# THE EUROPEAN UNION:
# OFFERING A GAP IN THE STRUCTURE

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## Abstract

The European Union (EU) exercises acts of agency that are collective in nature as motivation and actions aim to promote relationships of the 'self' (Member State) with others. Responsibility of the outcomes of such acts is distributed between the EU and the national governments. The agential capacity of the European Union is discussed in the context of the Enterprising Self and the human agency at the individual level.

The paradigm for development that the EU presents is a hybrid between the emphasis on economic growth that mobilises the Enterprising Self, and the embracement of social policies that improve the agential capacity of human beings. The spheres of functioning in which the exercise of personal agency is gaining prominence through the EU actions are presented.

Observations from surveys and experiential workshops deploying Morenian Action Methods, suggest that such agential top down acts may create a gap in the traditional structure, a safe "identity standpoint", through which the individual strategically chooses to challenge traditional dichotomies. A self in constant transition and in interaction with the environment releases the spontaneity and creativity of the individuals to reassemble their understandings in an active, positive manner. Consequently such identity standpoint is viewed as a resource particularly as there is no antagonistic relationship to other levels of identity (no attempt to define the same terrain in conflicting ways.)

The narratives of those who experience such 'self' can offer insight into how such resource is used to chart one's life course. Moreover such success stories may initiate a systemic change particularly as they can counteract incidents of resurfacing identity politics (as triggered for example by the Eurozone crisis).

## Key Words

Agent, Entrepreneurial, EU, Identity, Mobility

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) has evolved from an elitist project aiming to secure lasting peace through trade, to its current form of an aspiring political organisation. A number of major organisational changes accompanied the transformation from a market place where the various groups engaged and dealt with each other while holding onto their own ideas and ways, to a political unit where the different groups act together.

## Enterprising Self

The EU remains largely an economic union with a notion of the Enterprising Self (du Gay 1996) firmly embedded in its strategy. The launch of performance measurement systems, such as the Innovation Union Scoreboard[i], and 'management systems', such as Joint Programming[ii] in health and agriculture, inscribe enterprise culture (Keat and

Abercrombie 2012) within the EU organisation. Branding exercises, such as the Innovation Union, and terms such as knowledge-based economy and the so-called 'four freedoms' of movement of goods, services, people and money, are all consistent with the Enterprise Culture ideals. Inequalities in health, education and employment and the societal challenges (global warming, ageing, public health, pandemics, energy, water and food resources, security) are largely addressed through policies that do not separate economic issues from the greater society (Chuberre and Liolis 2010).

The *EU technology of government* is used here as a collective term to refer to the various funding instruments and programmes and their evaluation together with the rules and guidelines (Laws, Directives, Communications). This technology can be compared to the measurement and management system of an organisation that enables "new ways of acting upon and influencing the decision of individuals" and "creates the responsible and calculating individual" (Bourguignon, Saulpic and Zarlowski 2009). Various parts of such technology act as mediators of the relationship between the individuals and the EU as an organisation as the ways enterprise discourse at one level penetrates and affects behaviour at another level. The ways and the extent to which enterprise is mediated by actions such as portability of pension schemes, student mobility and cross-border harmonisation of medical prescriptions should not be underestimated.

## European Identity

The EU is an organisation with 27 member states and their 271 regions. Social identities can be national, ethnic or regional as illustrated by the cases of Silesia (Poland), Flanders (Belgium) and Wales (UK) (Smith and Wistrich 2009). In the light of such heterogeneity, defining a pan European identity remains a difficult task particularly in the absence of a common historic homeland, public culture and a European myth that does not clash with the national and ethnic ones (Smith 1995). A new concept of identity unlike the existing national identities (Kantner 2006) emphasising diversity creates legitimation issues for the EU (Mather 2006). Many opt for a definition of European identity based on self-identity and pride (Fligstein 2008; Green 2007; McLaren 2006; Niedermayer and Sinnot 1995; Standard Eurobarometer 2006). Another measure of European identity (Sigalas 2009; Standard Eurobarometer 2006) is to what extent people feel attached to Europe as a whole.

EU citizenship, introduced in 1993, has already made significant legislative progress: all citizens of the EU are free to choose where they live and work within the EU, to set up a business, be a candidate and vote at European and local elections in any EU country. However citizenship is not the same as identity and the feelings associated with it.

This paper will attempt to put forward the European identity as "an identity standpoint" from which the individual can challenge 'fixed' social identities (whether national or ethnic) and any associated perceptions of life-worlds. This standpoint is not an alternative "state of being" but it is accessed via the energising of a transient state of self, the Entrepreneurial Self, that is beyond the enterprise culture as related to welfare and business. This Entrepreneurial Self undertakes a strategy of intentional unpredictability as it can be spontaneous and creative in its decisions and actions, and takes affordable risks. It is not clear what exactly sets it into motion but curiosity appears to be one factor. The person can occupy this identity standpoint at any time as complementary to a multiplicity of other identities whether national/ethnic/occupational/familial. Such view of identity may not offer the desired legitimacy that the EU needs but it can be viewed as an evolutionary link in the process towards a collective sense of

belonging.  This paper also explores the role of the European Union and its capacity to contain the transitionary processes initiated by the Entrepreneurial Self and the social identities of its citizens.

## The EU as Agent

The concept of human agency is considered as the capacity to make choices and reflect on the consequences of that choice (Giddens 1984). Collective groups that are the constituents of society, such as the family, community, organizations, regions, nations "*can be considered to possess agential capabilities*: to think, judge, decide, act, reform; to conceptualize self and others as well as self's actions and interactions; and to reflect." (Burns and Engdahl 1998)

The EU is considered to have a capacity to perform agential acts by proxy, making choices (political agendas) that are imposed on the immediate world (member states and individuals) through laws and directives.  Furthermore the EU agential acts can be seen as aiming to promote the EU as a collective 'Self' and its own interests in the global arena, whether as a political actor or in the market place with benefits at the global level being distributed to its member states.  Under the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity, distribution of responsibility of the outcome of such agential acts is shared between the EU and its Member States with national governments deciding whether and how any EU Directives and recommendations fit into their particular sociopolitical and cultural environment.

Intentionality (Bandura 2001) of the EU agential acts is expressed in the various articles of the Treaties, for example Article 2 of the Treaty of Rome that describes one of the tasks of the EU as 'the raising of the standard of living and quality of life'.  Intentionality manifests itself in the areas of education and employment, health and environment.

## Spheres of Functioning

The theme of the 'responsibilisation of the self' as a means for encouraging an enterprise society (Miller and Rose 2008) has been prominent in EU policies for industry, competition, health and education.  Associated programmes recognise enterprise as the engine of European economy while triggering simultaneously a process of 'responsibilising the self' at the individual level, whether promoting innovation in Research and Development or healthy lifestyles and life-long learning.

The transformation of the EU into a knowledge and Innovation Society brings about a change in job roles and skills demands, such as job roles which are a hybrid of business and ICT skills, and employees in charge of decision making and self-development of skills from technical to interpersonal to understanding the business and the operational environment.

A number of organisational activities tap directly into the personal level of those who participate: support actions of the small medium enterprises, the formation of regional networks such as clusters, ERA-Nets, where cross-pollination of ideas occurs amongst individuals with diverse expertise.

### Social and Political Change

One of the major innovations of Lisbon Treaty is the launch of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy[iii] in world history.  The ECIs create the space for widespread collective action for common cause, by enabling one million EU citizens to call directly on the European

Commission to propose legislation of interest to them in an area of EU competence. The first ECI demanding water and sanitation to be declared a human right has reached the 1million mark at the time of writing this article.

An enterprise culture may engage the Enterprising Self at all three levels: sociopolitical, organisational and individual, but economic growth as the sole goal is insufficient for development of a society (Heron 2008). Heron calls for social policies that improve the agential capacity of human beings and in particular policies that aim "to satisfy or facilitate basic human needs on the basis of interdependence, intergenerational equity, environmental sustainability, rights facilitation and adequate access to health, education and living conditions - the very things that facilitate the positive expression of human agency." Enabling people to experience success in professional life is a way of nurturing their agency. Policies that focus on economic growth and promote the Enterprising 'Self' accomplish this but they are not enough. Engaging, however, people in dialogue about areas that will impact their lives, such as the ECIs, offers the opportunity for people to exercise some measure of control over developments in these areas. Being able to express a view about developments is in itself agential (Frost 2006).

# Agency and identity

Identity formation is an important aspect of human agency and personal identity is composed of amalgams of identities which are under constant negotiation, as values attributed to national, social, political, ethnic, occupational and familial aspects of life change as the individual interacts with the environment (Hall 1992; Appadurai 1990).

Historically the integral balance between collective national identity and individual ethnic identity and the creation of a sense of inclusion for multi-ethnic populations has long been considered to be an indicator of effectiveness of state management.

Emphasis on the economy and work is considered fundamental to the concept of citizenship and hence to identity. Schemes that promote systemically the mobility of people, aim often to foster European identity amongst the participants as in the case of the ERASMUS[iv] for university students (Sigalas 2009). The promotion of a European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures has been one of the primary goals of the Council of Europe since its foundation in 1949, and a number of educational and training opportunities with enhanced citizen's mobility and the establishment of networks (Chiara 2005) aim towards this goal.

# Survey and Workshop Findings

## Survey

A survey was sent out to a non-profit European society of medical specialists asking about attitudes and experiences in this membership. The following is a summary of some of their responses.

(i) Engaging in advocacy activities makes them feel "pro-European" despite the frustration for the lack of influence, lack of flexibility and the feeling that "decisions are made by people from outside". Some attach their European feeling to advocacy activities (through meeting "nice and motivated people") and to a regular follow-up of EU news.

(ii) Identification with Europe appears to be triggered by awareness that their occupation faces common challenges across Europe (from discussions at European meetings). This awareness of lack, or incompleteness, within a state or local identity, triggers entrepreneurial activity leading from the local to a European identification.

(iii) It is important to position 'Europe' versus the other ethnic groups, and they refer to 'being European' as a greater dimension [than ethnic or national identity]. The European identity is viewed as an "ethnic identity" compared with the USA, Africa or Far East. Awareness of having "more in common, both in background and outlook, with other European delegates than with delegates from other regions" is triggered in global meetings.

(iv) There is a distinct separation of 'being' or 'feeling European' versus their view of the EU as an organization. Their frequency of "bad experiences" in lobbying is felt to have a negative impact in how European one feels although there is no clear definition as to what constitutes a "bad experience". Belonging, however, to their medical society creates pro-European feelings. This may act as a counterbalance for "bad experiences".

(v) Some see that it is not advocacy engagement that impacts their views of feeling European but it is the other way around, i.e. feeling European impacts their activities and engagement for a common cause. Experiencing that some input in the EU organisation is possible and understanding "how things work", give hope that they are able to bring about a change, however small. Such feelings appear to increase their commitment to work together.

(vi) The ability to feel both national and European identities is attributed by some to the fact that "being European makes networking and communicating, working, sharing problems, interest, uniting force for a common goal possible"; others attributed this to age ("I'm old enough to have felt like that [only in ethnic or national identity] with a gradually increasing feeling of both the national identity and of being European.")

(vii) Individual enterprising is viewed as "a good opportunity to communicate with colleagues of different countries and to know more of the different mentalities".

(viii) There were concerns regarding "dealing with a mastodon bureaucracy", and how restricted personal resources such as own competence and understanding of the processes may impact their chance of success in changing things.

## Workshop

Experiential workshops using Morenian Action Methods integrate the space in the communication of both verbal and non-verbal messages (Moreno 1943; Kellermann 2007; White 2002). Participants re-enacted the pre-and post-Berlin Wall period including the building and the tearing down of the Wall using chairs. The map of Europe was created by the participants, first occupying a space that represented their identity as appearing in the passport and in geographic relation to one another; second by moving into the space representing the country of their choice (simulating hence freedom in mobility and the exercising of human agency). They explored further in small groups the common ground that gives rise to the positive and negative images of each other which persist decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The following is a summary of observations as related to the exploration of the micro-cosmos created in the workshop and in relation to the macrocosmos of the EU and its citizens and the 'loosening' of operating fixed social identities through the Entrepreneurial Self in action.

(i) The building of the 'Wall' was carried out by the group with speed and no hesitation. There was almost a caring and attending aspect as they laid scarves and rearranged chairs to make the structure stable. The breaking down of the 'Wall' was not as enthusiastic as its building up. Some did not participate as they said they did like the containment that the 'Wall' brought.

(ii) What emerged from the group work was that "being seen" is as important as is maintaining a distance between the different nations. The structure of the Bridge emerged as the embodiment of both the need to be united and divided, offering also the freedom to cross it or not.

(iii) When participants moved to a place of their choice, some moved to spaces that "felt more familiar and warm" with no apparent personal link to that place. A few revisited the spaces occupied by their grandparents and which was different to their own at the present time. They were surprised to find that the place did not feel 'cold' as they were expecting it but it was "quiet"; few also remained in the place of their born-identity and remained engaged without the need to move. Some expressed curiosity about a number of countries and they kept on moving throughout the exercise.

(iv) Those who moved to one of the Eurocrisis countries, were warned by the inhabitants of the country, not to come as "there was no money and no prospects". Despite the warnings, the participants moved to the chosen place, saying that "it felt warm and people were nice" and they were confident that they would be happy there. Later on they reaffirmed their contentment in their choice.

(v) The place of Switzerland was perceived as a safe and neutral place that required no action from its occupier.

# Discussion

## Entrepreneurial Self and 'Elite' Communities

Many see that those who benefit from the EU are the few 'with more degrees than a thermometer'. This may be so, however, it only takes one person in a system to change for the systemic change to follow (Burns et al).

An 'elite' community of lobbying organisations with the prefix European has grown around the EU, whose goals do not include the building of European identity. They are largely competing with other similar organisations for the EU 'attention' to their particular issues, in policies and funding support. Their activities however precipitate the creation of a 'collective sense of belonging' to a greater entity (Europe).

Occupational activities serve as a major source of personal identity, self-evaluation, and social connectedness. Professional associations or societies that are formed to support their members and to ensure that standards are upheld, play an important role in assisting the EU in the creation of, if not a European identity, at least a "feeling of being European".

We put forward that it is the belonging to such a professional body that mobilises the Entrepreneurial Self. Belonging to Europe is then seen as a resource that does not compete with, but complements ethnic or other identity. The role of the membership societies are crucial as they foster cooperation, provide common goals and respect on the basis of shared occupational experiences. Moreover the societies provide the space where awareness of the European dimension of their identity is made possible during professional meetings where they also work together in finding solutions to their issues. In addition this space acts as a mediator and a buffer when other experiences are not positive.

## Entrepreneurial Self and Multilingualism

Entrepreneurial acts and transition are facilitated by the capacity in multilingualism as people use at least two languages in their interactions, particularly in the border areas between nations and regions. The ERASMUS scheme supports language classes for their participants and fellowships awarded by European societies often require that applicants learn the language of the country they wish to work in. However, the most widely used language in the interactions between the EU and other boundaries (for example USA, Asia) is English. This places the English language as the common language for the entrepreneurial activities around social identities. Placing the English language as "the entrepreneurial vehicle" may support views of the English supremacy resulting in the idealisation of a particular social identity.

Idealisation of one social identity to the total exclusion of any other, "we are already the best", may have two effects. First it results in the individual that possesses the idealised identity in perceiving no gain in engaging with the Other. The intra-psychological conflict may then block entrepreneurial acts despite the affordable risk in doing so, and as a result the individual may appear not to be interested in the other during contact. Second, anyone coming into contact with those of idealised identity, may experience feelings of self-doubt as they experience the lack of engagement. This may be reinforced when the language used is seen by themselves as a "supreme" language. Such effects may explain the Euroscepticism of the UK, and also the findings of the study on the impact of ERASMUS on the formation of European identity (Sigalas 2009): the UK participants of the scheme report an increased European feeling upon their return to the UK, unlike the participants who returned home from the UK, reporting feeling "less European". If the Entrepreneurial Self experiences a lack of engagement by 'the other', it is possible that it withdraws and the transition from national to European identity is reversed.

## Diffusion of the entrepreneurial experience

Aside the 'elite' community of the lobbying organisations there is 'the ground level community' where collective identities (national and/or ethnic) operate. This level comprises of the ordinary citizens of each Member State who try to make sense of events which are beyond their control in their everyday life, such as climate change and the Eurozone crisis. Identification is relational, situational and flexible and therefore strong collective identities rooted in differences in life-worlds and personal identities are susceptible to exploitation for particular political ends. When this happens within national borders, a fission process with the concurrent expansion and contraction of the focus for identification often renders national identity and citizenship insignificant and irrelevant and gives rise to identity politics and the formation of identity-based political groups. However if the same process happens around an issue "shared" across national borders, it has the potential to give rise to the formation of "European" group, in a similar manner to a professional association.

The European Citizen's Initiative of the EU opens up the space for the ordinary citizen to set the Entrepreneurial Self in motion as they engage across borders for a common cause. Although the organising of such initiatives will probably be left to the elite communities (the ECI on water has been organised by members of Europe's public service trade unions), engaging in the voting process itself will result in each voter becoming entrepreneurial about the issue. The blurring of national boundaries through the use of internet and digital technologies for the voting process, will more than likely enhance the sense of "being European". What remains for this initiative to make a

difference in the European identity formation is effective publicity of its existence, the breadth and nature of the tabled issues and accessibility to ordinary citizens.

A number of other activities as a direct result of lobbying actions have a similar effect. The support of patient organisations by industry in the pursuit of lobbying activities is largely perceived as an exercise to increase trust and improve the industry's image amongst the public, particularly as the EU policy on corporate social responsibility aims to improve and track levels of trust in business (European Commission 2011). Some will argue that financial interests are also involved. Irrespective of the motive behind such support, the by-product of such actions will be to diffuse the entrepreneurial experience from the 'elite' to the 'ground level community' and instill a certain amount of control to the patients and their families regarding the particular condition and related policies.

## Social Mobility and Social Hierarchy

Entrepreneurial acts, although facilitated by, remain restricted to the elite groups. The diffusion of the entrepreneurial experiences is dependent on social flexibility or social mobility, a potential fifth freedom of movement that it is not only about space. The EU has the potential to create a gap in the traditional structures from where individuals can examine their national/ethnic identities and look onto life itself. In order for the EU to tap into such potential, the EU needs to manage and facilitate a degree of social mobility within the elite communities of lobbying and students.

There is an embedded tendency for social hierarchies to seek self preservation through a mechanism of reproduction of the established status and power relationships. This is prevalent across all cultures and types of groups and organisations (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Policies and structures may have to counteract established social hierarchies and create a space to ease the exercising of the Entrepreneurial Self. Successful entrepreneurial acts can then challenge and in extreme cases transform the established hierarchies as illustrated by job creation technology shocks in an established market of actors. (Michelacci and Lopez-Salido 2007).

Action Sociometry exercises (White 2002) used in the workshop suggest that mobility may contribute to the creation of a collective sense of belonging not only through the experience of another culture/nation/language but through a trigger at the emotional and cognitive level of the individual by the action of mobility itself. The current EU mobility schemes may be enough to energise the Entrepreneurial Self but they may be too short to precipitate a sustainable sense of belonging. Other actions such as the organising and protecting domestic cleaning (ETUC 2005) across Europe may increase "the awareness of the emergence of a transnational European social mobility field where migration becomes a potentially gratifying continuity in time and an individual trajectory rather than a traumatic disruption of space and 'uprooting' of ties" as envisaged by Eade (Eade 2007).

## Energising the Entrepreneurial Self and European Identity

The observations from the workshop suggest *an intergenerational dimension* being involved in entrepreneurial activity as well as *imagination of possibility* (or *a hope*). Curiosity whether for the past or for another place appears to also be involved. Such factors can either promote or inhibit entrepreneurial activity. Someone expressing the desire to leave their 'home group' for the exploration of 'another' can be a threat to security in the 'home group' which may then warn the individual against the venturing of such an "expedition". Warnings from the 'new' group can be ignored as in the case of the locals regarding the lack of prospects in their country during the workshop. The

'newcomers' felt that they could always return to their home country. Exploration therefore is made possible through the freedom to move spatially and the safety offered by the existence of a 'home group'.

It has been voiced that 'bad experiences' reduce the feeling of belonging and probably deactivate the Entrepreneurial Self. Structures such as ECI that aim to encourage participatory democracy and via which the individuals can exercise their human agency must not give false hope. They must be transparent, accessible and require little expertise to navigate through.

Enabling people to take responsibility for their education is key to motivation, but if they do not relate to what they learn, the agential act will not reach its full potential. Aligning curriculum and job descriptions to serve a knowledge economy, as envisaged in Lisbon strategy, rather than to the aspirations of the individual, will not energise the human agency to its full potential and hence undermine any input to European identity as the agency of the individual is struggling to find expression.

The EU may provide a space for human agency to operate through public consultations. However participants of such consultations often voice the feeling that the content of the consultations is predetermined and that the motive behind asking for their input is the seeking of approval of a decision already taken rather than a true concern of public opinion on a particular issue. These feelings may be counterproductive as they undermine human agency instead of maximising it.

The development of the EU is perceived by most European citizens as top-down and elite driven that has produced uneven outcomes for individuals. Only a handful of people travel, speak other languages and interact with other Europeans. The push toward market integration and the fast development of the EU as an institution was not followed by the Europeanization of the citizens (Yeo 2010). The so-called 'four freedoms of movement' of goods, services, people and money, the basis of the EU evolution, are spatial and promote the Enterprising Self which may be limited in its capacity to create a "sense of belonging".

Identity is about relatedness. Economic growth may create loyalty to an organisation as with employees towards the employer, it does not necessarily include "sense of belonging". Shared concern, however, like the one experienced by the medical specialists in relation to their profession, creates a "sense of belonging". There is increasing discontent with the dominance of gross domestic product growth as the dominant measure of societal progress as indicated by *GDP and Beyond*, a Commission communication to the Council and indicators for the European Parliament that sets out a roadmap with five key actions to improve the measuring progress that include measuring quality of life (Bache 2013). The first ECI has removed the focus from economic growth and placed it on a human right, something that people can relate to. If the content of the ECI is solely controlled by the citizens themselves, the initiative may have an impact in creating this "sense of belonging" to Europe as it will activate the Entrepreneurial Self which seeks personal fulfillment beyond professional and social success. Perhaps a shift in the political agenda will result in the EU increasing its offer to the citizen to examine their national/ethnic identities from such a gap in the structure.

## Containment of Social Identity and Entrepreneurial Self

Ethnicity is an ambiguous concept when loyalties within the family are divided, and trans-generational solidarity come into play. Social trauma as caused by past suppressive political regimes or other historic events (i.e. events

beyond the control of the individual) may question the safety in engaging in entrepreneurial activity and hence result in a "dormant" (does not act) or a "hidden" (acts but not openly) Entrepreneurial Self. The energising of the Entrepreneurial Self may also result in some loss of the certainty offered by ethnic and national identities. The EU has to offer incentives while exercising its power as a collective space for Member States or citizens if the transition to the Entrepreneurial Self is to be initiated and subsequently maintained. The EU will also need to balance the possibilities to reaffirm one's social identity and the space for this Entrepreneurial Self to operate.

## Conclusion

Introducing the concept of Entrepreneurial Self as a polarity and difference to Social Identity allows for a broadening of discussion of the EU. It allows for the crucial question "how can a super structure needing control for its functioning and operations manage an unavoidable ambiguity, and human nature, when allowing for entrepreneurial experiences that are in their core unsettling and destabilizing?" It illustrates that a meta-discussion, an awareness, a reflective level has to be incorporated in order to progress the EU project. This is partly done in emerging instruments such as ECI. At the individual level, the human experience, particularly of individuals and groups with recent traumatic experiences, such as Eurozone crisis or suppressive regimes in their political history, has to be contained differently. The EU will benefit from self reflectiveness of its own functioning, with its complex structures and power exercised, if it aims to truly integrate its citizens within its fabric.

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i The Innovation Union Scoreboard is a comparative assessment tool of the innovation performance of the EU Member States and includes innovation indicators and trend analyses for the EU27 Member States, as well as for Croatia, Iceland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey. It also includes comparisons based on a more reduced set of indicators between the EU27 and 10 global competitors.

ii The concept of the Joint Programming relies on the pooling of national research resources to address to tackle common European challenges more effectively; http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/what-joint-programming_en.html

iii Individual participation by citizens in political decisions and policies that affect their lives, especially directly rather than through elected representatives.

iv ERASMUS ('European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students') operates since the 1980s and moves annually over 150,000 students across Europe.