

# ERASMUS CHANGING LIVES OPENING MINDS FOR 25 YEARS



<http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus>





# Marc Goffart

*'I never imagined things would go so fast'*

Home institution:  
University of Ghent, Belgium

Host institution:  
Free University of Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

Field of study:  
Germanic Languages and Literature,  
Teacher Training

Duration:  
3 months (1990)

When he moved from the University of Ghent to the Free University of Amsterdam for three months in 1990, Marc Goffart was one of the very first students to be selected for Ghent's participation in Erasmus. *'I had learnt about the programme just a year before that. And I thought "That'll be very nice for my children". I never imagined things would move forward so fast that I would be a beneficiary myself.'*

He found it a challenging experience. *'I had imagined Flanders and the Netherlands to be a rather more unified area than they turned out to be, linguistically, culturally and politically. That made me reflect on my own identity, as a Belgian, with Flemish roots and Dutch as my native language.'* And he noticed some major differences between teaching methods. *'The Dutch approach puts a lot of emphasis on self-study, essays, smaller discussion groups and so on. The Flemish teaching system, particularly at that time, was more theoretical, more ex cathedra.'*

Back in Ghent, he helped to found the local branch of the Erasmus Student Network. His Erasmus mobility was *'one of the main reasons why I subsequently got a job in the university's international relations'*. It also *'opened the European door for me'*, leading to his present post with the European Commission. He hopes the day will come when most national politicians will be former Erasmus students. *'It will give them more of a European perspective, and that will help them to take a richer view of governance.'*



## HUGO MARQUANT



### *‘Erasmus today is Europe tomorrow’*

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**Home institution:**

Haute Ecole Léonard de Vinci,  
Belgium

.....  
**Field of study/job title:**

Retired – previously Head of the  
International Office

.....  
**Year became active in Erasmus:**

1986

With 30 years of experience in organising European programmes, Hugo Marquant believes Erasmus has three dimensions which affect students and staff who become involved. *‘The first is the focus on functional mobility which ensures the visiting students undertake the same studies as the home students. The second is the focus on European citizenship and the third is about independence and developing the confidence to take the initiative and make choices.’* For students undertaking a *‘functional stay abroad involves taking part, studying, living and following courses as if you are a local student. It is the very essence of an Erasmus exchange.’*

Before retiring from his role as Head of the International Office, he developed a joint master’s degree with many other universities and introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This was a *‘practical way to solve problems. It recognises that not everyone does the same thing at the same time, but it is important to recognise success wherever it occurs.’* Each of the university’s initiatives has been developed from the Erasmus programme as partner institutions strengthened their collaborative arrangements. From the early days when colleagues and students needed to be convinced of the value of a European perspective to learning, the Haute Ecole Léonard de Vinci *‘has acquired an international presence and reputation.’*



# BORYANA KLINKOVA

*'It changed my life'*

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**Home institution:**  
Burgas Free University, Bulgaria

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**Host institution:**  
Chemnitz University of Technology,  
Germany

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**Field of study:**  
Foreign languages

.....  
**Duration:**  
3 months (2001)

Boryana Klinkova was in the first group of students to go on an exchange from the Burgas Free University. At this time, it was not clear what to expect as no one at the University had completed an Erasmus exchange. Before going to Germany most of her experience of Western Europe had been gained from the television and radio. Everything was different – the university course, the accommodation and the practical arrangements of living in a different city. *'I had to do so much by myself – without the support of my friends and family. I was so proud of what I achieved and felt I had transformed myself from a teenager to an adult through the programme.'*

At the end of the Erasmus exchange, she was offered work in the host university's International Office and a scholarship to complete a second degree in Germany. She became increasingly involved in international affairs, and now works as an International Programmes Coordinator in another university in Germany. In this role *'I support young people so they can share the study abroad experience. My team organises exchange programmes for more than 700 students per year, of whom 400 participate in Erasmus.'*

As well as setting her on the road to a career in international exchanges, the Erasmus exchange led to her meeting her husband. *'Looking back over the past ten years, it is interesting to see how much has changed in the organisation of Erasmus and to reflect on the impact it has had on both my personal and professional life.'*



## Romyana Todorova



*'Each experience is different and each visit is a new challenge'*

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Home institution:  
University of Shumen, Bulgaria

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Field of study/job title:  
Vice-Rector for International  
Relations and Head of English  
Studies

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2003

Taking part in exchange programmes has allowed Romyana Todorova to teach at many universities. In each case the experience is different and *'although you may think that you are familiar with the culture you are going to, when you are immersed it turns out there is always something new to learn.'* These experiences have provided examples to use with her students in Bulgaria and this encourages more people to participate in exchange programmes as well as enriching her lectures.

Her work abroad is both an advertisement for the university as well an opportunity to strengthen and deepen relationships with existing partner organisations. She had *'expected the exchanges would lead to improvements at home, but it has been a surprise to see standards are similar across the sector.'*

Her work at the university includes promoting Erasmus to staff and students. Her advice to students is that this is *'something that they should not miss as they are not likely to get a second chance. It is also a good thing to include in a curriculum vitae as employers are always looking for something extra.'* In her experience, students who complete an Erasmus exchange are more popular with employers *'because they have demonstrated they can handle new and different situations.'*



TOMAS  
vitvar

## 'The start of my international life'

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**Home institution:**  
Technical University in Prague,  
Czech Republic  
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**Host institution:**  
Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland  
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**Field of study:**  
Computer science  
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**Duration:**  
6 months (2000)  
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As part of his PhD programme, Tomas Vitvar undertook a teaching assignment in Ireland. *'I found it a demanding job: teaching three hours and organising four practical sessions each week. Not only did I improve my English language, I met many great people and learnt to live without the close support of family and friends.'*

This experience abroad helped him to work as a consultant in Germany and later to gain a post-doctoral position at the National University of Ireland. In this role he managed an international team of researchers from Europe, Asia and the USA. Along the way he represented the Czech Republic in the 'One Million Erasmus Students' celebration in Brussels in 2002. Here he met his wife who was representing Slovakia. *'My first visit to Cork in Ireland as an Erasmus student eventually changed my personal life as well as giving me the experience that I use at work today.'*

He continues to work in international communities. After three and half years in Ireland he moved to Innsbruck in Austria where he spent another three years. In the summer of 2011, he took a senior technical position at the Oracle Corporation and now works in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. *'After almost ten years of international experience, I can see that success at work strongly depends on mutual understanding and respect. Experiences like those offered by Erasmus are a basis for a truly integrated Europe as this creates strong ties among nations and communities.'*



## Milada HLAVÁČKOVÁ

### ‘Opening doors into Europe’

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Home institution:  
Technical University of Ostrava,  
Czech Republic  
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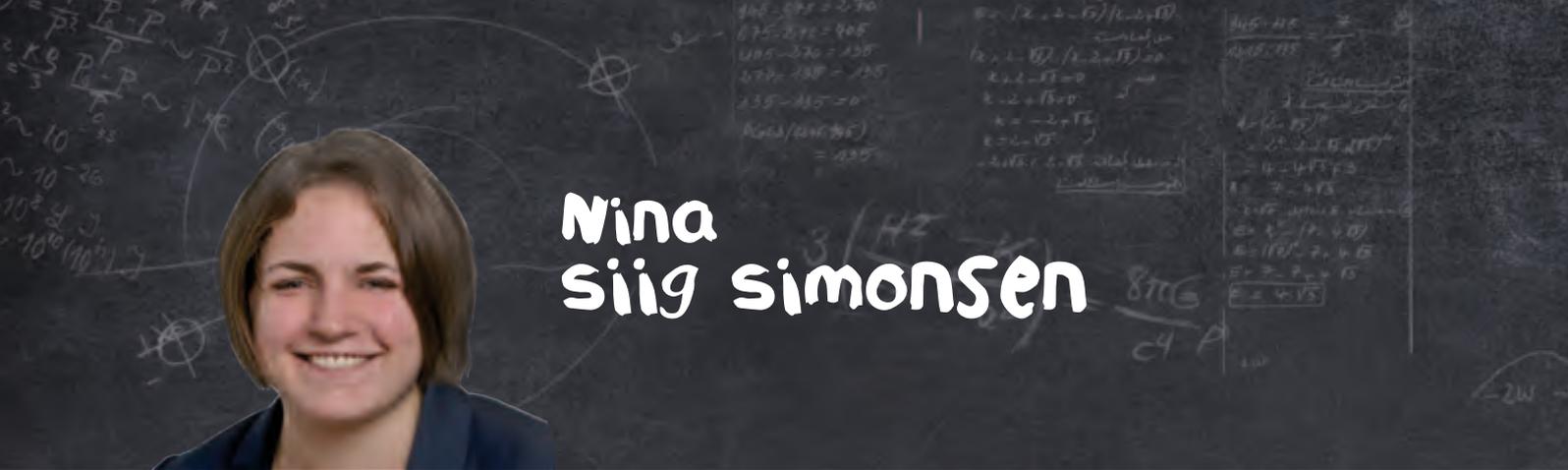
Field of study/job title:  
Lecturer and Erasmus coordinator  
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Year became active in Erasmus:  
2004  
.....

From the early days of a few foreign students visiting the Technical University of Ostrava in 1995, things have moved quickly. Erasmus has helped to open doors for the university. With over 30 bilateral agreements in the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering; students are now able to study throughout Europe as part of their degree. As the Faculty’s coordinator, Milada Hlaváčková makes all the academic arrangements for staff and students participating in Erasmus exchanges. For her *‘foreign students are the best advertisement for the faculty, the university and for the Czech Republic.’* And for those students from Ostrava who go abroad, they return with *‘better linguistic skills and with something different to include in their curriculum vitae that distinguishes them from other graduates.’*

For her, seeing foreign students return to the Czech Republic after their course has finished has emphasised the importance of developing *‘understanding and cooperation between countries and cultures’*. And when some of these students find local jobs or continue their studies locally, it is a very *‘tangible result of the university’s international approach. Without the EU’s practical and financial support this would not have been possible.’*

Alongside supporting students and staff, her own participation in intensive courses has led to the development of new curriculum materials, an English language version of the Faculty’s website and a greater understanding of the cultural differences students face when studying abroad.



# Nina Siig Simonsen

*‘Erasmus made me feel part of European integration – politically, historically and, most importantly, culturally’*

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**Home institution:**  
Roskilde University, Denmark

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**Host institution:**  
Mykolas Romeris University,  
Lithuania

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**Field of study:**  
Political science

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**Duration:**  
4 months (2009)

Initially Nina Siig Simonsen was hesitant about studying in Lithuania. When she arrived it was grey, rainy and cold. *‘On the evening of the second day we met our Lithuanian mentors and everything seemed brighter. We learnt that Vilnius would blossom when Spring arrived – and it certainly did.’*

The Lithuanian approach to learning was different. *‘In Denmark I had been encouraged to think critically and work independently. I had been trained to question my teachers. Now I realised that other things also mattered and there was a greater focus on knowledge and recalling information.’* Her exchange was part of her degree in political science. However on her return to Denmark she switched courses to focus on European Studies. The experience in Lithuania encouraged her to reflect on European culture and history and helped her to think about jobs in Europe.

For her, the switch in her degree studies and subsequent internship in a Danish Regional Office in Brussels would not have happened without Erasmus. *‘The cultural value of an exchange cannot be gained by reading about it, you have to experience it. Lithuania is still close to my heart. It was a great opportunity to meet new friends from all over Europe and I feel more European today than I did before leaving for Vilnius.’*



Connie  
Væver



## ‘Erasmus helps you create your own specialist community’

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Home institution:  
VIA University College, Denmark

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Lecturer in textile design

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2007

As a lecturer in textile design, Connie Væver works in a specialised field where student exchanges are not very common. However when the opportunity arose to go abroad, she discovered very welcoming colleagues who were keen to exchange ideas and share knowledge. *‘By taking the opportunity to go abroad, I have found a new group of colleagues who inspire me.’*

On her first visit to the Netherlands, it was clear that a great deal was similar but much was different. For her *‘it was interesting to see the different ways of giving feedback to students, compared to the approach used in Denmark.’* The time spent in the Netherlands gave her inspiration and ideas for her own students and helped her *‘to set up international classes’*. It also provided her with a better understanding of what her students experience when they are on an exchange programme.

Her experiences have also motivated her to send more students abroad, particularly to work in companies specialising in design. This enables *‘students from a small country to see the bigger picture, strengthens their curriculum vitae and makes them more attractive to employers.’* She would like all her students to take the opportunity to go abroad as they return from exchange programmes *‘different people who are more dedicated, more involved and often have new ideas and approaches.’*



**Katja  
Krohn**

## ‘Overcoming Post-Erasmus depression’

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**Home institution:**  
University of Greifswald, Germany

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**Host institution:**  
University of Oviedo, Spain

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**Field of study:**  
English and American literature

.....  
**Duration:**  
5 months (2007)

Studying abroad helped Katja Krohn recognise that she was both European and German. During her exchange programme, so much was different – both in relation to academic study and outside the university. *‘I had been used to completing end of semester exams in Germany, but in Spain I was asked to write assignments every two weeks. There were many cultural differences including things like the time everyone had dinner. At first I found myself comparing everything to Germany, but after some time I stopped.’*

*‘When I returned to my home university, I realised how much I had changed. The feeling of being in an international environment had gone and I suffered from a form of post-Erasmus depression, which only people who have been on an exchange could understand.’* She then joined her local branch of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to keep in touch with international students, practice her language skills and develop her management skills. This led to her becoming the Vice President of ESN Germany for one year and then their national representative in international meetings.

She is now based in Brussels, having been elected to the position of Vice President of ESN International. Part of this role involves *‘enabling students to support other students so they can each find their way in new cultures and situations.’* She now works with many national agencies and this year expects to visit most European countries before returning to her home university to complete her degree.



# CHRISTIANE BIEHL

*'I wanted every generation of students to have this opportunity'*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Cologne, Germany

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Field of study/job title:  
Head of Section for European  
Educational Programmes

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1997

Having completed part of her degree in the USA in the 1990s, Christiane Biehl was inspired to seek a career in international education. *'This experience was so important to my life; it helped me to reflect on my way of living, break old habits and try new things. I wanted every generation of students to have this opportunity.'*

At the University of Cologne, she coordinates Erasmus and other European programmes as well as promoting an international alumni network which includes students from the Erasmus programme. *'Over the years, the university has used the Erasmus programme to create organisational structures, recognise students' learning and increase the number of students and staff who travel abroad.'* For her, this increase in the number of students has made Erasmus a *'normal part of university life rather than something that is only for the best students.'*

She has also worked as an external assessor for the Socrates programme in Brussels and as a national expert for the German Academic Exchange Service. In this role she provides advice on Erasmus to universities in Germany as well as meeting other national experts to discuss new ways to improve staff and students' experiences of Erasmus. *'For my university, Erasmus has normalised international mobility programmes, established structures to support exchanges and motivated students. In many ways it is a gift or privilege for staff and students to benefit from these opportunities.'*



## HELEN MARGUS

*'You will remember your time abroad for the rest of your life'*

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**Home institution:**  
Tallinn University, Estonia

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**Host institution:**  
University of Ioannina, Greece

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**Field of study:**  
Psychology

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**Duration:**  
5 months (2005)

*'Erasmus allows students to have either a social or a serious opportunity – and it can be both.'* At home Helen Margus had combined work with academic study. Going to Greece meant studying full time. This included studying a new language, managing her own life and adjusting to new ways of studying. *'It wasn't so much about what I learnt; it was more about what I experienced. Knowledge can be acquired anywhere, it is the whole experience that matters. I would recommend everyone takes the opportunity as you will remember it for the rest of your life.'*

The Erasmus placement increased her confidence about living away from home and made her more open to socialising with people from other countries. It also improved her English language skills and showed her she was capable of making new friends and sorting out problems using another language.

After graduation, she worked as a student psychologist at her home university. Her experience of time spent abroad made it easier to empathise with many international students. She now works in private practice as a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist in a counseling centre. *'I feel that the experience of sharing everyday life with different people has given me more understanding, courage and confidence in my work and social life.'*



sirje  
virkus

## *'It has widened our knowledge of teaching and learning'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Tallinn University, Estonia

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Lecturer, Erasmus Mundus  
Departmental Coordinator

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1999

Sirje Virkus has been involved in Erasmus programmes since they became available in Estonia in 1999. Starting slowly, the involvement of students and staff has continued to increase. *'One important outcome of the mobility scheme has been the very visible change in the department as it has increasingly become international.'* With partnership arrangements in more than 15 countries, teaching staff can spend time lecturing in other countries. Taking advantage of these opportunities has widened her knowledge in many professional areas and increased her awareness of the teaching and learning methods used in partner institutions.

*'Erasmus is one of the EU's flagship education programmes. Success in this area has led to other collaborations'*. For her, this includes the development of a master's degree under the Erasmus Mundus programme, participation in European research projects, publications, conferences and work on quality assurance. As a member of the University's Internationalisation Council, her work has consolidated a large number of professional contacts into a strategic vision which underpins international work in Tallinn.

This approach includes the development of virtual mobility. *'As most students at the university work at the same time as completing their degree, it can be financially difficult for them to study abroad. Virtual seminars give students an opportunity to see what it could be like.'* For those who do study abroad, she sees returning students as *'more confident individuals with better language and international skills.'*



# Jessica Gough

## ‘There are no disadvantages to being involved’

Home institution:  
University of Limerick, Ireland

Host institution:  
Autonomous University of  
Barcelona, Spain

Field of study:  
Applied Languages

Duration:  
5 months (2009)

For students on Jessica Gough’s Applied Languages degree course, spending time abroad was compulsory. However, as she has cerebral palsy which affects her mobility and balance, she was offered the option of staying in Ireland. *‘I decided to go. As someone who does not give up, I wanted to rise to the challenge. I didn’t let my disability hold me back. I think in fact it made me even more determined to make my Erasmus experience a success.’*

Living away from home for five months and appointing a personal assistant to help with day to day activities were *‘obstacles to be overcome. I was absolutely determined to make this wonderful opportunity a success.’* Having chosen to study Irish, French and Spanish in Ireland, she used her time abroad to study Catalan alongside her Spanish, French and translation courses and also completed a Comenius placement in a primary school in France. It was during her placement that she had the opportunity to learn about Occitan, one of France’s regional languages. Together with Catalan, this exposure inspired her to write about minority languages in her final year dissertation.

She knows that she has *‘proven she can live and study independently in another European country and has grown in stature as a consequence’*. For her, *‘the decision to partake in the Erasmus experience changed my life in a number of ways and had an enormous impact on my academic and personal development.’* Following her graduation in 2011, she is now working as an English language assistant in a primary school in the South of France.



## Miriam Broderick



### *‘Erasmus solved so many issues for us’*

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**Home institution:**  
Dublin Institute of Technology,  
Ireland

.....  
**Field of study/job title:**  
Head of Department of Languages  
and Cultural Studies

.....  
**Year became active in Erasmus:**  
1989

As a languages specialist in an Institute of Technology, Miriam Broderick has taught engineering, science and business students for over 30 years. Before Erasmus started she had organised short exchanges and student placements and involved her institution in many European youth projects. *‘The arrival of Erasmus solved so many problems for us; recognition of study, participation of students at different stages in their training and longer placements which enhance employment prospects. Erasmus was the first time we really integrated our own work with the time spent abroad.’*

Erasmus has also led to other opportunities for staff and students such as *‘external examiner roles in universities abroad, the development of Erasmus Mundus joint master’s degrees, the development of an academic support programme for incoming staff and students, and the start of many good friendships.’* Getting involved in Erasmus has accelerated the international dimension to Dublin Institute of Technology’s work.

Over the years, exchanges have moved beyond engineering, science and business studies and now cover a wide range of degrees from tourism to food science and early childhood education. *‘Students are now much more willing to travel. And by preparing them in advance, those who go find they fit in easily. The introduction of continuous assessment and semesters has also made mobility much easier for students and universities.’*



# Maria Kaliambou

## ‘Erasmus changed my life’

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**Home institution:**  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,  
Greece

.....  
**Host institution:**  
Ludwig-Maximilians-University of  
Munich, Germany

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**Field of study:**  
Archaeology/Folklore Studies

.....  
**Duration:**  
6 months (1995)

An Erasmus exchange helped Maria Kaliambou to identify the area of study for her doctoral studies. In Germany *‘I was able to find a department which offered training that did not exist at home. This led to my return to Germany once I had completed my first degree in Greece.’* Following her doctorate which was awarded the Lutz Röhrich prize in 2006 for the best German dissertation in oral literature, she completed post-doctoral research in France. She subsequently moved to the USA to complete a Fellowship at Princeton University and now holds a lectureship position at Yale University. *‘It is no exaggeration to say Erasmus changed my life.’*

In her current role, she has worked with many students who are considering studying abroad. *‘I am able to convey to the next generation that the personal and professional benefits from an academic exchange programme can last a lifetime.’* The Erasmus experience also strengthened her understanding of European perspectives, an insight that is useful as she is often asked to speak to students about Europe.

As well as the professional side of the exchange programme, there was a lot of personal learning. *‘When I returned I felt like a different person. I don’t think everybody can get through the challenges of being abroad alone, lacking the safety of the familiar environment. To live and study abroad, and of course be successful, requires a very conscious decision, even if at the beginning you do not know where you are heading. During this journey one learns to have faith, patience and perseverance.’*



# Katerina Galanaki- Spiliotopoulos



## *'My university's motto for Erasmus – keep flying high'*

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Home institution:  
Athens University of Economics  
and Business, Greece

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Field of study/job title:  
Head of International Relations

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1987

With a large number of partnership agreements, the Athens University of Economics and Business is truly European in its outlook. During Katerina Galanaki-Spiliotopoulos' time at the University, the number of incoming students each year has risen from 3 to 300. Setting up partnerships takes a lot of time however. *'Before visiting a new Erasmus partner, I collect details on the institution, its academic structure, its study programmes, linguistic issues and facilities offered to students. My aim is to gather as much information as possible to establish a new Erasmus arrangement which leads to good quality in student mobility.'*

As well as benefitting students, the impact on her has been significant. *'I have established excellent relations and made wonderful friends and colleagues all over Europe with whom today we have good contact and we fully trust each other. We are always able to solve problems for our students with a spirit of understanding and excellent cooperation.'* This personal aspect has been key to making the Erasmus exchange programme fly.

Partner universities' arrangements are often familiar but not always. *'We noticed differences with some universities mainly in their academic calendar which created an obstacle to mobility, in housing and in cultural issues.'* For her good personal relationships can help students overcome practical problems, while tools such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) enable academic differences to be accommodated.



## TOMÁS SÁNCHEZ LÓPEZ

### *'A new vision of the world'*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Polytechnic University of Valencia,  
Spain

.....  
**Host institution:**  
Helsinki Metropolitan University  
of Applied Sciences, Finland

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Computer science

.....  
**Duration:**  
12 months (2002)

The Erasmus programme formed the final year of Tomás Sánchez López's master's degree. *'It was easily the best year of my university life, where I exploited new opportunities that were not available at my home university as well as making many good friends.'* As well as experiencing new ways of working in a different culture, the *'Erasmus year gave me a new vision of the world that goes beyond my home country and even Europe.'*

During the year abroad he applied for a scholarship to complete his PhD in South Korea. This international experience led to a post-doctoral position at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Today he has a senior role in the world-leading engineering and aerospace business EADS. As his work involves extensive collaboration with universities in Europe, his experience of study in three countries has been a real advantage. *'There is no doubt in my mind that without the initial chance to explore another EU country as an Erasmus student, I wouldn't be where I am today, and more importantly, I would not be who I am.'*

The Erasmus programme certainly helped him to be more mobile. *'I think my international career will continue for some time, but eventually I will want to return to Spain. In the current financial environment having something on your curriculum vitae that shows you stand out is a real asset – Erasmus does that.'*



## Fidel CORCUERA MANSO

### *'An important contribution to a European identity'*

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Home institution:  
University of Zaragoza, Spain

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Field of study/job title:  
Director of the French Studies  
Department

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1987

*'The development of Erasmus has been central to the construction of a European community of learners and researchers. It has contributed to building a common identity based on education and culture.'* For Fidel Corcuera Manso, the introduction and growth of the Erasmus programme has improved both staff and students' academic knowledge, linguistic skills and cultural competences. It has helped the education community to *'develop things in common but recognise where differences are.'*

While there have always been individual enthusiasts who cooperated on exchange programmes and international research, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty heralded the start of a period of growth in Erasmus. At the University of Zaragoza this made internationalism a daily part of life. *'What was once seen as exotic – the presence of foreign students – became part of everyday life.'*

His work with the Spanish University Committee of International Relations and Cooperation (CEURI) helped to establish a common strategy and policies for staff and student mobility for all universities in Spain. With 30 years of experience in developing European mobility schemes, he has witnessed the important role that education has in building a common European identity. *'As well as developing academic knowledge, Erasmus improves students' linguistic skills and increases their understanding of other cultures and different ways of living. They learn to value and enjoy this common European identity, but also to respect and understand all the differences which make Europe a unique continent.'*



Julien  
Pea

### *‘Erasmus accelerates opportunities and emotions’*

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**Home institution:**  
University of Franche-Comté, France

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**Host institution:**  
University of Birmingham, England

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**Field of study:**  
English language, arts  
and civilisation

.....  
**Duration:**  
9 months (2003)

Before starting his Erasmus exchange, Julien Pea had planned to become an English teacher. This all changed. *‘On my return I knew I wanted something else. I wanted to make myself useful to new students arriving at my home university. So I started an association to support international students.’* This led to voluntary work for the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and his appointment in 2006 to a national position. In this role his team bid for and hosted the 2008 Annual General Meeting of the International ESN which welcomed over 500 student representatives to France.

During his time abroad, he decided to live with local rather than international students. *‘This gave me a different perspective on British life. It helped me to see the cultural differences, understand accents and recognise the many ways that misunderstandings can occur.’*

Today he works at a European Information Centre in France. His experience of Erasmus continues to inform his work and his voluntary activities with ESN. Looking back it is clear that the exchange changed his career plans and aspirations. *‘The social benefits of Erasmus, and there are many, make you look at things differently. It made me want to do more. It provided opportunities for me; it informed my career choice and my perception of myself.’*



## Nathalie Brahimi



### *'It gives you new ideas for your own teaching'*

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Home institution:  
Lycée Ozenne, Toulouse, France

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Field of study:  
International trade

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Year became active in Erasmus:  
2007

*'Richness, sharing and pleasure'* are what Nathalie Brahimi gained from her Erasmus mobility. It served two purposes. *'The main reason was to put the structure in place for exchanges by our own students. But I also took the opportunity to do some teaching in the Netherlands.'* At the Lycée Ozenne in France, she was already teaching her subject – international trade – in English, and she wanted her students to gain more experience of the language. So she was looking for a partner with English-medium teaching in the same field. That search took her to the Saxion University in the Netherlands.

*'Once back in France, I talked to my colleagues in other sections of the Lycée and motivated them to get involved in Erasmus.'* Now, three of its technical sections have partnerships with eight institutions in the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Germany. And a Romanian partner will be joining them soon. Over the course of two years, 21 of the Lycée's students took part in Erasmus mobility, as well as 11 staff members. Erasmus is *'a great enrichment'* that she would not hesitate to recommend to other institutions. *'Naturally, there are some initial hesitations about the work involved, but it's well worth the effort. You're brought into contact with new teaching methods and other cultures. And that gives you new ideas for your own teaching back home. It shakes up your routine and makes you progress.'* But above all, Erasmus is appreciated by her own students. *'It's their enthusiasm and their feedback that has inspired me to keep on seeking new exchange partners.'*



# Maurizio Oliviero

## ‘Each of us can change the world for the better’

Home institution:  
University of Perugia, Italy

Host institution:  
University of Alicante, Spain

Field of study:  
Law

Duration:  
9 months (1988)

An Erasmus study exchange to Alicante, Spain, would open a world of opportunity for Maurizio Oliviero. The young law student from Perugia set off to find out how his peers were studying to become lawyers and ‘to meet Europe in the flesh’.

*‘It was very easy to live in a different country,’ he recalls. ‘When you are young and idealistic, everything is easy. If all young people could have the opportunity to learn about other cultures, the world would have fewer problems of intolerance.’*

His first contact with another model of law ignited a deep interest in different legal systems, and he decided to write his thesis on constitutional reform in Spain. He also grew fascinated by Spain’s history of tolerating Jewish, Christian and Islamic legal systems side by side. *‘History shows that we can live together; we’ve had that experience. When I got back to Italy, I asked my professor to give me more opportunity to study Islamic law in Arabian countries, and started to learn Arabic.’*

Now a professor of comparative law at the University of Perugia, and an expert on Islamic law, he is a member of the group drafting the Palestinian constitution, and is assisting in the reform of the judicial system in Afghanistan and training Afghan judges.

Those nine months in Alicante were ‘unique, vital and colourful’, he says. They also confirmed his love of fictional hero Don Quixote, who attacked windmills (which he mistakenly believed to be giants) – *‘it was a good position and it still is today. Each of us can change the world for the better. We just need to find the right tools and strategy.’*



## Ann Katherine ISAACS

*'It has had a huge impact'*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Pisa, Italy

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
History/Associate professor of  
Early Modern History

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1989

Ann Katherine Isaacs, history teacher and researcher at the University of Pisa, has coordinated or contributed to numerous Erasmus projects and been on nine staff mobility trips. She first got involved in 1989 by taking part in the pilot project to develop the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and is still active today: she contributed to the new ECTS users' guide for a system now used by millions. *'I have been very privileged to be able to contribute to developing the European Higher Education Area, and linking it with the European Research Area,'* she says. *'Thinking back, I can clearly see now the importance of those first steps in ECTS and in Erasmus staff mobility.'*

Over the years, she found Erasmus Intensive Programmes particularly instructive: *'They were like a laboratory for understanding the different interests, research and teaching styles in different countries.'* What she saw fed into a series of projects under the heading CLIOH (*'Creating Links and Overviews for a New History Agenda'*), including the European history networks CLIOHnet2, which won the Erasmus Gold Prize in 2009, CLIOHRES and CLIOHWORLD.

Now she is chair of the history group in Tuning, a process to develop guidelines and reference points to improve quality in higher education, and has helped export the process to other continents. Erasmus, she says, *'has had a huge impact. I've had the great satisfaction of being able to participate and make relevant changes.'* Looking to the future of the programme, she urges: *'Let's make it work better and better; let's keep at it.'*



# STAVROULLA ANTONIOU

## ‘Erasmus changes the way you see your life’

Home institution:  
University of Cyprus

Host institution:  
Universita Degli Studi di Roma Tre,  
Italy

Field of study:  
English language and  
comparative studies

Duration:  
6 months (2004)

Italy is a favoured location for Erasmus students from Cyprus. This gave Stavroulla Antoniou an opportunity to talk to other students and find out more information before her exchange started. *‘I was a bit shocked to discover that courses were mostly taught through the Italian language. However to my surprise, in time I was able to follow the lectures and take notes.’* As well as experiencing different approaches to learning *‘a lot of personal work is required, in order to get acquainted with a new city, its surroundings, the people, classmates, roommates, professors and a new lifestyle.’*

She *‘had always wanted to spend some time abroad and Erasmus was the ideal way. It offered academic recognition, a considerable grant, the chance to learn or improve language skills and of course lots of travelling.’* Despite the certainties of taking part in an established exchange programme, *‘to a great extent Erasmus is a leap of faith, a dive into the unfamiliar and a journey to the unknown. I have great respect for all Erasmus students; as they are attempting something that others merely talk about.’*

The Erasmus exchange encouraged her to complete her master’s degree in European Politics, and gain her current position as an Erasmus Coordinator at the Cyprus University of Technology. In this role she advises her students that *‘Erasmus, will not change your life, but it will definitely change the way you see it. One can feel at home in almost every corner of Europe, because of Erasmus.’*



## Maria Hadjimatheou



*'Students return more positive, more confident and more independent'*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Cyprus

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Administrative Assistant in the  
Life Long Learning International  
Programmes Office, Research and  
International Relations Service

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1999

Over the past 12 years, Maria Hadjimatheou had heard stories from students about their time on the Erasmus programme. Working in the University of Cyprus' Erasmus Office, she had only seen other universities through the internet. When the opportunity came to apply for an Erasmus training visit she was accepted and travelled abroad for the first time. Her time in Vienna was *'unique and unforgettable. It was a chance to get the same sort of experience that the students described.'* Her experience has helped her to empathise more with the students. *'Worrying about being away from my family, feeling strange, feeling insecure, phoning home to say I had arrived – all the things that the students talk about.'*

As so many students from the University of Cyprus live at home while they study, she realised what a huge change it was for them to live by themselves and organise their own finances. Having seen this for herself, it gave her a much better insight into the students' situation. It also explained why so many students returned to Cyprus *'more positive, more confident and more independent.'*

Back at the University of Cyprus, she has used the knowledge acquired through her training visit to help students use the Erasmus on-line enrollment systems and provide a better service to the university. *'I have also encouraged other staff to take part in Erasmus training as it is a unique and unforgettable experience.'*



# MADARA APSALONE

*'I learned that one should never underestimate the diversity of Europe'*

Home institution:  
University of Latvia, Latvia

Host institution:  
Copenhagen Business School,  
Denmark

Field of study:  
Global Management/International  
Economics

Duration:  
5 months (2006)

Recently returned with an MBA from a top US business school in Arizona, Madara Apsalone recalls how Erasmus – and a scholarship from her own university – helped set her on a path to an international career. *'Without Erasmus, education at Copenhagen Business School, located in one of Europe's most expensive cities, would be off-limits for me.'*

Back in 2006 in Copenhagen, the management and economics student had to adjust to a team-oriented study culture. *'In Latvia, it's much more theoretical. In Denmark, we didn't even have an exam in some courses; you are judged on how the team performed. This was very new; we had to manage all the dynamics of the team.'* The experience gave her *'a broader perspective on life... I learned that one should never underestimate the diversity of Europe.'* It also prompted her to go on a further study exchange, this time to California.

Keen to help others get the most out of their exchange experience, she also got active in the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *'perhaps the second best initiative for international higher education of the European Commission beyond mobility programmes themselves'*. She helped to enhance the structure and profile of ESN, before teaming up with five other ESN members to conduct PRIME, an EC-funded project into course recognition problems, and its successor PRIME II, in which she is international adviser. *'From my experience in ESN, I realised students themselves can find great ways to enhance international mobility and cross-cultural understanding.'*



## ALEKSEJS NAUMOVŠ



*'It's important to give our students a choice'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Art Academy of Latvia, Latvia

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Rector

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1999

Aleksejs Naumovs has been dubbed the *'father of the Erasmus programme'* by his colleagues at the Art Academy of Latvia (AAL). Starting in 1999, he has worked tirelessly to promote international exchanges for his staff and students, setting up some 70 agreements with art schools across Europe. Each semester, around 60 AAL students travel abroad on exchanges, while 20-25 incoming students visit Latvia. Now rector of AAL, he says: *'I have tried to be very active, taking steps to make new contacts for the academy. Nothing replaces personal contacts.'*

His aim has been to promote the academy – and his country – as widely as possible and give his students more opportunities to select where they want to study abroad. *'It's important to give our students a choice,'* he says. *'We also work together to develop skills for exchange and further cooperation projects,'* he adds.

Among the multiple benefits of contacts built up over the years have been student exchange exhibitions in Mainz and Nuremberg, as well as in Riga for the visiting students. The AAL has also participated in cultural festivals in St-Etienne and Strasbourg, France, and in an Erasmus Intensive Programme hosted by the music conservatory of Cuneo, Italy.

He brings home ideas from what he sees abroad and encourages his staff and students to do the same. *'I tell my staff and students: "We need new experiences; you need to know what it's like in other schools." And I ask them to share their experiences when they come back, and use what they learn in our own teaching system.'*



# TADAS ZUKAS

## *'It opened a new world for me'*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Mykolas Romeris University,  
Lithuania (formerly Law University  
of Lithuania)

.....  
**Host institution:**  
Christian Albrechts University  
of Kiel, Germany

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Law

.....  
**Duration:**  
6 months (2001)

When Tadas Zukas set off on an Erasmus exchange to Kiel in 2001, he knew little about his destination. *'It wasn't far from Lithuania and it was one of the few partnerships we had.'* Only later did he learn that the university's law faculty enjoyed an international reputation.

Curious and ambitious, he was overwhelmed by the facilities. *'I was studying in a small young country that was reforming its laws and there were almost no books, and then I went to Germany where there are 20 books on every subject and hundreds of years of experience.'* He went to every lecture he could and studied hard. What struck him most, though, was the friendly contact between lecturers and students. *'Exams were not this huge stress where the professor tries to find out what you don't know,'* he says. He earned the highest possible marks in his courses, then went home and graduated top of his class. A year later he was selected by the European Commission as Lithuania's one millionth Erasmus student.

*'The experience opened a new world for me,'* he says. After graduating, he got a scholarship to study for a Masters (LL.M.) in international business law in Zurich, where he also worked in the legal department of Siemens. Some years later, he passed the Bar Exam in Vilnius and graduated summa cum laude with a PhD in law from Lucerne University in Switzerland. He is now working for a leading Swiss law firm and has recently completed an internship in New York. *'Looking back after 10 years I can connect the dots and see my Erasmus exchange was the first step in my international career.'*



## Vilma Leonaviciene



### *'I'm full of ideas when I come back'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Lithuanian University of Educational  
Sciences, Lithuania  
.....

Field of study/job title:  
Lithuanian Language  
and Culture/Lecturer  
.....

Year became active in Erasmus:  
2005  
.....

*'Erasmus has become a big part of me, my work and practice,'* says Vilma Leonaviciene, head of the Lithuanian Language and Culture Centre at Vilnius Pedagogical University, the country's principal teacher training college, where she has organised language courses since 1998.

Passionate about teaching Lithuanian and the author of numerous textbooks, she has taught Erasmus students at her university since 2000, introducing them to the language, culture and social context of Lithuania. Since 2005 she has also organised Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) summer courses, which are now the most popular EILC courses in Lithuania. *'I'm stronger and braver afterwards,'* she reflects. *'When you've been teaching a group of twenty or more nationalities in one group it feels so easy afterwards to have just Lithuanian students.'*

She also makes annual staff mobility visits to Wroclaw University in Poland, following a year spent teaching Lithuanian language and history there in 2004. While there, she observes the institutional differences and hones her teaching methodology, gathering information that she can use back home. *'It's like a circle. All the time I feed back and spread ideas with my students here. I'm full of ideas when I come back.'*

Most recently, she has been involved in a new *'Erasmus for schools'* project in Lithuania, in which former Erasmus students visit secondary schools to share their experiences and inspire the pupils. *'Erasmus gives you the opportunity to challenge a whole spectrum of stereotypes, to represent one's own country and to share ideas.'*



# Matthieu Cisowski

*'I mixed with people that I'd never have met otherwise'*

Home institution:  
Paris IV Sorbonne University, France

Host institution:  
Bremen University, Germany

Field of study:  
Philosophy

Duration:  
10 months (2000)

Frenchman Matthieu Cisowski was studying at the Sorbonne and wanted to learn a foreign language as well as live in a new and unknown environment. *'I was interested in the personal dimension as well as exploring a new approach to philosophy.'*

His trip to Bremen in Germany lasted a full academic year and exceeded his expectations – *'by 130 %'* – as well as giving him professional-level German. *'I lived the reality of Europe. I discovered that what we have in common is greater than what divides us.'*

The teaching in Bremen was less formal than at the Sorbonne and academic staff were more accessible. He appreciated the difference, but says it did feel *'more like a "café philosophique" than a lecture'*. Ultimately, what he found most rewarding was meeting a wide variety of acquaintances. *'There is a real Erasmus community, and you have this one thing in common. I mixed with people that I'd never have met otherwise.'* The experience prompted him to take a further exchange two years later while working on his doctorate, this time to Bergen University in Norway for three months. It confirmed his memory of Erasmus as *'happy; professionally fulfilling; and personally enriching'*.

Now working in Luxembourg as the Human Resources Manager for a multinational industrial group, he says it is thanks to his Erasmus exchanges that he feels so at ease in an international environment. *'It taught me that I was adaptable, and made me more open-minded and tolerant. I grew more confident in myself and learned to take greater responsibility.'*



## Lucien Kerger

*‘Sometimes it is easier to set up a new university than to change the structures of a 500-year-old institution’*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Luxembourg,  
Luxembourg

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Vice-president (retired)

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1998

With a population of just half a million, Luxembourg is naturally outward-looking. Lucien Kerger was director of the country’s Higher Institute for Teacher Education from 1998 to 2003, and established over 40 student mobility agreements. *‘It was important for teachers to look beyond the borders of our small country. Forty-two percent of our school pupils are of another nationality; if a teacher wants to connect with them they have to have seen other horizons.’*

The partnerships gave an insight into other academic programmes and education systems, intelligence that would prove valuable when the country founded its own university in 2003. He became dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and in 2008 vice-president for academic affairs. One of the university’s founding rules was that every student enrolled in a bachelors programme must study abroad. *‘It was felt necessary for those who had been educated only in Luxembourg. On other hand, it was completely mad; no one thought it would be possible.’* They achieved a remarkable result: 96% of students now take part in foreign exchanges, two-thirds of them Erasmus.

The impacts of Erasmus have been *‘totally positive’*, he says. *‘Thanks to international contacts we’ve been able to avoid errors committed in other universities. We’ve learnt by opposition how to set up a mobility structure and student follow-up. Sometimes it is easier to set up a new university than to change the structures of a 500-year-old institution.’*



# PIROSKA BAKOS

## ‘Keeping all your options open’

Home institution:  
University of Pécs, Hungary

Host institution:  
European University Viadrina  
Frankfurt/Oder, Germany

Field of study:  
Hungarian and Communication  
Studies

Duration:  
6 months (1998-1999)

As one of Hungary’s first group of students to participate in Erasmus, Piroska Bakos was able to focus on topics not available at her home university. *‘By studying mass media and communication in Germany I was able to see new ways of thinking. It made a big impression on me. It improved my language skills and encouraged me to be open to new experiences.’*

Following graduation, the Erasmus experience helped her gain employment in the media industry. *‘Following a series of internships in Germany, I started work in public television as a news presenter and reporter covering German-speaking countries.’*

Her time spent abroad was also important in her position as spokesperson during Hungary’s first EU Presidency in 2011. *‘Intercultural communications, cultural diversity and migration are now important topics – these were all issues we dealt with during my studies more than a decade ago.’* In this role she has been able to encourage students to take advantage of spending time abroad. *‘In the current financial environment, it is good to keep an open mind and your options open. Erasmus helps you to understand more about different cultures (and how they co-exist) and how the world is changing.’*



## Mária Dudás

### *'Age is no barrier – only a state of mind'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Óbuda University, Hungary

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Institutional coordinator for  
Erasmus

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1997

For the past 15 years, Mária Dudás has been very active in European work. Having recently celebrated her 65th birthday, she is the longest serving and most experienced coordinator in Hungary. *'It has been a great pleasure for me since I have enjoyed every minute of my Erasmus work. I have tried to share this with everyone.'*

For her the greatest satisfaction has been the impact on students. *'It helps them to gain knowledge, improve their self-confidence and make new friendships. It also helps them see themselves as European and improve their options in the employment market.'* With more than one hundred partnership arrangements, there are many opportunities for students to travel. And to support incoming students, she has encouraged the university to offer courses in German and English.

She has received many accolades and prizes for her international work, however some successes count more than others: *'I was really proud when Erasmus celebrated two million students and the Hungarian representative was from my university.'* Helping students and her university to become more international has been an outstanding achievement. Activities such as an alumni association, 'buddy' systems, double degree programmes and accurate information for participants have all helped to promote mobility. And although *'you cannot convince everyone, the original Guild Fellows knew that travelling to learn was essential – it is the same philosophy today.'*



## David Friggieri

### ‘Better than you ever imagined’

Home institution:  
University of Malta, Malta

Host institution:  
University of Rennes, France

Field of study:  
Law

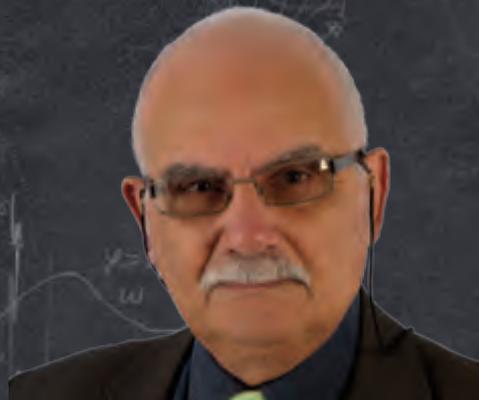
Duration:  
7 months (2000-2001)

It was the first year that the Erasmus programme was open to Maltese citizens, so David Friggieri set off for Rennes with five other law students from the University of Malta, pioneers from their country. *‘We were lucky to be there when it kicked off. I’d wanted to live and study in a foreign country for some time.’*

He wasn’t disappointed. The trip offered *‘a new way of life, and the fresh air of a new learning experience’*. Already working on his doctoral thesis, he spent a lot of time in the library, and was intrigued by the French style of presenting an academic paper. *‘They have this Cartesian way of doing everything, splitting everything into two. It’s a very different mental system.’*

He ended up extending his stay from three to seven months, and developed close friendships that have continued for over ten years since. *‘Four of us in Rennes had an ambition to continue our studies at the College of Europe in Bruges. We used to discuss the chances of all getting in. Amazingly, we all did and continued our academic life together.’* The four – two Maltese, a Pole and a Hungarian – went on to flatshare when they subsequently got traineeships in EU institutions, and now they all work for those institutions.

He says that it was during his Erasmus exchange that he started to make a network of contacts in different countries. *‘Some students hesitate to take part, worried that it might be a waste of time, or that they’ll have problems getting their credits recognised. I’d say don’t hesitate, go for it and deal with the consequences later. They’re likely to be better than you ever imagined.’*



## JOHN SCHRANZ



### *'Do it for what you love and nothing else'*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Malta, Malta  
.....

Field of study/job title:  
Theatre Studies  
.....

Year became active in Erasmus:  
2000  
.....

For theatre studies lecturer John Schranz, international collaboration had for many years been crucial to his study of what drives creativity. So when Malta finally joined the Erasmus family, he *'slipped into it like a glove'*, consolidating his collaboration with theatre makers/researchers, neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists, philosophers and sports scientists across Europe. *'Erasmus makes you live in a network characterised by thought and inquiry'*, he says.

In the course of numerous teacher exchanges, it has been the human encounters that encapsulate *'what the EU and the Erasmus programme are all about'*, he says. *'The ease with which you find yourself meeting fellow lecturers, theatre-makers and students at a deep level, immediately on arrival, is amazing. It goes far beyond what you could encounter as a casual visitor. You get a sense of belonging; a sense that much more is possible.'*

A turning point came in 2001, when he and academics from four other universities bid, successfully, for Erasmus Curriculum Development support for a new interdisciplinary course. The result was a joint master's degree in the Science of Performative Creativity, launched in 2007 and hosted mainly by the University of Malta. The course explores contexts that inhibit creativity and others that unleash it, studying the creative faculty that distinguishes the human brain from those of other species.

To anyone thinking of taking part in an Erasmus exchange he insists: *'Do it for what you love and not for anything else. Do it for the love of research and of pedagogy – and jump into it.'*



## DÉSIRÉE MAJOOR

### *‘Erasmus was the kick-off for my career’*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Utrecht University, the Netherlands

.....  
**Host institution:**  
University of Bologna, Italy

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Theatre Studies

.....  
**Duration:**  
6 months (1987)

One of the first students to go on an Erasmus exchange, Désirée Majoor spent six months in Bologna researching audience reactions to Futurist theatre performances for her master’s thesis. A few months later, she attended an Erasmus evaluation meeting in Ghent, where discussion turned to how to solve the practical problems that a number of students had experienced. The result was the creation of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). *‘We thought the easiest way would be for students to help students. That’s where the buddy system network grew up. I lived relatively close to Brussels so I drafted the proposal.’*

She set up an ESN section in Utrecht while others from the meeting did the same in their cities. A year later, the 22 sections held the network’s first AGM and she became its first president. *‘It was quite idealistic; it was never a job. We did it as volunteers.’* In 2010 ESN celebrated its 20th anniversary in Utrecht. Today it has 370 sections in 35 countries.

*‘Erasmus was the kick-off for my career,’* she says. She went travelling after her studies, and came back keen to work for an international organisation. *‘Because of my Erasmus experience, I got a job in the Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation of higher education. That’s what brought me to higher education management.’* Now faculty dean of communication and journalism at the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, she makes sure her own students make the most of the exchange opportunity. *‘It’s a terrific personal experience. There’s so much you can learn.’*



## Bram Peper



### *‘Seeing the students working together is inspirational’*

.....  
Home institution:  
Erasmus University Rotterdam, the  
Netherlands

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Sociology/lecturer

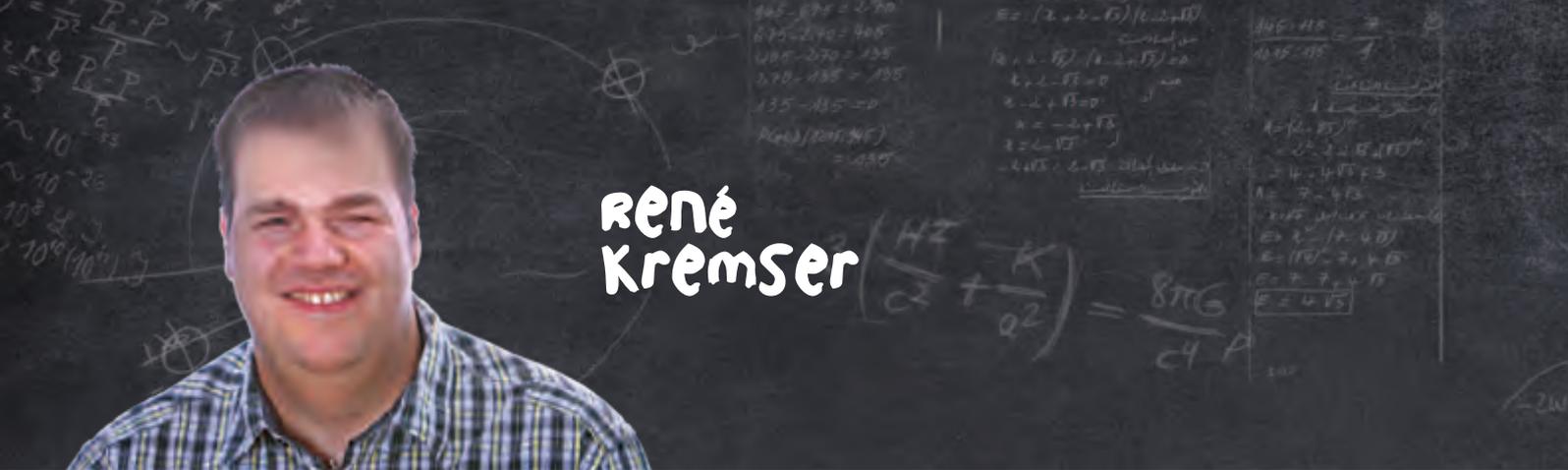
.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1992

Back in 1992, Bram Peper attended an Erasmus Intensive Programme organised by the sociology department of his own university in Rotterdam. The eight-day course brought together students and lecturers from different countries in an intense but informal gathering. *‘It was good to meet and talk to the other students, also for my own interest in discussing different welfare systems,’* he says.

Inspired to pursue his studies, he went on to become a sociology lecturer and, since 2005, has been himself the academic coordinator of Erasmus University Rotterdam’s Intensive Programme in sociology. The successful programme – it will host its 21st session in 2012 – now brings together staff and students from 13 institutions. *‘Every year we’re pleasantly surprised to see 50-60 students work together so hard and so well,’* he says.

The annual sessions offer a rich forum to share ideas and have led to the publication of four academic books. They are also useful for staff to observe other teaching styles. *‘It’s beneficial to see how other colleagues teach their class,’* he says. *‘University professors are normally very autonomous and don’t usually see how others present their lectures.’*

Even though it’s a lot of work to organise, he strongly advocates the benefits of organising an Intensive Programme. *‘It’s worth double the work you put in as you get so much out of it, both in terms of you as a lecturer and building an academic network with new colleagues; and seeing the students working together even though they speak eight or nine different languages. It’s inspirational and it’s a lot of fun.’*



## René Kremser

### ‘Obstacles are there to be overcome’

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Vorarlberg University of Applied  
Sciences, Austria  
.....

**Host institution:**  
VAMK, University of Applied  
Sciences, Finland  
.....

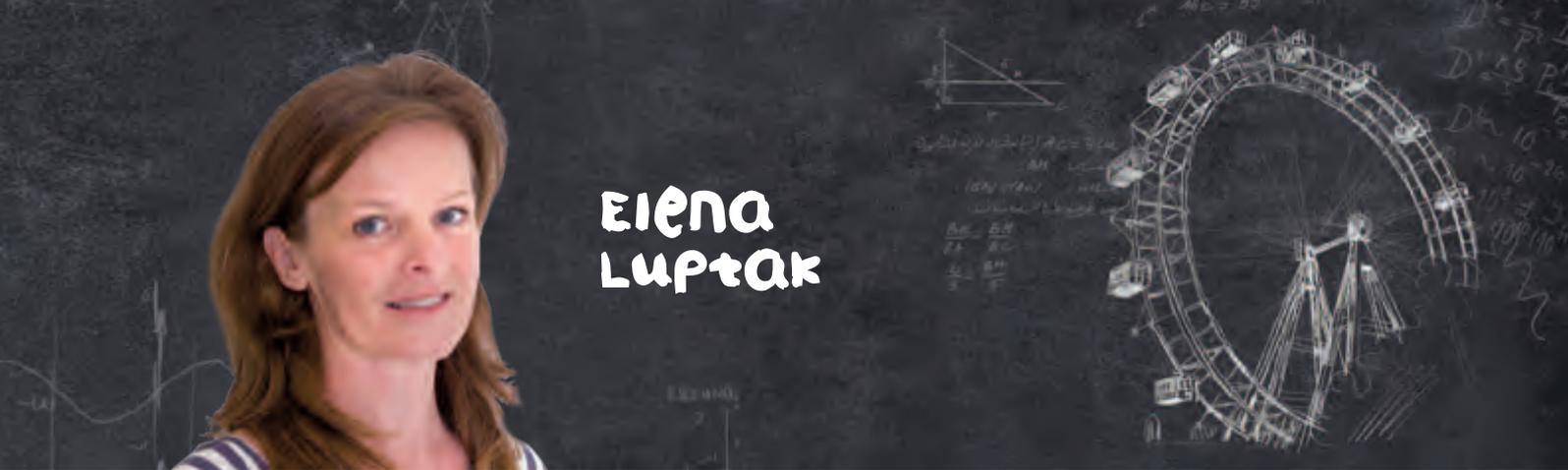
**Field of study:**  
Social work  
.....

**Duration:**  
5 months (2005)  
.....

Before going to Finland, René Kremser had always lived in boarding schools or with his parents. The Erasmus exchange offered him the chance to live independently. As someone who is blind and uses a wheelchair, everyone knew that special arrangements would be needed. Fortunately both his home and host universities wanted to make the placement work. For him, *‘it was important to try things out – even when you think you cannot do it. It is worth trying things out, if you really want to do something.’*

Going abroad required the appointment of a full time personal assistant. Through an advertisement in the local newspaper, he interviewed and appointed an assistant from Austria to accompany him to Finland. This enabled him to live independently for the first time. While there are many obstacles to overcome, he recommends that other students with disabilities go abroad as it helps you *‘to learn to fight for things as well as learn about other countries and cultures.’*

Whilst abroad, he combined study at university with practical placements. *‘This helped me to experience a wide range of institutions and gain a broad view on Finland’s approach to disability.’* As the appointment of personal assistants is rare in Finland, his experience provided a focus for his dissertation and has informed his work on supporting people with learning disabilities.



## ELENA LUPTAK

### *‘Making student exchanges a normal part of university life’*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Konservatorium Wien University,  
Austria

.....  
**Field of study/job title:**  
Dance teacher and Erasmus  
Department Coordinator

.....  
**Year became active in Erasmus:**  
2004

As a lecturer in a relatively new university, Elena Luptak was interested in going abroad in order to see how other institutions organised their courses. *‘I found it helpful to think about new ways of doing things and I gained a better overview of systems and approaches that were used abroad. I was also able to bring back new ideas that we could use at the university.’*

For her travel had always been seen as an important part of student life. However this is not always how students see their degree studies. *‘To make it a normal part of students’ experience, it has to be supported and refreshed regularly.’* To help dance students get the most from their experience abroad, two students ‘one with stronger technical expertise and one with more artistic expertise’ are selected who travel together. Exchanges also benefit those who do not go abroad as returning students bring a different perspective to their studies, which enhances everyone’s learning.

As well as organising student exchanges, she has developed extensive contacts in other universities. *‘This is an important part of my university life. It is interesting to meet new colleagues and students and I look forward to the time when this is seen as normal.’*



## Diana Dmuchowska

*'It gave me a direction'*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Medical University of Bialystok,  
Poland

.....  
**Host institution:**  
University of Duisburg-Essen,  
Germany

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Medicine

.....  
**Duration:**  
1 year (2005)

Diana Dmuchowska was in her fifth year studying medicine when set off for Essen looking for 'new ideas' and 'something out of the ordinary'. She chose Germany as she knew the language and wanted to be able to speak to patients without the need for a translator.

*'My stay fulfilled my expectations a thousand times more than I had expected. I made new acquaintances and made the most of the experience, but above all I met this doctor, a professor of ophthalmology. Her enthusiasm for research and surgery was overwhelming.'*

As a result of the meeting, her routine changed dramatically. She spent evenings and weekends working in the lab and reading scientific literature. *'Sometimes I was so deeply involved in my work that I hardly noticed the dawn.'*

When the year was up, she returned to Poland to complete her medical studies, while continuing with a German PhD supervised by the ophthalmology professor, which she defended in English and subsequently got recognised in Poland. *'Erasmus had a great impact on my life. It gave me a new direction,'* she reflects.

For the past three years she has been training to become an eye specialist back in Poland. Last year she returned to Essen to complete a three-month training course. Most recently she has been visiting the internationally renowned Moorfields Eye Hospital in London thanks to a scholarship from the European Society of Ophthalmology. *'I believe that visiting foreign centres is an essential part of my professional development. Just as I took my passion for research home to Bialystok, I hope to do the same with new ideas and experiences.'*



## RYSZARD ZAMORSKI



*‘If this were the only programme run by the EU, it’s one reason why the EU should exist’*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Bydgoszcz University of Technology  
and Life Sciences, Poland

.....  
**Field of study/job title:**  
Plant biochemistry/Vice-dean

.....  
**Year became active in Erasmus:**  
2000

An enthusiastic promoter of Erasmus since the start of Poland’s inclusion in the programme, Ryszard Zamorski developed 50 of his faculty’s current 54 institutional agreements with other universities, and has been on 40 staff mobility visits to prepare the ground for students and staff exchanges. *‘Erasmus is one of the best and spectacular programmes of the EU, bringing countless benefits not only for nowadays academic life, but even more for the future.’*

As vice-dean for teaching and students’ affairs in the faculty of Agriculture and Biotechnology from 1999-2001 and again since 2008, he started out developing partnerships through his own scientific contacts. He has built numerous friendships over the years, as well as becoming something of an expert on education systems in the EU and Turkey. *‘I always look up to Dutch solutions. We are currently rebuilding our faculty and I can see the influence of my visits there.’*

His visits generally include teaching sessions for students and staff interested in his field of biochemistry, meetings to discuss further scientific or teaching collaboration; and cultural activities to discover the city and region. *‘I have always gained more than I expected, and have been overwhelmed with hospitality,’* he says.

*‘I start my presentation to students by saying “If this were the only programme run by the EU, it’s one reason why the EU should exist.” It’s good to invest in young people, and those that go, whether staff or students, always come back happy and excited.’*



# Filipe Araújo

*'It gave me a powerful European identity'*

Home institution:  
Catholic University of Portugal,  
Portugal

Host institution:  
LUMSA University, Italy

Field of study:  
Media Studies

Duration:  
10 months (1999)

Inspired by a month's exchange trip to France when he was 13, Filipe Araújo got a chance to sample life as an Erasmus student while visiting friends in Rome, and lost no time in taking the same route himself as soon as he could. He set off from Lisbon in 1999 to follow a term of media studies at LUMSA University.

The five months flew by and he extended his stay. Thanks to one of his lecturers, a director at Italian state television RAI who knew that Araújo had worked as a journalist in Portugal, he secured a traineeship at the company for his second semester. *'It was an excellent chance to get deeper into Italian culture and understand its particular idiosyncrasies.'*

One opening led to another: he went on to work as a correspondent for Portuguese media before discovering, on a visit to a film set one day, that his true vocation lay in film. He founded an independent production company in 2005, and is now based between Lisbon and Madrid, with an office in Tallinn. His currently project is a documentary feature inspired by the Erasmus programme. It follows a former student travelling around Europe 15 years on in search of old friends, and a young student setting out to Scandinavia on his first foreign exchange.

*'Erasmus made a lot of what I am today. It gave me a powerful European identity and a strong confidence in people and the future. I deeply believe that one of the best ways to construct a European consciousness is to start when you're young. And there is no better way of understanding Europe than living it, in its joy and diversity. And that is Erasmus.'*



## JOSÉ MARAT-MENDES

*'My main objective was to educate people to become European citizens'*

.....  
Home institution:  
New University of Lisbon, Portugal

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Materials Science/Physics/  
Chemistry/Engineering/Lecturer  
(retired)

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1987

Retired physics lecturer José Marat-Mendes got involved in Erasmus at the very beginning. On a British Council fellowship to Aberdeen in 1986, he met some professors from Germany who spoke about Erasmus. *'I'd never heard of it and I became fascinated.'* The result, a joint project with universities in Aberdeen, Mainz, Bonn, Seville and Lisbon, aimed to offer advanced tuition to MSc and PhD chemistry students. He recalls a meeting in Mainz with a representative of the Erasmus office in Brussels. *'All of us had the feeling that a new era was coming.'*

Back in Lisbon, he became an enthusiastic Erasmus coordinator for almost 25 years, went on 10 teaching missions and had students queuing at his door to join the programme. *'My main objective was to educate people to become European citizens,'* he reflects.

In his own field of physics, he initiated a research project that led to an Erasmus curricula development project and Intensive Advanced Programme, bringing together staff and students from eight universities for annual courses. *'I can see even today that many years after the students finished their university degrees and started their careers the friendship still persists.'* At one of the last courses, at the University of Valladolid in Spain, a special ceremony was held to present him with a plaque which still hangs proudly on his wall: *'To José Marat-Mendes,'* it reads. *'In honour of work well done – Erasmus 1992-1997'.*



# Laura Popa

*'The value-added is that you are building your career from that point'*

Home institution:  
Academy of Economic Studies  
in Bucharest, Romania

Host institution:  
Istanbul University, Turkey

Field of study:  
Management

Duration:  
10 months (2008/2009)

Determined to quit her comfort zone, Laura Popa traded Bucharest for Istanbul for the third year of her bachelors' degree in management. She learnt enough Turkish to get by and had 'the best time of my life'. She also found an academic mentor in one of her lecturers. *'I wasn't sure which specialisation to choose as a postgraduate student and he helped me to select what was best for me.'* With his guidance, she enrolled for a Master's in Corporate Strategy and Governance at the University of Nottingham Business School.

While in Istanbul, she founded the Turkish branch of the League of Romanian Students Abroad. On her return home, she was chosen as the two millionth Erasmus student for Romania. This convinced her to take a gap year before leaving for the United Kingdom, touring universities in Romania to share her story. *'I wanted to promote Erasmus. It implied a great deal of effort from my side, but I considered it an investment for the future.'* She was also careful to discuss the ups and downs of studying abroad. *'Lots of speakers say go for it, but few tell you how to prepare in terms of skills, budget and the first steps to speed up the adaptation process to a new culture.'* Besides the social dimension of the programme, *'the value-added is that you are building your career from that point.'*

With her Master's now finished, she is poised to take her experiences into the professional realm. *'I am determined to carry on promoting Erasmus and want to launch an educational initiative to improve performance in Romanian universities.'*



ION  
VISA

*‘It has been very important in changing the mindset in our universities’*

.....  
Home institution:  
Transylvania University of Braşov,  
Romania

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Mechanical Engineering/Rector

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1997

There was a certain scepticism in Romania when the Erasmus programme was introduced, but Ion Visa was in no doubt as to its benefits. *‘Some people didn’t agree with sending students abroad. They were afraid that they wouldn’t come back to Romania. I told them it was a good opportunity for all of us to open our activity, our minds and our universities; and that we had no other solution.’*

The professor of mechanical engineering coordinated – and promoted – student and staff exchanges at the Transylvania University of Braşov from 1997 before becoming rector of the institution in 2004. He set up numerous partnerships and Erasmus projects, as well as designing degree courses to foster international mobility and research, most notably in the fields of industrial and product design and renewable energy systems. *‘It was thanks to the Erasmus programme and our staff and student exchanges that we developed our own curriculum,’* he says. Over the years, his aim has been to *‘open new collaboration opportunities for our students and staff members’*, to enhance teaching, cooperation and research.

The international dimension provides crucial training for his students, he says. *‘In our field we now work in complex teams that are geographically spread out. We need to prepare young people to work in this new environment.’*

*‘Eight years ago, we received maybe three to five students each year. Now we receive around a hundred. It’s a real pleasure to cooperate and creates a very good dynamic. It has also been very important in changing the mindset in our universities.’*



# Jure Kumljanec

## *'It was the most unforgettable year of my life'*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
Faculty of Tourism Studies Portorož,  
Slovenia  
.....

**Host institution:**  
University College Birmingham,  
Birmingham, United Kingdom  
.....

**Field of study:**  
Tourism Business Management  
.....

**Duration:**  
5 months (2007)  
.....

For Jure Kumljanec, a student exchange to Birmingham came as something of a culture shock. *'It was unusual for me to live in a big city and to meet people from different countries and races.'* He also found the course in tourism business management challenging and had to get paid work to cover living costs.

Despite initial fears, he was pleased to discover that people in the multicultural city were friendly and open-minded. He got a job, and stayed to work over the Christmas break when most other Erasmus students headed home. And despite his surprise that the lecturers cut no slack for Erasmus students – *'there were more assignments and tests than in Slovenia'* – he appreciated the freedom given to students to research assignments and *'think outside the box'*, and the fact that he was given feedback and corrections, and not just a simple grade on his work.

One reason that everything worked out so well is thanks to the efforts of the local Erasmus coordinator, to whom he pays tribute. *'He was available to help with any problems we might have. Knowing that strong support was there was great.'*

Now online marketing manager for LifeClass Hotels & Spa, the largest Slovene hotel chain, he has built on the skills he gained on Erasmus. *'I got more confident at speaking in public. And I got to know about different aspects of life from students from around Europe. That was a breakthrough for me.'*

*'It was the most unforgettable year of my life,'* he says. *'It changed the way I think, the way I socialise and the way I work.'*



VESNA  
Rijavec

### *'It brought fresh air for everyone, not just for me'*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Maribor, Slovenia

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Law

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2000

Vesna Rijavec had long been inspired by the benefits of cross-border collaboration so, as soon as the opportunity arose, drew on her contacts to set up Erasmus partnerships between her law faculty in Maribor and universities across Europe. *'Certain principles that govern law are universal. My view is that you can't really understand your national law without comparing it with another law.'*

She has taken part in eight teacher exchanges since 2000, to France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain, and has seen multiple impacts on her teaching and research activities. *'I got much more self-confident and adapted my lectures and research with substantially improved new elements.'* As well as the exchange of materials, collaboration for articles and development of new research programmes, her efforts have brought excellent results for Maribor students, some of whom have gone on to work at the European Court of Justice.

And the influx of foreign students to Maribor has also helped her faculty. *'It helped push my colleagues into working more actively at an international level, as they had to adapt courses for Erasmus students. I think it brought fresh air for everyone, not just for me. Staying closed in a small society is very different from being open to the world and seeing how things work elsewhere.'*

Her visits have also taught her to be proud of her own university. *'Our facilities are good in comparison with well known faculties and our professors do their best. Of course, we are a young university, with just 50 years of history, but the differences were not as great as I expected.'*



# Jana Vitvarová

## 'Erasmus gives you a pair of wings'

.....  
**Home institution:**  
University of Žilina, Slovakia

.....  
**Host institution:**  
National Institute of  
Telecommunications, Evry, France

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Telecommunications

.....  
**Duration:**  
5 months (2000)

*'My parents were my Erasmus ambassadors,' says Jana Vitvarová. 'International contacts were important in both their professions – my father was a computer science researcher and my mother a French teacher – so I didn't need anyone else to explain to me the benefits of going to study abroad.'*

In Paris, she relished the business focus at the National Institute of Telecommunications. In real-life simulation exercises, students worked for intense three-day sessions to develop project proposals for different companies. *'Many of my classmates had already done traineeships and I could see that they had extra intuition as a result.'*

She also valued the requirement to present her work, rather than just hand in written assignments. Thanks to the experience, in her later work specialising in next generation networks she found it easier standing in front of a group of people presenting her work. *'The presentation skills I acquired have improved my outputs in teaching, research as well as in business cases.'*

When selected as the one millionth Erasmus student from Slovakia in 2002, she was little prepared for how it would change her life. At the celebration in Brussels, she met her future husband, a former Erasmus student from the Czech Republic. Together, the pair moved to Ireland and, after a period in Austria, are now based in the Czech Republic with their two young children. *'Erasmus gives you a pair of wings. It's up to you whether you decide to fly a long way or just make a round trip.'*



JOZEF  
RISTVEJ



## *‘My international stays motivated me to work even harder’*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Žilina, Slovakia

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Crisis Management/Vice-Dean  
for Development and International  
Relations

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2003

A five-month student exchange to Linköpings University in Sweden in 2003 spurred Jozef Ristvej to adopt new study methods and pursue crisis management research to a higher level. *‘The level of education was even higher than I was expecting, students and teachers had a close relationship and there was a greater emphasis on self-study at the library.’*

He completed his PhD in 2007 and is became a lecturer, specialised in the information systems that support decision-making in crisis management. Now also Vice-Dean for Development and International Relations, he is driven to help students benefit from an experience that did so much for him. *‘I developed a lot of skills through my international stays and they always encouraged me further. They’ve acted as my motivators to keep me working even harder.’*

Further visits on Erasmus staff mobility have inspired him to help improve structures in Slovakia, and his is now active in a multilateral Erasmus project to modernise higher education, now in its third year. *‘Our faculty was the first in Slovakia to include crisis management, and it’s only 12 years old. In Italy, in contrast, it’s a well-established discipline, while Portugal was ten years ago in the same position as we are today. We can compare our development with theirs.’*

Besides gaining contacts and research partners, he has appreciated his Erasmus visits principally for the way they trigger new ideas. *‘Every time I go, for a week I am able to think about things in a different environment and a different way.’*



# Elina Ylipelkonen

## ‘Going abroad helped me decide what I wanted to do’

Home institution:  
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Host institution:  
Protestant University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany

Field of study:  
Social work

Duration:  
3 months (2006)

Having previously been to Berlin, Elina Ylipelkonen knew the city presented many opportunities to study social work. Her Erasmus exchange combined academic study for two days per week with practical placements in a probationary service for young people for the rest of the week. *‘In Berlin there were many chances of seeing places and working methods that were rare in Finland. I learnt a great deal and saw many new ways of doing social work.’*

The experience confirmed her decision about her choice of profession and strengthened her interest in multicultural issues. *‘It helped me to decide what job I wanted to do.’* Her practical placement in Berlin had mainly involved migrant communities. This, combined with working full-time for three years at the Helsinki Reception Centre for asylum seekers, gave her the focus for her ideal job – working with the Immigration Police.

She is now training to be a police officer in Finland and believes this, combined with her professional training as a social worker, will provide the ideal career. *‘I would recommend that other social workers spend time abroad. Erasmus should be for everyone if you have this possibility, you should take it.’*



PAULA  
PIETILÄ

### *‘Erasmus is open to everyone’*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Turku, Finland

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Disability Coordinator

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2010

Opening up higher education to everyone includes looking at how students with disabilities can be supported. For Paula Pietilä, who has a disability, *‘it is difficult to think how this can happen without international cooperation.’* To become more familiar with approaches used in the Nordic countries, she took part in a study visit to Denmark. This helped to support her work in Finland *‘where systems and processes were at an early stage and more needed to be done for students with disabilities to ensure they had equal access to higher education.’*

As a result of the visit she investigated different ways to offer counselling and support services to students with mental health problems or physical disabilities. The visit enabled her to *‘take a more holistic approach and consider changes across the whole university.’* It also helped her to think about how to redesign learning materials, how to design web pages and how to adjust the physical environment in order to support students’ learning. The visit also helped her to become involved in developing *‘inclusive education’* at the national level and within the Nordic Network for Disability Coordinators.

Few students with disabilities have so far completed exchange programmes. However she believes that *‘Erasmus is open to everyone’* as it provides opportunities to see things from a different perspective and experience new things.



# Karl-Fredrik Ahlmark

*'I learnt that there are no limitations in terms of where I can go and what I can do'*

Home institution:  
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Host institution:  
Loughborough University,  
United Kingdom

Field of study:  
European Studies

Duration:  
2008 (6 months)

Most European Studies students expect to study abroad at some point. For Karl-Fredrik Ahlmark, however, it presented more of a challenge due to his visual impairment. *'I had to prepare the trip thoroughly to make sure practical arrangements were in place before I arrived.'*

In Loughborough, he found there was plenty of support available from dedicated staff and volunteers, although things were arranged differently than in Sweden, and he had to pay for certain services. He also learnt to adapt his study methods to the teaching structure: in Sweden courses are taught consecutively, while in the UK they are taught in parallel. *'It made me aware of my possibilities and limitations, which I wasn't aware of before, when it comes to things related to my visual impairment. I learnt that there are no limitations in terms of where I can go and what I can do.'*

The trip triggered an interest in spending more time abroad. He has subsequently been to study at a research institute in Istanbul, and completed an internship at Sweden's permanent representation to the EU in Brussels. *'They said that one reason they picked me was that I had been abroad and specialised in topics I'd studied at Loughborough.'*

Now he has become a role model for visually impaired students back home. *'I encourage people very strongly to do this. It's just important to make sure prior to arrival that everything is worked out. You can't avoid practical issues.'*



HANS  
ÅHL



### *'The last day of the course is a weeping party'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Mid Sweden University, Sweden

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
EILC course coordinator

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1999

Hans Åhl coordinated Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) at the University of Mid-Sweden for 11 years from 1999-2010, alongside his term-time work training teachers of Swedish as a second language. The short summer courses aim to prepare Erasmus students for their study exchange by giving them a grounding in basic Swedish language and culture.

Now retired, Hans Åhl recalls how he expected, at the start, that the courses in Härnösand would be like a normal language course. *'I soon realised that it was much more than that.'* What he hadn't expected was the depth of cross-cultural exchange that he witnessed. Besides learning Swedish, students grew close during the varied activities arranged as part of the course, such as canoeing, fishing and hiking in the forest. *'The last day of the course is a weeping party,'* he says.

He chuckles at the number of Facebook friends he has now thanks to his EILC courses. And is proud to have seen good contacts develop between the students. *'I am even responsible for a marriage! The couple now has two children.'*

The courses gave him plenty of material that he could use as examples with his language teaching students during the rest of the year. They also gave the university good visibility in the local and national media.

Given what he witnessed, he regrets that more Swedish students don't take up the opportunity of Erasmus exchanges. *'We have fewer outgoing than incoming students. Perhaps they fear that they won't succeed. But I do recommend it myself. From what I've seen on these courses the experience of studying abroad is useful for their whole life and career.'*





## Julia Kennedy

### *'I hadn't expected the camaraderie'*

.....  
Home institution:  
Robert Gordon University,  
Aberdeen, United Kingdom  
.....

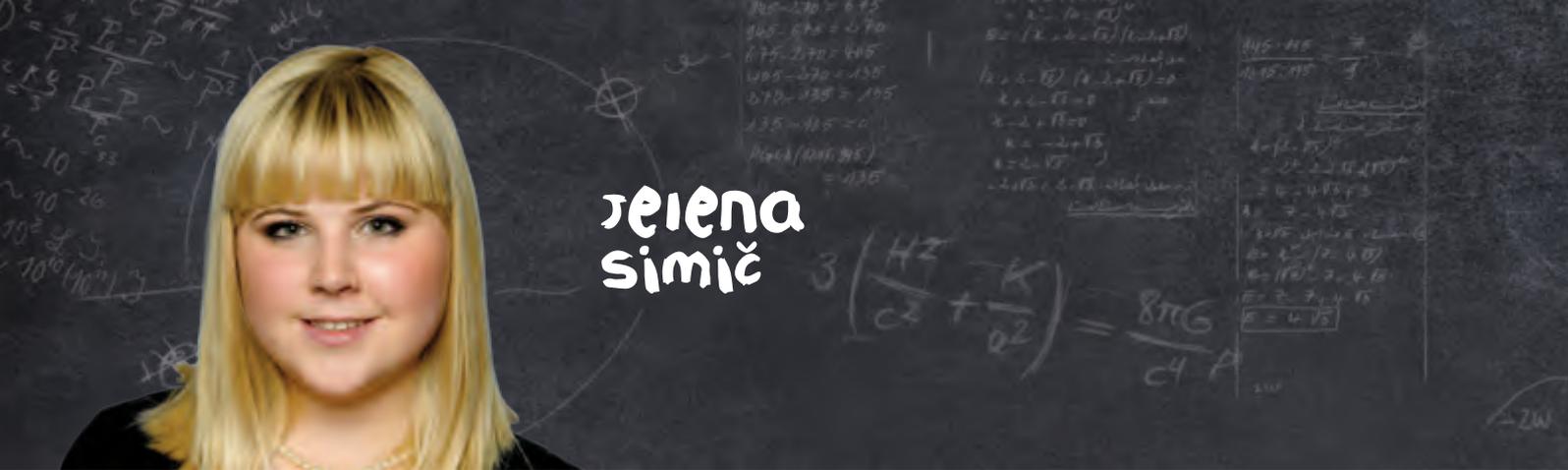
Field of study/job title:  
Erasmus Institutional Coordinator  
.....

Year became active in Erasmus:  
1996  
.....

After working with Erasmus for 13 years in Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Julia Kennedy wanted some fresh ideas. Fortunately, the Erasmus programme had been extended in 2007 to include training mobility for non-academic staff. Although she had received numerous requests from partners to spend a week's training with her, she was unable to honour these requests as she was the only staff member responsible for Erasmus at institutional level and could not devote a whole week to one person. Therefore, she decided to organise her own Erasmus Week for Administrative Staff, and invite her partner institutions. To prepare, she undertook a staff mobility to an International Week held by FH Campus Wien. *'I went to see how it was organised, what worked and to gain ideas on how to run my own week,'* she says.

The experience was *'educational, stimulating and very enjoyable'*. She learned some important lessons during her week, such as that working in English is tiring for non-native speakers, so it was essential to schedule breaks when organising a programme. One of the things she found most interesting was the opportunity to hear other countries' perspectives. *'One of the problems in the UK is that we receive more students that we can send out, while in other countries, they have the opposite problem'*.

Most of all, she relished the chance to talk to people doing a similar job as herself. *'I hadn't expected the camaraderie of everyone that was there, and their willingness to exchange ideas not just of best practice but also of things they could improve.'*



## Jelena Simić

*'It was all perfect'*

Home institution:  
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Host institution:  
University of Wrocław, Poland

Field of study:  
Croatian philology

Duration:  
4 months (2010)

Before taking part in the Erasmus programme, Jelena Simić had worked in a student radio station. As the weekly show included information about student exchanges, she had met many new people with different cultures and experiences of learning. This inspired her to apply for the Erasmus. *'I wanted to make Erasmus experience part of my life, so I did my best to make it happen. Erasmus opened doors for me into Europe.'*

An important component of her programme was research for her dissertation. *'The central purpose of my stay abroad was to attend consultations with my mentor and to take an additional course in the Polish language.'* However there was more to the exchange than completing a dissertation. The opportunity to learn other languages, listen to lectures from international experts, meet people from all over the world and explain about Croatia, all enhanced her time in Poland. Alongside her studies, she worked for a students' radio station and sent reports of her experiences to her home town. *'I also recorded shows for my colleagues at the University of Rijeka to help other students who were considering applying for the programme.'*

The time abroad has confirmed her interest in teaching Croatian as a foreign language and working closely with people from outside her country. *'Croatia is receiving its first intake of Erasmus student in 2011-2012 and this is an area which interests me. I would like to use my positive experiences in Poland to make it better for incoming students to Croatia.'*



Katica  
Šimunović

## ‘Learning to work in four languages’

Home institution:  
Mechanical Engineering Faculty  
in Slavonski Brod, Croatia

Field of study/job title:  
Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering

Year became active in Erasmus:  
2010

When Erasmus became available in Croatia in 2009 it gave Katica Šimunović the opportunity ‘to do something new’. She immediately ‘made a spontaneous decision to get involved even though I did not know much about the scheme when I started. On the basis of previously established contacts, I arranged a teaching assignment in Hungary.’

As well as teaching in English, she used Hungarian, Croatian and German during her time abroad. This opportunity to work in an international context helped her to evaluate the content of different degrees, promote her own university and faculty, arrange staff and student placements and invite Hungarian students and staff to visit Croatia. ‘With Croatia receiving Erasmus staff and students for the first time in 2011-12, my visit was an opportunity to encourage mobility and understand how it can be organised.’ As the Faculty Coordinator for Erasmus, managing programmes for incoming and outgoing students and staff is an important aspect of her role.

The short stay abroad confirmed for her the value of international study. ‘I was able to compare teaching techniques and qualifications, as well as improve competences and research quality. And I could see the value of mobility in terms of a global view of knowledge and what can be gained from co-operation in both teaching and research.’



# Begüm Yurdakök

*'It changes you from inside'*

Home institution:  
Ankara University, Turkey

Host institution:  
University of Bologna, Italy and  
Karolinska Institut Stockholm,  
Sweden

Field of study:  
Veterinary Pharmacology  
and Toxicology

Duration:  
2004 (9 months) and  
2008 (10 months)

Begüm Yurdakök was studying for a degree in veterinary medicine in Ankara when she went on an Erasmus exchange to Italy in 2004. *'I wanted to see how I could cope living on my own. It was as if something was knocking on a door inside me and pushing to get out.'*

In Bologna, she gained hands-on practice in the university's own veterinary clinic. *'I got to experience clinical applications for the first time.'* She appreciated the help of her host professors, who set up field trips so that she could follow courses in aquaculture and beekeeping – required in Turkey but not offered in Bologna – in other Italian universities.

Meanwhile, she grew fascinated by learning languages. *'Etymology became a big interest. You discover so much about a people's mentality and culture from how they name things.'* After Italy, she took up Spanish, Dutch and, later, Swedish. *'Now I'm learning Japanese too. It's a mind game for me, like Sudoku.'* Her language skills and international contacts were instrumental, she believes, in securing her subsequent post as research assistant in her faculty after completing her PhD.

In 2008 she set off again with Erasmus, this time to Stockholm. *'I was learning all these new techniques with one of the best pharmacogenetics teams in the world – it was very exciting.'*

Now she enjoys seeing first hand the impact of Erasmus on others: *'It's good seeing students in my office who want to go on Erasmus. They come back with their eyes shining. It really changes you from inside.'*



## Mustafa Çoban



### *‘Our curriculum has totally changed as a result’*

.....  
Home institution:  
Akdeniz University Vocational High  
School of Health Services, Turkey

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
Social Work (Elderly Care)

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
2007

In 2007, Mustafa Çoban took part in an Erasmus mobility project to the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. A social work lecturer teaching a new vocational course on elderly care at Akdeniz University in Turkey, he and his colleagues were keen to learn from the much longer experience in Germany. *‘We wanted to integrate courses with institutions that provide elderly care, such as hospices and nursing homes.’*

The six-day trip was intensive and inspiring. As well as meeting their counterparts in elderly care education, the team visited care institutions and met local non-governmental organisations. They established new contacts, gained insight into a different culture of care for the elderly, and got to discuss and assess their own situation.

*‘Our curriculum has totally changed as a result,’* he says. Their course was adapted to make it more relevant, and the revised structure served as a basis for 12 newly established elderly care programmes in other Turkish universities.

The results of the visit *‘improved the reputation of this field of study’*, he says. They also led to further projects in vocational and adult education, and to students going on Erasmus study exchanges. With increasing numbers of elderly Turkish people in care in Germany, it also provided their hosts with valuable insight into the culture of care in Turkey.

Anyone who has the opportunity to take part in an Erasmus mobility is *‘very lucky’*, he says. *‘Ask all the questions that you want, and let others ask questions of you. Everyone wants to learn.’*



## Ása Kjartansdóttir

### *‘Erasmus is still an important part of my daily agenda’*

.....  
**Home institution:**  
University of Iceland, Iceland  
.....

**Host institution:**  
Umeå University, Sweden  
.....

**Field of study:**  
Education studies  
.....

**Duration:**  
5 months (1997)  
.....

Ása Kjartansdóttir made a spontaneous decision to study abroad when her university professors persuaded her and a fellow student to study at Umeå University in Sweden, which had a good reputation in the field of educational sciences.

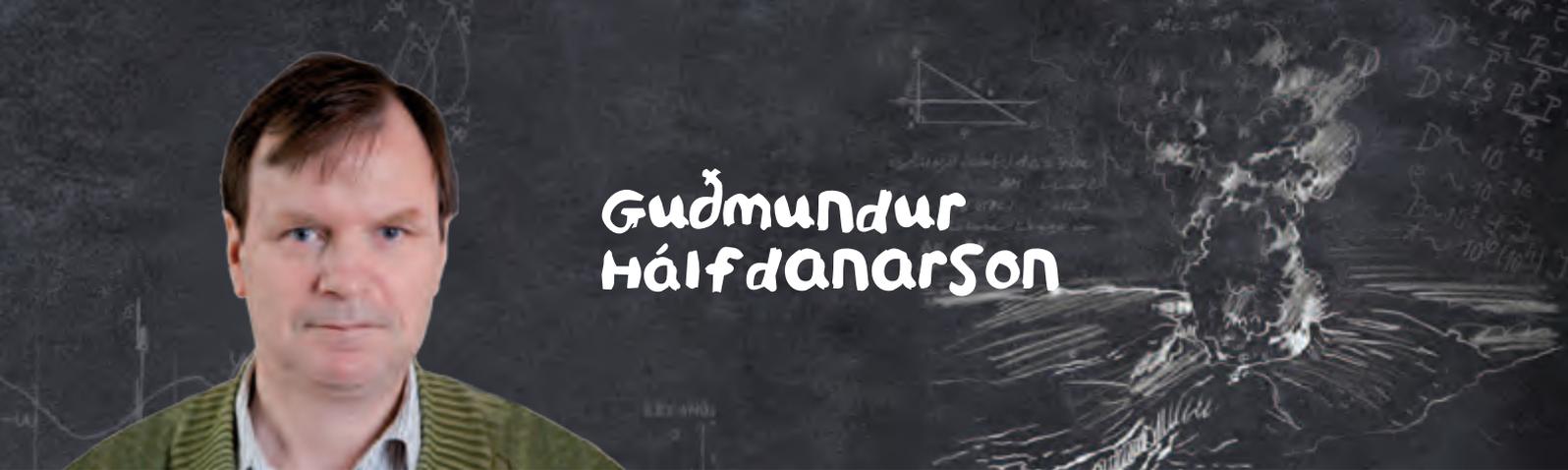
She and around 150 other international students were warmly welcomed at Umeå University. She was intrigued by the differences between study programmes in Iceland and Sweden, with courses being taught consecutively in a module system at Umeå rather than concurrently. *‘We just did one course at a time, which was convenient’*. Most of the courses were taught in Swedish and there was more emphasis on teamwork and problem solving than in Iceland.

Like many former Erasmus students, she looks back fondly on the *‘never a dull moment’* social life. Following her time in Sweden she has maintained contact with her fellow Erasmus students, keeping abreast of their professional and social developments.

The five-month experience shaped her attitude to life, she says. *‘I became more independent, open and internationally oriented’*.

In her current responsibilities as the Education, Science and Culture Counsellor at the Icelandic Mission to the European Union in Brussels, she frequently follows developments in the Erasmus programme. She previously worked for the European Commission as a national expert in the area of higher education and notably on the Erasmus programme itself.

*‘I think the Erasmus experience has influenced my life quite a bit and the European programmes, including Erasmus, are still an important part of my daily agenda’*.



# Guðmundur Hálfðanarson

## *‘Erasmus gives small universities the opportunity to become international’*

.....  
Home institution:  
University of Iceland, Iceland

.....  
Field of study/job title:  
History Professor

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1992

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson was instrumental in promoting student exchanges in the field of history when Iceland became part of the Erasmus network in 1992. *‘It helped develop the idea for students that they can and should take part of their university degree in another country.’*

The benefits of teaching or study exchanges may vary between disciplines, but for historians they are invaluable, he says. *‘It exposes you to new ideas such as how different communities deal with different things.’*

One major asset for universities, he says, is that Erasmus offers a way *‘to develop structured cooperation around specific programmes’*. In his discipline, this led to the creation CLIOHnet, the award-winning Erasmus history network which had 60 universities as members. As one of the main coordinators, along with Professor Isaacs, the Erasmus staff ambassador from Italy, he has been involved in several Erasmus Intensive Programmes for students and teachers from different universities. These offer *‘an extremely good way of getting people together in an intensive way to expose different historical experiences’*, he says.

One thing that has been fundamental, he believes, is the development of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which has been *‘extremely beneficial for the quality of education in Europe.’* He continues: *‘Erasmus is not elitist. Top universities are already international but for smaller universities this is not as clear; Erasmus gives them the opportunity to become really international.’*



# Gerold Büchel

## 'I wish I had stayed longer'

Home institution:  
University of Liechtenstein,  
Liechtenstein

Host institution:  
Catholic University of Lyon, France

Field of study:  
Business Information Systems

Duration:  
6 months (2001)

After finishing a four year apprenticeship, Gerold Büchel completed his degree at night school and combined work and study. A six month Erasmus exchange, followed by eight months on a Leonardo da Vinci industrial placement gave him the chance to focus exclusively on study. *'I had planned for all my lectures to be in English but I finally ended up taking business classes in French which forced me to learn this language. This was a good thing as, after graduation, I worked with the Research and Development centre located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.'* Despite his reluctance to learn languages *'I found myself using English with the American business centre, German with the head office and French with the team in Switzerland.'*

The experience enabled him to feel more at home when travelling abroad and helped him to develop the skills needed to work in cross-cultural teams. *'While the content of the courses on my exchange programme were similar, the ways of working were different. We often worked in mixed teams using different languages and approaches to solving problems. Today I am responsible for an international team in one of the largest departments of a high-tech European company.'*

While the exchange itself did not lead to a specific job, it encouraged him to look for something different and made him more *'open minded'* to employment. He wishes he had stayed longer in France as the friendships and contacts he made 10 years ago have helped him in his current high-profile role as a Liechtenstein Parliamentarian, a position he considers a great honour.



## HANSJÖRG HILTI

### 'It's a quality control system'

Home institution:  
University of Liechtenstein,  
Liechtenstein

Field of study:  
Architecture

Year became active in Erasmus:  
2005

*'I had already spent about ten years of my life outside my country and I wanted to go on building international relationships. We live in a globalised world and we have to train our students and staff to act internationally.'* Based in the architecture department of the University of Liechtenstein, Johann Georg Hilti treated his Erasmus mobility as 'a quality control system'. So it consisted of brief visits to architectural schools and universities in a number of countries. In each, he reviewed the work of about 20-40 students at different levels. *'Very often, these are thesis projects. A review consists of teaching, advising, comparing and holding very fruitful discussions with the students and staff. In architecture, we constantly need to know what other people are doing and we want them to know what we're doing. That means going out to look at the quality of other institutions and comparing it with my own.'*

While he has noticed differences of teaching method, these are mainly governed by the size of institutions. *'Most of these universities are much bigger than we are.'* Small though it may be, the University of Liechtenstein is very cosmopolitan. Its 700 regular students hail from about 40 countries.

He would *'absolutely recommend'* Erasmus mobility to staff members of any higher education institution. *'I think it's essential. We're all sending students abroad these days, so our staff need international training too.'* Asked to sum up his Erasmus experience in three words, he replied *'I enjoyed it'*.



# Frederik Strand Sardinoux

*'You can start from the beginning again'*

Home institution:  
INSA Toulouse, France

Host institution:  
Norwegian University of Science  
and Technology, Norway

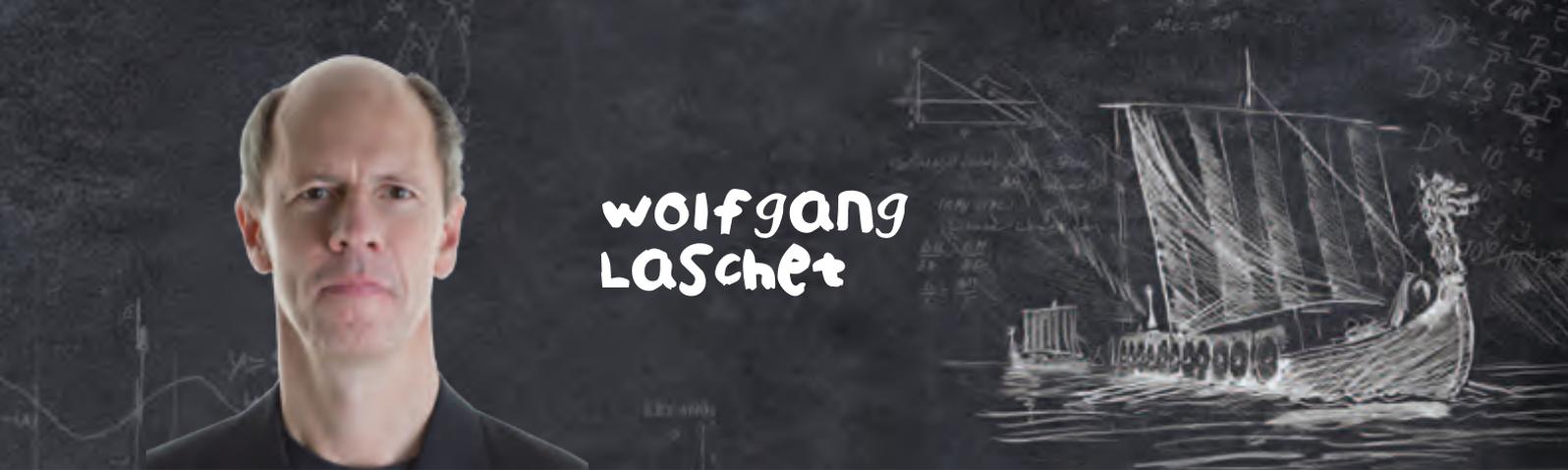
Field of study:  
Acoustics and telecommunications

Duration:  
6 months (2008)

Frederik Strand Sardinoux grew up in France, the son of a Norwegian mother and French father. He studied at INSA, an engineering school in Toulouse, until, inspired by foreign students he met, he decided to use the opportunity of Erasmus and return to the country of his birth during his third year of study. *'I wanted to improve my Norwegian and English, and see if Norway was a good place to live.'* The exchange would prove to be a one-way trip. Life in Norway suited him so well that he transferred to complete his studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

He integrated easily in the local culture, but so enjoyed the international student scene that at the end of his six months he began volunteering with the local chapter of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), welcoming students to the city and school, and going on trips to show them the country. He joined the board, became president and, later, national representative of ESN Norway. He also coordinated two Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) summer schools. *'I didn't think about the benefits at the time. But as I got involved I realised I learnt so much from it, from leadership to international collaboration.'* Now, with six months left to study, he is looking for a career with an international dimension.

No matter where you go to do Erasmus, he says: *'From everyone I've talked to, 90 % say it was the best time of their life.'* For him, the most valuable thing was *'the freedom; getting away from everyone who knows you so you can start from the beginning again'*.



## WOLFGANG LASCHET

*'Many dreams have been crushed by unnecessary bureaucracy'*

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Home institution:  
Norwegian University of Science  
and Technology (NTNU), Norway

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Field of study/job title:  
EU programme coordination

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1992

Born in Germany, Wolfgang Laschet, EU programme coordinator at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), lived in Sweden and Belgium before moving to Norway, and takes pleasure in helping others gain from an international experience. *'For students, it's a chance to get a specialisation you wouldn't get at home; for staff, it's an opportunity to see a different teaching style and create links that could lead to other projects.'*

One of his priorities has been to reduce paperwork for exchange students, and he has introduced simple online procedures to this end. *'I believe that NTNU's approach to this problem has contributed a bit to our position of being Norway's most popular destination for incoming students.'* And he regrets what he sees as a trend in some institutions to become less flexible about Erasmus partnerships, obstructing student mobility. *'Many dreams have been crushed by unnecessary bureaucracy,'* he warns.

He was instrumental in setting up the ATHENS Network of technical universities, whose Intensive Programme in engineering launched 15 years ago is now entirely self-supporting. Its 15 institutions now hold two international weeks a year, offering 70 to 90 courses in engineering and architecture to some 1800 students. He also started summer courses in Norwegian, which have expanded to cater for 180 students, with a focus on nature and teambuilding. *'Swimming in a cold lake is very good for teambuilding!'* he laughs. Asked for three words that sum up the Erasmus experience, he replies: *'Privilege. Self-reflection. Joy.'*



## MARCO AMHERD

### 'More than just a change of university'

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**Home institution:**  
Zurich University of the Arts,  
Switzerland

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**Host institution:**  
Centre d'Etudes supérieures  
Musique et Danse, Toulouse, France

.....  
**Field of study:**  
Music

.....  
**Duration:**  
10 months (2011)

Identifying a university has taken Marco Amherd a lot of time. *'For me it is less important to find the right university, it is the tutor that matters. As a musician, most of my training involves one-to-one tuition, rather than attending lectures.'* To ensure he made the right choice he looked for opportunities across Europe, visited a number of universities and asked friends for advice. His decision to select Toulouse for the first year of his master's degree was based on both his tutor's international reputation and the repertoire of organ music available in France.

Alongside the specialist tuition, he attends lectures with other international students. For those learning to play the organ *'establishing a network of specialists is important. It will play a central role in my future career.'* Prior to starting the Erasmus exchange, he had combined studies in economics and music. The forthcoming year will be different and provide *'the first opportunity to concentrate on my music. Living away from home for such a long time will also help me to be independent and strong minded – something that also matters in the music profession.'*

He began his Erasmus exchange in September 2011. It is already clear that there are differences between universities and living in France rather than Switzerland. *'It will take some time to feel at home. It is a great opportunity, but I am sure I will notice the cultural differences even though there is no language barrier. However if you want it all to be like home, then you should stay at home.'*



## Antoinette Charon Wauters

### *'Keeping the Erasmus dream alive'*

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Home institution:  
University of Lausanne, Switzerland

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Field of study/job title:  
Director of International Relations

.....  
Year became active in Erasmus:  
1991

With 20 years experience of international projects, Antoinette Charon Wauters has seen a lot of changes in Switzerland's Erasmus involvement. Keeping the dream of student exchanges alive during this time has required patience and a commitment to a vision of mobility and internationalism. She has worked *'to put Switzerland's higher education system on the map'*. As well as *'keeping in touch with European developments'* her involvement in European associations has helped to *'spread the good news'* to other universities in Switzerland.

An early initiative to pilot the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (ECTS) in the Faculty of Medicine saw the number of students travelling abroad rise from 5 to 90 in 10 years. She was first nominated as the *'ECTS coordinator for Switzerland'* in 1992. Her ECTS work continued through the 1990s, during her time as the Vice President and President of the European Association for International Education and led to an invitation from the World Bank to work with the University of Montenegro on European mobility schemes.

The impact on the University has been *'to embed internationalisation. The next phase is to make best use of the many staff and students who come to Lausanne.'* With 25 % of students and over 30 % of teaching and research staff from other countries, there are many opportunities for students to learn in a truly international environment.