

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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**Determinants of Erasmus Students' Destination Choice:
Evidence from Tarragona, Spain**

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that influence international students, specifically Erasmus+ participants, to choose Spain as their host country. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, using a Likert-scale survey to objectively assess the perceived importance of factors such as quality of education, cultural appeal, cost of living, language, and lifestyle. The quantitative data is evaluated through correlation tests to determine the strength of the relationships between these motivators and the students' destination choice. Additionally, the study includes a qualitative analysis of Spanish university websites to examine whether they provide tourism information and promote local attractions. The findings reveal that students' decisions are influenced by a combination of academic, cultural, and environmental factors, with long-stay students being particularly motivated by a destination's political stability and institutional reputation. The research aims to provide valuable insights for destination management strategies and inform how universities can improve their international recruitment efforts and market positioning.

Keywords: Erasmus+, international students, Spain, correlation testing, destination management

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, international study exchanges have seen remarkable growth, reflecting a rising trend among young people seeking global exposure and academic enrichment. An increasing number of students are choosing to spend a semester or more abroad, not only to experience different cultures but also to enhance their skills and boost their career prospects in an increasingly interconnected world.

By 2022, there were 6.9 million international mobile students, up from 2.1 million in 2000, with 40% of them studying in North America and Europe (ICEF Monitor, 2025). In the EU, 9% of university graduates, or around 387,000, participated in credit-mobility schemes lasting at least three months in 2021 (Eurostat, 2023). In the same year, 11% of participants chose Spain as their destination, making it the most popular host country, with 16,771 undergraduates, the most of any destination that year (Alessio & Yilmaz, 2024). Furthermore, in 2023, Spain welcomed nearly 200,000 Erasmus+ participants, including students, teachers, youth workers, and others, the most of any EU member, followed by Italy with around 150,000 (Gonzalez, 2024). This constant increase demonstrates Spain's growing importance not only as an academic hub, but also as a key player in the global education sector. As student mobility becomes more closely linked to cultural exploration and lifestyle attraction, host countries have additional opportunity to use their educational infrastructure for broader national benefits.

Spain's status as a top Erasmus+ destination has had a big impact on education tourism, boosting the country's economy and its international reputation. The rise in academic mobility has blurred the line between regular tourism and educational travel. International students frequently participate in tourism-related activities while studying abroad, contributing to Spain's €3.8 billion international education sector by spending on lodging, food, transportation, and recreation (Universidad de Granada, 2023). In reality, many students select Spain not just for academic reasons, but also for its lifestyle, which includes reasonable housing, a sunny environment, cultural liveliness, and well-connected cities (ErasmusPlay, 2024). These circumstances are consistent with Spain's destination marketing strategy, which emphasizes academic

opportunities alongside its broader tourism appeal. Turespaña integrates education into tourist promotions, and recent visa and regulatory improvements facilitate international students' study and work in the country (ICEF Monitor, 2024). As a result, Spain has emerged as a shining example of how education tourism can be used for both cultural interchange and economic development, boosting the country's influential power while promoting long-term tourism growth.

This research investigates what motivates international students, particularly Erasmus+ participants, to study abroad and select Spain as their host country. The study will use correlation tests to analyze survey data, measuring the perceived importance of factors such as education quality, culture, cost of living, and language, to understand their relationship with a student's decision to choose Spain. Additionally, the study will examine if Spanish university websites provide tourism information and explore how these findings can be used to improve both destination marketing and university recruitment strategies.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to identify the general motivators influencing Erasmus+ students' decisions to study abroad. Furthermore, it will specifically identify the primary factors driving their choice of Spain as a host country, categorizing these influences into environmental and economic factors (such as weather and climate, language, and cost of living) and academic factors (including education quality, program offerings, and institutional reputation). Utilizing a quantitative approach, the study will assess the perceived importance of these factors. Additionally, the research will qualitatively examine how Spanish universities in the REDINTUR (Red Interuniversitaria de Posgrados en Turismo) network integrate tourism information into their international websites. The findings will be used to enhance destination management and improve international student recruitment.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Educational Tourism and the Role of Erasmus and Erasmus+

Educational tourism is travel focused on learning and skill development, covering activities like study abroad programs, internships, and conferences. This form of tourism not only enhances educational and professional skills but also fosters intercultural understanding and personal growth (Ritchie, 2003).

A key example in Europe is the Erasmus Program, which began in 1987 as an EU initiative to promote student mobility in higher education. It allowed students to study abroad and earn credits that were recognized by their home universities (European Commission, n.d.-a). In 2014, it became Erasmus+, expanding its reach to include vocational training, youth work, and sports (European Commission, n.d.-b).

The objectives of Erasmus+ are pursued through three main Key Actions:

1. *Learning mobility of individuals*

Erasmus+ aims to provide students, trainees, apprentices, youth workers, professors, and education personnel with opportunities to learn, study, gain experience, or volunteer abroad to improve their skills, cultural understanding, and job opportunities.

2. *Cooperation among organizations and institutions*

Erasmus+ also encourages international alliances and collaboration among universities, vocational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and government agencies to foster innovation and improve the quality of education, training, and youth work.

3. *Support for policy development and cooperation*

Erasmus+ encourages dialogue, change, and evidence-based policies in the areas of sport, youth, and training. Through stakeholder participation and well-informed policy measures, this seeks to promote current, inclusive, and resilient educational systems.

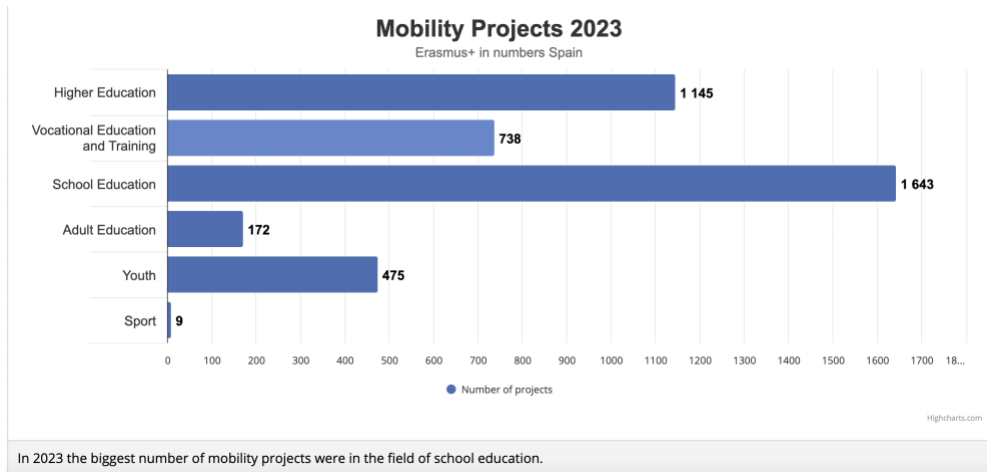


Figure 1. Erasmus+ mobility projects in Spain during the year 2023

The impact of Erasmus+ is evident in its scale. In 2023, Spain hosted 1,643 mobility projects in school education, 1,145 in higher education, and 738 in vocational education and training (European Commission, 2023a). These figures reflect the program’s emphasis on supporting students and educators at multiple levels, particularly in primary and secondary education. Meanwhile, adult education (172 projects), youth initiatives (475), and sports (9) represented smaller but still significant components.

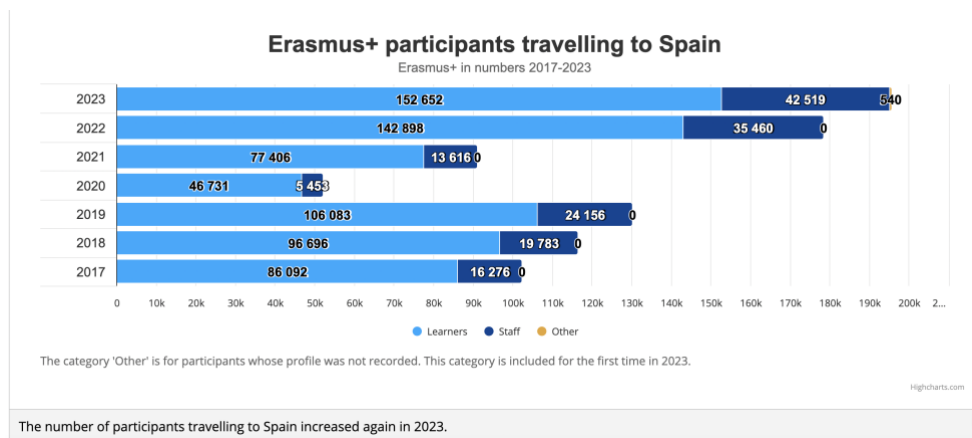


Figure 2. Erasmus+ participants travelling to Spain from 2017-2023

Moreover, participation rates in Erasmus+ demonstrate its growing appeal. According to data from 2017 to 2023, Spain consistently ranked among the top destinations for Erasmus+ participants. In 2023 alone, Spain welcomed 152,652 learners and 42,519 staff members, along with 540 participants in other categories

(European Commission, 2023b). This recovery from the decline caused by the COVID-19 pandemic underscores Spain's resilience and enduring appeal as a hub for educational mobility.

The Erasmus and Erasmus+ programs have played transformative roles in shaping educational tourism in Europe. While Erasmus laid the groundwork for academic exchange, Erasmus+ expanded its reach to foster a more inclusive, skill-oriented, and cooperative European education area. Their continued success illustrates the value of international mobility in enriching both individuals and societies.

3.2 The Student as a Tourist

Quintela et al. (2022) emphasize the growing importance of Erasmus students as a strategic market for tourism-oriented cities. While their primary objective is academic, Erasmus participants also assume tourist roles during and after their stay, becoming informal destination ambassadors through personal networks. The study identified four key factors influencing Erasmus destination selection: university quality and prestige, hospitality, climate and landscape, and destination popularity. These findings suggest that cities seeking to attract Erasmus students should integrate academic excellence with tourism branding. This also underlines the importance of cooperation between academic institutions and tourism stakeholders to remain competitive in academic tourism markets (Quintela et al., 2022).

This dual academic-touristic role of Erasmus participants is supported in the research by Mendoza Jiménez and García Rodríguez (2016), who examined Erasmus student motivations in the Canary Islands. Their findings show that destination-related factors, such as climate, culture, and lifestyle, are more influential than university-related ones. Students often pursue exchanges for personal enrichment, cultural exposure, and language development, rather than purely academic reasons. The research also shows that Erasmus students contribute significantly to tourism development as their high satisfaction with the destination experience can lead to return visits and positive word-of-mouth.

Adding further depth, Lesjak et al. (2015) surveyed 360 Erasmus students across 26 European countries to explore their motivations. The key drivers for mobility were professional and personal growth, including academic advancement, cultural learning, and employability. In terms of destination choice, two core motivators emerged: infrastructure and image (e.g., safety, cultural richness, unique character) and lifestyle and commercialization (e.g., natural attractions, vibrant social scenes). Gender, age, field of study, and degree level all influenced these motivations. For instance, female and younger students prioritized infrastructure and image, while master's or PhD students were more drawn to lifestyle-oriented destinations. The study confirms that Erasmus mobility is not only educational but also deeply connected to tourism behaviors and preferences.

International student mobility is shaped by a blend of academic, social, and environmental considerations. Van Mol et al. (2024) found that both academic quality and non-academic aspects, such as city size, cost of living, and availability of amenities, play significant roles in shaping student decisions to study abroad. Furthermore, the presence of an international student community increases a city's attractiveness, demonstrating the influence of social networks and peer recommendations.

Abrahams (2022) conducted an in-depth study on international students' motivations to enroll in higher education institutions in the Western Cape, South Africa, using a Likert-scale approach to identify significant push and pull factors. The analysis revealed that environmental and linguistic elements outweighed logistical and academic considerations for most participants.

Important pull factors (rated 4 or 5 by most respondents)	
<i>Factors</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Natural and environmental features (e.g., landscapes and beaches)	93.3%
Favorable climate and weather	86.6%
English as the medium of instruction	82.6%
Common language and ease of travel	65.3%
Lower cost of living in South Africa	56.0%
Welcoming attitudes of locals	53.3%
Qualified and friendly academic staff	44.0%
Less important push/pull factors (rated 1 or 2)	

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Proximity to home country	90.6%
Ease of obtaining a visa	73.3%
Availability of domestic websites	73.3%
Media advertising	72.0%
Availability of research instruments	70.6%
Access to overseas websites	70.6%
Favorable government policies	66.7%
Cultural familiarity	64.0%
Low discrimination	60.0%
Safety and security	57.3%
Political or historical ties	56.0%
Ease of admission	50.4%
University services	45.3%
University ranking	44.0%
Referrals from friends/family/social media	41.3%
Academic specialization	40.0%
Accreditation/reputation of institutions	36.0%

Table 1. Environmental and Cultural Pull Factors from Abrahams 2022

These findings suggest that students value a high-quality *experience* over institutional prestige or logistical ease. The Western Cape’s appeal lies primarily in its natural beauty, English-speaking environment, and lower cost of living, rather than traditional academic metrics. This trend reinforces the idea that educational tourism is shaped by lifestyle factors and broader cultural offerings.

Today's international students consider more than just rankings or tuition costs. They are often drawn to destinations that offer a compelling blend of nature, culture, and everyday livability. These factors serve as powerful pull factors, shaping students' personal perceptions and influencing their decisions at a deeper level. For Erasmus students especially, the choice of a study destination often reflects a desire for meaningful experiences beyond the classroom.

3.3 Implications for Destination Management and the Role of Universities

The reviewed literature underscores the necessity for universities and destination marketers to align their strategies. Erasmus students and international learners should be seen not only as academic participants but

also as temporary residents and experience seekers. Institutions and cities that combine strong academic offerings with vibrant, welcoming, and linguistically accessible environments are better positioned to attract this mobile population. Collaborative promotional efforts between higher education and tourism sectors as highlighted by Mendoza Jiménez and García Rodríguez (2016), can thus enhance both student satisfaction and destination competitiveness. Such collaboration allows for a more holistic representation of the student experience, highlighting not only academic strengths but also lifestyle and cultural immersion.

An integrated and strategic approach is essential for effective destination management, and academic institutions play a vital role in this process. By collaborating with local governments and tourism boards, universities help create destinations that are both livable and serve as a vibrant educational ecosystem. This is true for tourism and hospitality programs, where the city itself becomes an extended classroom. Urban planning, cultural accessibility, safety, mobility, and recreational activities should all be intentionally designed to improve the experiences of international students. As temporary residents, students on programs like Erasmus interact with the city far beyond the lecture hall. Every touch point, from public transport to local events, contributes to their overall quality of stay and their perception of the destination.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Questions

1. What motivates students to study abroad?
2. What makes students choose Spain as an Erasmus destination?
3. Do host universities provide the destination information on their websites?

4.2 Research Instrument

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the motivational factors influencing students and to analyze how Spanish university websites integrate tourism information. To answer the first two questions, the research uses a semi-structured survey questionnaire (*see appendix*), administered through Microsoft

Forms and employing a five-point Likert scale (where 1 meant 'Not at all important' and 5 meant 'Very Important'), to assess the key factors that influence students to study abroad and their decision to choose Spain as their host country under the Erasmus+ mobility program.

The 18-question survey has an estimated completion time of 7 minutes and is comprised of three parts covering demographics, participant motivations, and tourism-related information. The categories of motivational factors include Environmental and Economic Considerations, and Academic Factors. These factors are informed by the framework developed in Elhaam Abraham's 2022 research at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, titled *Edu-Tourism Destination Selection Motives: A Focus on Study-Abroad Programs at Universities in the Western Cape, South Africa*. Furthermore, a Pearson's r correlation analysis was done to see how strongly the different factors measured in the study were connected to each other. Beyond identifying motivators, the study will also analyze disparities in assessed factors between students with short-term and long-term stays, utilizing t-tests to determine statistical significance. It will also consider the larger implications of all this for countries and institutions who intend to attract Erasmus students. Furthermore, the study investigates students' impressions of Universitat Rovira I Virgili as a host university and Spain as a tourist destination, offering light on which factors are most important in their decision-making processes.

To answer the third question, the research will assess qualitative data by reviewing universities in Spain that provide international exchange programs and analyzing their websites to see if they include destination information and promote tourism activities.

4.3 Data Gathering

This survey was conducted in June and July of 2025 and distributed with the help of the International Center of Universitat Rovira I Virgili, who shared the link on their social media. Moreover, Erasmus students were approached in person on campus and through the WhatsApp Erasmus Community. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose, assurance of anonymity

and confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time, ensuring informed consent was obtained from all participants. Additionally, relevant website information was manually collected from REDINTUR, a network of 30 Spanish universities that specialize in postgraduate tourism programs. REDINTUR was specifically chosen for its unique position in Spain's educational landscape given its focus and is expected that these institutions are more aware of the importance of digitally promoting their destinations than other universities. This process involved consulting the REDINTUR website to identify all participating institutions, followed by a thorough examination of their individual websites and international landing pages to analyze how they integrate tourism information.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis of the data was conducted using Microsoft Excel and XLSTAT. A descriptive statistic was performed to gather and illustrate the demographic data such as but not limited to age, gender, and country of origin. Additionally, two types of correlation tests were performed to further analyze the data. Pearson's r was used to determine the relationships of the analyzed factors with one another, and a t -test was used to reveal the disparities in answers between short-term and long-term students. Lastly, an exploratory factor analysis was done to see whether the results align with the previous study by Abraham (2022).

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The target population for this research consists of Erasmus+ students at Universitat Rovira I Virgili during the 2024-2025 school year. A total of 62 students responded to the survey, and 56 were valid participants.

I. Student Degree Distribution

The figure below shows the frequency of the degrees of the participants in the Erasmus+ program at Universitat Rovira I Virgili. Of the 56 respondents, 32 are on their bachelor's degree while 24 are on their master's degree.

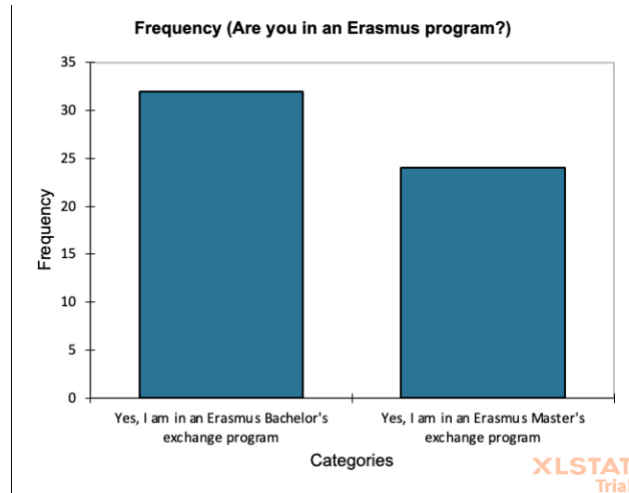


Figure 3. Distribution of Respondents by Degree Type

II. Nationality Distribution

The study included 56 student respondents from a wide range of nationalities. The largest group is Italian, with 13 students, who make up 23% of the sample. Following them are Greek students, who constitute 20% of the respondents with 11 individuals, and German students, who account for 14% of the group with 8 individuals. The rest of the participants come from many different countries, with most nationalities represented by only one or two students. This broad mix of backgrounds highlights the multicultural nature of the student population being studied.

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Italian	13	23%
Greek	11	20%
German	8	14%
Turkish	3	5%
Polish	3	5%
Filipino	3	5%
Swedish	2	4%
Portuguese	2	4%
Irish	2	4%
Ukrainian	1	2%
Slovak	1	2%
Romanian	1	2%
Peruvian	1	2%

Mexican	1	2%
Maltese	1	2%
Estonian	1	2%
Dutch	1	2%
Belgian	1	2%
TOTAL	56	100%

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Nationality

III. Age Distribution

Among the 56 respondents, the data shows that the vast majority are young adults. The largest group, with roughly 28 participants, falls into the 18-24 years old category. The 25-34 years old group is nearly as large, with about 27 participants. In contrast, a very small number of students, only about 2 individuals, were in the 35 years old and above category.

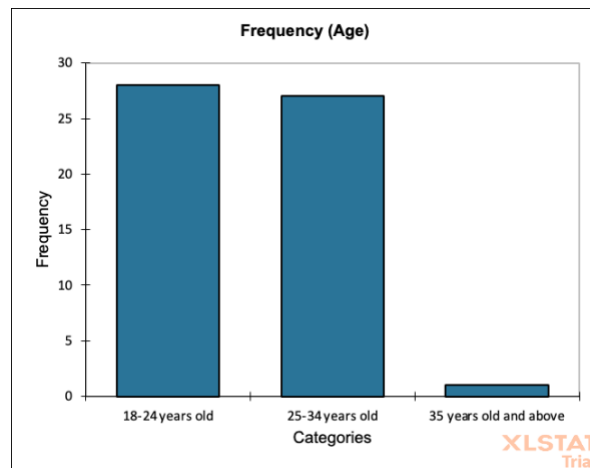


Figure 4. Distribution of Respondents by Age

IV. Gender Distribution

When it comes to the gender distribution of the participants reveals a notable difference between men and women. The sample includes approximately 36 women, 19 men and 1 undisclosed. This shows that most respondents in the study were women, making up a significantly larger portion of the population studied.

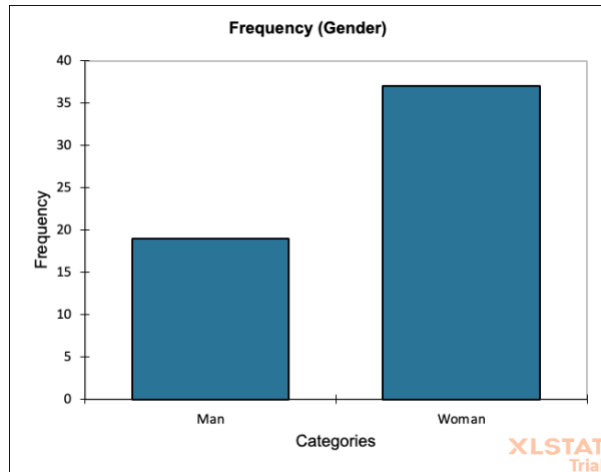


Figure 5. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

V. University Course Distribution

The university courses of the students offer insight into the academic fields most represented in the study. The largest number of students, 18 individuals, are in the Business & Administration field, making up 32% of the sample. Following this are Hospitality & Tourism students, who account for 20% of the group with 11 individuals, and Humanities students, with 8 individuals (14%). A wide range of other fields are also represented, from Health Science to Engineering, but these smaller groups each contain only one to four students, showing that while the student body is academically diverse, a clear majority are concentrated in business and tourism-related studies.

Course	Frequency	Percentage
Business & Administration	18	32%
Hospitality & Tourism	11	20%
Humanities	8	14%
Health Science	4	7%
Arts & Design	4	7%
Engineering	2	4%
Architecture	1	2%
Education	1	2%
Archaeology	1	2%
Communication & Media Studies	1	2%
Applied Technologies	1	2%
Spanish philology	1	2%

Natural Sciences	1	2%
English Studies	1	2%
Social Sciences	1	2%
TOTAL	56	100%

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by University Course

VI. Distribution of Respondents by Erasmus+ Program Duration

The duration of an Erasmus+ program can be quite flexible, and the data on student choices reflects this variety. The most popular program lengths are 5 and 12 months, with roughly 20 participants in each category. A significant number of students, around 11 individuals, also chose a 6-month program. However, shorter and more unique durations, such as 3, 9, and 10 months, were chosen by only a small handful of students, showing that most participants opt for either a single semester or a full year abroad.

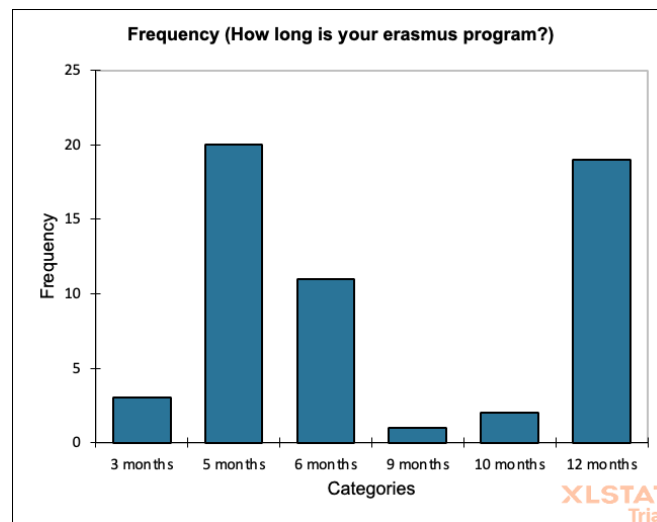


Figure 6. Distribution of Respondents by Erasmus+ Program Duration

VII. Distribution of Respondents Source of Funding

How students manage the financial side of their studies is a critical part of their experience. The data shows that many students, or 43%, rely on self-funding to finance their program. Scholarship and Erasmus Allowance are also very common funding methods, accounting for 26% and 28%, respectively. A very small fraction of students, just 2 individuals, listed "Other" as their source of funding. This highlights that

while a variety of funding options exist, most students either pay for their education themselves or rely on major institutional support.

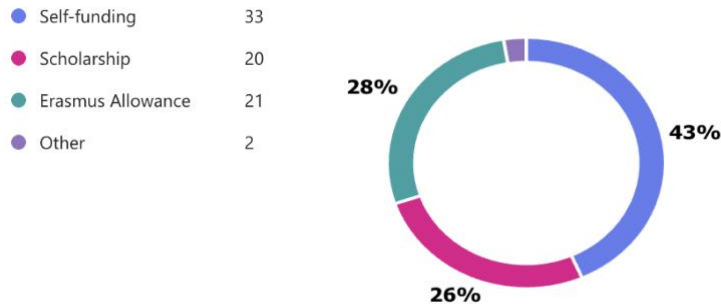


Figure 7. Distribution of Respondents by Source of Funding

5.2 Factor Ranking by Mean Score

This table outlines the scoring framework for the 5-point Likert scale used in the survey. It provides the meaning for the mean scores, which range from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Very Important). This key will be used to interpret the respondents' views on the importance of various factors discussed in the following sections.

Value	Interpretation	Reasoning
1	Not at all important	Respondents overwhelmingly reject the statement/factor.
2	Unimportant	Respondents generally don't consider it important or relevant.
3	Neutral	Opinions are divided, or most selected "Neutral" (3).
4	Important	Respondents generally consider the factor important.
5	Very Important	Strong consensus that the factor is very important.

Table 4. 5-point Likert-scale interpretation

I. Which of the following factors *motivated you to study abroad*?

Students are overwhelmingly motivated by personal and cultural experiences. The highest-ranked factors are the desire for a different cultural experience (4.821), a general international experience, and the opportunity to live in another country (4.714). Other key motivators include international exposure in their

field of study (4.429), to further career prospects (4.393), to make new friends (4.357), Quality education (3.875), as part of the university program (3.839) and a desire to become independent (4.250).

The positive factors suggest that the decision to study abroad is primarily an internal one, driven by a desire for personal and professional growth rather than external pressure or relationship-based factors. Conversely, the factors ranked low are external factors and personal influences. The least motivating factor by far is the desire to live with a partner, with a mean score of just 1.509.

Factors	Mean
Different cultural experience	4.821
International experience	4.714
To live in another country	4.714
International exposure in field of study	4.429
To further career prospects	4.393
To make new friends	4.357
To become independent	4.250
Quality of education	3.875
As part of the university program	3.839
Paternal encouragement	3.321
Cost of study	3.179
University marketing activities influence	3.000
Sponsorship	2.964
University counsellor influence	2.786
Lack of available program in home country	2.764
My friends are going	2.589
To live with my partner	1.509

Table 5. Mean Score Ranking of Motivational Factors for Studying Abroad

The bar chart below provides a visual summary of the key factors that motivate students to study abroad. The survey results establish a clear hierarchy of motivational factors, with a different cultural experience and the overall experience of living abroad emerging as the primary drivers, as evidenced by their highest mean scores.

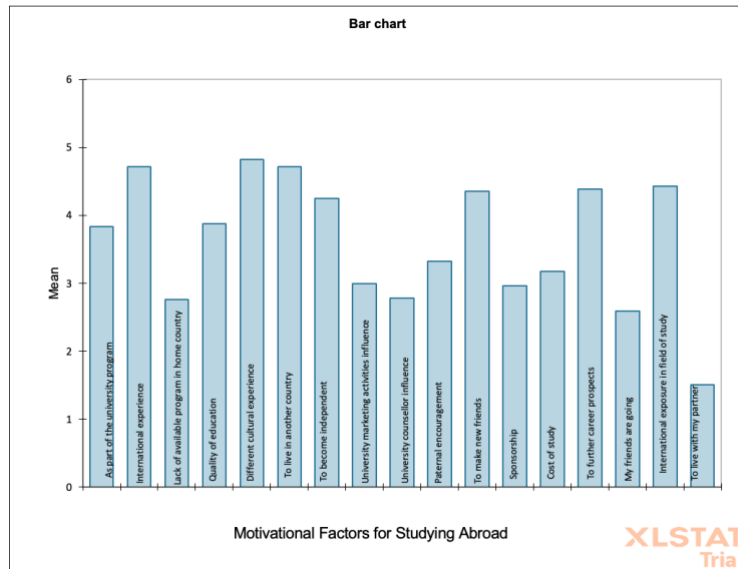


Figure 8. Bar Chart of Motivational Factors for Studying Abroad

II. Which *environmental and economic factors motivated* you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?

Based on the data, students' choice of Spain as an Erasmus destination is primarily driven by environmental and lifestyle factors. The top-ranked motivators are favorable climate and weather conditions (4.571) and natural and environmental factors (4.411). In contrast, economic and political considerations, such as a low cost of living (3.482) and political or historical ties with Spain (3.018), were ranked as much less important.

This suggests that students are primarily attracted to the perceived quality of life and experiential benefits a destination offers, rather than its practical or historical connections, aligning with the earlier finding that personal and cultural experience is a main motivator.

Factors	Mean
Favorable climate and weather condition	4.571
Natural and environmental factors (ex. mountains, beach, etc.)	4.411
Safety and security	3.804
Hospitality of the locals	3.714
Referral from friends, family members, and social media	3.661
Familiarity with own culture	3.545
Low cost of living	3.482
Low rate of discrimination	3.482

Common Language	3.446
Favorable government policies	3.393
Closeness or proximity in the home country	3.268
Political or historical ties with Spain	3.018

Table 6. Mean Score Ranking of Environmental and Economic Factors for Choosing Spain

The radar chart below provides a visual overview of the factors that motivated students to choose Spain as their Erasmus destination. Briefly, it shows how different factors compare to each other. The outer spikes of the chart represent the highest mean scores, corresponding to environmental factors like favorable climate and weather condition and the natural environment. While the innermost part of the chart highlights that economic and political factors received the lowest scores.

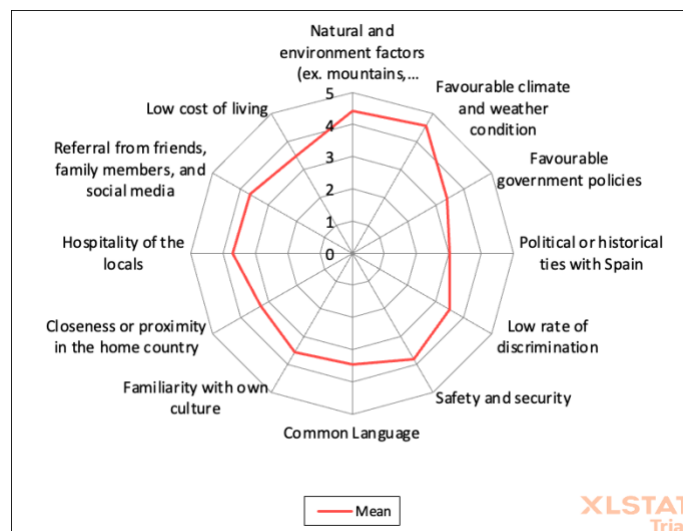


Figure 9. Radar Chart of Environmental and Economic Factors for Choosing Spain

III. Which *academic factors* motivated you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?

When students choose a university abroad, what academic factors truly matter to them? The data shows it's all about the practical, core educational experience. The highest-ranked motivators are English as the teaching medium (3.875) and the accreditation and reputation of the institution (3.857), showing students prioritize clear communication and a respected degree. The expertise in their area of study (3.786) and qualified and friendly staff (3.625) is also key.

Interestingly, less importance is placed on a university's public image or marketing. Factors like a specific university ranking (3.375) and various promotional channels such as overseas websites (3.179) and media advertising (3.107) received notably lower scores. This suggests that students are more focused on the learning aspects of their education rather than the institution's brand name or marketing efforts.

Factors	Mean
English as teaching medium	3.875
Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	3.857
Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	3.786
Qualified and friendly academic staff	3.625
Easy admission	3.607
Availability of labs and research instruments	3.564
University services	3.500
University ranking	3.375
Overseas websites	3.179
Media advertising	3.107
Domestic websites	3.107

Table 7. Mean Score Ranking of Academic Factors for Choosing Spain

The chart's shape highlights that the most important factors were tied directly to the quality of education, such as English as the teaching medium and the reputation of the country and its institutions. Factors like university ranking, media advertising, and websites were less influential.

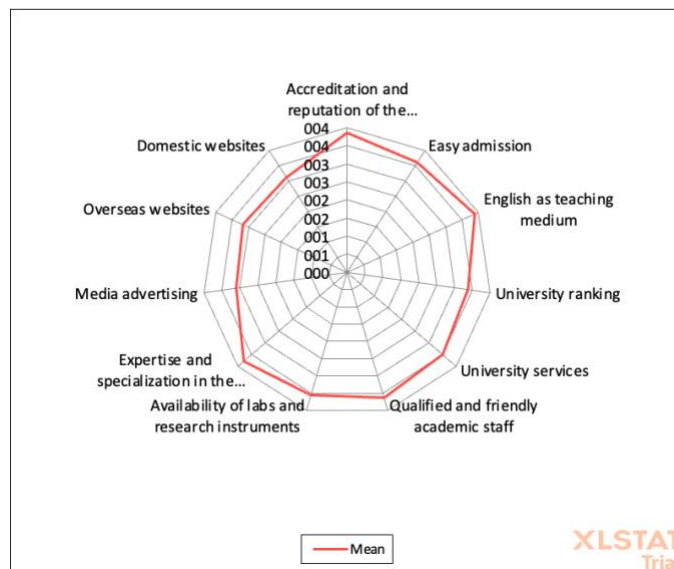


Figure 10. Radar Chart of Academic Factors for Choosing Spain

IV. During your program, what parts of your experience at the host university (Universitat Rovira i Virgili) did you find most valuable?

In the process of learning the parts of a student's experience that truly matter to them we identified that the data shows it is the social and academic connections they build. The most valuable factors are integration activities with local students (3.929), a sense of belonging to international networks (3.857), and strong university infrastructure (3.821). This suggests that students' perceived value is tied to their ability to connect with people and engage with the university's physical and social environment. In contrast, administrative support and institutional factors like the Office for managing the Erasmus program (3.482) and agreements to collaborate with other universities (3.464) were rated as the least valuable parts of the experience. This indicates that while bureaucracy is a necessary part of the process, it is the personal, community-based elements that truly enrich a student's time abroad.

Factors	Mean
Integration activities with local students	3.929
Belonging to international networks	3.857
Infrastructure	3.821
Subjects in other languages	3.821
Language courses	3.821
Sources of information in other languages	3.732
Dedicated University Support for Incoming Erasmus Participants	3.714
Personnel dedicated exclusively to the Erasmus program	3.696
Adequate information system	3.618
Students' associations	3.589
Availability of Destination Information on the University Website	3.571
Destination-related information is clearly presented on the university website	3.518
Office for managing Erasmus program	3.482
Agreement to collaborate and cooperate with other universities	3.464

Table 8. Mean Score Ranking of Students Experience at Universitat Rovira I Virgili

The radar chart shows that the most important factors are social and academic, with integration activities with local students and a sense of belonging to international networks being the most valued.

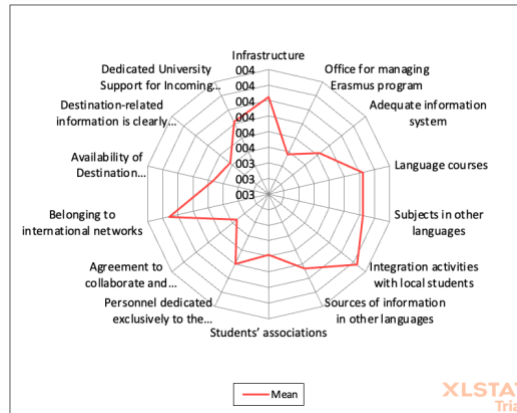


Figure 11. Radar Chart of Students Experience at Universitat Rovira I Virgili

The innermost parts of the chart correspond to administrative factors, such as the office for managing the Erasmus program, which received the lowest mean scores. This visual pattern reinforces the finding that students' perceived value is tied to their ability to connect with people and integrate into the community, rather than the formal bureaucratic aspects of the program.

5.3 The Interplay Between Environmental, Economic, and Academic Factors

I. Environmental and Economic Factors

The table presented is the Pearson's r correlation analysis performed on the identified environmental and economic factors. From this analysis, we can identify which factors are related or influence one another. In the results, "*favorable climate and weather*" and "*natural and environmental factors*" have a strong connection (0.509). This suggests that people who value nature also tend to value good weather. "*Safety and security*" and "*low rate of discrimination*" are also highly related (0.578), indicating that people who feel safe are also likely to feel they are not being discriminated against. Lastly, "*safety and security*" also correlates with "*favorable government policies*" (0.285), "*political or historical ties with Spain*" (0.280), and "*low cost of living*" (0.484).

Variables	Natural and environment factors (ex. mountains, beach, etc.)	Favourable climate and weather	Favourable government policies	Political or historical ties with Spain	Low rate of discrimination	Safety and security	Common Language	Familiarity with own culture	Closeness or proximity in the home	Hospitality of the locals	Referral from friends, family members, and	Low cost of living
Natural and environment factors (ex. mountains, beach, etc.)	1	0.509	0.208	-0.031	-0.068	0.013	0.106	0.181	0.134	0.064	0.212	0.223
Favourable climate and weather condition	0.509	1	0.039	-0.246	-0.218	-0.083	-0.094	0.121	0.079	0.004	0.224	0.046
Favourable government policies	0.208	0.039	1	0.453	0.341	0.285	0.215	0.316	0.076	0.242	-0.024	0.422
Political or historical ties with Spain	-0.031	-0.246	0.453	1	0.386	0.280	0.228	0.415	0.161	0.374	0.192	0.098
Low rate of discrimination	-0.068	-0.218	0.341	0.386	1	0.578	0.133	0.192	0.127	0.398	0.002	0.331
Safety and security	0.013	-0.083	0.285	0.280	0.578	1	0.025	0.114	0.096	0.225	0.039	0.484
Common Language	0.106	-0.094	0.215	0.228	0.133	0.025	1	0.497	0.252	0.531	0.424	0.255
Familiarity with own culture	0.181	0.121	0.316	0.415	0.192	0.114	0.497	1	0.427	0.407	0.413	0.380
Closeness or proximity in the home country	0.134	0.079	0.076	0.161	0.127	0.096	0.252	0.427	1	0.456	0.494	0.293
Hospitality of the locals	0.064	0.004	0.242	0.374	0.398	0.225	0.531	0.407	0.456	1	0.518	0.370
Referral from friends, family members, and social media	0.212	0.224	-0.024	0.192	0.002	0.039	0.424	0.413	0.494	0.518	1	0.285
Low cost of living	0.223	0.046	0.422	0.098	0.331	0.484	0.255	0.380	0.293	0.370	0.285	1

Values in bold are different from 0 with a significance level $\alpha=0.05$

Table 9. Pearson's *r* Correlation Matrix of the Environmental and Economic Factors

“Familiarity with own culture” connects well with several factors such as “common language” (0.497), “hospitality of the locals” (0.531), “referral from friends, family, and social media” (0.424). This suggests that if something feels familiar, people are more likely to hear good things about the place and will feel welcomed. Moreover, “referral from friends, family and social media” also has strong links with “hospitality of locals” (0.518) and “closeness or proximity to home” (0.494), which can entail that people often make decisions based on what others say especially if they feel a cultural or geographic connection. Hospitality, safety, familiarity, and common language can be seen as central connectors as they show up in many strong relations as illustrated in the matrix.

II. Academic Factors

Variables	Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	Easy admission	English as teaching medium	University ranking	University services	Qualified and friendly academic staff	Availability of labs and research instruments	Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	Media advertising	Overseas websites	Domestic websites
Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	1	0.701	0.489	0.762	0.752	0.644	0.690	0.563	0.570	0.587	0.662
Easy admission	0.701	1	0.407	0.593	0.603	0.489	0.468	0.520	0.443	0.425	0.490
English as teaching medium	0.489	0.407	1	0.487	0.565	0.495	0.462	0.293	0.590	0.479	0.532
University ranking	0.762	0.593	0.487	1	0.860	0.845	0.844	0.534	0.723	0.695	0.692
University services	0.752	0.603	0.565	0.860	1	0.889	0.856	0.661	0.789	0.817	0.834
Qualified and friendly academic staff	0.644	0.489	0.495	0.845	0.889	1	0.848	0.572	0.742	0.798	0.742
Availability of labs and research instruments	0.690	0.468	0.462	0.844	0.856	0.848	1	0.585	0.752	0.757	0.729
Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	0.563	0.520	0.293	0.534	0.661	0.572	0.585	1	0.570	0.587	0.531
Media advertising	0.570	0.443	0.590	0.723	0.789	0.742	0.752	0.570	1	0.871	0.818
Overseas websites	0.587	0.425	0.479	0.695	0.817	0.798	0.757	0.587	0.871	1	0.906
Domestic websites	0.662	0.490	0.532	0.692	0.834	0.742	0.729	0.531	0.818	0.906	1

Values in bold are different from 0 with a significance level alpha=0.05

Table 10. Pearson's *r* Correlation Matrix of the Academic Factors

Looking at the correlation matrix for academic factors, the strongest relationship is between "domestic websites" and "overseas websites" (0.906), which suggests that universities with a strong web presence in their home country also tend to have good international reach. Both of these factors are also closely linked to "media advertising" and "university services." Additionally, "university services" has a strong relationship with "qualified and friendly academic staff" (0.889), "university ranking" (0.860), and "availability of labs and research instruments" (0.865). Finally, "qualified and friendly academic staff" is also highly related to "university ranking" (0.860). This indicated that positive academic attributes such as good staff and high-quality services go together which can contribute to a higher university ranking.

"Accreditation and reputation" have medium but relevant relation to "university ranking" (0.762), "university services" (0.752), and "easy admission" (0.701). Quality services contribute to a good reputation which then reflects good ranking. Additionally, schools seen as reputable are also seen as easier to get into possible due to strong marketing.

Lower but still relevant correlations were found between "English as a teaching medium" and "university services" (0.565), as well as "accreditation and reputation" (0.489). There is also a correlation between "expertise in study interest" and "university services" (0.661). This could mean that a university's use of English for instruction and its expertise in a specific subject is both connected to the quality of its services and its reputation.

5.4 Evaluating the Differences in Perceptions of Short- and Long-Term Students

To gain further insights from this research, a t-test was performed to compare the survey responses between students who stayed less than 6 months and those who participated in the Erasmus program for more than 6 months. Below, the factors with significant differences are presented and elaborated.

I. Motivational Factors for Studying Abroad

	Lack of available program in home country	Quality of education	University marketing activities influence	University counsellor influence	Cost of study
MEAN <6months	2.76	3.88	3.00	2.79	3.18
MEAN >6months	3.06	4.12	3.39	3.09	3.48
STD <6months	1.027295463	0.994053466	0.992063367	1.070628348	1.214210979
STD >6months	1.366358476	1.166125416	1.456438163	1.528145043	1.50252313
T.TEST	0.031186024	0.043825742	0.004941173	0.036912128	0.045498284

Table 11. T-test Results for Significant Motivational Factors

A result is considered statistically significant if the p-value is less than alpha (α) level of 0.05. Among the motivational factors for studying abroad, five emerged to have a significant difference between the two groups. These are *lack of available programs in home country*, *quality of education*, *university marketing activities influence*, *university counsellor influence*, and *cost of study*. Between the two groups, students who stayed for more than 6 months gave higher scores on the aforementioned factors making the difference statistically meaningful. From these results, we can infer that:

1. Long-stay students are more likely to go abroad because of the lack of certain programs in their home countries.
2. Long-stay students rate Spain's educational quality as a stronger motivator.
3. Promotional material resonates more with long-stay students.
4. Long-stay students are more influenced by the advice of university counsellors.
5. Long-stay students are more motivated by the lower perceived cost of study.

The bar chart below compares student responses to the five factors, showing a clear difference in which long-stay students consistently rated the factors higher than short-stay students.

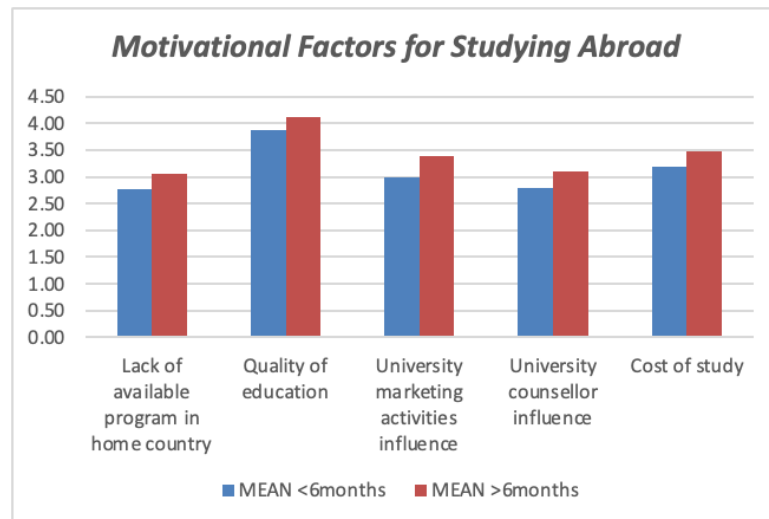


Figure 12. Comparison of Motivational Factors between Short-stay and Long-stay Students

II. Environmental and Economic Factors

Favorable government policies and *political or historical ties with Spain* were the only factors that showed statistically significant differences, while all other factors had a p-value greater than 0.05. This means that these two factors were rated higher by long-stay students, whereas the rest were rated similarly by both groups.

	Favorable government policies	Political or historical ties with Spain
MEAN <6months	3.39	3.02
MEAN >6months	3.73	3.33
STD <6months	1.164358718	0.945135246
STD >6months	0.94448158	1.241638702
T.TEST	0.008244515	0.011240068

Table 12. T-test Results for Significant Environmental and Economic Factors

From this, we can say that:

1. Long-stay students valued how Spain’s government policies can affect them more than short-stay students.
2. Long-stay students are more motivated by their countries’ political or historical ties with Spain compared to short-stay students.
3. Other factors, such as climate, environment, language, and safety, are valued to the same extent whether students stay for a short-term or a long-term period.

The following chart is a visual representation of the difference in scores for the two factors, comparing the responses of long-stay and short-stay students.

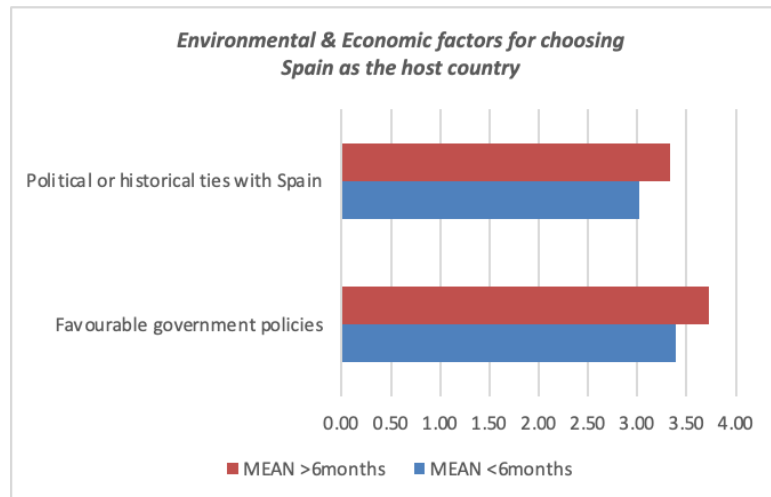


Figure 13. Comparison of Environmental & Economic Factors between Short-stay and Long-stay Students

III. Academic Factors

Among the academic factors, five had statistically significant differences: *accreditation and reputation, easy admission, university ranking, media advertising, and domestic websites*. These factors were also scored higher by long-stay students. This indicates that students who stayed longer in Spain were significantly more influenced by the formal and structured university-related information. Additionally, this suggests that long-stay Erasmus+ participants may engage in more thorough research and planning or prioritize academic prestige compared to short-stay students.

	Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	Easy admission	University ranking	Media advertising	Domestic websites
MEAN <6months	3.86	3.61	3.38	3.11	3.11
MEAN >6months	4.12	3.91	3.67	3.42	3.45
STD <6months	1.038773981	1.230379613	1.147260011	1.433644296	1.269900871
STD >6months	1.023400452	1.071320341	1.290994449	1.299766879	1.325021441
T.TEST	0.026392063	0.025265313	0.035225254	0.045353013	0.019835318

Table 13. T-test Results for Significant Academic Factors

Furthermore, we can interpret that:

1. Long-stay students valued the reputation of Spain and its institutions more.
2. Long-stay students are motivated by the ease of admission.
3. Long-stay students valued the university ranking more than short-stay students.
4. Promotional media has a stronger influence on long-stay students.
5. Long-stay students relied more on domestic websites for information or research.

The bar chart below serves as a visual summary of the results, highlighting a clear and consistent difference in responses between the two student groups. Specifically, it shows that students who stayed for a longer duration consistently gave higher ratings to the five academic factors being measured.

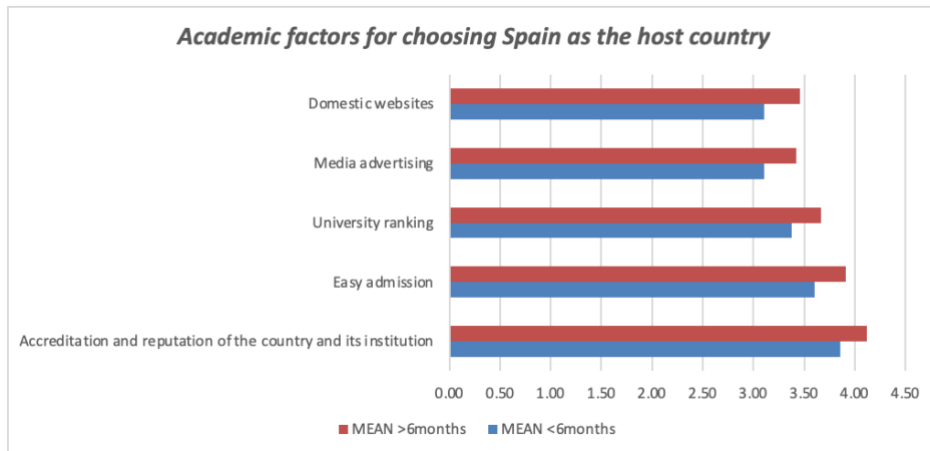


Figure 14. Comparison of Academic Factors between Short-stay and Long-stay Students

IV. Student Experience in Universitat Rovira I Virgili

After performing a t-test on the elements contributing to the overall experience of the students at Universitat Rovira I Virgili, none of the factors had p-values below 0.05. There were no major differences in what short-term and long-term students valued during their academic experience. This implies that once students arrive, they generally experience and value the same parts of the program, regardless of how long they stay.

V. Discussion

The findings revealed that the length of stay in the Erasmus+ program influences students' initial motivations for studying abroad and their reasons for choosing Spain, however, not their perception of the host university experience.

The students staying more than 6 months were significantly more influenced by institutional and academic factors, which suggests a more strategic or career-focused decision-making approach. Moreover, they were more likely to be motivated by the lack of programs available in their home country and the desire to further their career prospects. Meanwhile, students who stayed less than 6 months also valued these aspects, but they generally gave these factors lower scores.

Both groups valued their experiences at the Universitat Rovira I Virgili similarly, indicating that regardless of the duration of their stay, the Erasmus experience itself is positively received. Students' motivations may vary by length of stay, but their satisfaction with the Erasmus+ program remains consistently high.

5.5 Factors Influencing Erasmus Students' Destination Choice

I. Retained Environmental and Economic Factors

To compare the study's findings to that from Abraham (2022), an Exploratory Factor Analysis with a Varimax rotation was also performed. It is important to remember that the analysis is exploratory due to the limited number of respondents. However, this could prove useful for future research on the topic. A Kaiser's criterion and a Scree Plot were used to determine which factors were retained, as shown below.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8
Eigenvalue	3.279	1.603	1.043	0.694	0.239	0.162	0.096	0.072
Variability (%)	27.328	13.360	8.692	5.779	1.988	1.354	0.799	0.597
Cumulative %	27.328	40.688	49.380	55.159	57.147	58.501	59.301	59.898

Table 14. Eigenvalues of the Environmental and Economic Factors

Among the environmental and economic factors, the ones which have an eigenvalue of more than 1 are retained. That makes F1 to F3. However, the XLSTAT system also considered F4, even with an eigenvalue of 0.694. Together, these factors explain a cumulative variance of 59.898% where F1 (27.328%) is the largest followed by F2 (13.360%).

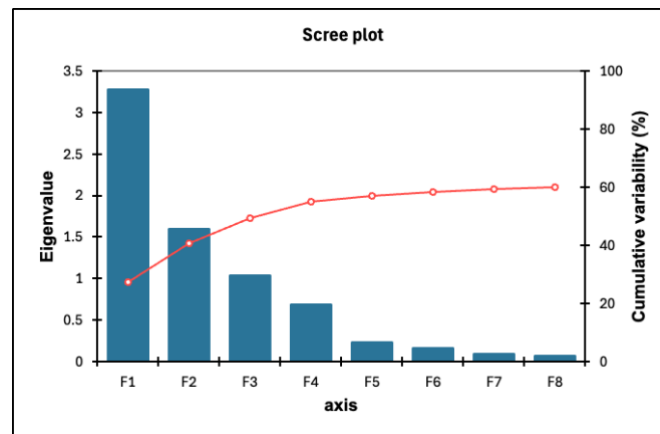


Figure 15. Scree Plot of Eigenvalues of the Environmental and Economic Factors

The screen plot visually represents this outcome. There is a significant drop after the first two factors, afterwards it steadily declined, making them the most significant and leaving F5 to F8 to be insignificant. The following table provided represents the factor pattern coefficients wherein the values in bold hold the significant loadings for each factor. F1 is primarily defined by the high loadings from “*Favorable government policies*”, “*Safety and security*”, “*Familiarity with own culture*”, “*Hospitality of the locals*”, and “*Referral from friends, family members, and social media*”. This suggests that F1 is defined by a blend of social and governmental attributes that influence students' perceptions.

F2 is mostly associated with “*Favorable climate and weather condition*” and “*Referral from friends, family members, and social media*”. This means that the second factor’s primary drivers are environmental condition and social recommendations.

	F1	F2	F3	F4
Natural and environment factors	0.056	0.148	-0.251	-0.007
Favorable climate and weather condition	-0.056	0.328	-0.419	0.103
Favorable government policies	0.265	-0.214	-0.378	-0.629
Political or historical ties with Spain	0.019	-0.032	0.137	-0.149
Low rate of discrimination	0.084	-0.147	0.051	0.019
Safety and security	0.238	-0.442	-0.317	0.620
Common Language	0.081	0.083	0.103	-0.061
Familiarity with own culture	0.232	0.068	0.046	-0.118
Closeness or proximity in the home country	0.079	0.088	0.040	0.082
Hospitality of the locals	0.259	0.026	0.192	0.080
Referral from friends, family members, and social media	0.230	0.291	0.149	0.127
Low cost of living	0.036	0.087	-0.053	0.092

Table 15. Factor Pattern Coefficients of the Environmental and Economic Factors

Instead of having a positive loading, F3 is characterized by strong negative loadings from “*Favorable climate and weather condition*” and “*Favorable government policies*”. This tells us that factor 3 is a “**dissatisfaction**” mindset. If a respondent scores high on this factor, it is most likely they gave low ratings to the weather and government policies.

Finally, F4 is solely and strongly defined by “*Safety and security*”. This high value shows that this factor is distinct and suggests that **security** is a unique attribute that does not overlap with the others.

II. Retained Academic Factors

For the academic factors, only F1 has an eigenvalue of more than 1 making it the dominant and sole significant factor. It also explains a large portion of the variance with 65.015% out of the cumulative variance of 73.016%.

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Eigenvalue	7.152	0.491	0.226	0.144	0.019
Variability (%)	65.015	4.466	2.052	1.307	0.176
Cumulative %	65.015	69.482	71.533	72.840	73.016

Table 16. Eigenvalues of the Academic Factors

The scree plot illustrates this clearly with the large difference between F1 and the rest of the factors. This means that the other factors are weak and offer little to no explanation at all. Based on the factor pattern coefficients table, it explains that F1 is related to a **university’s resources and practical offerings** due to the high loadings on “*University Services*” and “*Availability of labs and research instruments*”. This represents a dimension of university appeal that is tied to its infrastructure and the support systems it offers students.

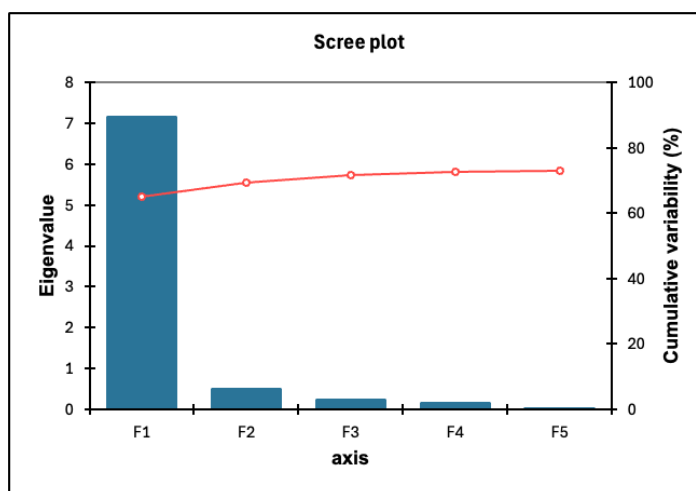


Figure 16. Scree Plot of Eigenvalues of the Academic Factors

	F1
Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	0.044
Easy admission	0.055
English as teaching medium	-0.006
University ranking	0.048
University services	0.409
Qualified and friendly academic staff	-0.031
Availability of labs and research instruments	0.280
Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	-0.021
Media advertising	0.125
Overseas websites	0.114
Domestic websites	0.062

Table 17. Factor Pattern Coefficients of the Environmental and Economic Factors

III. Varimax Rotation

The Varimax rotation resulted in two factors (D1 and D2) representing the environmental and economic factors, simplifying the data by grouping the related variables together. The table shows that D1 accounts for 21.906% while D2 accounts for 18.783%. Together, they explain a cumulative percentage of 40.688% of the total variance in the data.

	D1	D2
Variability (%)	21.906	18.783
Cumulative %	21.906	40.688

Table 18. Cumulative variance of D1 and D2

D1: Cultural and Social Familiarity

This factor is strongly associated with "*Natural and cultural environment*", "*Common Language*", "*Familiarity with own culture*", "*Closeness or proximity in the home country*", "*Hospitality of the locals*", and "*Referral from friends, family members, and social media*".

D2: Political Stability and Security

This factor is strongly associate with “*Favorable government policies*”, “*Political or historical ties with Spain*”, “*Low rate of discrimination*”, “*Safety and security*”, and “*Low cost of living*”.

	D1	D2
Natural and environment factors	0.402	-0.174
Favorable climate and weather condition	0.350	-0.419
Favorable government policies	0.249	0.562
Political or historical ties with Spain	0.249	0.528
Low rate of discrimination	0.083	0.706
Safety and security	0.045	0.734
Common Language	0.564	0.185
Familiarity with own culture	0.654	0.238
Closeness or proximity in the home country	0.564	0.091
Hospitality of the locals	0.637	0.366
Referral from friends, family members, and social media	0.752	-0.068
Low cost of living	0.419	0.424

Table 19. Factor Pattern after Varimax Rotation

In related research, Abraham (2022) identified factors from his analysis were Quality, Socio-Political, Marketing, Environmental, and Social. Similarly, the two factors that emerged from this study fall under these categories. This two-factor structure provides a clear and meaningful summary of the underlying dimensions that influence a students’ choice on choosing Spain as their Erasmus+ host destination.

5.6 Exploratory Content Analysis of University Websites

Spain has emerged as a leading destination for international students, attracting over 240,000 foreign enrollees in the 2022–2023 academic year (StudiesIn, 2023). This growth is attributed to several factors: the high quality of education, a wide array of programs offered in both Spanish and English, and a culturally rich yet affordable lifestyle. Additionally, the QS International Student Survey (2024) highlighted that a welcoming environment, modern facilities, and strong graduate employment rates are key factors influencing students' decisions to study in Spain. Research focusing on Erasmus students indicates that the

attractiveness of the destination itself, encompassing climate, leisure activities, and cultural experiences, all play a crucial role in students' choice of academic centers (Souto-Otero et al., 2021).

Spanish universities that specialize in tourism education play a particularly important role in this context. REDINTUR, was created to promote cooperation, exchange, R&D projects, and knowledge transfer in tourism's postgraduate and doctoral fields. Given their position, it is expected that these institutions are more aware of, and place a higher value on, how they digitally position their destinations. The table below provides an overview of the universities that are part of REDINTUR. It includes links to their official websites, their respective international pages, and notes whether they offer a dedicated page, or at least a link, to the tourism website of their university's city or destination.

REDINTUR Website: <https://red-intur.org/>

University Name	Website	Landing Page	Tourism Info	Remarks
Universidad de Alicante	UA	International page	Alicante tourism	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	UAB	International page	X	No information on destination
Universidad Nebrija	ANU	International page	Madrid tourism	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
CETT- Universitat de Barcelona	CETT	Collaborating entities	Barcelona tourism Convention bureau	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universidad de Cádiz	UCA	International page	X	No information on destination
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid	UC3M	International page	Madrid tourism	Dedicated page about the destination and links to Madrid's tourism website and tourist offerings
Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha	UCLM	International page	University cities and heritage	Dedicated page with brief information about the campuses and its tourist offerings
Universidad Complutense Madrid	UCM	International page	About Madrid	Dedicated page about the destination
Universidad da Coruña	UDC	International page	Coruña tourism Ferrol tourism	University website directs visitors to the

				destination tourism website
Universidad de Extremadura	UNEX	International page	About UNEX Extremadura tourism	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universitat de Girona	UDG	International page	About UDG	University website provides brief information about the destination and directs visitors to the tourism website
Universitat de les Illes Balears	UIB	International page	About the Balearic Islands	Dedicated page about the destination
Universidad de La Laguna	ULL	International page	X	No information on destination
Universitat de Lleida	UDL	International page	About Lleida About UDL	Dedicated page about the destination
Universidad de Málaga	UMA	International page	About Malaga	Only general information about the destination
Universidad de Murcia	UM	International page	Murcia town council Murcia tourism	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	UOC	X	X	No information on international opportunities and destination
Universidad de Oviedo	UNIOVI	International page	About Asturias	Dedicated page about the destination
Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena	UPCT	International page	X	No information on destination
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos	URJC	International page	X	No information on destination
Universitat Rovira i Virgili	URV	International page	Tourism sites	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela	USC	International page	X	No information on destination
Universidad de Seville	US	International page	Seville tourism	University website directs visitors to the destination tourism website
Universidade de Vigo	UVIGO	International page	X	No information on destination
Universitat de València	UV	International page	Excursions in Valencia	Offers scheduled excursions for international students
Universidad de Zaragoza	UNIZAR	International page	X	No information on destination

These universities also participate in international exchange programs such as Erasmus, further positioning them within the broader landscape of global student mobility. A review of their websites indicates that information about mobility programs is generally well-presented and accessible. However, out of the 26 listed universities, 9 did not provide dedicated pages about their location, covering aspects like key attractions, local highlights, or what the city is known for. This presents a missed opportunity, as the decision to study abroad is increasingly shaped by more than academic factors alone. Universitat Rovira I Virgili stands out for its user-friendly international page, which is not only simple to locate but also has a special section dedicated to tourist sites throughout the Tarragona area, with direct links to the official tourism websites for each destination. Both Universidad de Alicante and Universidade da Coruña also stand out for making it simple for exchange students to explore their host cities, thanks to easy-to-find international pages with direct links to local tourism sites.

Given that the choice to participate in a mobility program is often influenced by the overall destination experience, universities that actively promote their location and local lifestyle may gain a competitive edge. This is supported by research showing that Erasmus students' decisions are shaped not only by academic considerations but also by non-academic factors such as the attractiveness of the city and its cultural and leisure offerings (Lesjak et al., 2015). In this way, destination branding becomes a strategic component of higher education marketing, especially in fields like tourism where place and learning are closely interconnected.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The data for this research was collected from Erasmus students at Universitat Rovira I Virgili during the 2024–2025 school year. The majority of these students are from the departments of Business & Administration and Hospitality & Tourism. Furthermore, most of them participated in 5-month or 1-year Erasmus programs.

In the factor ranking results, the top motivators for studying abroad are: (1) experiencing a different culture, (2) gaining international experience, and (3) living in another country. The major environmental influence is the favorable climate and weather conditions. For academic factors, participants ranked English as a medium of instruction as the most important. Lastly, the students most valued the integration activities with local students and the university's international networks during their experience at Universitat Rovira I Virgili.

The correlation test suggests several key relationships. Favorable climate and natural attributes are strongly linked. Safety and security are closely tied to low discrimination, government policies, political ties, and a low cost of living. Familiarity with one's culture is related to a common language and referrals from friends and family. For academic factors, domestic and overseas websites show a strong correlation, and both are related to media advertising and university services, which, in turn, positively correlate with qualified staff, university ranking, and research facilities. Overall, the findings show that students' motivations for studying abroad are influenced by a complex interplay of environmental, economic, cultural, and academic factors. The strongest relationships observed suggest that certain motivations, like experiencing a new culture, are often linked to specific external conditions, such as a favorable climate and a sense of safety.

The t-test results reveal that students on long-term stays in Spain are more influenced by broader, long-term considerations than short-stay students. The data indicates that long-stay students place a higher value on government policies, political and historical ties with Spain, and the reputation of the country and its

institutions. They are also more motivated by practical academic factors like ease of admission, university rankings, and the availability of information on domestic websites. Conversely, factors like climate, environmental quality, language, and personal safety hold equal importance for both long- and short-stay students, suggesting these are universal motivators for studying abroad. This pattern suggests that the decision-making process for long-term stays involves a deeper evaluation of institutional, economic, and political stability, whereas short-term stays may be driven more by general, universally appealing factors.

The exploratory factor analysis identified two factor categories: Cultural & Social Familiarity and Political Stability & Security. Both categories align with findings from a similar 2022 study by Abraham on international students in South Africa, which highlighted five categories: Quality, Socio-Political, Marketing, Environmental, and Social. These findings suggest that despite the geographical difference, students are similarly motivated by safety, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to connect with others.

Lastly, after the review of the websites of partner universities at REDINTUR, it shows that information on mobility programs is generally well-organized. However, many institutions miss the opportunity to promote their location's key attractions and activities, which are increasingly important factors for students choosing a study-abroad destination. Actively highlighting what makes a place unique could give universities a competitive edge by appealing to students motivated by the overall destination experience.

6.2 Limitations

As this is exploratory research, it is necessary to view the findings with cautious interpretation. It is essential to emphasize that while this study's primary focus is on Erasmus students, who are typically EU citizens, the participant pool also includes exceptions. This includes individuals from outside Europe who have gained EU citizenship, as well as other non-EU citizens who participated in an international exchange at Universitat Rovira I Virgili. Given the number of respondents, it is also important to note that the responses should not be used as a generalization of the whole population of Erasmus students. Furthermore, the

research did not meet the required number of respondents to perform a complete factor analysis. Thus, the results should only be looked at as a possible interpretation, not as final conclusions.

6.3 Recommendations

To gain deeper insights from this research, it is recommended to broaden the study's scope by including all international students, not just those in the Erasmus program. Additionally, increasing the number of respondents to over 100 would allow for a more specific and statistically significant analysis.

For educational institutions, it is recommended to provide clear academic information. For both short-term and long-term students, a well-established academic environment is crucial. Provide easy access to details about qualified academic staff, university rankings, and research facilities. Since the overall destination experience is a key motivator, universities should improve their websites and media advertising to showcase local attractions, cultural highlights, and the unique lifestyle of the city. Moreover, universities can also target long-stay students with specific information. As long-stay students are more influenced by political stability, government policies, and university reputation, marketing efforts should specifically address these factors.

For Spain's destination managers, the key to attracting international students lies in a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond academia. Universities are crucial partners in this effort, as their marketing can be a powerful tool for promoting the entire destination. This involves highlighting the unique local culture, lifestyle, and key attractions, as these factors significantly influence students' decisions. It is also crucial to actively promote a sense of safety, security, and belonging by showcasing low discrimination rates and opportunities for integration with residents. Lastly, a targeted marketing strategy is key for attracting long-stay students. This should emphasize the destination's political stability, favorable government policies, and the strong reputation of its institutions. This partnership between universities and destination managers will appeal to a broader range of students and give Spain a competitive edge.

6.4 Personal Reflection

Working on this research was a valuable experience, offering both personal and professional insights. I learned that while the data shows us what is connected, it also reveals what people truly want: safety, belonging, and new experiences. These basic needs are crucial in driving decisions. Consequently, the results revealed the importance of strategic destination management. There is an opportunity to bridge the gap between a university's academic value and the destination experience by treating the location itself as a key part of the overall offering. Actively highlighting what makes a place unique could give universities a competitive edge. This approach ensures that a student's choice is not just about a program, but about a complete destination experience.

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VIII. APPENDIX

8.1 Research Questionnaire

How Students Choose Their Study Abroad Destination

Hello, I'm Lea Mari Vinluan, a master's student currently conducting research as part of my Tourism Destination Management program. This short questionnaire (less than 10 minutes to complete) explores the decision-making process of students participating in international exchange programs like Erasmus. Your participation is completely anonymous, and all responses will be kept confidential and analyzed only in aggregate.

Thank you so much for your time and support!

Section 1

Section A: Demographic Profile

1. Are you in an Erasmus program? *

- Yes, I am in an Erasmus Bachelor's exchange program
- Yes, I am in an Erasmus Master's exchange program
- No, I am not in an Erasmus Program

2. What is your Nationality? *

Enter your answer

3. Age *

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35 years old and above

4. Gender *

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

5. What are you studying? *

Select your answer

6. What country are you from? *

Enter your answer

3. Age *

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35 years old and above

4. Gender *

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

5. What are you studying? *

Select your answer

6. What country are you from? *

Enter your answer

3. Age *

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35 years old and above

4. Gender *

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

5. What are you studying? *

Select your answer

6. What country are you from? *

Enter your answer

7. What other countries did you consider the Erasmus exchange program? Please rank the countries listed in your mobility program request in order of preference, with 1 being your top choice. *

Spain
Italy
Germany
France
Portugal
Austria
Poland
Netherlands
Greece
Ireland

8. How long is your erasmus program? *

- 2 months
- 3 months
- 5 months
- 6 months
- 12 months

7. What other countries did you consider the Erasmus exchange program? Please rank the countries listed in your mobility program request in order of preference, with 1 being your top choice. *

Spain
Italy
Germany
France
Portugal
Austria
Poland
Netherlands
Greece
Ireland

8. How long is your erasmus program? *

- 2 months
- 3 months
- 5 months
- 6 months
- 12 months

9. What is your main source of funding? *

- Self-funding
- Scholarship
- Erasmus Allowance
- Other

Section B: Motivational Aspects

Please rate the following sections based on the reasons for participating in study abroad programs at universities in Spain on a scale of importance.

10. Which of the following factors motivated you to study abroad?

- 1= Not at all important
- 2= Unimportant
- 3= Neither important/unimportant
- 4= Important
- 5= Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
As part of the university program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of available program in home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different cultural experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To become independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University marketing activities influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University counsellor influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paternal encouragement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To make new friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Sponsorship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To further career prospects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friends are going	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International exposure in field of study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To live with my partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Which environmental factors motivated you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?

- 1= Not at all important
 2= Unimportant
 3= Neither important/unimportant
 4= Important
 5= Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
Natural and environment factors (ex. mountains, beach, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Favourable climate and weather condition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Favourable government policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political or historical ties with Spain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low rate of discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safety and security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common Language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Familiarity with own culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Closeness or proximity in the home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hospitality of the locals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Referral from friends, family members, and social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low cost of living	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Which university factors motivated you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?

- 1= Not at all important
 2= Unimportant
 3= Neither important/unimportant
 4= Important
 5= Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy admission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English as teaching medium	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

University ranking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Qualified and friendly academic staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of labs and research instruments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overseas websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Domestic websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. During your program, what parts of your experience at the host university (Universitat Rovira i Virgili) did you find most valuable?

- 1= Not at all important
 2= Unimportant
 3= Neither important/unimportant
 4= Important
 5= Very Important

	1	2	3	4	5
Infrastructure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office for managing Erasmus program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate information system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Subjects in other languages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integration activities with local students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sources of information in other languages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students' associations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Personnel dedicated exclusively to the Erasmus program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agreement to collaborate and cooperate with other universities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Belonging to international networks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of Destination Information on the University Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Destination-related information is clearly presented on the university website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dedicated University Support for Incoming Erasmus Participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Is this your first time in Spain? *

- Yes
- No, I've been to Spain 2-3 times
- No, I've been to Spain 4-5 times
- No, I've been to Spain more than 5 times

15. Before your Erasmus mobility, which of the following sources did you use to get information about the tourist and leisure offer of the destination?

(Select all that apply) *

- Social media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.)
- Official websites of the destination
- Travel blogs or forums
- Travel agencies (online or physical)
- Recommendations from family or friends
- Mobile travel apps (Tripadvisor, Booking, etc.)
- University website or welcome guide
- I did not look for any information
- Other

16. During your Erasmus stay, which of the following sources do you use to find out about tourist and leisure activities in the destination? (Select all that apply) *

- Social media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.)
- Official websites of the destination
- Tourism mobile apps (Tripadvisor, Google Maps, etc.)
- Recommendations from other students

- Host university website
- Events organised by student associations (e.g., ESN)
- Local tourist information offices
- I don't usually look for information
- Other

17. Since arriving in Spain, which of the following tourism related activity have you done? *

- Visit key tourism site attractions
- Wine tasting
- Swimming, Surfing, or Watersports
- Hiking
- Attending festivals
- Nightlife
- Shopping
- Gastronomy
- Other

18. How likely are you to recommend Spain as an Erasmus destination to a friend or colleague? *

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at all likely Extremely likely

8.2 Complete T-test analysis

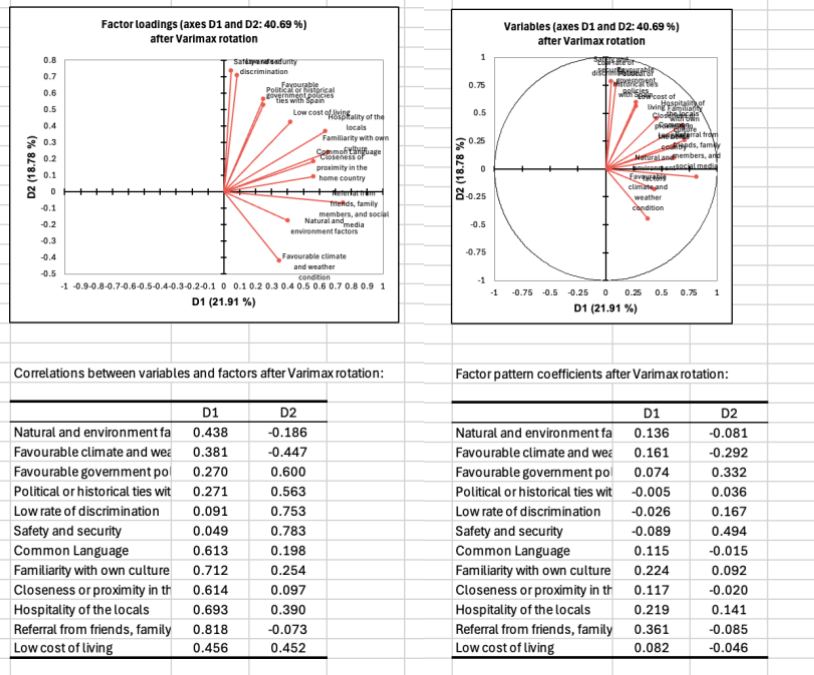
Which of the following factors motivated you to study abroad?																	
	As part of the university program	International experience	Lack of available program in home country	Quality of education	Different cultural experience	To live in another country	To become independent	University marketing activities influence	University counsellor influence	Paternal encouragement	To make new friends	Sponsorship	Cost of study	To further career prospects	My friends are going	International exposure in field of study	To live with my partner
MEAN <6months	3.84	4.71	2.76	3.88	4.82	4.71	4.25	3.00	2.79	3.32	4.36	2.96	3.18	4.39	2.59	4.43	1.51
MEAN >6months	3.94	4.67	3.06	4.12	4.79	4.67	4.42	3.39	3.09	3.30	4.24	3.24	3.48	4.58	2.73	4.39	1.50
STD <6months	1.01957133	0.42174117	1.02729546	0.99405347	0.45769659	0.51843486	1.2792043	0.99206337	1.07062835	1.19120625	0.79025688	1.19947288	1.21421098	1.05762804	1.55911194	0.73047713	1.23838477
STD >6months	1.17098767	0.81649658	1.36635848	1.16612542	0.48461168	0.59511904	0.96922337	1.45643816	1.52814504	1.40278403	0.8302975	1.54171785	1.50252313	0.66286797	1.39805059	1.05887304	0.91581094
T.TEST	0.4117569	0.49106042	0.03118602	0.04382574	0.52430571	0.44227819	0.1866879	0.00494117	0.03691213	0.89816714	0.20856649	0.07045284	0.04549828	0.08250914	0.41252294	0.72573122	0.94350583

Which environmental factors motivated you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?												
	Natural and environment factors	Favourable climate and weather condition	Favourable government policies	Political or historical ties with Spain	Low rate of discrimination	Safety and security	Common Language	Familiarity with own culture	Closeness or proximity in the home country	Hospitality of the locals	Referral from friends, family members, and social media	Low cost of living
MEAN <6months	4.41	4.57	3.39	3.02	3.48	3.80	3.45	3.55	3.27	3.71	3.66	3.48
MEAN >6months	4.48	4.55	3.73	3.33	3.52	3.73	3.33	3.73	3.36	3.70	3.52	3.58
STD <6months	0.76484	0.6563764	1.1643587	0.9451352	1.2730096	0.7927537	1.4377739	1.2024506	1.1403487	0.9637706	1.1795356	1.2287723
STD >6months	0.66714	0.5640761	0.9444816	1.2416387	1.1214169	1.1256311	1.3616779	1.3293026	1.4321789	1.1035411	0.9721501	0.8671182
T.TEST	0.3653121	0.7091909	0.0082445	0.0112401	0.8084436	0.4717944	0.4748811	0.1943439	0.5014239	0.8800565	0.2419461	0.4482714

Which university factors motivated you to choose Spain as your Erasmus destination?												
	Accreditation and reputation of the country and its institution	Easy admission	English as teaching medium	University ranking	University services	Qualified and friendly academic staff	Availability of labs and research instruments	Expertise and specialization in the area of study interest	Media advertising	Overseas websites	Domestic websites	
MEAN <6months	3.86	3.61	3.88	3.38	3.50	3.63	3.56	3.79	3.11	3.18	3.11	
MEAN >6months	4.12	3.91	4.06	3.67	3.73	3.70	3.78	3.88	3.42	3.42	3.45	
STD <6months	1.03877398	1.23037961	1.23358791	1.14726001	0.93673388	0.94722394	1.05388421	1.19120625	1.4336443	1.37020814	1.26990087	
STD >6months	1.02340045	1.07132034	1.24848393	1.29099445	1.35260691	1.38032715	1.28851941	1.24392463	1.29976688	1.39262125	1.32502144	
T.TEST	0.02639206	0.02526531	0.18592831	0.03522525	0.07605179	0.57551664	0.10617216	0.49489392	0.04535301	0.11697294	0.01983532	

During your program, what parts of your experience at the host university (Universitat Rovira i Virgili) did you find most valuable?														
	Infrastructure	Office for managing Erasmus program	Adequate information system	Language courses	Subjects in other languages	Integration activities with local students	Sources of information in other languages	Students' associations	Personnel dedicated exclusively to the Erasmus program	Agreement to collaborate and cooperate with other universities	Belonging to international networks	Availability of Destination Information on the University Website	Destination-related information is clearly presented on the univers	Dedicated University Support for Incoming Erasmus Participants
MEAN <6months	3.82	3.48	3.62	3.82	3.82	3.93	3.73	3.59	3.70	3.46	3.86	3.57	3.52	3.71
MEAN >6months	3.91	3.45	3.70	3.97	3.85	4.00	3.79	3.64	3.73	3.55	3.85	3.70	3.70	3.70
STD <6months	0.926124997	1.12288448	1.10194633	1.33957695	1.1660548	0.88688289	1.07062835	1.20111937	1.11227431	1.112274314	1.05762804	1.117591991	1.009833078	1.096166515
STD >6months	0.947484708	1.09232862	1.10354113	1.07485024	1.09319521	0.93541435	1.21854359	1.16774842	1.17984976	1.325021441	1.32573593	1.211529211	1.158793782	1.262063006
T.TEST	0.404811447	0.82468531	0.51959356	0.28927095	0.83200061	0.4836425	0.66130938	0.72392728	0.80946576	0.548341715	0.94759509	0.335484838	0.140902321	0.89472484

8.3 Factor Analysis after Varimax Rotation



8.4 Tourism Related Data

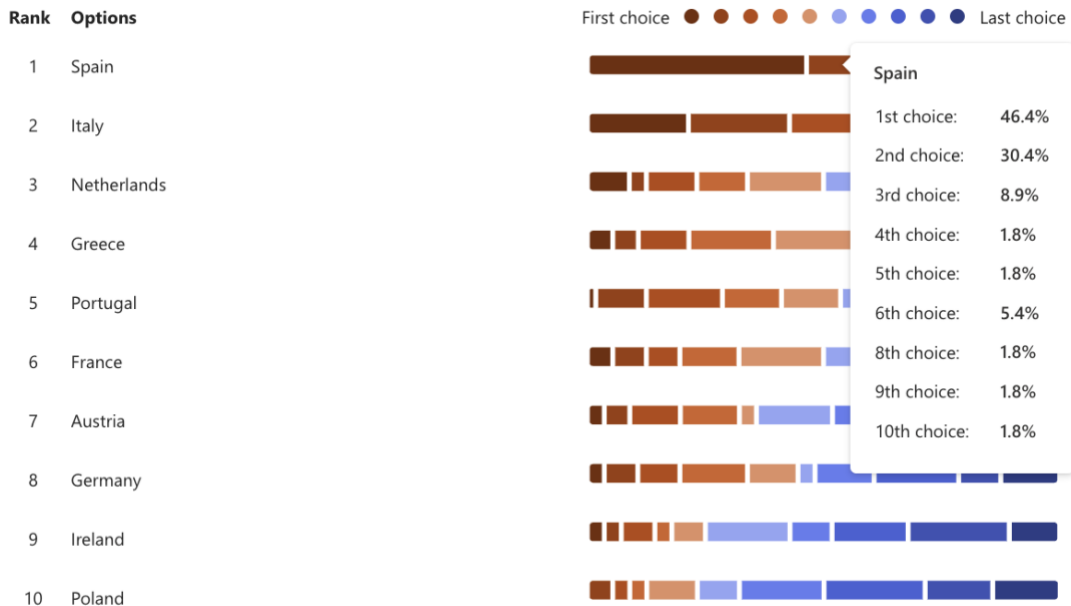


Figure 17. Respondent Preferences for Top 10 Erasmus+ Host Countries

This figure illustrates respondent preferences for their host country, with Spain identified as the top choice, selected by 46.4% of participants.

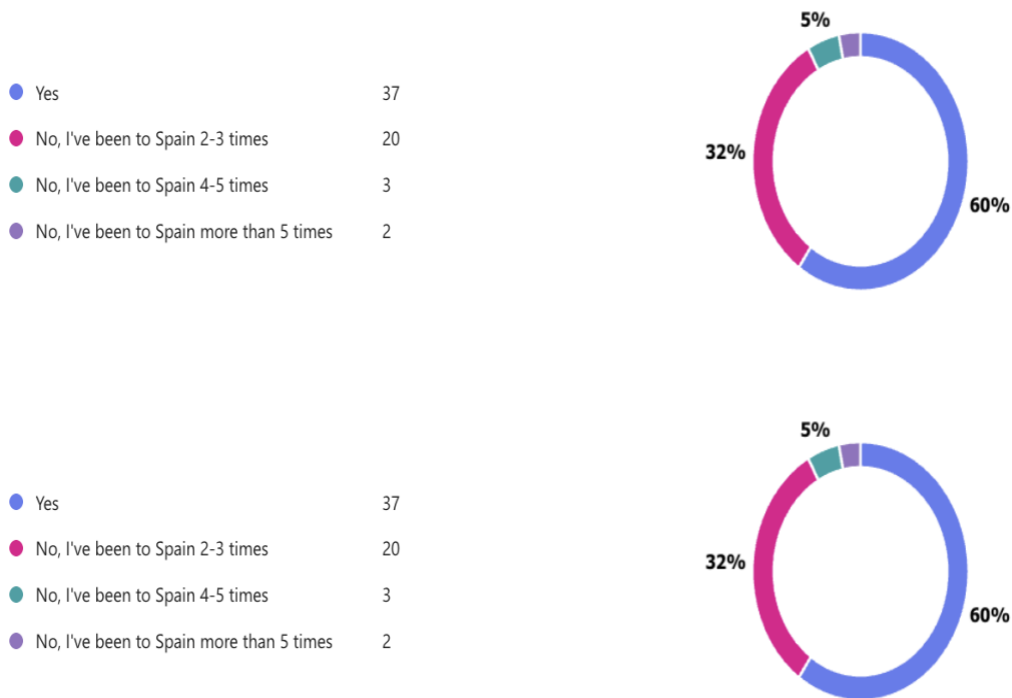


Figure 18. Respondent's Prior Travel to Spain Before Erasmus Mobility

This figure illustrates the number and percentage of respondents who had visited Spain before their Erasmus mobility, categorized by the number of previous visits.

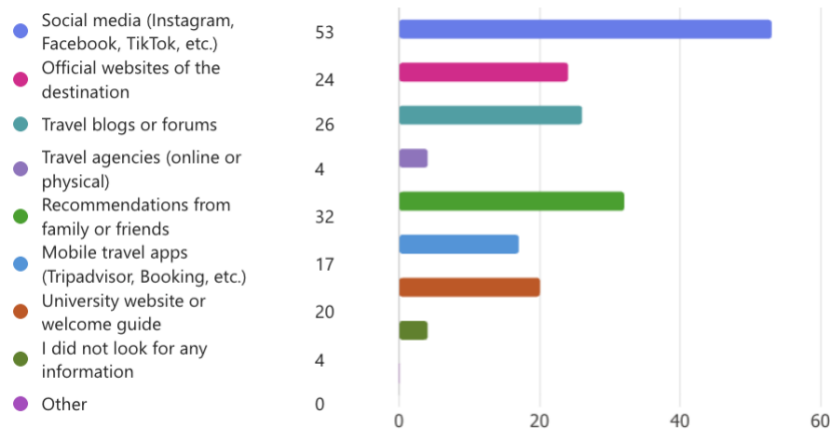


Figure 19. Pre-Erasmus Mobility Information Sources for Tourist and Leisure Offer.

The figure shows the various sources of information students used to research tourist and leisure activities before their Erasmus mobility.

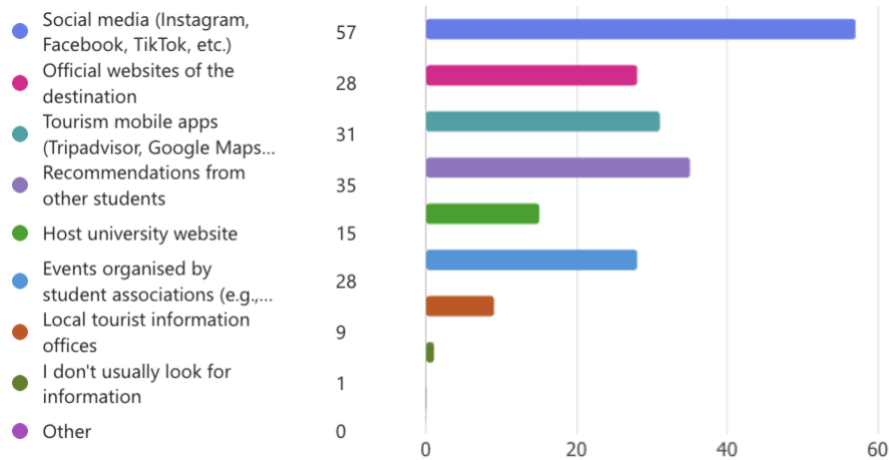


Figure 20. Information Sources for Tourist and Leisure Activities During Erasmus Mobility.

This figure illustrates the different sources students relied on to discover tourist and leisure activities while on their Erasmus mobility.

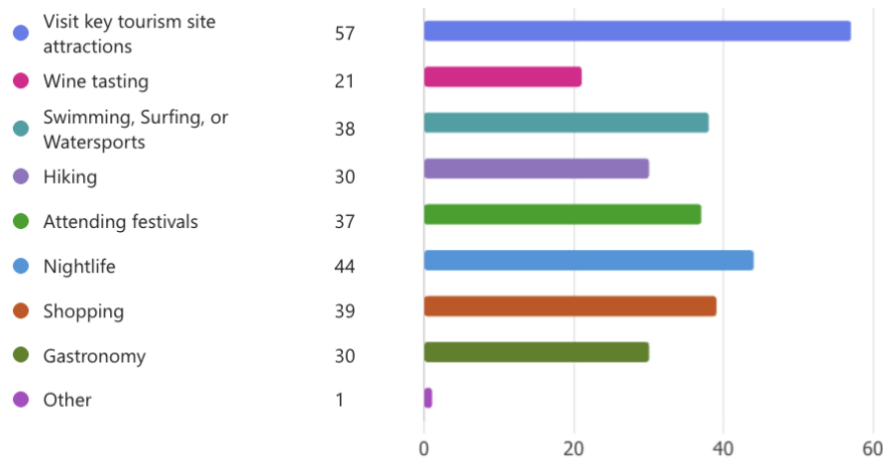


Figure 21. Tourism-Related Activities Undertaken by Students in Spain.

The figure displays the types of tourism-related activities, such as cultural visits or leisure, in which Erasmus students have participated since their arrival in Spain.

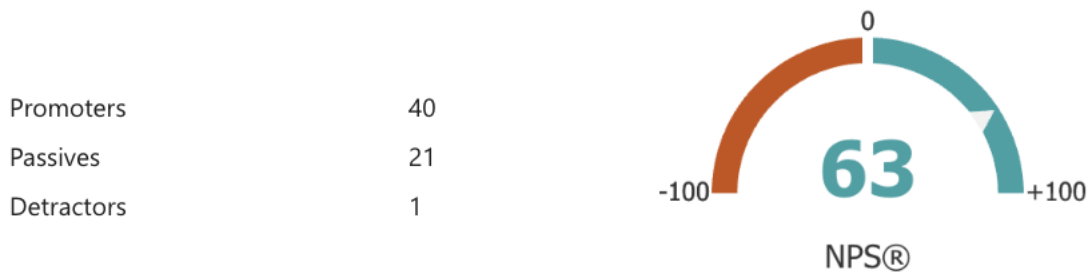


Figure 22. Net Promoter Score (NPS) for Spain as an Erasmus Destination.

This figure presents the likelihood of students recommending Spain as an Erasmus destination to others, based on the Net Promoter Score (NPS) metric. A score of 63 falls in the "excellent" category, suggesting very high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, to get a whole view, the score should always be benchmarked against industry averages. What is considered a great score in one industry may only be ordinary in another.

8.5 REDINTUR Universities



Figure 23. Spanish Universities that are part of REDINTUR

The image summarizes the Spanish universities in the REDINTUR network that offer various tourism programs.