

# Laurea International Week – Erasmus after Brexit: Will Britain miss out?

TEKSTI | Lucie Klimankova



Britain has been overshadowed by the uncertainty of Brexit for a couple of years. Although I am not a British citizen, I live and work in the UK and, like many others, fear the impact of a bad or no Brexit deal. Leaving aside political and economic matters, Brexit will undoubtedly affect educational funding. Opportunities to attend events such as Laurea International Week or undertake Erasmus mobility could disappear for both staff and students from UK universities.

Some may argue that it will not matter because innovative tools and technologies allow us to connect with others anywhere in the world without leaving the comfort of the office or study space. To a certain extent, this is true. Educational institutions offer online teaching and learning on a global scale to countless geographically dispersed learners. Synchronous and asynchronous communication technologies allow us to share knowledge, acquire new skills and collaborate in innovative ways without the necessity to be in the same seminar room, lecture theatre or conference hall. There are however benefits to both online and face-to-face collaboration and communication.

Over the past two years, I have been studying towards an MA in Online and Distance Education. As can be anticipated from the title, the course is based in the virtual environment. I have only met my course mates in the online chat room and all our ideas, experiences and opinions have been shared via a range of e-tools. It has been an interesting learning curve. I have worked on projects with students from very different cultural backgrounds based in distant time zones, and have experienced numerous challenges that such a collaboration brings. While planning a virtual meeting, it is not only the time differences, work patterns and family responsibilities of the participants one has to consider. Individual's religious commitments and beliefs also play a significant role but may not be necessarily known or shared.

Online forum discussions can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. This relates to both what is being communicated and who is participating in the communication. How do you politely respond to a post that you disagree with? It is much easier to agree with someone's comment than to challenge their opinion without imposing on their views. What language do



you use to construct and maintain social relationships? What is seen as polite in one culture may be considered as less polite in another. When do you respond? Is an instant response expected in the virtual world and silence seen as passive or even ignorant?

Misunderstanding, confusion or difficulties in working cross-culturally are not exclusive to online learning and collaboration. They can certainly occur in face-to-face communication and negatively impact individuals, teams or the overall outcome of any collaboration.

I have participated in a range of events in European countries as well as in Zambia and China, some one week long, others longer, all funded by Erasmus. I highly value having the opportunity to work closely with people from different cultures in their own environment. Occasionally, I found myself out of my comfort zone, unaware of local customs and traditions, and I learnt about these only through interaction with local people.

The online environment allows us to collaborate with peers around the globe, yet it does not give us the same cultural experience that occurs at face-to-face international events or opportunities. This is where British institutions may be losing out after Brexit.

### **About the author:**

"I grew up in the Czech Republic (then known as Czechoslovakia) and have since travelled widely, living and working in Greece, France and the UK. This has fostered my interests in travel and experiencing new cultures and learning languages (especially Greek). I am also interested in online learning and teaching. I have worked in higher education since 2007 and have been in my current role for 4 years."



**Lucie Klimankova**

Senior Library Assistant, Cardiff Metropolitan University

Brexit

Erasmus

International collaboration