen on the horizon also came true, for example, I'm now a Spanish citizen. So yes, things were fulfilled. There's nothing I regret. But when you get down to the details, the analysis becomes more diverse. You say: yes, I'm happy with my master's, but the institution could improve.

Or: being a student in Europe is expensive and demanding, if you want something, you have to work for it, pay for it, sort everything out yourself. Sometimes you live in horrible flats and pay a fortune.

It's hard too.

On the migration side, it was also a process. For example, I eventually got Spanish citizenship, but there were many difficulties along the way, starting from the day I applied at the Spanish consulate in Lima: bureaucracy, rude staff, bad treatment, inconsistent requirements... Being a migrant is like that; sometimes it's wonderful, and sometimes, especially nowadays, they make you feel like you've come from outside and you're not really part of the place.

The same applies to my idea of Spain and the European Union. Barcelona is a city I adore, it feels like home. If everything fell apart in Brussels and I had to choose somewhere to go back to, I would go back to Barcelona. But in daily life you learn a lot about Spain, its complexities, it's not a perfectly resolved country, starting from questions of identity, of "what are we as a country?", and everything that means. Politically, it's full of tensions. In the end I realised Spain isn't that different from many things I saw in Latin America.

Regarding the EU, it's the same: it's great, but you see the difficulties, how certain problems have crept in and are hard to remove, like having openly anti-democratic actors inside EU institutions and not knowing how to deal with them. My thesis compared exactly that, how regional bodies deal with democratic crises: Venezuela–OAS versus Hungary–EU. Two very different regions, two very different organisations, but the same result: neither succeeded in stopping democratic backsliding. So my perception didn't become negative, I still value Spain and the EU, but being inside, you see the difficulties. The same applies to my studies and migration process.

00:25:18 Interviewer

Well, I'm glad to hear that overall you seem to have a good opinion and you're satisfied.

00:25:32 Carlos

Yes. And also, I've gone through something similar before, so I think that helped me be patient. Now, for example, I've come here with my partner, she's from Barcelona. She has lived in many places because her family moved around a lot, but it's her first time migrating on her own. And sometimes she goes through processes that I think I already internalised long ago.

For example, she's having trouble with the public transport card here, and I see her frustration, and it reminds me of all the times I went through similar things. I think I've developed a kind of thick skin for these things. I struggled with the German transport card too, all those little things that cause frustration. Somehow I've already normalised them. But they're many. From Latin America, people idealise Europe, or when they see someone they know who moved to Europe, they think "wow, they're doing so well over there." But often it's hard, even with all the privileges one may have, because many people don't even have the chance to leave. Still, these processes are difficult day-to-day, and you need patience and resilience. That's something I often tell friends: the biggest skill you develop when migrating is resilience, tools for all aspects of life, not just career or education, but for managing your own problems and all the emotional frustration you face.

00:28:40 Interviewer

Yes, definitely. So, to finish, I wanted to ask what direction your professional career took after studying in Spain.

00:28:59 Carlos

Well, as I mentioned, it opened a huge door for me. I don't know if I can speak for all Latin Americans, but I feel that for us Spain is like the gateway to Europe, as if it were our arrival airport. It opened a huge door: First, to dedicate myself to International Relations, which is what I always wanted. And second, to enter the European job market, to meet professionals from here, institutions from here. It's a gradual process. For example, now I'm in Brussels trying to get into the "EU bubble". That was one reason I applied to the EU-LAC Foundation, because often, when you apply here, you can bring lots of experience, but since you come from another region, you often have to take a step back.

Many Latin Americans study master's programmes when they're older, 28 to 35, after having solid careers in their countries. Sometimes they have stable jobs, financial security, maybe a car, and moving here means sacrificing a bit and starting again at a lower level. In my case it was like that, but I already knew it would be, and I faced it.

Now I have access to the labour market here, and my goal is to consolidate myself in Europe, without abandoning Latin America, of course. I'd like to work on cooperation or Latin American specialisation, because here in Europe there are institutions and political groups that always focus on Latin America. So yes, it opened that door.

00:32:14 Interviewer

Yes, the first step. Right. And what do you do now, if you'd like to tell me?

00:32:25 Carlos

At the moment I'm doing freelance work, some consultancy in communication, that kind of thing.

Because I'm a journalist, there's a lot of small jobs like editing, translating... But meanwhile, what I'm doing almost daily is trying to find something based in Brussels, not necessarily in a EU institution, but in this job market, because that's the goal my partner and I set when we came, and also because Brussels is expensive and you need a local salary.

00:33:21 Interviewer

Ah, right, then my next question is already answered. Everything has flowed quite nicely.

00:33:49 Carlos

Yes, I also saw there were questions about discrimination and access.

00:33:55 Interviewer

Yes, the idea is to ask whether you had any difficulties which you've already mentioned. If you don't mention it, I assume you didn't, but maybe I should ask more directly, though I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable.

00:34:16 Carlos

Well, I think it's hard for me to distinguish what things are specific to my personal experience and what things belong to the current era. Because I came now, I don't know what migrating to Spain or Europe was like 5 or 10 years ago. I only know what it was like 2 or 3 years ago, and now. And I feel there are certain tensions. As I said, this is my second migration process, so I can compare, and I notice things that are always present, little micro-tensions, subtle things expressed in many ways, from different origins.

I was also a Latin American living in Spain as a migrant, and there's maybe an extra layer in a place like Barcelona, in Catalonia, where there's another element related to nationalism that mixes with the rest, and it's hard to tell where one thing ends and the other begins. So there were some clashes.

Thankfully, I haven't experienced any serious incidents of discrimination, more like something continually present under the surface. For me it felt strange, for example, simply arriving in Spain, taking the metro, and seeing swastikas painted on the walls. That's a lot for me, especially considering the perception one has of Europe from outside, and then you see that and think: wow, is this a matter of the times, or was it always like this and I never knew?

00:36:44 Interviewer

It's never been that perfect.

00:36:46 Carlos

Exactly. In my case, it's hard to know because I arrived recently. Little things, like being on a train and the person next to you has a bracelet or a tattoo that's... well...

00:37:08 Interviewer

Revealing, right?

00:37:09 Carlos

Yes, bracelets referencing the Reconquista, tribal-looking tattoos that, when you look closely, end up being swastikas. That's the extreme, but fortunately I've not had anything worse than that. Still, in daily life you sometimes notice little things. On the positive side, I think the migration bureaucracy has improved since the pandemic, now things are more digital. That changes a lot.

My first visa application in Lima was in person, and I remember how difficult it was, the attitude, the endless documentation... And I've heard many people say the same: You bring all the documents, and they say, "You're missing something", "But it's not on the list", "I don't care, you're missing something", "Book another appointment", "That degree you have doesn't appear valid to me" ... I've heard all of that.

Fortunately, now everything is online, and if they reject something, they have to justify it clearly. But there are still bureaucratic difficulties, like trying to book an appointment for certain immigration procedures, which is almost impossible. People end up paying intermediaries to find appointments. And sometimes, when you need to go to the police to get your national ID or passport, you notice in their expressions that they're not thrilled about giving you an ID or passport or removing the NIE. So overall, yes, I notice a latent tension, though in my case it has never turned into explicit discrimination. I think it helps that we Latin Americans are numerous, there's a big community, so we're not isolated. And also that, in the current political climate, we're not the main target of anti-migrant sentiment.

Other migrants have it much worse, I've heard Spaniards say things like, "No, it's not the Latin Americans they hate, they want to expel the Moroccans." And I think: well, that doesn't make me feel any better, I'm not comforted by the idea that someone else is the target instead of me. But yes, that's the strange dynamic now. So that's my experience in general as a migrant in Spain and Europe.

00:32:14 Interviewer

Well, thank you, that's been very helpful.

00:32:25 Carlos

Of course, thank you too.

3. Interview María (33, Cuba)

00:00:34 Interviewer

So, in which year were you in Spain?

00:00:39 María

From 2021 to 2023 studying in Spain, but also with a mobility period in Stockholm.

00:00:50 Interviewer

And the name of the programme was Latin America...?

00:00:56 María

It's called LA Globe: Latin America–Europe in a Global World, but I think they've just closed it because it was fully funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus programme. So I think they didn't renew it for a new cohort.

00:01:46 Interviewer

Right, the first question would be: what motivated you to study outside your country?

00:01:54 María

For me, there were two motivations: one academic and professional, and the other personal. Academically and professionally, I had been working for two years at the British Embassy in Havana, basically in international relations and diplomacy, specifically UK–Cuba relations. My interest was to continue my studies in that field, not in journalism, which is what I'd done for my undergraduate degree. And in fact, even as a journalist, what I covered was international relations and foreign policy.

In Cuba there were no programmes that met that interest from a non–national-centred perspective. There are international relations programmes, but with a very Cuban-oriented focus and not the kind of international outlook I wanted. So that was the main reason.

And the other reason is that it had always been my wish to study abroad. I also did a postgraduate diploma in India, so it wasn't the first time I studied abroad. I find it interesting because you grow as a person, not just academically. That's one side of it.

On the other hand, when I decided to look for a Master's, it was 2020, just after the pandemic, and it was already clear that Cuba was heading into an even more severe economic and socio-political crisis. So I knew that there wasn't a programme in Cuba that matched what I wanted to study, and I also didn't want to stay much longer in Cuba. Those were the motivations: the professional one, my constant interest in studying abroad, and simply needing a change of country.

I applied in 2020, because for this programme you have to apply almost a year in advance. And in August 2021 I left for Spain.

00:04:30 Interviewer

And did you choose Spain for any particular reason, or did you choose the Master's first?

00:04:36 María

No, I chose the Master's. In my case, I knew I wanted to study in Europe, and in fact what I did was apply only to Erasmus Mundus programmes because they're really good and the programmes tend to be very strong. I applied to three programmes that interested me; all were related to international relations.

One was more political science-oriented, called EPS, European Politics and Society or something similar. Another one was Euroculture, also focused on European studies. All three were Master's programmes combining European studies, international relations, and some specific theme. One was more cultural, another more political science, and this one was about EU–Latin America and Caribbean relations.

So it wasn't that I chose Spain; I chose programmes based on my interest. First, I selected a scholarship, Erasmus Mundus, because it is excellent. Secondly, I chose programmes that genuinely interested me. All three admitted me, but I finally decided on this one because I liked the topic and felt it had potential to help me find something afterwards; it connected well with my background. And the fact that it started in Spain meant that, if I wanted, I could later stay in Spain, although I could theoretically have stayed in any of the three countries. But I personally preferred Spain. So it wasn't my initial motivation, but it was ultimately what made me choose that programme.

00:06:22 Interviewer

And what was the reason, well, you've mentioned the possibility of staying in Spain, was it because of bureaucracy or interest in the country?

00:06:32 María

Well, after you finish an Erasmus Mundus Master's, in almost every country you can stay if you have migration-related plans, because they all have these job-seeking visas. The thing is, for me personally, Spain was easier because I had friends there. Cultural and linguistic familiarity obviously make life much easier. But also, in Spain the path to citizenship for Latin American nationals is an incentive. You might not even be planning to stay in Europe long-term, but if you consider the possibility, you think: "Well, Spain is better, because in two years I can obtain citizenship."

That was my personal case, but, for example, in my cohort I was the only one who stayed in Spain. Of all the Latin Americans who stayed in Europe, I was the only one who chose Spain. And I should say: not everyone who studies in Spain intends to stay.

00:08:12 Interviewer

Of course. And about the application process, the bureaucracy, deadlines, information... how was that?

00:08:33 María

Well, on the website I sent you, all the requirements and procedures are detailed. But basically, I think we had to apply around November or December 2020, and then the first three months of the next year they informed you whether you passed the first stage. It's really the same process for all these scholarships: you submit your CV, your motivation letter, all your diplomas. If you pass the first filter, you have an interview; after the interview, they tell you yes or no.

Then, in terms of bureaucracy, the only thing I had to do was obtain the visa. Since we all started in Spain, all Latin Americans had to apply for a national visa, because it was a stay longer than three months, although some people didn't bother, because they didn't expect to stay in Spain beyond the minimum. But I did; I applied for the national student visa.

That was the bureaucracy required to enter Spain. But the bureaucracy within the programme was really minimal, because the administration handled everything: enrolments in all three universities, all of that. I never had to go in person to register anywhere.

00:10:13 Interviewer

That's a relief. And what perceptions did you have of Spain before arriving to your programme?

00:10:22 María

I had already travelled to Spain several times, I already knew it and had friends there. Everything was exactly what I knew it would be, because I already knew the country. Spain and Latin America are extremely similar. Some Spaniards don't like admitting it, and some Latin Americans neither, but yes, they're very similar. So I knew pretty well what to expect; not 100 per cent, but roughly 80 per cent.

And the Spanish educational system is very similar to the Cuban one, which is still a bit old-fashioned. It has that style of many modules in one semester, many lectures where the professor speaks for two hours, and then many written assignments. So the educational system was very similar in that sense to my degree in Cuba. So, regarding expectations, not that I didn't have any, but they were confirmed, because they were based on what I already knew.

00:12:04 Interviewer

And what was your opinion of the European Union before the programme, and how did it change throughout?

00:12:09 María

Well, I already knew it very well, even from the inside, you could say, because as a journalist I covered foreign relations. One of the topics I covered was EU–Cuba relations. And in 2019, a year before applying to the Master’s, I took part in a study visit to EU institutions: the European External Action Service, the Council, the Parliament... For a week, journalists from Latin America visited all the EU institutions.

So I knew the EU’s institutional setup very well, and I had already travelled to many European countries: Belgium, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, France... I had experience both with the countries and with the EU institutions. So again, my expectations were based on real knowledge.

I’ve always had a positive opinion of the EU, thinking of the benefits it gives its citizens, the sort of things the European Commission likes to advertise on Instagram: the Schengen Area, the Eurozone, the single charger... those kinds of things. When you come from another part of the world, you’re very aware of how much of a privilege these benefits are, freedom of movement, free circulation of goods and people. Here people take it completely for granted. They don’t even think about the fact that they can travel with a national ID and no passport.

So I was conscious of all that, but also very aware that programmes like Erasmus Mundus, or Erasmus generally, are designed from an extremely Eurocentric perspective and are, in many ways, a soft power tool. I say this also thinking about Asia and international students. The idea is often: “We’ll train people who will take that knowledge back to their home country.” But in many cases, it is also producing talent for the EU labour market. I wouldn’t call it brain drain because the statistics would need to be checked, but clearly European taxpayers aren’t funding people who will all return home, many end up staying and paying taxes here. So my opinion of the EU was a combination of admiration for the benefits and awareness of the Eurocentric and power-driven aspects.

00:15:45 Interviewer

And what did the experience give you personally, academically, and professionally?

00:16:50 María

For me, it was truly a 360-degree life-changing experience. Professionally, I enjoyed it enormously. I had the opportunity to experience very different educational systems, Spain, France, Italy, all completely different. It contributed a lot, and in fact my current professional career is 100 percent the result of my master’s degree.

Personally, as an international student, you meet people from so many parts of the world, mainly from the EU and Latin America in my case, because of the programme's profile, but also from elsewhere. It was extremely enriching. And today, most of my closest friends, apart from lifelong childhood friends, are the ones I met during the Master's. They truly become friends for life. And in my case, I chose to work after the Master's rather than do a PhD, but the path to a PhD would also have been possible.

00:18:28 Interviewer

Right, that's the positive side. And on the negative side, were there any negative experiences, bureaucracy, discrimination, access to information, or issues with the programme itself?

00:18:42 María

Honestly, no. In my case, all my legal processes were tied mostly to Spain, and I never had any issues, apart from delays. But I always had all my documents perfectly in order, and my best friend, who lives in Spain, works in immigration, well, in a law firm that assists migrants with immigration procedures. So I don't know whether I was lucky or whether it was because I always had my documents in perfect order, but I never had problems with any procedure, neither for my study visa, which I had to renew, nor for my job-seeking residence permit.

I also never saw any discrimination, neither at university nor in any administrative procedures. Even in 2021, when we still had post-pandemic measures and I had to get vaccinated and deal with the public health system, I had no issues. It required the usual paperwork, of course, but everything was fine. Sometimes the administration doesn't respect deadlines, but we all know Spain currently has an enormous backlog in immigration cases, so it's understandable. I didn't experience any discrimination that I can remember. If nothing comes to mind now, it's because nothing significant happened.

00:20:26 Interviewer

Of course, I think there are always small things. One interviewee told me about micro-aggressions or micro-situations: the look a clerk gives you, the tone of voice, seeing swastikas or Francoist flags in the street... Not directed at them personally, but making Spain feel less open than expected.

00:20:57 María

Yes, of course, those things exist. I don't recall any personal incident that marked or affected me. Some people are more sensitive to such things; maybe I go through life without noticing what people are saying around me. But I never had issues with public officials beyond the usual grumpiness typical of civil servants.

In Madrid, apart from registering your address, everything is online. And in Salamanca, where I did have to do more things in person, I also never had any problem. I can't say the same applies to everyone: for example, Africans or non-Spanish-speakers do not receive the same treatment in police queues. But that didn't affect me personally, beyond observing it.

That doesn't mean I never heard comments such as "With Franco this didn't happen", but they weren't directed at me as an immigrant. More general comments complaining about drunken students in Salamanca.

00:22:49 Interviewer

Well, I'm glad, because you never know who you'll meet or what impression they'll give of Spain.

00:23:00 María

And you know what? I follow Spanish news and media, and there are so many trolls and so many Vox voters that you think: "God, if you meet one of these people on the street...". But luckily nothing like that happens.

00:23:16 Interviewer

It's true that statistics show Latin Americans are the group of foreigners most integrated into Spanish culture due to the language and closeness.

00:23:39 María

One hundred per cent. There are stories of Latin Americans like me, who obviously speak with a Latin American accent, being told by someone from Castile, "Oh, I can't understand you." But that never happened to me.

I did have, of course, some conservative professors, and you could tell that their approach to Latin American issues came from a colonial perspective, like we were still in the 16th century. But again, I didn't feel personally discriminated against; it was simply that my professor was a white, conservative Castilian man in his fifties.

00:24:28 Interviewer

Right, to finish: if you had any suggestions to improve mobility in general, or your specific programme, given your experience, what would they be?

00:24:55 María

There's a reality we have to acknowledge: people from Latin America who study in Spain or in the EU tend to be privileged, either economically privileged, able to pay for a Master's and two years abroad, or academically/professionally privileged, able to win scholarships.

For example, in my Master's you needed Spanish, English and French. Someone who speaks Spanish, English and French at C1 level is someone who, in Latin America, had the means to

study, so it's not an inclusive programme open to everyone. You can access it if you can pay or if you have academic merit, but it's not open to absolutely anyone.

Not everyone who accesses these programmes has money, people like me go on scholarships, but to win those scholarships you must have studied at a certain level. And in Latin America, that usually requires being at least lower-middle class. If your whole family is working class, it's harder. Maybe I'm generalising a bit, but...

00:26:39 Interviewer

Well, there are scholarships for many people, but yes, most require high grades or some background.

00:26:51 María

Yes. They also look at your university. A strong public university in a national capital or a private university, which already means someone paid for it. So there's a big filter.

One thing that could be improved is administrative coordination between the universities. Since my Master's wasn't only in Spain but across three universities, things like issuing the diploma can take almost a year or more. You think, "How is this possible?" But coordinating three bureaucracies, even within the EU, can be a lot.

Another issue is grade equivalence. For example, in Sweden you have A, B, C. A B might correspond to an 8 in Spain, but in Spain an 8 is considered mediocre, people often get 9s and 10s. Then in Paris you might get a 17 out of 20, which is considered good. So harmonising grades when each country uses a different system remains a challenge. There are equivalence tables, of course, but something is always lost.

00:29:07 Interviewer

Yes, and in Germany, where the scale goes from 1 to 6 and 1 is the best, conversion is horrible.

00:29:24 María

Exactly, you always end up losing out. And with three universities, it's also difficult to ensure proper curricular continuity. You spend one semester in one, then another semester in another, then another... Sometimes topics are repeated a bit.

4. Interview Daniel (28, Colombia)

00:00:00 Interviewer

Your study period in Spain, when did you do it?

00:00:07 Daniel

In 2020.

00:00:10 Interviewer

Okay, and what was the programme?

00:00:17 Daniel

It was Erasmus Mundus.

00:00:20 Interviewer

Right, and the area of study or what you studied?

00:00:27 Daniel

I basically did Latin American Studies.

00:00:31 Interviewer

Was it the LA Global one?

00:00:35 Daniel

Yes, LA Globe, yes.

00:00:37 Interviewer

I know it. So it was in Salamanca, right?

00:00:43 Daniel

In Salamanca, yes.

00:01:17 Interviewer

Right, now for the more open questions. I wanted to start by asking: what motivated you to study outside your country?

00:01:26 Daniel

In general, I wanted to study outside my country. I did my undergraduate degree abroad as well, in the Netherlands. I wanted to study International Relations, and I'm from Colombia, from Cali, and in Cali there aren't many options. I would have had to move to Bogotá, but then I thought, "Well, if I'm going to leave Cali or Bogotá, I'd rather go somewhere further away, somewhere more interesting and more specific." So that's why I went to the Netherlands first. Then for the Master's, I wanted a very specific programme at very good universities, in another language, to practise languages and meet people.

00:02:23 Interviewer

Yes, the usual, getting out of your comfort zone, enriching yourself. And did the choice of Spain play an important role, or was it more because it was one of the programme's cities?

00:02:40 Daniel

I think it was more the second option, more because it happened to be one of the cities in the programme. I really like Spain. In fact, after living in Salamanca, I went to Bilbao to work. So I like Spain a lot. Because of the language, it's easier. And it's "nicer", you know, than some other countries, warmer, sunnier, more familiar.

But ultimately it was because the Master's was already set up that way.

00:03:19 Interviewer

And before the Master's, had you been to Spain, or what opinions did you have of the country?

00:03:27 Daniel

Yes, I'd been to Spain several times, because I also have an aunt who lives in Madrid. It's a calmer, more relaxed country compared to other places in Europe. It's like a mix between Europe and Latin America, it's European, but at the same time life is more relaxed, more pleasant.

From my aunt, though, I had heard some negative opinions, that Spaniards can be a bit racist towards everyone, but also towards Latin Americans. It didn't bother me much because I was part of a group of students from all over the world. But, for example, in Spain, unlike in other European countries, as soon as I speak, people immediately know where I'm from. Here in Brussels, everyone is international, and everyone speaks English, so it doesn't matter. But in Spain it's like, "Ah, you're Colombian," just from hearing one word. But at the same time, I was happy to go to Spain because it's lovely and very beautiful. The only downside was that during COVID everything was closed. In Salamanca everything was shut, and there was a curfew at six or eight in the evening, so that was a bit boring.

00:05:42 Interviewer

And do you think that opinion changed after the mobility?

00:05:49 Daniel

Yes, also because I met loads of Spaniards, and I had a Spanish boyfriend, I met his family... so I developed a nicer opinion of Spaniards. Although I already had a fairly neutral opinion from living there and from my professors, I think it became more positive.

00:06:26 Interviewer

Okay, so more based on your own experience and not so much on what you'd heard?

00:06:33 Daniel

Yes, more or less.

00:06:34 Interviewer

Right, now I wanted to ask the same question but about the European Union. What opinion did you have before compared with after?

00:06:47 Daniel

When I lived in Spain, I could understand European and Spanish stereotypes better, I understood how Europeans view Spain and how Spaniards view Europeans. Also because I had classmates from many countries: a Swedish girl, some French people, Italians... so I also

learned a bit more about other nationalities. But the thing is, I had already lived in the EU before, in the Netherlands, in Germany and in France, so I already had a pretty clear idea of the European Union.

00:07:39 Interviewer

Okay. And did anything about your opinion change after the programme?

00:07:51 Daniel

Not really. Mainly, because my Master's was about the EU, Latin America, Spain and all that, I understood Spain's role in EU–Latin America relations better at a political level. But in terms of everyday life, not much changed, it was more academic knowledge that expanded.

00:08:25 Interviewer

Of course, more about institutions and academic content. And how was the application process, bureaucracy, registering, deadlines...?

00:09:02 Daniel

The thing is, the Master's is organised mainly from the French side, so I didn't really deal with the Spanish side when applying. What did happen is that, for example, when it came to accommodation, they weren't very helpful. They basically didn't recommend the university accommodation because it was more for year-long students. So for housing, they didn't help much.

For registering in the city, I didn't have to do that either because it was only six months. I didn't have much administrative contact with the Spanish university at all.

00:11:11 Interviewer

And regarding your academic expectations, were they met?

00:11:22 Daniel

Yes, they were. I liked the Spanish part a lot. There were lots of courses, lots of assignments, lots to do, whereas in Paris and Stockholm everything was super relaxed. Paris was a mix of the two.

I liked that in Salamanca they introduced us to all the different topics of the Master's. We had an economics class, a political science class, a demography class, a history class... lots of classes, plus some mini elective classes that were really cool.

Personally, I enjoyed it because I like having classes and listening, but some people didn't like it as much because they prefer writing essays and fewer lectures. But for me, it was great. I thought the professors were very good, everything was well coordinated, and we also had classes with the students from the Salamanca Master's, so we met other people. And it was really nice because the Institute of Ibero-America was small and easy to navigate.

00:13:22 Interviewer

And in general, what did the experience give you personally, professionally, and academically?

00:13:33 Daniel

I learned a lot about how Spaniards see Latin America, partly because many of us were Latin American but also because of the subject of the Master's itself. I also learned about Spain because I was living there, the food, the culture. I now like Spanish artists a lot after living there.

Basically, cultural knowledge, films, music, and also getting to know people there better: Spaniards, the academic system, which is very different from that of France or Sweden. It feels more like a school to me, with classes, exams and lots of tasks.

00:14:54 Interviewer

And was there any negative experience during your stay? You mentioned something about your aunt.

00:15:03 Daniel

Yes, but that was more her own opinions, what she thinks about Spaniards, because she's lived there a long time, so she has complicated opinions.

The only negative experience I personally had was getting fined for not wearing a mask during COVID. But otherwise, everything was fine.

Ah, well, the landlord wasn't great. But compared with the one I have now, who is very kind, the one in Spain wanted us to send him cash, and the flat was extremely basic. He didn't seem very interested in the tenants' wellbeing.

00:17:01 Interviewer

Right, and to wrap up, what direction did your professional career take after the programme?

00:17:18 Daniel

The programme is very good. I got an internship at the EU-LAC Foundation thanks to it, and through that and the programme I then got an internship at the Delegation of the European Union in Ecuador. That later helped me get the job I have now, basically.

00:17:56 Interviewer

And now the final question: if you had any suggestions for improvement, either for your programme specifically or for academic mobility between Latin America and Europe more broadly, what would they be?

00:18:26 Daniel

I think in general it would be interesting to have more mobility between Latin America and countries that aren't the obvious ones. Spain is the most obvious country. But, for example, Poland is huge, Romania as well, countries with excellent universities.

The problem is that these countries don't really care about Latin America politically. For example, now that Josep Borrell is no longer High Representative, no one here seems to care about Latin America.

So it would be good to encourage exchanges with non-obvious countries, to strengthen the culture of seeing Latin America as important, economically, diplomatically, culturally.

00:19:28 Interviewer

A very good point. Thank you so much; this has been incredibly helpful.

00:20:08 Daniel

Great, thank you very much.

Part 4: Spanish original transcription of the interviews

1. Entrevista Sebastián (29, Brasil)

00:00:22 Entrevistador

Bueno, primero te quería preguntar así datos más concretos, ¿en qué periodo estuviste en España? ¿En qué año?

00:00:32 Sebastián

¿Cómo estudiante?

00:00:34 Sebastián

Sí.

00:00:34 Sebastián

Como estudiante, bueno, yo la verdad es que hice una maestría de esas eras Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree, que son de esas maestrías que tenés como doble titulación, así que la maestría que hice tenía un semestre ahí en Salamanca, entonces hice un semestre en Salamanca, fue el segundo semestre del 2022.

Algunos de mis compañeros después volvieron a España para hacer la tesis porque teóricamente en el último semestre teníamos que ir a la universidad en la cual hacíamos la tesis. Yo hice mi tesis en Estocolmo, así que no volví a España, pero sí que estuve el primer semestre en Salamanca y después bueno, ahora trabajo acá en España en el instituto de investigación y hago mi doctorado también.

00:01:26 Entrevistador

Vale, ok, pues eso también súper interesante. O sea, fue después de defender tu tesis en Estocolmo, ¿volviste a Brasil o te quedaste directamente en España?

00:01:42 Sebastián

No, volví a Brasil, había terminado la tesis y ahí tuve algunos meses hasta que me consiguiera algo y ahí bueno, me conseguí un trabajo de asistente a investigación y bueno, y ahí trabajo en ese centro de investigación y después sale mi doctorado.

00:01:58 Entrevistador

¿Vale, y de qué es el doctorado? ¿Te puedo preguntar?

00:02:02 Sebastián

En ciencia política, sigo ahí en el mismo rubro.

00:02:04 Entrevistador

Vale, te quería preguntar también cuál es la universidad de origen tuya desde la que fuiste a Salamanca o bueno, lo único que claro, tú hiciste el grado este conjunto, Salamanca, Estocolmo y son 3 universidades, ¿verdad?

00:02:33 Sebastián

Exactamente como que hice en Salamanca, Estocolmo, la Universidad de Estocolmo y en la Sorbonne en Francia. Pero sí que mi pregrado lo hice en Brasil, en la Universidad de Sao Paulo.

00:03:08 Entrevistador

Vale, genial ¿De qué era el máster que hiciste en España, Estocolmo y Francia?

00:03:20 Sebastián

Digamos que era de estudios latinoamericanos. Entonces ponele que en Salamanca estábamos ahí en el Instituto de Iberoamérica, cuando fuimos a Estocolmo estuvimos ahí en el Instituto Nórdico de Estudios Latinoamericanos y en la Sorbonne estábamos ahí en el Instituto de Altos Estudios de Latinoamérica.

00:05:16 Entrevistador

Bueno, te iba a preguntar la edad ya solo como para la parte demográfica.

00:05:22 Sebastián

29

00:05:38 Entrevistador

Y bueno, te quería preguntar primero, ¿qué te motivó a estudiar fuera de tu país, de Brasil?

00:05:45 Sebastián

Muy buena pregunta, muy buena pregunta. Pero yo creo que fueron dos cosas sobre todo en su momento. La primera cosa es que yo antes de irme a Europa a estudiar, yo había ido también a Europa durante el pregrado en el marco de un intercambio en la Science Po ahí en Francia y a

partir de ese intercambio como que al principio yo pensaba que las oportunidades para estudiar acá en Europa eran oportunidades solo para gente que tenía mucha plata. Cuando fui al intercambio como que poco a poco fui descubriendo otras posibilidades para estudiar acá en Europa: cuáles eran las becas, cómo tenía que postular, dónde eran. Y al final descubrí que tenía un buen perfil para esas becas. Porque al principio yo pensaba, vos tenés que ser un genio, tenés que ser la Malala, vos tenés que tener mucha guita, ¿no? Y bueno, cuando yo me fui a ir a Francia, como que poco a poco hablando con los profesores, con otros estudiantes de intercambio, medio que fui hablando con ellos, buscando más cosas en internet y fui como que haciendo tremendo, tremenda tabla ahí de cuáles eran las posibilidades de beca que tenía y para cuáles yo tenía más partido. Y cuando volví a Brasil, ahí en el 2020 dije, capaz no está mal. Sobre todo porque, y ahí viene la segunda razón, o sea, la primera es que descubrí que era posible estudiar.

00:07:32 Sebastián

La segunda razón es que en ese momento sí que estaba el gobierno Bolsonaro y yo la verdad es que al final como para mí, o sea, fue un tremendo shock volver a Brasil y sobre todo porque estaba en Science Po, que es una escuela de donde salen ahí los presidentes, la alta burocracia del Estado francés y para mí fue un shock volver a Brasil y estar el gobierno de Bolsonaro con pocas oportunidades de beca, pocas oportunidades de investigación y aparte un tremendo clima de persecución a los académicos, viste? Académicos izquierdistas y yo siempre comparaba con el ambiente de Francia y la gente siempre cuando le decía que estudiaba en Francia era como "Wow, que estudiaba en Science Po". Entonces ponele ese clima ahí en Brasil, la falta de posibilidad de financiamiento, ese bajo prestigio social en los académicos en ese momento me hizo decir "Sabés qué, o sea, vuelvo a Europa". Pero solo voy a volver a Europa si me consigo una beca ahí de maestría. Y ahí fue que volví poco antes de la pandemia Brasil y ahí terminé el pregrado, me quedé un año haciendo lo que en Brasil se llama licenciatura, pero no es exactamente la licenciatura, sino es más una especie de profesorado, ¿viste? como que tenés clases ahí en la facultad de educación para que puedas dar clases, en mi caso de sociología.

00:09:06 Sebastián

Porque el grado que hice en Brasil se llama Ciencias Sociales, pero en Brasil no hay el grado en Ciencia Política, en Sociología o en Antropología. Lo que tenés es sólo el grado en Ciencias Sociales. Entonces si querés ser cientista político, tenés que hacer el grado en Ciencias Sociales. Si querés ser sociólogo, lo mismo y antropólogo también. Así que terminé el profesorado ahí. Pero el profesorado es sólo para Sociología, porque nuestro currículum ahí escolar sólo tenemos ahí este lo que sería... acá en España no sé si sigue siendo eso, pero es cuando tenés

ahí de los 14 a los 17 más o menos. O sea, en el bachillerato tenías en esa época clase de sociología.

00:09:54 Sebastián

Y ahí hice el profesorado en el 2021 para dar clases de sociología y ahí en el 2022 me estuve postulando a muchas becas y en el 2022 me aceptaron en dos. De esas Erasmus Joint Master's Degree, pero me gustaba mucho más ese en estudios latinoamericanos, así que le di para adelante.

00:10:21 Entrevistador

Genial, pues qué interesante, la verdad. Me alegra mucho entonces que descubrieras todas las becas. Es verdad que imagino que ir de un sitio de Latinoamérica a España puede resultar como muy Dios, eso no se lo pueden permitir las élites, así que menos mal que hay becas.

00:10:41 Sebastián

Sí, totalmente. Y aparte allá cuando estaba en Science Po era una cosa muy loca porque yo la verdad es que a mis compañeros no me gustaba mucho preguntarles quiénes eran porque cuanto más sabía ellos, más sabía lo élite que eran, no solo en términos económicos sino en términos políticos. Porque ponele que una de mis compañeras fue...Yo estuve justo en el año y nos llevamos súper bien pero estudié con Sofía Petro, con la hija de Petro. Y yo ni siquiera sabía quién era, o sea, solo casualmente en un momento, como estaba hablando con un amigo colombiano y me dijo, ¿pero sabes qué su padre va a ser el próximo presidente de Colombia? Pero ¿nunca viste su apellido?

00:11:31 Sebastián

Así que, o sea, mis compañeros eran un poco así. Al final, como no quería saber mucho quiénes eran porque exactamente, eran gente muy ahí de élite, no sólo en términos económicos, como también en términos políticos.

00:11:52 Entrevistador

Ya, ok, te iba a preguntar, entonces elegiste el máster, es un máster, ¿verdad? Lo de estudios latinoamericanos.

00:12:00 Sebastián

Exactamente, es un Erasmus Mundus

00:12:04 Entrevistador

¿Lo elegiste más por el tema o por los países, por ejemplo, en España o en Estocolmo ¿O sea, qué te llamó la atención del programa?

00:12:18 Sebastián

Yo cuando elegí ese programa, la verdad es que estaba intentando para miles de becas en lugares distintos en Europa al mismo tiempo. Era porque quería venirme a Europa, no específicamente, sino porque había muchas becas en Europa que estaban muy buenas.

Entonces me postulé a Inglaterra, Italia, Alemania, este las becas del DAAD, quedé finalista, pero después no me eligieron para ir a Magdeburg. Entonces casi fui a Alemania al final, pero lo que me retaba en algunos puntos también es que no sabía alemán.

00:12:59 Sebastián

En el caso de las becas Erasmus Mundus, me dieron dos y ahí tuve la oportunidad de elegir entre estudios latinoamericanos y otra que era solo en Global Studies, relaciones internacionales. La otra me la dieron en la lista de espera, la de estudios latinoamericanos me la dieron de una, pero al final como que tuve la oportunidad de elegir entre las 2 y lo que me gustaba en mi programa es que teníamos la oportunidad de hacer un semestre en cada lengua. Eso me gustaba mucho, sobre todo porque en ese momento pensaba en hacer el examen de acceso a la carrera diplomática en Brasil y se pedían 3 lenguas extranjeras más allá de portugués: inglés, francés y español.

00:14:03 Sebastián

Hoy solo se pide 2 lenguas extranjeras, así que puedes elegir entre español y francés, pero en ese momento yo estaba bueno, si en algún momento quiero estudiar para el examen diplomático, capaz está bien tener una experiencia en cada uno de los países, o al menos una experiencia académica con cada una de esas lenguas. Y la otra maestría, la de Global Studies sí me llamaba mucho la atención, me gustaba bastante el programa, pero la cosa es que era para hacer un semestre en Bratislavia, en Polonia, que sería durísimo y el segundo año sí que sería en Viena. Y lo que estaba bueno es que era una maestría en relaciones internacionales, pero al final los países me llamaban menos la atención, sobre todo Polonia y el hecho de que quería estar en un ambiente totalmente multilingüe, porque ahí en Viena y Polonia solo hablaría inglés. Pensé que lo de Viena estaría muy bien porque yo estudié como 1 año y medio de alemán y que bueno, capaz está el momento ahí para volver a estudiarlo y aprenderlo bien. Pero dije, okey, el costo de oportunidad capaz es demasiado grande, porque a la vez como que estoy dejando la oportunidad de estar estudiando académicamente a muy buen nivel, no solo para comunicarme, sino un nivel académico, para estar escribiendo en esos idiomas. Así que fue eso al final que me motivó y también como que sabía que iba a tener un medio más fácil socialmente para hacerme amigos, para lidiar también con los profesores. Yo creo que capaz si hubiera elegido irme a Polonia y a Viena hubiera tenido seguro más dificultad en insertarme socialmente y entender cómo las cosas funcionaban ahí en términos académicos también.

00:16:44 Entrevistador

¿Y respecto a las dificultades en general, tuviste alguna ahí? Bueno, yo te voy a preguntar más respecto a España porque es de lo que va mi tesis, pero en realidad me puedes contar si quieres en los otros países. O sea, dentro de la movilidad académica tanto como la vida en la ciudad, ¿tuviste alguna dificultad?

00:17:08 Sebastián

Mira, yo vine a Sao Paulo, que es una ciudad enorme, inmensa, con 12 millones de personas y si sumas el área metropolitana tenés como 20 millones. Así que yo fui a Salamanca, Salamanca me parece un pueblo porque al final tenía 150.000 personas. Para los estándares igual de España tampoco es muy chica, pero para mi estándar de Brasil es chica. Así que para adaptarme en la ciudad, cero, todo me parecía muy fácil. Yo vivía ahí como a 50 metros de la Plaza Mayor de Salamanca, que me encantaba. Y la verdad es que, para serte muy sincero, al final yo no creo que haya tenido problemas ahí para insertarme socialmente. La experiencia en Salamanca, por extensión en España, fue tan buena que al final afectó mucho mi elección de volver a España ahora, no para trabajar y para el doctorado.

Cuando volví a Brasil, estaba pensando después de haber terminado el máster ¿vuelvo a Europa, hago algo por acá, ¿qué hago con mi vida? Yo había ya me había conseguido ahí un empleo que estaba bueno, en investigación en la universidad de Sao Paulo. Me pagaban bien para los estándares de Brasil, o sea en euros no es mucho. Yo tenía ahí un proyecto de investigación armado, pero siempre estuve pensando “ok, si me aparece algo en Europa, capaz una oferta de empleo en alguna organización internacional o en un *think tank* o en una universidad, una posibilidad de doctorado, capaz me voy. Pero solo me voy si es para un lugar que de verdad me gusta, no voy para cualquier lugar”. Y bueno, ahí medio que fui tachando las opciones. Los nórdicos te pagan súper bien, vivir súper bien, pero a la vez es muy difícil insertarse culturalmente. O sea, yo viví en Suecia y en Suecia es como si *fuera The Truman Show*. Todo funciona, todos son lindos, todos son ricos, pero después es muy difícil que te conectes con la gente. Entonces dije, ta, los nórdicos te pagan bien, pero mejor no.

Alemania me gustaba y siempre hay muchas posibilidades, pero no hablo alemán, entonces como que estaría el esfuerzo de aprender bien el alemán y muchas de las oportunidades también me...o sea, yo quedaba medio limitado por eso, ¿no? Porque en alguna en algunas de las vacantes ya te pedían el alemán.

En Italia lo mismo, e Italia todavía suma puntos positivos porque, al final, me parece que el sur de Europa ya es muy muy distinto en términos..., bueno vos sos española y vivís en Alemania, entonces seguro me entendés, como que en términos sociales te cambia mucho la vida de estar

en Alemania o en Suecia o en Países Bajos o en el Reino Unido. Aparte, en Italia también está el hecho de que no tenés muchas oportunidades de beca. Francia, me gustaba mucho vivir ahí, y me gusta mucho el francés y sobre todo, o sea, Francia en términos de oferta cultural, pero la academia francesa me parecía que tiene un modelo muy específico y muy autocentrado que me desagrada profundamente, muy jerárquico, y muy cuadrado al final.

Entonces al final me quedaron Portugal y España y a Portugal, o sea, no voy. A Portugal no voy porque Portugal de verdad es un país en el cual nosotros brasileros tenemos muchos problemas con la xenofobia. Muchos, muchos, muchos de verdad. Yo como turista, ni siquiera viví ahí. Basta que abras la boca y que ellos te escuchen hablar con el acento brasiler y te van a discriminar y te van a tratar muy mal. Mi exnovia vivía ahí, ella me contaba algunas experiencias, cuando la fui a visitar sí que tuvimos también unas malas experiencias como pareja ahí, así que es difícil Portugal.

Bueno, sobró España y dije, wow, para, España me gusta. En España me parece que tienen hecho una especie de apertura con Latinoamérica que está muy bien. Y para mí todos los académicos que tienen, los centros de investigación de Latinoamérica, hay mucha gente que también es muy leída del lado ahí latinoamericano. Es muy importante esos temas que son españoles o latinoamericanos, que están trabajando en España desde hace mucho. Entonces España sí está muy bien, sobre todo por eso porque me parecía que se adecuaba mucho a mis aspiraciones, mis expectativas en términos de estándares de vida.

O sea, no se cobra mucho, es verdad, los salarios son más bajos, no se cobra tan bien, pero me gusta cómo viven, me parece que es más fácil hacerse amigos acá. De la maestría tengo algunos amigos que son españoles y me llevo súper bien con ellos. O sea, España me parece que llena todas las casillas, ¿no? Así que dije, bueno, ta, perfecto. A ver cuáles son las oportunidades en España.

Y ahí me surgió la oportunidad esa en el IBEI, que es el centro en el cual trabajo hoy. Hace muchas cosas ahí con la fundación. Yo trabajo en el IBEI y a la vez hago el doctorado en la Pompeu Fabra. Así que al final fue medio eso, como dije, pa, me gusta tanto España que, o sea, me parece que las barreras culturales son más bajas, o sea, siempre está la diferencia con la burocracia de extranjería, con los papeles y todo, pero después de haber vivido en Francia por 1 año... ¿Sabes qué? O sea, los españoles se quejan de su burocracia, pero en Alemania con el *Anmeldung* y todo lo que tienen que hacer, está todo mucho más fácil acá.

00:24:47 Entrevistador

Y entonces, en general, en la burocracia, no de nacionalidad y todo eso, sino más en lo que es el programa tuyo de Erasmus Joint Degree ¿Cómo fue el proceso de solicitarlo, de buscar información y todo eso?

00:25:07 Sebastián

Te estuve contando el programa, pero se me escapó de decirte el nombre del programa, se llamaba "LA Globe Latin America Europe in a Global World" Si quieres buscarlo. Al final, yo no tuve problemas con la universidad. La verdad es que todo ahí en Salamanca estuvo muy bien y te digo más, o sea, hasta en términos académicos, el semestre que más me gustó de la maestría fue por lejos el semestre de Salamanca. Fue un semestre muy bueno, muy pesado, con muchas cosas, pero las clases me gustaban, los profesores. De hecho, eran expertos en sus temas. Teníamos como ahí muchas clases de profesores invitados que solían ser siempre de Latinoamérica y unos locos ahí re importantes, re salados. Así que nada, me gustaba mucho la gente de verdad importante en sus rubros ahí en Latinoamérica y también que era leída acá y escribían ahí muchos artículos con los profesores acá. Los profesores acá también eran muy activos en el otro lado. Así que me gustó mucho la experiencia en el Instituto de Iberoamérica en Salamanca. Así que, en términos académicos, yo no tuve ningún problema. O sea, al final teníamos muchas clases y muchos trabajos pero me parece que es... y nos contó una vez el profesor de historia "Al final el máster ahí de Salamanca es un máster de investigación, entonces dura dos años, pero a la vez está hecho para que tengas clases solo el primer año". Entonces tenés muchas clases el primer año y en el segundo año te dedicás solamente a la tesis, pero son muchas clases de primer año. Capaz es la única crítica que tengo, pero me gustaban todas las clases.

En términos de burocracia, yo tuve más problemas con la burocracia administrativa, la visa y eso, pero creo que eso todos tienen. Después al final, o sea, tuve problemas, pero me dieron ahí una visa de 1 año, ni siquiera tuve que pedir visa ahí para irme a Estocolmo después. Así que, de verdad mi experiencia en España fue muy muy muy positiva, hasta por eso volví.

00:27:40 Entrevistador

Genial, pues oye me alegro que te fuera bien. Bueno, ya me has contado la dirección que tomó tu carrera profesional después del programa de movilidad, pero te quería volver a preguntar cómo fue entonces. O sea, hiciste tu grado, luego este máster y después en Brasil buscaste ofertas de trabajo y ya directo a España, ¿o tuviste algo entre medias?

00:28:13 Sebastián

No, entre medias sí que estuve ahí unos meses ahí medio sabáticos haciendo algunas cositas para tener un poco de dinero también, pero nada a tiempo completo. Y cuando me conseguí

algo a tiempo completo, fue casi al mismo tiempo que me conseguí algo acá en España, así que lo dejé muy rápidamente porque fue como tremenda suerte. O sea, recién había empezado en el otro empleo de investigación y ya me había conseguido la posibilidad de hacer el doctorado y el trabajo en Barcelona. Y ahí ya arranqué con todos los trámites otra vez para volver a España. Entonces volví en septiembre a Brasil y a España volví... ya sabía que había quedado para la vacante esa de trabajo en el IBEI a principios de marzo o fines de febrero, no me acuerdo. Y bueno, por los trámites de la visa y todo, solo volví a España a fines de mayo.

00:29:29 Entrevistador

Y entonces lo de la pasantía, ¿Lo hiciste durante el máster?

00:29:38 Sebastián

Sí, hice durante el máster.

00:29:41 Entrevistador

Como prácticas profesionales.

00:29:43 Sebastián

Exactamente, o sea es raro porque al final nosotros en nuestra maestría podríamos hacer o estancia de investigación o una pasantía, prácticas, y al final yo había decidido hacer trabajo de campo en Argentina, porque estudiaba política exterior de Brasil y Argentina.

Entonces me fui a Argentina a hablar con la gente, con los diplomáticos, con algunos académicos y pasé algunos meses ahí, como 2 meses y medio más o menos. Pero mientras estaba en Argentina, me postulé también a EU-LAC y dije bueno, a ver qué onda. Y ahí quedé y dije bueno, a hacer la pasantía también porque seguro me va a abrir puertas y de hecho me abrió puertas. Y estuvo muy bien. O sea, la experiencia en EU-LAC también fue otra de esas cosas que yo miro hacia atrás y siempre digo “wow, ok, acá como que hice bien en irme a Hamburgo” Porque tampoco fue fácil, porque yo en 2024 estuve viviendo en cuatro países a la vez, un poco en Francia, un poco en Argentina, un poco en Alemania, después volví a Francia y bueno, después volví a Brasil, así que estuvo difícil, fue bastante difícil la verdad, pero sí que valió la pena, la pasantía fue una excelente experiencia.

2. Entrevista Carlos (36, Perú)

00:03:50 Entrevistador

Primero, ¿cuándo estuviste en España o en qué periodo?

00:03:56 Carlos

Yo llegué a España septiembre del 2022. Llegué a estudiar el máster en relaciones internacionales en Barcelona. En un instituto que se llama IBEI, que es de la Pompeu Fabra y

un par de universidades más. Entonces fue de 1 año, supongo que de septiembre de 2022 hasta la promoción de mayo, junio. Sí, en realidad como que yo lo terminé alargando por un tema de que estaba al mismo tiempo trabajando un poco de remoto, como también cuando quieres hacer un poco las prácticas y eso tienes que estirarlo para seguir siendo alumno. Al final, en realidad fue un máster de 2 años. Fue de septiembre del 22 a pues creo que junio o mayo del 24.

00:05:08 Entrevistador

¿Te puedo preguntar el pregrado, bueno, el grado que hiciste antes del máster?

00:05:18 Carlos

Sí, mi pregrado es en ciencias sociales con orientación en periodismo. Yo mi background era sobre todo periodismo. Yo soy peruano de nacimiento, pero viví varios años en Argentina estudiando allá el pregrado y algunos años trabajando y luego volví a Perú y luego fui a España a hacer el máster.

00:05:45 Entrevistador

Qué guay, viajaste mucho también.

00:05:50 Carlos

Sí, un poco. O sea, también eso me sirvió para afrontar todo, digamos, este segundo proceso un poco más curtido.

00:06:00 Entrevistador

Sí, y también digamos que hace también es un reto bastante grande, sí, la verdad.

00:06:11 Carlos

Sí, adaptarse a nivel papeleo, emocional...porque al final estás dejando atrás una vida y estás empezando de cero en un nuevo lugar y pues migrar muchas veces viene acompañado de muchas cosas

00:06:30 Entrevistador

Es un reto, desde luego. Me contaba ayer otro de los estudiantes que en un año estuvo viviendo en cuatro países diferentes. Yo no sé cómo lo hizo.

00:06:42 Carlos

Yo no sé cómo lo hacen, sobre todo ustedes, los europeos, que están tan acostumbrados a esto. Yo también donde sea que voy conozco gente que dice “yo soy de Francia, pero estoy estudiando en Italia, vine a hacer Erasmus acá a Bélgica...” Y yo llego a un punto en el que ya no puedo, la cabeza no da.

00:07:04 Entrevistador

La verdad que no. Entonces viniste a estudiar todo el máster, pero no fue con ningún programa de Erasmus Mundus o Fundación Carolina ni nada.

00:07:16 Carlos

O sea, yo postulé a cosas, pero al final no me agarré. Y bueno, yo ya sabía que quería estudiar. Justo me tocó en la post pandemia un momento en el que el trabajo que tenía terminó. Yo trabajaba en comunicación política para un para un político y él terminó su periodo, digamos, de gestión. Entonces acababa de terminar la pandemia y era como justo siempre había querido estudiar algo, digamos, en España o en Europa, estaba como por ahí la idea. Y dije, bueno, este es el momento, si no lo hago ahora, la verdad que va a ser difícil. Entonces ahí empecé todo el proceso. Estudié los 2 años y de ahí me he quedado un poco instalado y un poco tratando de abrimme paso acá. Como tú mencionabas, muchas veces los procesos de estudio son una manera de poner el pie en un lugar. Entonces, en este caso para mí también ha sido eso. Bueno, estudiar relaciones internacionales, además que es un campo tan, digamos, internacional, por ser redundante, pero entonces yo estudio relaciones internacionales y digo “bueno, si regreso a Perú va a ser un poco digamos, dar un paso hacia atrás”. Entonces dije “vamos a ver qué puertas se abren”. Y ha sido un poco eso.

En realidad, este periodo posterior ha sido usar esos escalones para decir “bueno, aplico esto, aplico lo otro...”. Hice una pasantía en la Organización de Estados Americanos desde Barcelona, pero las hice remotas. Después hice las prácticas en la Fundación EU-LAC. Ahora ya me he venido a Bruselas porque mi novia, que justamente la conocí en Barcelona en el máster, ha agarrado unas prácticas en la comisión. Yo apliqué a la del Parlamento, me pusieron en la short list, pero al final no me agarraron. Nosotros hemos dicho “vamos porque justamente es el centro, hay de todo”. Entonces hemos venido como para intentarla, como si fuese un proceso de migración de otro proceso de migración, en mi caso, que ya se dio.

00:10:29 Entrevistador

Sí, o K, pues te iba a preguntar. ¿Qué fue lo que te motivó a estudiar en Europa?

00:10:53 Carlos

La verdad es que yo creo que siempre tuve la idea de estudiar algo en Europa. Creo que después la vida me hizo pues trabajar, concentrarme en lo que estaba haciendo en ese momento en Argentina. Y un poco la idea fue quedando y luego la retomé, como te digo, cuando acaba la pandemia. Pues yo creo que lo de Europa fue un poco, obviamente, el nivel educativo es bastante alto. Entonces a nivel académico, es dar escalones hacia arriba. También el hecho de adquirir una nueva perspectiva, pues Europa termina siendo como un punto de encuentro y un núcleo y un centro a nivel internacional. Y también por eso fue que elegí el máster que elegí, que hice como una especie de balance. Elegí España porque sentía que era algo que de alguna manera estaba un poco cerca a mi cultura, el idioma. También tenía amigos que ya vivían en

Barcelona, que es algo que, cuando se estudian los procesos migratorios suele ser algo muy recurrente, que los previos terminan marcando los posteriores. Pero al mismo tiempo, el máster que yo elegí era un máster en inglés. Y que cuando hice todo el research vi que era un máster que no era simplemente en español y que voy a conocer gente de Latinoamérica y gente de España, sino que venía gente de todo el mundo, que había gente que venía de Asia, Norteamérica, Egipto, Turquía. Y al final de cuentas, una especie de balance de un lugar que conozco y que no es tan difícil instalarme y al mismo tiempo, teniendo esa ventana internacional a estudiar asuntos globales rodeado de personas de todo el mundo, que he sentido que fue muy enriquecedor. Eso ha sido más o menos el proceso de cómo he terminado yendo exactamente a esa ciudad y estudiando.

Yo conozco gente que viene de regiones muy, muy distantes y dicen me voy a Polonia, me voy a Suecia y terminan y estudian ahí. En mi caso fue un poco balancear las dos cosas, fue como “a ver, tengo amigos que ya están ahí y me van a dar una mano para llegar”. Sé que en España es más fácil quedarse, que el tema migratorio tiene ciertas consideraciones para los latinoamericanos. Entonces fue una mezcla un poco de todo, combinando lo natural con decisiones concretas.

00:14:54 Entrevistador

¿Y qué opiniones tenías de España antes de ir?

00:15:16 Carlos

Bueno, siempre he tenido buenas opiniones de España en general, había estado muy poco tiempo, una sola vez había venido de viaje, de vacaciones. Creo que había estado como una semana en Madrid, una semana en Barcelona, una cosa así antes de hacer la típica vuelta por Italia. Tengo amigos, amigas que son españoles de antes de haber venido. Hay cosas que han sido por ahí un poco distintas a nivel educativo, pues la idea generalizada, es que el nivel educativo es mayor en España que en América Latina a nivel concreto y a nivel de nombre. Las cosas que se estudian por ahí tienen un nivel de profundidad o de perspectiva, sobre todo si se trata de temas de relaciones internacionales. También hay un tema de nombre: Yo me voy, por ejemplo, a Perú, me voy a Argentina, me voy a Chile a postular y vengo con un máster de España. Inmediatamente te da un prestigio que es mayor y te da como más posibilidades, como muchas veces una cadena. O como si uno viene a España con un título del Reino Unido. Esa era mi percepción de España.

De la Unión Europea también siempre ha sido una percepción positiva. Siento que, con todos sus problemas y dificultades, la percepción que siempre he tenido del proyecto europeo ha sido de intenciones positivas, por lo menos de intentar forjar un eje fuerte y sólido y de liderazgo

en temas que son importantes: derechos humanos, temas ambientales, democracia. Creo que estando acá uno, uno ve un poco los matices, las dificultades. Además, la época es completamente distinta a la que quizás era hace algunos años.

00:18:30 Entrevistador

Ok, ¿crees que tus expectativas que tenías antes de estudiar en España, en Europa, se cumplieron tras terminarlo?

00:18:46 Carlos

Sí se han cumplido, o sea, yo estoy muy contento de mi paso por España y de esta nueva vida en general, porque para mí, como te decía, ha sido la puerta a abrir un nuevo, un nuevo capítulo profesional y personal, porque yo estoy en una nueva etapa, tratando de abrirme espacio en todo un mercado nuevo que a veces es difícil de penetrar. Estoy muy contento por haber estudiado en España. En realidad, yo siento que se ha cumplido, tipo haber estudiado un buen máster, haber compartido con gente internacional. Las facilidades también de haber podido estar en España han sido como más un proceso más fácil a nivel migratorio también. También, digamos, se han cumplido las cosas que yo veía en el horizonte, por ejemplo, yo ya yo ya soy un ciudadano español.

Entonces, si bien entonces se han cumplido esas cosas, no hay nada de lo que yo me arrepienta, pero en la práctica he visto los matices, y he visto que tampoco todo es color de rosa. Ya en el detalle el análisis es mucho más diverso. Uno dice, bueno, sí, estoy feliz con mi máster, pero la institución podría mejorar. O al estudiar, el proceso de ser estudiante en Europa es un proceso tan costoso y tan sacrificado. El que quiere tiene que bancársela él y hacerlo, y las prácticas, y pagar, y buscársela él. Y a veces vives en unos huecos horribles y pagas un montón de plata y cuesta también. Por el lado migratorio, también ha sido un proceso así. O sea, al final he llegado a este último paso que ha sido tener la ciudadanía española, pero en el medio también ha habido un montón de dificultades de entradas. Desde el primer día en el que yo aplico a la visa de estudiante en el consulado español en Lima, ha sido lidiar con muchas cosas: que si la burocracia, que te pongan malas caras, que te traten más o menos bien, más o menos mal, etc. Ser migrante es también eso, a veces es buenísimo y a veces, especialmente en esta época, te sientes o te hacen sentir como que vienes de afuera, que no eres parte.

Y lo mismo también podría decirse con mi idea de España y de la Unión Europea. Bueno, justo ahorita no estoy ya en España por tema profesional, pero a mí me encanta España.

He disfrutado mucho Barcelona, siento más mi hogar Barcelona. Si hoy si tú me dices “¿dónde ves tu hogar si todo falla en Bruselas, ¿a dónde vuelves?”. Yo vuelvo a Barcelona, pero también

en el día a día, pues he aprendido muchísimo sobre lo que es España y las complejidades de España, que también era algo que no lo tenía mapeado.

De ser un país con tantas cuestiones no resueltas, partiendo desde la propia identidad, desde el propio “¿qué somos como país” y todo lo que eso significa. Y a nivel político ya ni te hablo. Al final he terminado dándome cuenta de que España tampoco es tan diferente a muchas cosas que yo veía en América Latina. Y por el lado de la Unión Europea también hay algo de eso, está buenísimo, pero al mismo tiempo también uno ve las dificultades que tienen como institución, cómo se les han colado problemas de los que es tan difícil salir, como tener representantes tan antidemocráticos dentro de la propia institución y cómo lidiar con eso. Yo, por ejemplo, hice mi tesis justamente del máster en los organismos regionales y cómo lidian con crisis democráticas. Comparaba el caso de Venezuela y la OEA con el caso de Hungría y la Unión Europea. 2 casos en 2 organizaciones tan distintas en 2 regiones tan distintas y al final el resultado es el mismo, no haber podido exitosamente lidiar o frenar los procesos de autocratización.

Si bien mi percepción no ha cambiado, no es que yo tenga una percepción negativa ni de España ni de la Unión Europea, pero ya estando desde dentro ves todas las dificultades y lo mismo se ha dado en mi proceso de estudios y migratorio.

00:25:18 Entrevistador

Bueno, me alegra saber que por lo que cuentas parece en general, tienes una buena opinión y estás contento.

00:25:32 Carlos

Bueno, es que yo también ya he pasado antes por esto, entonces yo creo que me ha ayudado mucho a tener la paciencia. Ahora, por ejemplo, me pasa de que he venido con mi pareja y ella es de Barcelona. Y ella ha vivido en muchos lugares porque su familia siempre se está mudando, pero es la primera vez que ella se muda a un país nuevo por sí sola. Y a veces ella pasa por ese proceso que yo creo que ya lo interioricé mucho. Ella, por ejemplo, está teniendo problemas acá con el tema de la tarjeta de transporte. Y noto en su frustración, y yo me acuerdo también de todas las veces que a mí me pasa, y me doy cuenta de que yo ya muchas veces he generado como una especie de cuero grueso ante esas cosas.

Me peleé con todo el tema de la tarjeta esta alemana, todas esas pequeñas cositas que generan frustraciones. Creo que de alguna manera también ya lo he naturalizado, pero son muchas cosas. O sea, muchas veces uno de América Latina idealiza, o cuando es un conocido el que se va, es como “mira, qué bien la pasa en Europa”, pero muchas veces es difícil, no. Incluso con todos los privilegios y situación afortunada que uno puede tener, porque mucha gente

simplemente no tiene la posibilidad de irse. Igual son procesos que son bastante difíciles en el día a día y que uno los transita con muchísima paciencia y con muchísima resiliencia. Eso es algo que yo también le decía a otro amigo, que también al final lo que uno más aprende al migrar es a ser resiliente. O sea, te da herramientas para todos los aspectos de la vida, ya no solo lo que tú dices para laboral o educativo, sino sí para salir de tus propios problemas y gestionar emociones de frustración, que son muchas.

00:28:40 Carlos

Sí, desde luego. Pues bueno, para ir acabando ya te iba a preguntar también qué dirección tomó tu carrera profesional después de estudiar en España.

00:28:59 Carlos

Bueno, como te comentaba, me ha abierto una puerta muy grande. Bueno, no sé si puedo hablar por todos los latinoamericanos, pero me da la impresión que para nosotros España es como la puerta a Europa, es como si fuese nuestro aeropuerto de llegada. Entonces me ha abierto una puerta enorme que es, en primer lugar, dedicarme a las relaciones internacionales, que es lo que siempre quise hacer, pero además abrirme al mercado más europeo, contactar con profesionales de acá, con instituciones de acá, y es algo que poco a poco es un proceso también. Porque, por ejemplo, ahora yo estoy en Bruselas y estoy en el proceso de tratar un poco de meterme en la “EU Bubble”, porque fue una de las razones también por las que postulé a la Fundación EU-LAC, porque muchas veces uno postula acá y puede venir con un montón de experiencias.

Porque uno cuando viene de otro lugar tienes que dar pasos hacia atrás, como que uno podría tener un trabajo estable, estar recontra asegurado. Y aparte para nosotros latinoamericanos hay una cuestión como del gap de edad, porque para nosotros funciona de manera distinta. Estudiamos nosotros los masters cuando ya hemos hecho algo de experiencia. Claro, tenemos 28 para arriba, de 28 a 35 suelen hacer los masters latinoamericanos, y muchas veces es gente que ya está bien establecida en su país, está tranquila, tiene trabajo, tiene un auto y venir a esto requiere un poco el sacrificio de empezar un poquito de vuelta. Bueno, en mi caso eso ha sido un poco el proceso, pero ha sido un proceso que yo ya sabía que iba a ser un poco así y que pues lo he afrontado.

Y ahora pues me ha abierto las puertas al mercado laboral de acá y lo que trato ahora es como de consolidarme acá, obviamente no dejando atrás Latinoamérica, trabajando quizás temas de cooperación o especialización en América Latina, que acá hay instituciones y grupos políticos que siempre están mirando América Latina, pero me ha abierto, digamos, esa posibilidad.

00:32:14 Entrevistador

Sí, el primer camino. Vale, te iba a preguntar también a qué te dedicas ahora mismo, si quieres contármelo.

00:32:25 Carlos

Sí, ahora estoy haciendo cosas que son más freelance, un poco de consultoría en comunicación, en esa dirección. Como soy periodista, hay mucho pequeño trabajito que es tipo editar, traducir, ese tipo de cosas, pero mientras tanto lo que estoy haciendo casi a diario en general es tratar de conseguir algo que sea basado en Bruselas, por más que no sea en una institución de la Unión Europea, que sea dentro de este mercado laboral, porque ese es el objetivo que nos hemos trazado con mi pareja cuando hemos venido y también por el tema económico, porque es caro vivir acá y necesitas caminar con un sueldo de acá.

00:33:21 Entrevistador

Ah vale pues ya está respondida a la pregunta siguiente así que creo que ha fluido bastante bien.

00:33:49 Carlos

Sí, vi que había también cosas de discriminación, de acceso.

00:33:55 Entrevistador

Claro, la idea es preguntar si has tenido alguna dificultad, que ya me has comentado, y ya en base a eso dejar que comentéis, y si no lo comentas yo asumo que no pero igual sí debería preguntar más directamente, es que tampoco quiero incomodar.

00:34:16 Carlos

A ver, yo creo que a mí también me cuesta un poco como diferenciar qué cosas son propias de mi experiencia y qué cosas son más de la época. Porque yo he venido en esta época, o sea, yo no sé cómo era migrar a España o a Europa hace 5, 10 años, yo sé cómo es migrar hace 2 o 3 años y cómo es ahora, siento que hay ciertas tensiones. Yo, como te digo, es el segundo proceso que hago, entonces tengo inmediatamente la comparación y sí que veo cosas que están siempre presentes, que son micro latentes, pequeñas. Y que se expresan de muchas maneras distintas y vienen de muchas cosas distintas. Además, porque además yo era un latinoamericano viviendo primero en España como un migrante, y además hay quizás un ingrediente extra cuando uno está, por ejemplo, en Barcelona,

en Cataluña, que hay otro elemento distinto del nacionalismo que se mezcla un poco con el otro, y hasta qué punto uno es distinto del otro. Entonces, pues ahí ha habido choques. O sea, hechos así graves de discriminación por suerte no he vivido, sino una cuestión como siempre latente y presente. Para mí es raro, por ejemplo, sólo el hecho de llegar a España y estar en el metro y ver tipo esvásticas pintadas y otras cosas también de España. Claro, para mí es un

montón, sobre todo por lo que te decía antes de la percepción que uno tiene de Europa y choca un poco con eso. Entonces es como guau, entonces a ver, uno se pregunta por eso. Acá hay una cuestión que es puramente de época ¿O es que no era tan así como que...?

00:36:44 Entrevistador

Nunca ha sido tan perfecto.

00:36:46 Carlos

En mi caso es difícil saberlo porque yo acabo de llegar y bueno, cositas así como que estás en un tren y la persona que tienes al lado tiene algún alguna pulsera o algún tatuaje que te parece ahí bastante...

00:37:08 Entrevistador

Que delata, ¿no?

00:37:09 Carlos

Algunas pulseras que hablan de reconquista, algunos tatuajes que son como tribales, pero que después veías en la forma en la que terminaban y eran esvásticas. Eso como el extremo, por suerte no he tenido experiencias más extremas que esas, pero por ahí a veces un poco en el día a día hay ciertas cositas.

Por suerte tengo entendido que desde la pandemia ha habido cambios en la manera en la que se gestionan los trámites migratorios. Bueno, han cambiado muchas cosas, pero lo que ha cambiado es que ya no se hacen presencialmente, sino que se hacen telemáticamente. Y eso creo que, si bien suena como una tontería, creo que cambia bastante en algunas cosas. Yo mi primer trámite en el Consulado de Lima lo hice cara a cara y eso que ni siquiera sé si la persona que me atendió era español o era peruana, pero recuerdo la dificultad, uf, cada cosa que te pedía... y eso lo he escuchado también de gente que ya vivía acá, que tú vas con tus documentos pero “acá te falta otra cosa, pero no está en la lista, no me importa, acá te falta otra cosa, acá otra cita y vas a volver a venir y traerlo, esos estudios que estás haciendo a mí no me aparece que son válidos, que sean suficientes...” Eso también lo he escuchado. Por suerte ahora todo es automático, entonces ya la gente lo ingresa por internet y ahí te resuelve. Está como más documentado, entonces si te van a rechazar, en realidad tiene que quedar bien claro por qué, por suerte eso ha hecho que las dificultades sean quizás más burocráticas que otra cosa. Por ejemplo, conseguir citas. Es imposible para algunos temas migratorios, es imposible. La gente tiene que pagarle a tramitadores para que les consigan citas porque no existen. Pero sí, por ahí hay veces en que uno tiene que ir, por ejemplo, a la policía para que te den el DNI o el pasaporte. Y uno nota un poco en las caras que por ahí no les está encantando darte, digamos, el DNI o darte el pasaporte, ahorrarte el NIE.

Entonces, bueno, en general, noto que hay cierta tensión latente que por lo menos en mi caso nunca no se ha expresado en un hecho de discriminación, creo que también juega a nuestro favor que somos muchos, entonces tenemos como mucha comunidad. Entonces no es que estamos solos contra el mundo y eso cambia mucho. Y también el hecho de que en esa tensión que existe en este momento, que no es solo de España, que está en toda Europa, nosotros estamos como ahí medio en el medio, no somos en realidad los más odiados y discriminados. Cuando se habla de la migración y todos estos antimigrantes, los latinoamericanos no es el primer grupo en el que están pensando, el primer grupo que rechazan. Y eso incluso me lo han dicho a mí latinoamericanos que están en España. Que me dicen, no, pero en realidad no son los latinos que ellos odian o quieren sacar, a los que quieren expulsar es a los marroquíes. Y yo digo, bueno, a mí no me deja para nada tranquilo. Claro, no es muy tranquilizante no ser el primer grupo objetivo. Tampoco, estaría tranquilo de que sean otras las víctimas y yo no, pero bueno, entonces existe como esta cuestión que es medio rara, que yo no sé si es solamente de época o es si ha estado siempre presente, pero hasta ahí. Esa es mi experiencia en general como migrante en España y en Europa hasta ahora.

3. Entrevista María (33, Cuba)

00:00:34 Entrevistador

Entonces, ¿en qué año estuviste en España?

00:00:39 María

Del 2021 al 2023 estudiando en España, pero también con movilidad en Estocolmo.

00:00:50 Entrevistador

¿Y el nombre del programa era Latin America...?

00:00:56 María

Se llama LA Globe, América Latina Europa en un mundo global, pero creo que lo acaban de cerrar porque es financiado totalmente por la Comisión Europea del programa Erasmus, entonces creo que no lo renovaron para una nueva promo.

00:01:46 Entrevistador

Vale, la primera pregunta sería: ¿qué te motivó a estudiar fuera de tu país?

00:01:54 María

Para mí, hay como dos motivaciones, una de interés académico profesional y otra interés como personal. En lo académico y profesional, yo llevaba dos años trabajando en la embajada británica en La Habana y trabajaba básicamente en relaciones internacionales y diplomacia. En este caso, relaciones Reino Unido-Cuba, pero mi interés era por ese tema de continuar mis

estudios hacia ese tema y no hacia, por ejemplo, periodismo, que fue lo que yo hice en mi licenciatura. Y de hecho, como periodista siempre lo que cubrí era relaciones internacionales y política exterior. Entonces, en Cuba no había ningún problema, ningún programa que satisficiera ese interés mío con una perspectiva no nacional centrista. Digamos que en Cuba hay programas de relaciones internacionales, pero con un enfoque bien desde la realidad cubana y el contexto cubano, y no con un enfoque más internacional como yo hubiese querido, como quería. Entonces eso fue el principal motivo.

Y el otro, siempre era lo que quise, estudiar afuera. De hecho yo también hice un diplomado allá en la India, entonces no es la primera vez que estudiaba afuera. Siempre fue lo que me gustó, me parece interesante porque creces como persona y no solo académicamente. Y eso por un lado.

Y por el otro, que en el momento que yo decidí buscar un máster fue en el 2020, justo después de la pandemia, que se preveía ya que Cuba entrara en una crisis económica, político-social más grave. Entonces, también sabía que además de que en Cuba no había el tipo de programa que yo quería estudiar, tampoco quería estar en Cuba mucho más tiempo, y pues esas fueron las motivaciones. Y la profesional, que a mí siempre me gustó estudiar afuera y que sí, me hacía falta cambiar de país.

Apliqué en el 2020 porque sabes que para este programa hay que aplicar casi que con un año de antelación. Y en agosto del 21 me fui a España.

00:04:30 Entrevistador

¿Y elegiste España por algún motivo particular o fue más porque elegiste el máster?

00:04:36 María

No, elegí el máster. En mi caso particular sabía que quería estudiar en Europa y, de hecho, lo que hice fue aplicar solo a Erasmus Mundus porque, la verdad, es muy buena y los programas solían ser muy buenos. Y lo que hice fue aplicar a tres programas que me interesaban, todos tenían que ver con relaciones internacionales.

Uno era más de ciencias políticas, EPS se llamaba, estudios europeos y políticos, o algo así. El otro era también como Euroculture, que era igual enfocado en estudios europeos. Todos eran una maestría de estudios europeos, relaciones internacionales y algún tercer tema en específico. Uno era como más cultural, otro era más de ciencia política y este era de relaciones Unión Europea y América Latina y el Caribe.

Entonces, realmente no fue que elegí España, sino que elegí programas de mi interés. Y primero elegí una beca que era el Erasmus Mundus porque era muy bueno. Segundo, elegí programas que me interesaban. Y los tres que a los que apliqué me aceptaron, pero luego me decidí por

ese porque me interesaba el tema, porque era un tema que creo que tenía un potencial para después encontrar algo porque se conectaba con mi background. Y el hecho de que empezara en España implicaba que luego, si quería, me podía quedar en España, aunque al final lo hubiese podido hacer en cualquiera de los tres, pero prefería, en mi caso personal, España. Entonces no fue lo inicial que me motivó, pero sí fue al final lo que me decidió a ese programa.

00:06:22 Entrevistador

Y entonces cuál era, bueno ya me has dicho que había posibilidad de quedarse en España, ¿por tema burocrático, o por interés en el país?

00:06:32 María

Es que realmente luego que termines un máster Erasmus Mundus, en casi todos los países te puedes quedar si tienes un interés migratorio, porque todos tienen este visado de búsqueda de empleo. Lo que pasa que a mí, en lo personal, se me hacía más fácil España porque tenía amistades. O sea, las conexiones culturales obviamente hacen la vida extremadamente fácil e idiomáticas, pero también en España el camino a la nacionalidad para cualquier ciudadano latinoamericano es un incentivo. O sea, que a lo mejor no piensas que te vayas a quedar en Europa, pero si lo piensas dices “pues mejor en España, que en dos años puedo tener la ciudadanía”.

Ese fue mi caso personal, pero también de mi master, por ejemplo, fui la única que se quedó en España. De todos los latinos que se quedaron en Europa, yo fui la que me quedé en España. Igual te voy a decir que no todo el mundo que estudia en España piensa en quedarse.

00:08:12 Entrevistador

Claro, sí, luego es muy interesante cómo la gente aprovecha la oportunidad de estar en Europa para reinvertir lo adquirido en su país y que no se quede todo en Europa. Y sobre el proceso de aplicación al programa, ¿cómo fue tema burocracia, plazos, información...?

00:08:33 María

Pues puedes ver en la página de que te mandé. Ahí están como todos los requisitos y procesos detallados, pero básicamente creo que había que aplicar como en diciembre del 2020, noviembre del 2020, y luego, en los primeros tres meses del año, te daban los resultados o si pasabas de la primera fase a la segunda. Pero es realmente el mismo proceso en todas estas becas: mandas tu CV, tu carta de motivación, todos tus diplomas.

Luego, si pasas el primer filtro, tienes una entrevista, y luego de la entrevista te dicen sí o no. Luego, burocráticamente hablando, lo único que tuve que hacer fue sacar el visado.

En mi caso, como todos empezamos en España, todos los latinoamericanos tuvimos que sacar visado nacional porque era una estancia de más de tres meses, aunque hubo quien no lo hizo

porque nunca pensó quedarse en España más de lo mínimo imprescindible. Pero yo sí lo hice, saqué el visado nacional para la estancia por estudio.

Esa burocracia para entrar a España, pero la burocracia en el máster realmente fue mínima, porque la administración se encargaba de todo, de hacer las matrículas en las tres universidades, todo eso lo hizo la administración del programa. Yo nunca tuve que ir a matricularme a una oficina ni nada.

00:10:13 Entrevistador

Es un rollo, menos mal ¿Y qué percepciones tenías de España antes de llegar a tu programa de estudios?

00:10:22 María

Es que yo ya había viajado a España varias veces y ya lo conocía y tenía amistades. Fue todo lo que yo sabía que iba a ser porque ya conocía el país y realmente España y América Latina son extremadamente similares. A algunos españoles no les gusta admitirlo, a algunos latinos tampoco, pero sí, sí es muy similar, entonces sabía tal cual cómo iba a ser, no al cien por ciento, pero sí digamos un 80 por ciento y luego el sistema de enseñanza español es muy similar al cubano, que es todavía un poco arcaico, pero es mucho ese estilo de muchas asignaturas en un semestre, muchas clases de profesor hablando con el alumno durante dos horas y luego entregar muchos trabajos escritos. Entonces el sistema de educación fue muy similar en ese sentido de mi licenciatura en Cuba.

Entonces, en cuanto a expectativas, no que no las tuviese, pero sí que tenía una expectativa que al final se confirmó porque era ya basada en hechos.

00:12:04 Entrevistador

Y ¿cuál era tu opinión de la Unión Europea antes del programa y cómo fue cambiando a lo largo?

00:12:09 María

Es que, de hecho, igual la conocía perfectamente, incluso desde adentro se puede decir, porque yo como periodista lo que cubrí eran relaciones exteriores. Entonces, uno de los temas que cubrí fueron las relaciones de Unión Europea-Cuba. Y, en el 2019, un año antes de aplicar al máster, justo hice un viaje de estudios a las instituciones europeas. O sea, al Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior, el Consejo, el Parlamento... Durante una semana, estuvimos periodistas de América Latina visitando todas las instituciones del Parlamento. Entonces, conocí a la institucionalidad de la Unión Europea súper bien, y ya había viajado por los países más comunes: Bélgica, Noruega, Países Bajos, España, Francia... Entonces, tenía como la experiencia de conocer varios países europeos y, además, tenía la experiencia de conocer la

institucionalidad de la UE. Así que, nuevamente, mis expectativas estaban basadas en lo que ya conocí en la realidad, y siempre he tenido una opinión favorable de la Unión Europea pensando en los beneficios que implica para sus ciudadanos. O sea, los que siempre pone la Comisión Europea promocionando en Instagram: el espacio Schengen, la zona Euro, un solo cargador, ese tipo de cosas, ¿no?

Pero cuando vienes de otra parte del mundo eres muy consciente del extra que significa tener estos beneficios, la libertad, el libre mercado, la libertad de movimiento, o sea el libre movimiento de mercancías y personas...y aquí la gente lo da como por sentadísimo. Ni te lo piensas el hecho de poder viajar con tu DNI sin pasaporte, la gente lo ve como normal.

Entonces era como muy consciente de eso, pero también era muy consciente que programas como Erasmus Mundus, como Erasmus en general, están contruidos desde una perspectiva extremadamente eurocentrista y que al final son, en muchos sentidos, una herramienta de soft power hacia el mundo. Y lo digo desde la perspectiva de Asia, estudiantes internacionales y que en muchos casos se piensa como “vamos a formar personas que luego le van a devolver ese conocimiento a su país”. Pero también, en muchos sentidos, no lo quiero llamar robo de cerebros porque no es el caso, habría que ver las estadísticas, pero también en realidad es formar gente en la UE que luego se queda trabajando en la Unión Europea también, ¿no? O sea, hay que ver los números, a lo mejor estoy diciendo sandeces, pero al final no es que se estén gastando los impuestos de la ciudadanía europea en formar gente que luego se va a ir, porque al final hay gente que termina pagando impuestos. Entonces, mi opinión de la UE era básicamente esa felicidad con los beneficios que implica, pero también que, muchas veces, los programas son extremadamente eurocentristas y desde el poderío de la UE.

00:15:45 Entrevistador

Y bueno, ¿qué te aportó la experiencia tanto a nivel personal, académico, profesional...?

00:16:50 María

Pues mira, para mí sí fue como un totalmente una "life changing experience" 360 grados. Profesionalmente, me gustó muchísimo y tuve la posibilidad de pasar por sistemas de enseñanzas muy diferentes, porque nada que ver España con Francia o Italia, entonces sí me aportó muchísimo y, de hecho, mi carrera profesional actual es resultado al 100% de mi máster. En lo personal, como estudiante internacional tienes la posibilidad de conocer a gente de tantas partes del mundo...En mi caso, básicamente Unión Europea y América Latina porque era el rango en donde estudiaba, pero también de otros lugares. Así que sí fue extremadamente enriquecedor y, a día de hoy, la mayor parte de mis amigos más cercanos, aparte de los que vienen conmigo desde la infancia, son los que tuve durante el máster, porque sí se vuelve como

amigos para el resto de la vida. Y en mi caso yo al final me incliné por trabajar y no por hacer un doctorado pero sí hubiese sido posible irse al camino de un doctorado.

00:18:28 Entrevistador

Vale, esto es la parte positiva. Y, en la parte negativa, ¿hubo alguna experiencia negativa de burocracia, discriminación, de la dificultad de acceder a la información o de lo que es el programa en sí?

00:18:42 María

Mira, la verdad que no. Y en mi caso, que yo, como todo mi proceso legal, lo hice más que nada atado a España. La verdad que yo nunca tuve ningún problema, aparte de procesos demorados. Pero bueno, yo siempre he tenido todos mis papeles súper en orden y mi mejor amiga, que vive en España, de hecho trabaja en extranjería, bueno, en un bufete de abogados que atiende a migrantes en trámites de extranjería. Entonces, no sé si corrí con suerte o si es por el hecho de que, como siempre tuve mis documentos totalmente en orden, nunca tuve problemas con ningún trámite ni para mi estancia de estudio, que tuve de hecho que renovarla, ni para mi residencia de búsqueda de empleo.

Nunca tampoco vi ningún tipo de discriminación, ni en el ámbito universitario, ni en el ámbito de todas las gestiones que tienes que hacer. Y yo, de hecho, estudié en el 2021, que todavía estaba como post pandemia, y tuve que vacunarme y lidiar también con la sanidad pública. Y también sin ningún tipo de problema. Tuvo su trámite, obviamente, pero todos salieron bien. A veces la administración no respeta los plazos, pero todos sabemos que España tiene ahora mismo una sobrecarga de solicitudes de expedientes de extranjería, que ni modo que puedas resolver a plazos.

Tampoco tuve ninguna experiencia de discriminación. A menos que yo recuerde ahora, así que no debe haber habido nada traumático.

00:20:26 Entrevistador

Claro, yo creo que siempre hay como pequeñas cositas. Uno de los entrevistados me comentaba que eran como mini, microagresiones o micro situaciones, como la cara que te pone un empleado de la administración, cierto tono con el que te hablan, ver esvásticas por la calle o la bandera franquista... cosas que no eran directas hacia ti, pero que te hacían ver a España como no tan abierta como nos creemos.

00:20:57 María

Sí, claro, esas cosas. Yo no recuerdo ningún hecho en lo personal que me haya marcado o afectado. A lo mejor hay personas que son más sensibles o que perciben más esas cosas, a lo mejor yo voy por la vida sin enterarme de lo que está diciendo la gente, pero con los

funcionarios públicos jamás tuve ningún problema más allá de la mala leche típica de funcionarios. Pero bueno, en Madrid más allá del empadronamiento, todo es telemático. Y en Salamanca, que sí tuve que hacer más cosas en persona, tampoco tuve nunca ningún problema. Que no puedo decir que le suceda lo mismo a otras personas, por ejemplo, los africanos. No, hispanohablantes en la atención que me daban a mí en la policía, comparada con la que le daban a africanos y asiáticos en la fila nunca ha sido lo mismo. Pero bueno, eso no me afectó a mí personalmente más allá de recibirlo. Eso no quita por supuesto que alguna vez escuché estos comentarios "con Franco esto no pasaba", pero no dirigido hacia mí como inmigrante si no en general, quejándose de los jóvenes borrachos por Salamanca, de estudiantes...

00:22:49 Entrevistador

Vale, pues me alegro mucho, la verdad, porque nunca se sabe aquí con quién te puedes encontrar y qué imagen te va a dar eso de España, pero bueno, me alegro.

00:23:00 María

Y sabes que yo sigo todas las noticias y todos los medios españoles y una cantidad de troles y una cantidad de votantes de Vox, que tú dices: "Dios, si te encuentras un tío de estos en la calle, te dan ganas de darle un..." Pero menos no pasa nada de eso.

00:23:16 Entrevistador

Es que es verdad que, viendo estadísticas, los latinoamericanos son los extranjeros que más integrados están en la cultura por el idioma y la cercanía.

00:23:39 María

100% hay historias de gente que latinos, como yo, que hablamos obviamente con español latino y que ha habido castellanos, castizos que le han dicho "Ah, no, es que no te entiendo". Pero a mí nunca me pasó. Sí tuve, por supuesto, profesores conservadores y sí se notaba ahí que su "approach" hacia los temas relacionados con América Latina era desde una perspectiva colonial, ni que estuviésemos en el siglo XVI, pero nuevamente no fue como sentí que fue una discriminación personal, sino simple y llanamente que mi profesor era un señor blanco, español, de Castilla, de 50 años, conservador de toda la vida.

00:24:28 Entrevistador

Bueno, pues ya sí, para acabar, si tuvieras alguna sugerencia para mejorar la movilidad en general o más bien el programa tuyo en concreto, ya que tienes esa experiencia.

00:24:55 María

Hay una realidad que hay que tener en cuenta, y es que las personas que estudian en España, o las personas de América Latina que estudian en España o la Unión Europea son privilegiadas, ya sea desde el privilegio económico, que te puedes pagar un máster en España y pasarte dos

años estudiando y después, si quieres, volverte, o si no quizás sacar una de esas residencias no lucrativas y luego, bueno, te haces ciudadano. Entonces, el privilegio económico o el privilegio de tener una posición académica profesional que te permite acceder a becas para estudiar en España, esas dos cosas. Porque por ejemplo, en mi máster había que saber español, inglés y francés. Ya por ahí, alguien que habla inglés, español y francés a nivel C1 es evidentemente alguien que en América Latina tuvo la posibilidad de estudiar, o sea que no es que sea un programa inclusivo al que cualquiera puede acceder. O sea, puedes acceder si tienes los fondos para pagártelo o los méritos académicos y profesionales para hacerlo, entonces no es que cualquiera pueda estudiar en España. Y, o sea, no creo que todo el mundo que acceda que tenga dinero, porque la gente como yo viene con becas, pero porque estudió, y para estudiar en América Latina se sabe que tienes que tener cierta una posición mínima de clase media baja, si tu familia entera es obrera, es más difícil. A lo mejor estoy quizás generalizando un poco, pero...

00:26:39 Entrevistador

A ver, hay becas para mucha gente, pero es verdad que casi todas mínimo tienes que tener buenas notas o haber tenido cierta trayectoria.

00:26:51 María

Luego van a fijarse en tu universidad, y a lo mejor es buena una universidad pública de capital en América Latina o una universidad privada, que ya es quien se la paga, o sea que de por sí hay un filtro grande.

Y pues mira, una cosa que se mejoraría, es que en mi caso personal, como no fue solo un máster de España, sino en 3 universidades, la coordinación administrativa de una universidad a otra y que tuviésemos, por ejemplo, el título de terminar el máster se demora casi un año o más. Entonces, tú dices, “¿cómo es posible?” Porque sí se unen las burocracias de los tres países, aunque sea la UE, y sí puede ser una historia. Pero eso sí es personal de mi máster.

Y luego que también las notas de una universidad no tienen el mismo valor en las otras. Por ejemplo, en Suecia tienes A, B, C y a lo mejor sacas B, que en España vendría siendo un 8, pero en España un 8 te hace casi que malísima nota, podrían sacar nueve y diez, y luego entonces en París puedes sacar un 17 de 20 que para París es buena, 17. Entonces, básicamente, cómo hacer la homogeneización de las de las notas, cuando cada país utiliza un sistema diferente, sigue siendo un reto, Y existen como las tablas de equivalencias obviamente, pero como que siempre se pierde algo.

00:29:07 Entrevistador

En sistemas tan diferentes como el de Alemania, que va del 1 al 6, siendo el 1 la más alta, es súper complicado. Y tienes que utilizar diferentes sistemas de conversión, y según lo que uses te da una nota u otra, es horrible con el de Alemania.

00:29:24 María

Sí, sí, sí. Entonces eso, que siempre sales perdiendo.

Luego también es bien difícil, cuando son tres universidades, lograr hacer la concatenación del currículo, porque pasas un semestre en una, un semestre en la otra, un semestre en otra...A veces se repiten un poquito los temas.

4. Entrevista Daniel (28, Colombia)

00:00:00 Entrevistador

El periodo de estudios en España, ¿cuándo lo realizaste?

00:00:07 Daniel

En 2020.

00:00:10 Entrevistador

Ok, ¿y cuál era el programa?

00:00:17 Daniel

Eran el Erasmus Mundus.

00:00:20 Entrevistador

Vale, ¿y el área de estudios o lo que estudiaste?

00:00:27 Daniel

Hice básicamente estudios latinoamericanos.

00:00:31 Entrevistador

¿Era lo de LA Global este?

00:00:35 Daniel

Sí, LA Globe, sí.

00:00:37 Entrevistador

Lo conozco, entonces fue en Salamanca, ¿no?

00:00:43 Daniel

De Salamanca, sí.

00:01:17 Entrevistador

Vale, pues ahora las preguntas así más abiertas. Te quería empezar preguntando ¿qué te motivó a estudiar fuera de tu país?

00:01:26 Daniel

A nivel general, yo quería estudiar fuera mi país, entonces yo estudié el pregrado también fuera, en Holanda. Quería estudiar relaciones internacionales y digamos que yo soy de Colombia, pero soy de Cali. Entonces en Cali no hay muchas como opciones, entonces hubiera tenido que ir a Bogotá, pero dije como que “bueno, si voy a estar en Cali o en Bogotá, pues prefiero irme a otro lugar como más lejos y que sea como algo más interesante, como algo más específico”. Entonces fue por eso por lo que me fui primero a Holanda. Y luego, el máster, porque quería estudiar un programa muy específico en universidades que sean muy buenas, en otro idioma, para también practicar idiomas, conocer gente...

00:02:23 Entrevistador

Bueno, lo normal, sí, o sea, salir de tu zona también, enriquecerte. Sí, y entonces, ¿la elección de España jugó un papel importante o fue más bien porque era una de las ciudades del máster?

00:02:40 Daniel

Pues sí, yo creo que es más la segunda, más que más porque era una de la ciudad de máster. O sea, a mí me gusta mucho España. De hecho, después de vivir en Salamanca, fui a Bilbao también a trabajar. Entonces me gusta mucho España. Digamos que por el idioma pues es más fácil. Y pues es más chévere, ¿no? que otras ciudades, que otros países porque es más caliente, más sol, más cercano, pero al final pues también fue básicamente porque el máster estaba prediseñado.

00:03:19 Entrevistador

¿Y antes del máster habías estado en España o qué opiniones tenías de del país?

00:03:27 Daniel

Sí, antes del máster habías estado en España bastantes veces, sí, sí, porque también tengo una tía que vive en Madrid. Es un país más tranquilo en Europa, más relajado, digamos que es una combinación entre Europa y América Latina porque es europeo, pero al mismo tiempo es un poquito más tranquila, la vida, más chévere. En España, por mi tía, también tenía como opiniones medio negativas a nivel de que los españoles son un poco racistas contra todo, pero también contra los latinos. A mí no me importa mucho porque formaba parte de un grupo de muchos estudiantes de todas partes. Pero, por ejemplo, cuando estaba en España, no es como cuando estoy en otro país de Europa, que cuando hablo la gente sabe de dónde soy exactamente. Aquí, en Bruselas, todo el mundo es internacional y todo el mundo habla inglés, entonces da igual, pero en España es como "ah, tú eres colombiano", solamente con decir una palabra, ya es como "ah, eres de América Latina", pero al mismo tiempo también estaba contento de ir a España porque es muy chévere, muy bonito. Lo único es que en el periodo de COVID también

estaba un poco aburrido porque no había nada. Digamos que en Salamanca estaba todo cerrado, había un toque de queda como a las 6 de la tarde o a las 8 entonces...

00:05:42 Entrevistador

¿Y tú crees que esta opinión cambió después de la movilidad?

00:05:49 Daniel

Sí, también porque conocí a muchísimos españoles, y tuve un novio español, conocí a su familia y después tuve una opinión más chévere de los españoles, aunque también la tenía antes viviendo allí, con los profesores también, y pues digamos que tenía una opinión más neutral.

00:06:26 Entrevistador

Ok, o sea, ya como más basada en tu experiencia y no tanto en lo que habías oído, supongo.

00:06:33 Daniel

Sí, más o menos.

00:06:34 Entrevistador

Ok, pues ahora te quería hacer la misma pregunta, pero con respecto a la Unión Europea, ¿qué opinión tenías antes en comparación con después?

00:06:47 Daniel

Cuando viví en España pude ver más los estereotipos europeos y españoles, entendí mejor cómo ven los europeos a España y cómo ven los españoles a los europeos, también porque obviamente tenía compañeros de muchos países entonces había, por ejemplo, una sueca, franceses, italianos... entonces también entendí un poquito mejor de otras nacionalidades, pero la cosa es que ya había vivido antes en la Unión Europea, en Holanda, en Alemania y en Francia, entonces ya tenía una idea bastante clara de la Unión Europea.

00:07:39 Entrevistador

Okay. Y lo mismo, entonces ¿cambió algo de la opinión después del programa?

00:07:51 Daniel

No, yo creo que sobre todo fue como... Bueno, porque mi máster también era sobre eso, sobre la Unión Europea, América Latina, España y todo eso. Entonces entendí mejor el rol de España dentro de la Unión Europea con relaciones con América Latina a nivel de cosas políticas. Pero más como del día a día, no, como que más aprendí cosas del máster y eso.

00:08:25 Entrevistador

Claro, más académicas o de las instituciones. Vale, y qué tal fue el proceso de solicitud, o sea, la burocracia, registrarte, los plazos...

00:09:02 Daniel

La cosa es que este máster está más organizado por la parte francesa, entonces no tuve relación directa con la parte española a nivel de aplicar. Lo que sí fue es, por ejemplo, a nivel de alojamiento y cosas así fueron como súper poco útiles, porque básicamente no recomendaban los alojamientos de la universidad, porque era más para la gente que estaba inscrita como un año. Entonces, para la parte de alojamiento no ayudaron mucho. En la parte de registrarme en la ciudad, no tuve que hacerlo tampoco porque apenas fueron como 6 meses. No tuve mucho contacto con la universidad a nivel de burocracia, de administración y tal.

00:11:11 Entrevistador

Y respecto a tus expectativas académicas en el programa, ¿se cumplieron?

00:11:22 Daniel

Pues sí, la verdad, la parte en España me gustó mucho, fueron muchos cursos, bastantes trabajos y cosas que hacer mientras que, por ejemplo, en París y en Estocolmo eran súper relajados, y en París era como una combinación entre los dos, pero me gustó porque nos introdujeron a todos los diferentes temas del máster. Teníamos una clase de economía, una clase de ciencia política, una clase de demografía, una clase de historia...Entonces tuvimos muchas clases y también unas mini clases electivas que fueron súper chéveres. Entonces digamos que a mí personalmente me gustó porque a mí me gusta mucho tener clases, escuchar y así, pero a otra gente no le gustó tanto porque digamos que a alguna gente le gustan más trabajos y ensayos y menos clases. Pero bueno, a mí sí me gustó bastante, me pareció que los profesores eran muy buenos, estaba como todo coordinado, teníamos clases con los estudiantes del máster de Salamanca, entonces también conocimos a otras personas. Y además era súper chévere porque era el instituto de Iberoamérica que era como pequeñito, fácil de manejar.

00:13:22 Entrevistador

Y así a rasgos generales, ¿qué te aportó la experiencia tanto a nivel personal, profesional, académico?

00:13:33 Daniel

Pues aprendí bastante de cómo ven los españoles a América Latina, obviamente porque muchos éramos latinoamericanos, pero también por el tema del máster como tal. También aprendí cosas de España porque estaba allí, como la comida, la cultura, a mí me gustan mucho los artistas españoles después de haber vivido allí. Sí, básicamente conocimiento a nivel cultural, de cine, de música... y también conocer la gente allí un poco más: los españoles, el sistema académico, que es muy diferente al sistema académico de Francia o de Suecia. Es más parecido como a una escuela para mí, porque es como clases, exámenes y muchas cosas.

00:14:54 Entrevistador

¿Y hubo alguna experiencia negativa dentro de tu estancia? Has mencionado algo con relación a tu tía.

00:15:03 Daniel

Sí, pero eran más bien sus opiniones, lo que ella piensa con respecto a los españoles, porque ha vivido mucho tiempo allí, entonces tiene opiniones complicadas.

Lo único es que me multaron por no usar la mascarilla en el tiempo de COVID. Pero de resto no, del resto fue todo bien. Ah, bueno, mi arrendatario no fue mal, pero comparando con el de ahora, que es súper buena gente, el de allá quería que le enviáramos el dinero en efectivo, y además la casa era lo más básico posible. Como que no estaba muy interesado en el bienestar de la gente.

00:17:01 Entrevistador

Vale, y así ya para acabar, ¿qué dirección tomó tu carrera profesional después del programa?

00:17:18 Daniel

Pues el programa es muy bueno, conseguí la práctica en la Fundación EU-LAC, gracias a la cual y también al programa conseguí una práctica en la delegación de la Unión Europea en Ecuador. Y eso me ayudó luego a tener el trabajo que tengo ahora, básicamente.

00:17:56 Entrevistador

Pues así ya, la última pregunta, si tuvieras alguna sugerencia de mejora, tanto de tu programa en concreto, como de en general la movilidad académica entre Latinoamérica y Europa, no tanto España. Si se te ocurre algo que pudiera mejorar o cambiar.

00:18:26 Daniel

Pues yo creo que a nivel general también estaría interesante si hubiera más movilidad entre América Latina y países que no son tan obvios, porque España es el país más obvio. Pero, por ejemplo, Polonia es un país muy grande, o Rumanía son países que tienen universidades muy buenas. El problema es que a esos países no les importa América Latina a nivel político. Por ejemplo, ahora que ya no está Josep Borrell como el alto representante, ya a nadie le importa América Latina acá. Entonces intentar tener más intercambios entre países que no son tan obvios para que se desarrolle un poco más la cultura de que América Latina es súper chévere, es importante, relaciones económicas, diplomacia y eso.

00:19:28 Entrevistador

Pues muy buen punto, la verdad. Oye, muchísimas gracias, de verdad, me ha servido un montón.

00:20:08 Daniel

Muy bien, muchas gracias a ti.

Appendix B: Interview with Martina Bo, ESN's Liaison Officer for the Americas 2023-2025

Part 1: English translation of the script

1. Impact of mobility programmes in diplomacy and national development:

How can ISM be used as a soft power tool in diplomacy to strengthen EU-LAC relations? Especially between LAC and EU states other than Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany to increase general interest for Latin American affairs to the EU as a whole

2. Suggestions to fight brain drain. Many mobility students stay in the EU, leading to a lack of qualified professionals in LAC, especially having in mind the unbalanced flow of students (mainly from LAC to EU but not viceversa)

How can the student flow be more bidirectional instead of generally occurring from the global south to the global north?

3. Identified challenges & improvement suggestions:

What are some problems that prevent these programmes from reaching their full potential? How can these programmes be improved to overcome challenges?

4. Impact of mobility programmes in young professionals' career development:

How do mobility programmes shape young professionals' careers?

Part 2: Spanish original interview script

1. ¿Cuál es el impacto de la movilidad de estudiantes EU-LAC en el acercamiento diplomático entre estas regiones? ¿Cómo se podría usar como herramienta de poder blando para reforzar las relaciones con países de la EU más allá de España, Portugal, Italia, Francia y Alemania para aumentar el interés general por LAC?
2. ¿Cómo se podría lograr un mayor equilibrio entre los estudiantes de LAC que viajan a la EU y viceversa para que la movilidad académica sea más bidireccional en vez de predominantemente sur-norte?
3. ¿Qué otros problemas impiden aprovechar el potencial de ISM al máximo y cómo se podrían superar?
4. ¿Cómo influye la movilidad académica en el desarrollo profesional y personal de los estudiantes?

Part 3: English-translated transcription of the interview

00:01:21 Interviewer

So, if you're ready, I'll start with the questions.

00:01:25 Martina

Yes, please.

00:01:32 Interviewer

First of all, as a representative of ESN, what do you believe is the impact of student mobility between Europe and Latin America on bringing the two regions closer together, in general terms?

00:01:51 Martina

Well, as a representative of the Erasmus Student Network, both I and my association are convinced that student mobility, especially through the Erasmus+ programme, has the power to create links and bridges between the two regions, particularly from the bottom up. This happens through students and academic or administrative staff who go abroad to train and then return to their home countries with a suitcase full of new skills, new networks and contacts. Ultimately, they enrich society through this "suitcase" brought back by international students. So the impact is definitely very positive.

00:02:43 Interviewer

Yes, absolutely. Although when interviewing students, some told me they noticed a big tendency to go to Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany... but that the rest of the EU countries attract far fewer students. So I wondered how we could encourage more links between Latin America and, say, Poland or Romania, countries that are also large and have a lot of potential.

00:03:18 Martina

Well, first of all, I agree, I have data from the European Commission showing that Spain is the number one destination, Italy is number two, followed by Germany, France and Portugal as the countries that attract most students from Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, as the European Union, if we look at our countries as a single region, we share many values with Latin America and the Caribbean. What is needed is to promote the EU as a whole, encouraging students to study not only in the typical Mediterranean countries or those with stronger linguistic ties to Latin America and the Caribbean.

And this is where ESN comes in: we work before, during and after the mobility.

Before mobility, we launched something called the Erasmus Generation Portal, where each EU country has its own dedicated page containing details, testimonials from students who studied

there, and information on scholarship and funding opportunities. It's a big effort to promote all 27 EU Member States.

Then, extremely important: during the mobility itself. Our sections, because we operate in more than 45 countries, work at local level, at the level of cities and universities. We have 500 local associations. This allows us to support students from Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in countries that are not close to them in terms of language, culture or tradition.

We support them through activities, events, and also through a beautiful initiative called the Buddy Programme. A Romanian student already studying there is paired with, for example, a Cuban student who knows nothing about Romania and will be there for six months. That way, they already have a friend waiting for them. These are all ways of breaking down barriers and promoting student mobility across all of Europe.

00:06:23 Interviewer

Yes, and students also mentioned the need to increase Europe's overall interest in Latin America, especially now that Borrell is no longer High Representative, and some countries don't prioritise the region. Hopefully these initiatives will help.

00:06:44 Martina

And you know what another major problem is? The flows from Latin America and the Caribbean to Europe are much larger than the flows from Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean. For strong, sustainable links, it would be ideal to have more balance.

If the region could attract European students to the same extent, the bridges would be much stronger.

00:07:15 Interviewer

That was actually my next question: how could we achieve greater balance between students travelling from one region to the other, so that mobility is not so unidirectional, from the Global South to the Global North, but more reciprocal?

00:07:37 Martina

Yes, I see different issues and different solutions.

From the perspective of challenges: Latin America is a region with the lowest percentage of intra-regional mobility in the world. A Brazilian student is far more likely to go to the United States or Europe than to Mexico, for example. This is due to various barriers: recognition of diplomas and credits, grading systems, and questions regarding quality assurance. That's a major obstacle the region needs to address collectively. And to be fair, there are very good initiatives working on this, which I mention in the paper.

As for solutions, a strong one is the Erasmus+ programme. Erasmus Mundus, for example, creates double and triple Master's degrees where students must study in different countries in Europe and Latin America or the Caribbean. This means studying in both regions is part of the academic path itself, and universities are required to collaborate.

It's an excellent way to link the two regions and ensure that students study in Europe and also in Latin America and the Caribbean.

00:09:40 Interviewer

Yes, absolutely. I also interviewed people from LA Globe, which is one of those programmes, although that one is only in Europe and doesn't include a Latin American mobility period. But I agree that adding a mandatory component in Latin America would be fascinating and would require genuine university cooperation.

00:10:03 Martina

And of course, a lot of cultural diplomacy and promotional work is also needed. That's why EU Delegations exist in Latin America and the Caribbean, they're like the EU's embassies abroad, promoting study opportunities in Europe.

And likewise, Latin American and Caribbean embassies in Europe have the same role: promoting study opportunities in their countries for European students.

00:10:49 Interviewer

Another issue some students mentioned was the brain drain concern, when many talented students stay in Europe afterwards, as is the case for most of the people I interviewed. What suggestions do you have to reduce or prevent this?

00:11:12 Martina

I completely agree this is an important issue. For example, Erasmus+ is designed as a temporary mobility programme. You study abroad, but when you finish, the idea is that you return to your home country. This is its great strength: you go back with a suitcase full of skills, friendships, and contacts, which you can then use to strengthen your local community.

This belief in post-mobility impact is at the heart of ESN. ESN itself was created this way: after their Erasmus experience, a group of students wanted to share what they had learned with their local community and support others in having a similar experience. So it's a kind of virtuous cycle, before mobility, during mobility, and continuing after mobility.

00:12:44 Interviewer

Yes, I've noticed that even those who stay in Europe often work in organisations like the EU-LAC Foundation or on Latin American topics, so they're not exactly "disconnecting" from their region, they're still contributing from here.

00:13:03 Martina

Exactly. And every year ESN conducts a large survey of Erasmus students, last year we collected 25,000 responses. One of the most striking findings is that students who go abroad are far more likely to vote for and support initiatives related to human rights, climate action, European identity, and integration once they return home. So mobility transforms you into a more active and globally minded citizen.

00:14:09 Interviewer

Yes, definitely. And apart from these academic and professional benefits, what about personal development? What sorts of changes do students experience?

00:14:32 Martina

There are many positive effects.

First, employability: students who participate in mobility have 23 % lower risk of unemployment, according to the European Commission. That already means much better chances on the labour market.

There is also the Erasmus Mundus Association, which runs its own surveys every year. Their results show that students who study abroad gain highly valued skills: project management, flexibility, additional languages, and soft skills such as open-mindedness, curiosity, and a willingness to build networks even with people who think differently or come from different backgrounds.

And, as I mentioned earlier, the biggest impact is active citizenship: mobility makes people more likely to vote, to get involved in their local community, to volunteer, to take part in public life.

It truly is a 360-degree life-changing experience.

00:16:59 Interviewer

Absolutely. I mean, you did a mobility yourself, so you can really see the influence it has. I think it changed me too, after mobility you come back completely different.

00:17:15 Martina

I really consider myself a citizen of the world. Italian by birth, but a citizen of the world by adoption. Thanks also to my parents, who let me travel from a young age, doing family exchanges, studying abroad during secondary school. Before university I had already done exchanges, and then during my university career I did not one, but two Erasmus experiences. And now here I am, an Italian living in Luxembourg who travels to Latin America. It really changed me.

00:18:03 Interviewer

I can tell! And finally, what other problems, ones that might not be so obvious, exist in mobility between Europe/Spain and Latin America? And how could they be addressed?

00:18:23 Martina

This is an excellent question, because there are still several issues, and it is important to reduce these barriers. First, visas. It is unbelievable that in 2025 a student with an acceptance letter can still be unable to study abroad because the host country will not grant the visa. A possible solution would be a specific Erasmus student visa. ESN is doing advocacy work on this, trying to convince EU institutions and Member States, although visas remain a national and sensitive issue.

Second, recognition of degrees and competencies obtained abroad. This is a problem in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in Europe. In fact, in Europe the problem is even bigger because all EU countries signed the Bologna Process, which obliges them to recognise degrees and credits. Yet the European Commission's data show that the EU average recognition rate is only 75–80%.

So if Europe, which is obliged to recognise degrees, still fails to do so fully, what can we expect from other regions?

Third, financial resources. Mobility programmes are still seen as not very inclusive, because students often have to pay upfront for travel and accommodation costs, which can be extremely high in some countries. Not everyone can afford that, so scholarships must be sufficient.

We are now approaching the end of the current Erasmus+ funding cycle (ending in 2027), and discussions for the next one are beginning. We are pushing for increased funding.

Erasmus Mundus is an excellent model, the scholarship covers €1,400 per month, plus travel, visa, and accommodation. But these scholarships are extremely competitive and therefore limited.

00:21:51 Interviewer

Yes, students also mentioned that you often need financial resources or strong academic achievements to be able to do a mobility, and unfortunately not everyone in Latin America can afford quality education in the first place.

00:22:09 Martina

Exactly. And one last problem, one I always try to highlight at every forum and conference, is the lack of youth participation in decision-making.

It makes no sense to talk about students without involving them.

00:22:33 Martina

How many panels do we see about the future of education or Erasmus where no students are present?

It is essential that young people have a seat at the table.

00:22:49 Interviewer

Well, thank you so much, you've helped me enormously with all this information, and it shows how genuinely committed you are to putting students at the centre.

Part 4: Spanish original transcription of the interview

00:01:21 Entrevistador

Sí, así que nada, si quieres empiezo ya con las preguntas.

00:01:25 Martina

Sí, por favor.

00:01:32 Entrevistador

Bueno, lo primero te quería preguntar, como representante de ESN, ¿cuál crees que es el impacto de la movilidad de estudiantes entre Europa y América Latina en el acercamiento entre las 2 regiones, así en nivel general?

00:01:51 Martina

Bueno, como representante de Erasmus Student Network, yo y mi asociación estamos convencidos que la movilidad estudiantil, sobre todo a través del programa Erasmus Plus, tiene el poder de crear enlaces y puentes entre las 2 regiones, sobre todo desde abajo, a través de los estudiantes del personal académico y administrativo que se va a formarse en el extranjero y después regresa en su a su país de origen y tiene una maleta llena de nuevas competencias o redes de contactos y al final enriquece la sociedad a través de esta maleta del estudiantado internacional. Entonces seguramente es un impacto muy positivo.

00:02:43 Entrevistador

Sí, desde luego, aunque entrevistando a los estudiantes, algunos me mencionaron que ellos notaban que había mucha tendencia a venir a España, a Portugal, incluso Italia, Francia, Alemania, pero que luego el resto de los países de la Unión Europea no llaman tanto. Y entonces yo me preguntaba cómo se podría hacer que hubiera más lazos entre América Latina y, no sé, por ejemplo, Polonia, Rumanía, que me mencionaban algunos estudiantes que son también países muy grandes con mucho potencial.

00:03:18 Martina

Bueno, antes de todo estoy de acuerdo porque tengo datos de la Comisión Europea que subrayan el hecho que España está en la plaza número uno, Italia número 2 y después Alemania,

Francia y Portugal como destinos que atraen la mayoría de estudiantes de América Latina y el Caribe. Sin embargo, como Unión Europea, si consideramos nuestros países como región en total, compartimos muchos valores con la región de América Latina y el Caribe, y entonces lo que se necesita es promover la Unión Europea como total para que se impulse a los estudiantes a estudiar también en países que no sean los típicos países mediterráneos o que tienen enlaces de idiomas más fuertes con los países de América Latina y el Caribe. Y ahí, por ejemplo, como Erasmus Student Network, trabajamos sobre todo en este ámbito antes, durante y después de la movilidad.

Antes de la movilidad hemos lanzado un portal que se llama el portal de la generación de Erasmus, donde un estudiante tiene páginas dedicadas a cada uno de los países de la Unión Europea, con detalles, testimonios de estudiantes que se fueron a estudiar en este país para promover un poco los 27 países miembros. Las oportunidades de financiación de becas, entonces es gran trabajo de promoción de todos los países de la Unión Europea y después súper importante. También durante la movilidad, nuestras secciones, nosotros como asociación estamos presentes en más de 45 países y trabajamos a nivel local, de ciudad, de universidad. Tenemos 500 asociaciones locales. Entonces es de ahí que ayudamos a los estudiantes de América Latina y Caribe, sobre todo en un país que no está tan cerca, desde un punto de vista de idioma, de cultura, de tradición. Estamos ahí presentes con nuestras actividades, con nuestros eventos. Tenemos un programa muy bonito que se llama Buddy Program. Un estudiante de Rumanía que estudia ya se conecta con un estudiante de Cuba que no sabe nada de Rumanía, que va a estar ahí 6 meses, para que ya tenga un amigo o una amiga. Entonces son todas formas para destruir estas barreras y para promover la movilidad estudiantil en toda Europa.

00:06:23 Entrevistador

Pues sí, como me mencionaron los estudiantes, les parecía necesario aumentar el interés general por Latinoamérica, que ahora que no está Borrell, no todos los países no tienen ese interés. Pero bueno, esperemos que con todas esas iniciativas...

00:06:44 Martina

¿Y sabes cuál es un gran problema también? Que los flujos desde América Latina y Caribe hacia Europa son mayores con respecto a los flujos desde Europa hacia América Latina y Caribe. Sería genial para de verdad fortalecer estos enlaces, estos puentes, si hubiera una equidad de flujos. Si América Latina y Caribe pudiera atraer de la misma forma también a estudiantes de Europa.

00:07:15 Entrevistador

Pues mira, esa era justo la siguiente pregunta: ¿cómo se podría lograr un mayor equilibrio entre los estudiantes que viajan de una región a otra para que no sea tan unidireccional, sino que sea también más desde Europa, y en general, del norte global al sur global, para invertir la tendencia?

00:07:37 Martina

Sí, veo distintos problemas al mismo tiempo, distintas soluciones. Desde un punto de vista de problemáticas, la región de América Latina, imagínate, es una región que tiene el porcentaje más bajo de flujos entre la misma región. Entonces, un estudiante de Brasil prefiere estudiar a Estados Unidos, Europa que México. Porque existen distintas barreras desde el punto de vista de reconocimiento de los diplomas adquiridos en otros países, de las calificaciones, de calidad de enseñanza. Y entonces esto seguramente es un primer obstáculo donde América Latina y Caribe como región tendría que trabajar. Existen muy buenas iniciativas, que de hecho las menciono en el papel. Al mismo tiempo existen también soluciones, sobre todo a través del programa Erasmus +. Una de estas se llama Erasmus Mundus y son doble, triples maestrías donde el estudiante está obligado a estudiar en distintos países de Europa, América Latina y el Caribe, y entonces forma parte de su curso, de su carrera académica y las mismas universidades están vinculadas para colaborar conjuntamente. Entonces, esta es muy buena iniciativa para que las dos regiones se vinculen y para que los estudiantes estudien en Europa y también en América Latina y Caribe.

00:09:40 Entrevistador

Sí, desde luego. Yo entrevisté también a gente que hizo LA Globe, creo que se llama, que es uno de ellos, lo único que está solo en Europa, no estudian en América Latina, pero la verdad que me parece superinteresante si también se añade como un punto obligatorio para que haya esa necesidad de colaboración entre universidades.

00:10:03 Martina

Y, por ejemplo, claramente se necesita también mucho trabajo de promoción, diplomacia cultural, y es por eso por lo que en América Latina y en el Caribe existen las delegaciones de la Unión Europea, son como las embajadas de la Unión Europea en el extranjero, que promueven los estudios en Europa y al mismo tiempo las embajadas de los países latinoamericanos y caribeños tienen el mismo papel en Europa. Entonces, promover los estudios para estudiantes europeos en América Latina y el Caribe, como donde trabajo.

00:10:49 Entrevistador

Vale, otra cosa que me mencionaron algunos estudiantes es el tema del brain drain o fuga de cerebros, que bueno, ocurre también mucho cuando se atrae a muchos estudiantes que se

quedan en Europa, como es el caso de los que he entrevistado yo. Entonces, ¿cuál es alguna sugerencia para acabar con este problema o frenarlo?

00:11:12 Martina

Totalmente estoy de acuerdo, por ejemplo, el programa Erasmus + es un programa de movilidad limitado. Entonces tú, como estudiante, te formas en el extranjero, pero cuando termines tus estudios tienes que regresar a tu país de origen. Y esta es la belleza porque vas a regresar con una maleta llena de contactos, de competencias, de amistades que al final puedes compartir con tu comunidad local en tu país de origen. Y de hecho, ESN cree muchísimo en este impacto después de tu programa de movilidad. Y ESN fue creada así porque después de su Erasmus, un grupo de estudiantes decidieron que querían compartir esta experiencia, lo que habían aprendido con la comunidad local y tener un impacto positivo ahí, y decidieron crear una asociación que pudiera ayudar a otros estudiantes para participar en una experiencia parecida. Entonces de verdad es un círculo virtuoso que empieza antes de la movilidad, continúa durante la movilidad y no termina después de la movilidad, sino que se continua el impacto positivo.

00:12:44 Entrevistador

Sí, yo me he dado cuenta de que muchos de los que tal vez se quedan en la Unión Europea lo hacen trabajando en, por ejemplo, la Fundación EU-LAC o algo relacionado con Latinoamérica. O sea, no es como que ya se olviden de su región, sino que aunque sea desde aquí siguen contribuyendo.

00:13:03 Martina

Y de hecho a través de ESN cada año lanzamos una encuesta, una gran encuesta para alumnos de Erasmus. El año pasado, por ejemplo, recopilamos 25 mil respuestas, y uno de los resultados más impactantes y relevantes es que si tú como estudiante te vas al extranjero para participar en un programa de movilidad, cuando regresas a tu país de origen vas a tener más intención de votar a favor de temas como derechos humanos, cambio climático, identidad europea, integración. Entonces, es un dato bastante relevante que al final tu experiencia de movilidad te cambia tanto que eliges ser ciudadano activo, sobre todo en temas multilaterales.

00:14:09 Entrevistador

Sí, desde luego, sí. Y además te iba a preguntar, aparte de estos temas más académicos y profesionales que se adquieren en una movilidad, ¿cuáles son otros aspectos más a nivel personal de desarrollo?

00:14:32 Martina

Hay un montón de efectos positivos. Empezamos, por ejemplo, con la inserción laboral, porque claramente un estudiante quiere tener mejores oportunidades de trabajo y los datos de la

Comisión Europea afirman que los estudiantes que participaron en un programa de movilidad tienen el 23% más bajo de quedarse sin empleo. Entonces ya eso significa que vas a tener una mejor inserción laboral. Después hay otra asociación que se llama Erasmus Mundus Association, EMA, que también lanza una encuesta cada año y los resultados principales demuestran que los estudiantes que participaron en un programa de movilidad tienen mejores competencias que están valoradas positivamente por parte del lugar donde se trabaja, por ejemplo, gestión de proyectos, flexibilidad, más idiomas hablados...son todas competencias suaves, que se aprecian muchísimo en el lugar del trabajo. Y entre estas competencias se incluye también la apertura mental, la curiosidad, esta voluntad de crear redes, enlaces con también personas que quizás no comparten tu misma visión del mundo o tus mismas tradiciones. Y al final, como te decía antes, el impacto positivo mayor es este impacto de ciudadanía activa: vas a votar, quieres desarrollarte como persona y ayudar a los demás, te involucras en tu comunidad local a través de voluntariado, de iniciativas locales, actividades para los demás. Entonces es de verdad un cambio de vida a 360 grados.

00:16:59 Entrevistador

Sí, desde luego. O sea, bueno, creo que tú hiciste una movilidad también, pues ahí se nota como ha influido. Yo creo que en mí también, o sea, después de la movilidad es como que vuelves completamente diferente.

00:17:15 Martina

Yo de verdad me considero ciudadana del mundo. Italiana por nacimiento, pero ciudadana del mundo para adopción, porque gracias también a mis padres, que me permitieron viajar desde cuando era pequeña, sola, haciendo intercambios de familias, hice intercambios durante mi bachillerato. Entonces, antes de entrar en la universidad y después claramente durante mi carrera académico-universitaria, hice no uno, pero 2 Erasmus. Y ahora nada, soy una italiana aquí en Luxemburgo que viaja a América Latina. Sí, de verdad, a mí me ha cambiado.

00:18:03 Entrevistador

Sí, lo veo. Bueno, ya sí, para acabar, te iba a preguntar ¿qué otros problemas que igual no son tan obvios existen entre la movilidad de Europa/España y Latinoamérica y cómo se podrían enfrentar?

00:18:23 Martina

Esta también es una muy buena pregunta, porque siguen existiendo problemas y es muy relevante trabajar para reducir estas barreras, sobre todo de visado. Es increíble que, en el 2025, un estudiante que tiene su carta de aceptación no pueda irse a estudiar al extranjero porque el país de acogida no le acepta el visado. Una solución podría ser, por ejemplo, tener un visado

estudiantil limitado, un visado Erasmus y de hecho con Erasmus Student Network que estamos haciendo este tipo de lobbying para que las instituciones europeas puedan convencer a los Estados Miembros, porque claramente es un tema nacional y delicado, pero al mismo tiempo una gran barrera para participar en un programa de movilidad.

Segundo, el reconocimiento de las competencias y los diplomas adquiridos en el extranjero o en otra institución es un problema de América Latina, del Caribe y de Europa también. Y creo que en Europa el problema es más grande porque los países europeos están vinculados a una carta, que se llama Carta de Bolonia, que les obliga a reconocer 100% a los exámenes y los diplomas, las competencias. Sin embargo, los datos de la Comisión Europea subrayan que la media europea de reconocimiento es de 75-80%. Entonces, imagínate, si Europa, que tiene la obligación de reconocer, no lo hace al 100%, no me imagino a los otros países.

Tercer problema, el problema de recursos, porque estos programas de movilidad siguen siendo percibidos en algunos casos como no tan inclusivos, porque el estudiante tiene que anticipar de antemano los costos de viaje y de alojamiento, sobre todo en algunos países en que están bastante caros. Y claro, no todos pueden permitírselo. Entonces es importante que las becas sean suficientes. Ahora va a terminar el periodo de financiación actual del programa Erasmus + hasta el 2027, y ya empiezan las discusiones o los debates para el próximo marco. Estamos intentando ver si se puede aumentar aún más la financiación para el programa Erasmus. En general, por ejemplo, becas como Erasmus Mundus son perfectas, porque el estudiante que gana este tipo de beca tiene 1400 EUR cada mes más el coste del viaje pagado, el coste de visado y de alojamiento pagado, pero son muy competitivos. Entonces hay muy pocas becas.

00:21:51 Entrevistador

Sí, la verdad que también me mencionaban los estudiantes que muchas veces tienes que tener los fondos o los méritos académicos para poder hacer una movilidad y que, por desgracia, no todo el mundo no se puede permitir haber tenido una buena educación, sobre todo en Latinoamérica, con muchas brechas de acceso.

00:22:09 Martina

Sí, y termino con el último problema, de verdad, intento promoverlo en cada foro, en cada conferencia, es poner a los jóvenes, a los estudiantes en el centro de las discusiones, que no tiene sentido que se hable de los estudiantes sin involucrar ni incluirlos.

00:22:33 Martina

¿Cuántas veces se ven mesas de trabajo sobre el futuro de la educación en el futuro del programa Erasmus sin estudiantes sin jóvenes? Entonces, de verdad, es importante que los jóvenes tengan un asiento en estas mesas de trabajo.

00:22:49 Entrevistador

Yo desde luego que te agradezco que me hayas ayudado con toda esta información, con lo que demuestras que de verdad estás convencida de que hay que poner a los estudiantes en el centro.