

Addressing Careers Service Internationalization challenges through transnational consortia

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Abstract

Providing high quality education and student experience is critical to attracting and retaining students in an increasingly competitive environment. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are under growing pressure to 'guarantee' the employability and successful access to labor markets of their graduates. On the other side, with a growing number of international student mobility last decades, a new student profile has emerged. A student with a broader professional perspectives, in geographical terms.

Among the challenges for HEIs is to deliver a comprehensive education, to develop their graduates' employability relevant skills and support them with structures that ease their integration either in the local, national or in the international labor markets. The mere scope of this challenge suggests that the responsibility for success does not lie with one particular stakeholder of the university. Inter- and intra-institutional cooperation can be considered the key to forming integrative impactful strategies and operations in this context – academia, administration, senior management, students and external partners need to collaborate in order to create effective practice.

This paper aims to outline both the current context and the status of European careers service internationalization and the main challenges faced in this process. An exploratory single case analysis is used to identify how the formation of international careers service consortia could contribute to overcome some of the challenges especially in terms of resource efficiency and international network development and reach.

1. Introduction

Providing optimal support on employability for students and graduates has become an integral part of the role of HEIs. In U.S., international students tend to seek job opportunities a reason why universities such as University of Southern California or New York University “provided resources and professional development workshops on job search processes and strategies” (Nara, Martirosyan, Bustamante & Saxon, 2019) as a way to fit demand and supply. In the case of Europe, the Bologna Process led to an increase in the implementation of career services at European HEIs in order to strengthen the employability of their institution's graduates (Ronald and Sultana, 2009).

In fact, in the 2014-2016 period, internships abroad have showed an upward trend (European Commission, 2018a). Universities have developed strategies to internationalize their structures and to favor international mobility. In particular, the number of students involved in international internships has grown with 14%, from 73,338 students (and recent graduates) in the first year of the Erasmus + program implementation to 84,190 students in 2016 (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2018a).

The provision of student services has become a key topic among academics and different stakeholders due to the growing numbers of mobile students (Perez-Encinas, 2017). A good provision of support services can attract and retain international students and meet their expectation as to provide with better structures and opportunities locally and internationally can enhance their general experience (ACE, 2016). To this respect, this paper explores how work and internship mobility, as well as career services operate, in an international and national level. Two central questions are addressed with an exploratory method. Firstly, how are European career services equipped to adapt to the more and more international dimension of their work –e.g. integrating international students in labor markets

or supporting their students to find internships abroad. And secondly, how could international career service consortia support HEIs global ambitions.

2. International internships and benefits for studying abroad

The increasing number of internationally mobile students reflected the expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide (OECD, 2013). Consequently, it is claimed that a more comprehensive approach to internationalization of higher education (Hudzik, 2014) will increase the awareness that internationalization has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on physical mobility, but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes (European Parliament, 2015). Therefore, in 2014 the ERASMUS + program was launched as the successor to the ERASMUS program, integrating other mobility schemes that were previously separate and promoting the mobility of more students under more typologies. The EU's program with a budget of €14.7 billion provides opportunities for more than 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. In particular, it aims to tackle high levels of (young) unemployment and reduce poverty by promoting education system modernization and encourages cooperation and partnership of higher education providers, aside from serving as a vehicle for social inclusion, intercultural comprehension, and networking (European Commission, 2018a). In addition to this strategy, the European Commission has launched a new virtual mobility action called Erasmus +Virtual Exchange taking advantage of nowadays-digital learning tools in order to complement the physical mobility programme in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. Social competences and a sense of initiative could be two skills, among others, that virtual mobility could enhance (Vinagre, 2016).

Students who participate in international mobility face new challenges and unfamiliar situations that might enable them to develop autonomy and self-confidence. According to the Erasmus Impact Study (2014) students participating in internships abroad were able to interact and work with people from other backgrounds and cultures, they adapted and act to new situations being at the end of the internship more intercultural competent and gained foreign languages skills and a broader knowledge of the host country's culture, society and economy.

Erasmus+ participants are considered employable by promoting the acquisition of knowledge and competences that may not be taught at home and are demanded by employers to satisfy today's business needs (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2018b). In this sense, working abroad is a valuable opportunity for students to improve their CVs (European Commission, 2014) for instance by stressing newly developed skills, such as acquiring a better knowledge and practice of a foreign language or understandings and personal attributes (Yorke 2006, p. 8). In fact, research done by van Mol (2017) indicated that international education is particularly valued when employers need graduates with good foreign language and decision-making skills.

In the European context, the international dimension of higher education started to be managed less by incidental and individual initiatives and began to be structured into organized activities, projects and programs based on political rationale and driven more by national governments than by higher education itself (De Wit & Merckx, 2012). By then, internationalization of higher education also influenced support service organization. The Erasmus for traineeship has gradually grown in importance since Erasmus+ was launched. In the three years since implementation, around 235,000 students have gone abroad on traineeship, 20,500 of them being recent graduates (Erasmus+ annual report 2018b).

In particular, the role that career services play in supporting students in their school-to-work transition and in the acquisition or improvement of crucial skills and competences to gain an initial employment (e.g. problem solving skills, multi-cultural environments, networking and socializing, initiative and entrepreneurship), according to Altmann and Ebersberger (2012). The traditional way of providing

career services is changing in response to current trends and different pressures. Do Céu and de Nazaré (2014) argue that career services may provide students with seminars, workshops, career counseling and information to support the school-to-work transition. Moreover, career services can also support students to be aware about the existence of mobility programs to study or internships abroad that allows them to enhance employability in the global context. Knight and Yorke (2003) suggested that employability improvement might be achieved through work experience, entrepreneurship modules, portfolio of achievement, and (good quality of) career advisers. Yet, the delivery of support services varies significantly across European HEIs, with students getting information and support from different sources instead of a central and unified structure. For instance, international students may have to ask for information, advice or support from offices which originally were created to support only exchange students or on their enrollment department (Kelo & Roger, 2010). Additionally, especially in European institutions, there seems to be a lack of research literature around the internationalization of career services, which is not written from an Anglo-American perspective and that provides more in-depth knowledge about the heterogenic developments (cf. for American universities e.g. Kenyon & Rowan-Kenyon, 2014). The importance of a broader view was highlighted a decade ago by Kelo and Roger's (2010) in an innovative work in six European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and UK). In line with this study, Mikulás and Jitka (2019) has explored the acculturation experiences from a database of questionnaires responses of international students studying abroad (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal). One of the results is that the cultural impact of mobility is positive and most favorable for Germany.

When it comes to international students' needs, still many European HEIs find it difficult to satisfy them, as in many cases support services are differentiating between domestic and international students, and those domestic services are not in all cases adapted to tackle the needs of international students or those willing to go abroad. Taveira (2017) argued for example, that career services have to face a more holistic approach and introduce Psychological and Guidance Services to students¹.

3. Method

This paper is exploratory in nature and does not aim to generalize or to evaluate with statistical certainty. As a first step, we conducted desk research and combined and interpreted already known statistics and surveys about careers services mainly in Europe under a new research interest. Based on the presentation of the current state of career services, the article presents a case study approach, in order to explore the benefits of a careers service consortium model. We applied an exploratory holistic single case analysis (Yin 2017, p. 26-32; see also Ridder, 2016). The case was chosen because the authors are involved with the career consortium implementation,² which allowed us in-depth insights regarding the unit of analysis. While the authors' close involvement in the study may pose bias, this is limited since the purpose of the study is to develop propositions for further research and not to judge or assess overall impact or quality of the work conducted. The data was gathered mainly during evaluation sessions, where project participants discussed the stage and progress made during the project and through evaluation surveys for the different activities of the consortium. Additionally, we had access to funding proposals, internal

² On advantage and disadvantages on consortiums see Daniel Lang, «The consortium in higher education», *Journal of Educational Administration* 13 (1975): 23-36, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb009730>. The term consortium started to be used in 19th century linked to business world. After 1945, it became popular in education connected with the cooperation between universities and colleges.

documentation and project outputs. We worked through the material “ground up” (Yin, 2017, p. 168-169) and analyzed it using a hermeneutical approach close to Yin’s “logic models” (Yin, 2017, p. 194-195). Finally, we present preliminary findings regarding collaboration, career services, summer schools and institutions involvement and conclude with a short assessment of how career service consortia can complement current student support practice in higher education.

Since the 1980’s case studies are a popular research method from a wide range of disciplines from social sciences to health- with different perspectives and approaches in order to understand complex realities. In Education, the pioneers were Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) and Simons (Simons 2009). According to Stake (1995, p. xi) “a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case”, in consequence even a single explanatory case study would be sufficient to extrapolate results (Yin, 2009) ³. In this case, we cannot claim any representative results but by pointing out a number case specific findings, we hope to inspire follow-up research that helps addressing the need for more data and in-depth analysis of the internationalization of career services and/or changes in their adaptation to a more globalized career trajectory of nowadays graduates.

4. How fit are Careers Services to facilitate global student work mobility in Europe?

As it is shown previously, there are still many white spots when assessing and comparing the role of careers services internationally, especially when it comes to something as specific as the internationalization of careers services. Relatively well documented is the structural situation of career services in Germany and their internationalization efforts. In the following section we will examine the case of Germany in detail and contextualize it with findings from other countries (Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, Romania, Spain, Italy, France, UK, USA). Whilst this proceeding does not offer sufficient knowledge to give a quantitative global answer to the question, it helps to outline where further research is needed, what it should focus on and support the initial argument, that more intra- and inter-institutional cooperation is needed.

In 2014, the German rector’s conference (HRK) conducted a survey amongst German career services and international offices, asking about their internationalization efforts (Böhm & Brandl, 2014). The same stakeholders, meaning the German rectors’ conference and the Career Service Network Deutschland e. V., published in 2015 a general report on the structural situation of career services in Germany (CSND, 2015). Additional data to compare the German case internationally was derived from the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration’s (ECGFIM) study “Train and Retain. Career Support for International Students in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden” (2015) and data published by the Qareer-project (2017), which conducted a cross-national study with special focus on Italy, Romania, Spain and Poland. The main findings provide a good indication for the current state of affairs and highlight the urgent need for more reliable academic research.

The HRK-survey (Böhm & Brandl, 2014) results show that German HEIs have started to internationalize their career services. More than 78 % of the answering institutions state that they already provide activities aiming to internationalize their services (e.g. trainings, projects, specific classes), which shows that these institutions recognize to a certain extent that facilitating support for the international dimension of careers is part of their responsibilities.

When asked about their main target group, about 61 % of the institutions identified international students trying to integrate into the German labor market, whilst 39 % stated that the focus of their internationalization activities aims at local graduates.

The responsibility for the integration of international students into the German labor market is largely assigned to career services (57 %), which in Germany are usually central departments (78,9%). This is

also reflected in the career service' budgets, where activities aimed at international students receive the largest budget share (compared to activities specifically for i.e. men, women, doctoral students, disabled students, drop outs) (cf. CSND, 2015).

The main challenge is a student body that might not be accustomed to the specifics of the German labor market, face workplace discrimination and language barriers. Consequently, most career services aim to minimize the effects of these "disadvantages", typically via workshops in the job application process, individual coaching for international students, language and intercultural trainings (Böhm & Brandl, 2014). This is true for most countries according to the "Train and retain"-report (ECGFIM, 2015, p. 24-25). German HEIs, similar to Swedish universities, mainly focus their services on students who are about to graduate, whilst Canadian and Dutch HEIs tend to start early after enrolment and offer support throughout the study circle (ECGFIM, 2015, p. 22-23). Even though German institutions score high in targeting their services to international graduates compared to Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, it is only in the Netherlands that the strategic use of international alumni in job market integration is a popular activity of career service work (ECGFIM 2015).

Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to directly assess the extent of these measures and their impact, which is a recognized issue, when addressing the impact of career service work (Eimer, 2014). While it is assumed that Career Services provide a useful service, the extent to which students benefit from career services is unclear. For example, in Germany, one report states that only 31 % of international students were satisfied with the support received at German universities when looking for an internship (Esser & Gillissen 2014, p. 105; also ECGFIM, 2015 refers to the same report). However, Career Services in Germany are often not able to promote their offerings directly to the relevant target group for example via email mailings, due to data protection regulations (ECGFIM, 2015, p. 23).

From an organizational perspective – communication restrictions are an issue when trying to reach students. But even more severe is the resource question that makes a continuous need focused, ready-when-demanded service delivery rather unlikely. Thanks to the 'Train to retain'-report (ECGFIM, 2015) and the HRK-survey (CSND, 2015) one has a rough idea of the student-to-staff ratios in career services (Canada: 2,922:1; Germany: 7,283:1; The Netherlands 8,765:1; Sweden: 4,999:1). Though these numbers differ quite a bit from institution to institution, it is fair to say that it is close to impossible to imagine that all students could benefit from individual attention and counseling. Considering that the student-to-staff ratios at international offices (Canada: 2,770:1; Germany: 2,082:1; The Netherlands 2,445:1; Sweden: 1,941:1) are much lower, it seems that organizational priorities (expressed in funding and resource allocation) do not favor career departments. One could argue that one cannot compare two distinctly different university service functions, but the Canadian case shows comparable student-to-staff ratios in both offices, suggesting it is more about strategic priorities than potentially different workloads. The answers to the survey questions clearly refer to a lack of resources when asked about sustainability of internationalized services (Böhm & Brandl, 2014).

As the authors of the "Train and Retain" study wrote: "Despite international students' need for more systematic and coordinated job entry support at the local level, most of them encounter a poorly coordinated patchwork of occasional career fairs, job application training and chance acquaintances with service staff or company representatives who may or may not be able to help them" (ECGFIM, 2015, p. 4).

The countries in the above mentioned study belong to the rather well off countries and while in Germany, for example, the establishment of most career services is only 10 years ago, countries like Romania started even later with the establishment of university career services on a larger scale (Cojocariu & Puiu, 2014). The uneven development of careers services in Europe is also a reason why there are no commonly shared international standards of careers service work (Qareer, 2017), which

leads also to the question of how professionals in career services are trained. Whilst the UK within the European context is leading in offering careers qualifications as fully recognized study programs on a university level, such high degree of professionalization is the exception not the rule in Europe (cf. Qareer, 2017).

After having looked at the inbound perspective, meaning integrating international students, let's have a look at the outbound perspective. How are career services helping their students to find work abroad?

There is a lot of financial support in the EU for students to support mobility. Students can apply for ERASMUS+ internship funds and/or government funding (e.g. BAFÖG) in order to get some financial help when they go abroad (in 2013/2014 the National Agency managing ERASMUS funds in Germany alone allocated about 10.000.000 € for 6.500 students to do internships abroad and additional funding schemes are available).

According to the HRK's survey (Böhm & Brandl, 2014) around 39 % of career services identified home students as the main target of their internationalization activities. Organizing workshops that aim to enable students to find work abroad and/or intercultural training aiming to prepare graduates for a global work environment are the most popular services offered (ibid.). Survey responses suggests, however, that institutions quite often do not possess the necessary knowledge internally but have to rely on external coaches providing these workshops, which means, they might be not able to satisfy information needs when in actual demand but only at specific times (ibid.). About 29 % provide job boards, where also international job advertisements are published. It is unclear how many students are able to benefit from such workshops and how well-connected career services are internationally. European universities rarely provide structured schemes that aim to place students with companies abroad, in contrast to many North-American universities (cf. Kenyon & Rowan-Kenyon, 2014).

To summarize: All outlined aspects considered the patch-work impression prevails. Though one finds admirable efforts at institutions and surely there was never a time when more has been done to support international work mobility, there still is a great deal of work to be done to improve services to support global work mobility. Hudzik's (2014) call for comprehensive internationalization needs to be followed also in career service work – currently we find more a multitude of activities which are somewhat related to in- or outbound mobility and labor market integration but only a limited discussion what internationalization should mean in the context of career service work and how institutions can address the problem of lacking resources, networks and knowledge to adapt to the demand of preparing a truly global workforce.

4.1 Case study: Benefitting from inner- and intra-institutional cooperation

As shown, one of the main challenges for career centers in HEIs to support their students are scarce resources and the lack of prioritization amongst others. To build knowledge of foreign labor markets, to produce target group specific activities and resources for international students to integrate into the local economy and to build worldwide company collaborations is a very costly endeavor. Seldom are the necessary institutional resources in place to put a systematic strategy and aligned effective operations into practice.

One answer to limit the expense for individual institutions could be the participation in career service consortia. Considering the amount of HEIs worldwide there is enormous potential to connect and collaborate in order to improve student career mobility, meaning student migration flows with the aim to work (internship or entry level) abroad. Rooted in the context provided so far, we present in this part learnings of an ERASMUS+ strategic partnership project, that aimed to address many of the outlined challenges and to improve the service-offer in the involved institutions – a transnational career service consortium operating under the name "European Centre for Career Development and Entrepreneurship" (ECCE).

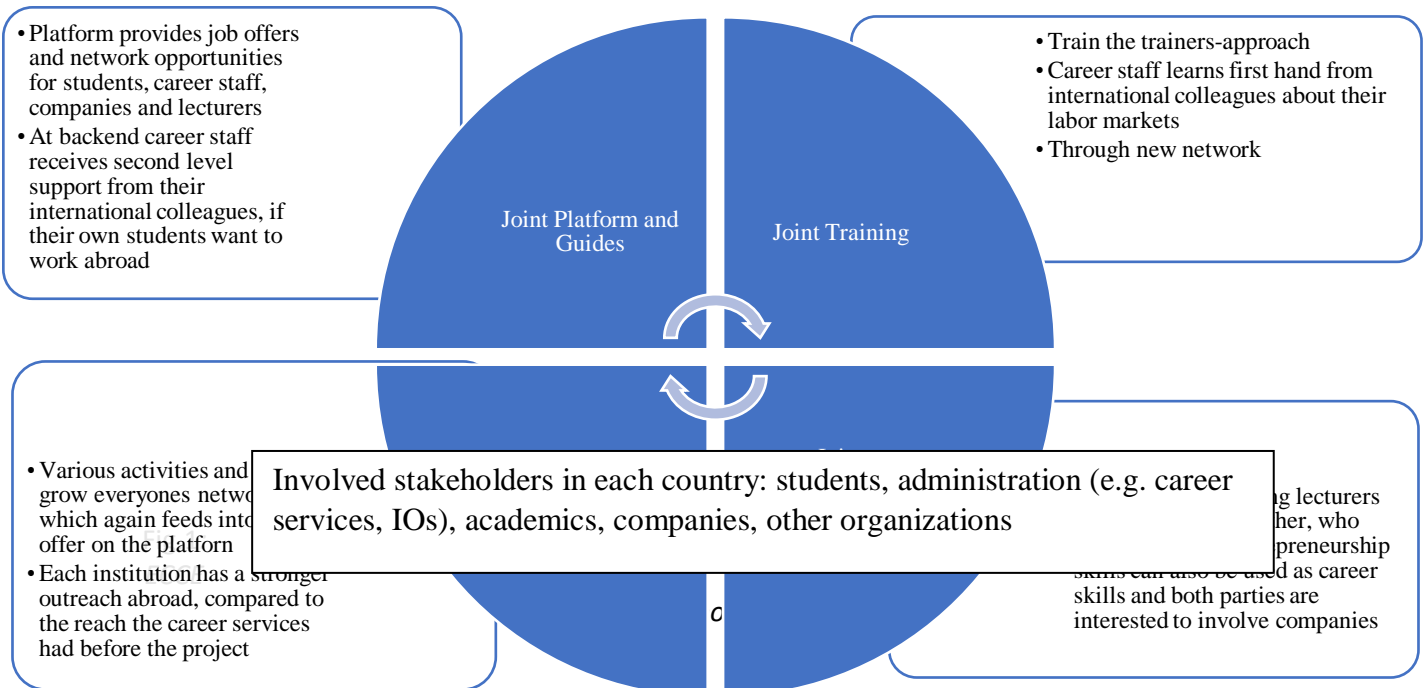
The ECCE-consortium was established between Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Regent's University London, Paris School of Business and EBC Hochschule. The preparation phase started in 2014 and in 2015 the initiative received funding through the ERASMUS+ Key Action 2-strategic partnerships.

The project partners aimed to create a small consortium which should, in its core, work like a second-level-support for career officers and support those officers directly on an operational level, meaning helping them to advise and place their students abroad. This would involve colleagues from different countries collectively developing and sharing materials, training each other on labor market standards in their respective country, regularly liaising with each other, and responding to specific questions from their student-facing colleagues. This approach aimed to improve the availability of international know-how at all times and not only when external coaches were present, the institutional reach (meaning rather share company networks than trying to develop your own) and push inner- and intra institutional cooperation through the involvement of a diverse set of stakeholders. Besides the classical career service responsibilities, the partners decided to add 'Entrepreneurship'-education to their consortium-portfolio, in order to enhance cooperation within their own institutions and between institutions. The latter decision allowed through project-based summer schools on *Entrepreneurship in Europe* to train students. The basic assumption was that the core of entrepreneurship education is to foster problem-solving skills and initiative – both traits beneficial also for students aiming for a corporate career, hence here was a clear link to career service work (ECCE, 2015). The summer school curriculum was developed commonly involving academics and project managers from all institutions – also the summer school delivery is involving all institutions. Doing so allowed career service officers to expand their workshop offer, reach out and collaborate with colleagues from international offices and, most importantly, involved academics and entrepreneurs, which again brought their entrepreneurship knowledge and networks to the table and gained international teaching experience and the possibility to cooperate with like-minded academics from the partner institutions (ECCE, 2017a).

The heart of this network is a platform where the partners share resources like job-boards, application guides etc. and offer the possibility to match academics, students and other stakeholders who have an interest in entrepreneurship in terms of research or actual start-up cooperation. This has been accompanied by staff training weeks for career service members, summer schools to foster entrepreneurial skills amongst students in order to develop internationally-aware staff and students. The aim remains to keep the network small and foster deep relations between the involved career officers, so that they truly benefit from their enlarged network in their day-to-day operations. At the same time, ECCE promotes the model and its experiences, since it wants other institutions to copy the model.

4.2 The ECCE model

Two central questions were addressed, how are European career services equipped to adapt to the more and more international dimension of their work (e.g. integrating international students in local labor markets or supporting their students to find work abroad) and how could international career service consortia support HEIs global ambitions. Figure 1 replies to these questions by proposing the ECCE model built by the authors, where four main elements should be taken into account: a joint platform and guides, a joint training, joint networks and joint entrepreneurship summer schools. In this model, it is important to involve and connect with stakeholders in each country: students, administration (e.g. career services, IOs), academics, companies, other organizations.



The long-term impact of the initiative remains to be seen but preliminary feedback indicates that pursuing such a model (as it is represented in Table 1) could be worthwhile in relation to career services, summer schools, collaborations and the institutions. As note by Larrance (2002, p. 9) “the commitment to the long term must be present in order to succeed, and success in leveraging resources will follow if these areas are recognized and thoroughly explored”.

Career service	Officers participating in the training expressed their high satisfaction with the training, and felt better prepared to advise their students and appreciated the exchange with their international colleagues. They also indicated that the work led to increased overall work satisfaction, as they have better target specific materials at hand to advice both inbound and outbound students. International job offers overall have increased, though language remains a major obstacle to mobility.
Summer Schools	Participants in the summer schools expressed very high satisfaction with learning outcomes and execution of training; appreciated the enlargement of their international networks and oftentimes stayed in contact with their peers leading to valuable ongoing collaboration; several participants went on to put their learnings into practice by funding their own businesses and led to spin-off projects.
Collaboration	The collaboration between the universities led to increased international academic cooperation and to a larger network of entrepreneurs, academics, administrators and students supporting each other with advice and contacts. From initially 5 project managers there have been now more than 50 staff (academics and administration) contributing to the success of the project from across institutions and institutional levels and external stakeholders.

Institutions	Currently each institution has nominated a liaison career officer, which helps to transform the initiative from project phase into institutionalization. Other institutions outside the network can benefit from the ECCE-experiences in utilizing several outputs which have been produced by the project team, such as a European career advisor curriculum, which synthesizes the learnings of the staff weeks, the ECCE-concept paper, which documents the project and key learnings, parts of the platform in order to enlarge the entrepreneurship community or a career guide for the involved partner countries, specifically written with international students in mind. (ECCE, 2017a).
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Tab.1: *Results from ECCE model*

In the above mentioned concept paper the ECCE-team stresses the following as critical for those considering implementing a similar structure:

"The main challenge for a consortium is not so much the creation of technical resources and tools to share but to foster a team spirit across universities and countries and to keep this spirit alive over time and personnel turnover. The advantage of small consortia compared to larger associations is that the colleagues know each other faster and better" (ECCE, 2017b).

5. Conclusions

In a global perspective, institutional engagement has allowed to develop career services to allow student an optimal entrance into the job market. Those universities that have specialized support services in that direction are more prone to attract students. In this paper, we have dealt with the new challenges that European career services have to face with internationalization and how consortiums could support such a demanding task. Given the challenges of very heterogenic economies and careers service landscapes internationally, smooth global work mobility facilitated by HEI will remain a long-term goal.

The power of consortiums is based on the fact that they allow both large and small, private or public institutions, and like-minded people to come together to try to solve the problems facing higher education, and create services that satisfy the needs of all users. The ECCE results indicate that a lot of small actively cooperating networks could have a larger impact and offer truly helpful student-centered support than large associations would have, though they would not necessarily need to compete, but could complement each other. Personal relations will be key if we want career officers to not only broaden their perspectives, but also obtain the tools necessary to assist students on a larger scale.

These transnational models have a lot of potential to add a new dimension to already existing EU university networks. The challenge will remain to find sustainable funding models and to scale the operations for a larger input. Accommodate needs and ambitions goes through practical and coordinate programs inside HEIs. In line with this idea, some steps have been taken. A pilot program of the European Commission called European Universities has been create following the conclusion of 2017 Gothenburg Summit. Transnational alliances based on cooperation models among European Universities under the Erasmus + Program were launched. For instance of the 2019 call, 17 university consortia have been created, consisting of an average of seven institutions of higher education throughout Europe which aim is "to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans able to cooperate across languages, borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and skills shortages faced in Europe" (https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en). The European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability, EU-CONEXUS, or CIVIS, a European Civic University, are some examples.

At an individually level or through alliances, the international collaboration should be at the core of HEIs in order to govern resources and provide the infrastructures needed to enable students to face new and future challenges. Our case study highlights how networks of engaged workers in different institutions were able to establish a quick and transparent communication to be able to organize a series of actions involving academics, entrepreneurs, students and career service staff. This professional integration has generated a more collaborative networking, benefiting students with a more clear perception of labor market. However, all those benefits need to be channeled by administrations to last in the long run and not become a case study. More resources and collaboration means more opportunities.

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