

## Innovation vision of international, cultural and educational partnership in the field of human capital: The Erasmus + case and its impact in Ukraine (2016-2024)

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### Abstract

Education can serve as a civilizational communication strategy through the consensual transmission of values such as human rights, democracy and sustainable development, among other aspects, as shown by the European Union's core programme Erasmus+. In this sense, through a hermeneutical methodology together with the documentary research technique, situated in a constructivist

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epistemological perspective, the objective of this research is to critically analyze the strategic innovation vision of the Erasmus+ program as a multifaceted mechanism of international, cultural and educational partnership in the development of Ukrainian human capital during the historical period 2016-2024, simultaneously evaluating its transformative impact on the national educational landscape and on the strengthening of the country's professional capacities. In conclusion, it is stated that the transformative experiences of Erasmus+ must be understood, philosophically, as concrete manifestations of a broader civilizational strategy, functioning as mechanisms for the construction of alternative identities that allow Ukraine to escape the geographical and historical determinisms that seek to confine it to spheres of Russian influence, alien to its authentic democratic aspirations for development and national self-determination.

**Keywords:** Erasmus+, education programme, social capital, international partnership, innovation vision, Ukraine.

*Visión de innovación estratégica de asociación internacional, cultural y educativa en el ámbito del proyecto de capital humano: Erasmus+ y su impacto en Ucrania (2016-2024)*

## Resumen

La educación puede servir de estrategia de comunicación civilizacional mediante la transmisión consensuada de valores como los derechos humanos, la democracia y el desarrollo sostenible, entre otros, como lo muestra el programa central de la Unión Europea Erasmus +. En este sentido, mediante una metodología hermenéutica junto a la técnica de investigación documental, situada en una perspectiva epistemológica constructivista, el objetivo de esta investigación consiste en analizar críticamente la visión de innovación estratégica del programa Erasmus+ como mecanismo multifacético de asociación internacional, cultural y educativa en el desarrollo del capital humano ucraniano, durante el período histórico 2016-2024, evaluando simultáneamente su impacto transformador en el panorama educativo nacional y en el fortalecimiento de las capacidades profesionales del país. A modo de conclusión se afirma que, las experiencias transformadoras de Erasmus+ deben comprenderse, filosóficamente, como

manifestaciones concretas de una estrategia civilizacional más amplia, que funciona como mecanismos de construcción de identidades alternativas que permiten a Ucrania escapar de los determinismos geográficos e históricos que pretenden confinarla en esferas de influencia rusa, ajena a sus aspiraciones democráticas auténticas de desarrollo y autodeterminación nacional.

**Palabras clave:** Erasmus+, programa de educación, capital social, asociación internacional, visión de innovación, Ucrania.

## Introduction

Although it is a commonplace to affirm it, education constitutes the fundamental pillar on which the contemporary European civilizational project is built, representing much more than the simple mechanical transmission of traditional academic knowledge. In this transformative context, typical of the digital age, European education systems are consolidating themselves as primordial architectures of a democratic society that finds its essence in the unwavering defence of universal human rights, sustainable scientific-technological progress and diverse cultural preservation (Council of the EU, 2023).

In the domains of the European Union, individual freedom emerges as a supreme value that allows each citizen to develop his or her maximum human potential without interference from arbitrary or authoritarian forces that restrict his or her integral development to be and do in accordance with the purposes of his or her life project. As Jafari et al. (2012) argue, the holistic approach to education transcends national borders to become the foundation of a shared European identity, based on strong democratic principles and mutual respect among the most diverse cultures. Ultimately, the permanent construction of an educational Europe

represents a civilizational paradigm that aspires to serve as an inspiring model for the rest of the contemporary world.

The traditional concept of human capital has undergone, in the words of Goldin (2016), a profound epistemic metamorphosis, evolving towards the more complex and dynamic notion of human talent, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, creative, and ethical dimensions of integral personal development. In this sense, contemporary educational processes are configured as catalysts for the continuous development of all the capacities inherent to the human person, enhancing not only specialized technical skills, but also transversal skills essential for active civic life.

When an attempt is made to reproduce human talent, education reveals itself as a genuine transforming force of social, economic and political reality, capable of shaping a critical, reflective and participatory citizenship that assumes the historical responsibility of building its own collective reality. At the same time, any comprehensive education programme must generate, under certain conditions, a highly skilled and versatile productive force, equipped with the necessary skills to promote the integral economic, social and cultural development of Europe. This educational duality, between citizenship training and professional preparation, represents the perfect synthesis for building prosperous, inclusive and democratically mature societies.

In this common thread, the Erasmus+ programme is shown to be the most ambitious and transformative strategic initiative of the European Union in the field of international educational cooperation, which translates into an innovative mechanism for building academic, cultural and professional bridges between European nations and associated countries (Delegation of the European Union to

Ukraine, 2024). As a multinational educational platform, Erasmus+ transcends student mobility alone to become a complex ecosystem for the exchange of knowledge, innovative pedagogical methodologies and institutional best practices that strengthen global educational quality.

In the specific context of Ukraine, Erasmus+ has acquired an extraordinary geopolitical and humanitarian dimension, functioning as an instrument for European integration and strengthening the country's institutional resilience. In the words of the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine (2024), Ukrainian participation in this programme has facilitated the modernisation of its education systems, the internationalisation of its academic institutions and the training of a new generation of professionals with a European perspective. This is a strategic partnership process that has proven to be key to consolidating European democratic values on Ukrainian territory and, at the same time, to substantially improving the country's socio-economic development prospects.

During the period 2016-2024, Erasmus+ has deployed a multidimensional educational support strategy in Ukraine that ranges from mass academic mobility to the implementation of long-range institutional cooperation projects, benefiting more than 33,000 Ukrainian citizens who have actively participated in these exchange programmes (Erasmus+, 2025). For what it means, this initiative has transcended geographical and political barriers to materialize concrete European solidarity, especially during the most challenging moments of recent Ukrainian history. The program has facilitated the printing of more than 1.5 million textbooks in Ukrainian, ensuring access to quality educational materials, regardless of adverse geopolitical circumstances.



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European university alliances have incorporated approximately 40 Ukrainian higher education institutions, creating transnational academic networks that strengthen collaborative research and pedagogical innovation (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2024). This transformative impact is reflected, not only in quantitative indicators of participation, but mainly in the qualitative improvement of the living conditions, professional opportunities and prospects of thousands of young Ukrainians (Erasmus+, 2025a). Therefore, it can be said that the Ukrainian experience with Erasmus+ demonstrates how education can serve as a tool for building peace, democracy and shared prosperity, even in contexts of high geopolitical complexity.

The general objective of this research is to critically analyze the strategic innovation vision of the Erasmus+ programme, as a multifaceted mechanism of international, cultural and educational partnership in the development of Ukrainian human capital, during the historical period 2016-2024, simultaneously evaluating its transformative impact on the national educational landscape and on the strengthening of the country's professional capacities.

In terms of its content, this article is structured in four central sections that guarantee a systematic and rigorous analysis of the phenomenon under study. The first section develops an exhaustive and critical review of the fundamental contributions of the existing academic literature on international educational cooperation and student mobility programs, establishing, simultaneously, the theoretical foundations that conceptually support all the research.

The second section presents the research methodology adopted, including the study design, data collection and analysis techniques, source selection criteria, and results validation procedures used. The third part constitutes the analytical

core of the work, where the results obtained are analyzed, interpreted and critically discussed, establishing significant theoretical connections and contrasting the findings with the pre-existing specialized literature. Finally, the fourth section presents the main conclusions of the study and recommendations for future lines of research in this emerging field that intertwines, all things being equal, education, human capital and contemporary geopolitical realities.

## 1. Theoretical foundation and literature reviewed

In general, constructivist theories applied to international educational cooperation recognize, as Toprak (2006) explains, that student mobility programs operate as spaces of social construction where participants develop new academic and cultural identities through intercultural interaction. The constructivist perspective emphasizes, therefore, that learning emerges from collaborative and reflective processes, where students and academics actively reconstruct their cognitive frames of reference when confronted with diverse educational systems. Wang (2025) develops the Triple-A TNE *Partnership Framework* conceptual framework that identifies agility, adaptability, and alignment as fundamental capabilities to navigate intercultural challenges in transnational education, evidencing how educational institutions respond dynamically to disruptions, while negotiating structural differences.

The constructivist approach shows that international educational cooperation transcends the transfer of knowledge to become, at each moment of the teaching-learning processes, a transformative process of construction of shared meanings. But, in addition, constructivist theoretical frameworks demonstrate that international educational associations function as laboratories of pedagogical

innovation where new modalities of meaningful learning are recreated, which respond to the heterogeneous realities of specific cultural contexts.

For their part, and as Kulesa and Brantuo (2021) state, critical theories of education question the asymmetrical power structures that characterize North-South educational partnerships, revealing with concrete empirical evidence how certain models of cooperation perpetuate neocolonial dynamics. In contrast, Oberhauser (2019) proposes a *critical feminist pedagogy* that challenges the racialized, neoliberal, and colonizing dimensions of higher education, proposing relational and interactive forms of global learning that promote the ethics of mutual understanding rather than paternalistic relationships that subordinate women. For this researcher, in today's world it is clear that:

Neoliberalism has profoundly impacted the structures and practices of higher education. Over the past several decades, financial models in higher education have shifted from an emphasis on public support and funding to more corporate practices in what Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) label academic capitalism. With reduced public funding, universities are more focused on income-generating models, private and corporate fund raising, and entrepreneurial activities (David and Clegg, 2008; Heyman, 2007). The neoliberal turn in the academy is also linked to populist movements and nativist rhetoric that attack critical and cross-cultural aspects of higher education (Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey, 2009; Sultana, 2018). In many cases, critical perspectives on global issues and diverse social identities provide important counter-narratives to this populist rhetoric and extremist conservative viewpoints. (Oberhauser, 2019, p. 753)

In addition to the above, the critical perspective examines how international educational associations can reproduce implicit hierarchies that privilege Western forms of knowledge over local epistemologies. Today, critical approaches reveal that the decolonization of educational partnerships requires recognizing non-

Western forms of knowledge and authority, questioning inherited colonial structures that influence access to higher education. As stated by Kulesa and Brantuo (2021), critical pedagogy emphasizes the social need to build transparent, inclusive, and non-hierarchical relationships that allow the empowerment of historically marginalized communities in international academic exchange processes.

Within the framework of the critical, humanist and constructivist pedagogical tradition, the theoretical frameworks of the Bologna process have fundamentally transformed the architecture of European higher education, establishing principles of harmonisation that facilitate academic mobility and the mutual recognition of qualifications (European Commission, S/D). More precisely, the implementation of the Bologna process in Ukraine since 2005 has generated significant structural transformations that include the adoption of the three-cycle education system, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and the development of quality assurance frameworks, aligned with European standards (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2024).

In this context, Bordogna (2020) analyzes how social capital develops among operational academics who implement international collaborative programs, identifying that networks of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect are fundamental for the sustainability of educational associations. In line with Bordogna (2020), Nikolaeva's (2017) research on the Bologna process shows that, beyond the technical aspects of curricular harmonisation, these frameworks facilitate the construction of shared European academic identities and promote

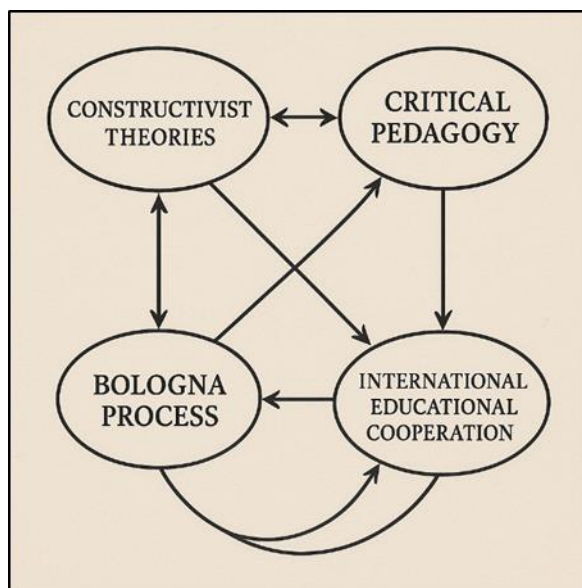
common democratic values between the EU and Ukraine, hence their geostrategic value.

As it is logical to imagine, the implementation of the Bologna process in Ukraine indicates to public policymakers in education that structural reforms must be complemented by profound cultural transformations, to achieve a true integration of the European Higher Education Area.

In a synthesis of the theoretical contributions reviewed, significant convergences between constructivist and critical perspectives and the Bologna process in the analysis of international educational cooperation are evidenced. Authors such as Wang (2025), Oberhauser (2019), Bordogna (2020) and studies on the Bologna process in Ukraine (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2024), agree that international educational associations function as complex systems of social construction where pedagogical, political, cultural and economic dimensions converge, which should not be omitted in scientific research on the subject.

In this sense, the literature consulted demonstrates consensus on the importance of social capital as an articulating element of successful associations, while critical approaches provide analytical tools to examine the power relations inherent in these processes that, ultimately, expand the symbolic and cultural limits of European civilization.

**Image 1.** Diagram of connections between the different theoretical foundations of the research.



**Source:** prepared by the authors (2025).

Constructivist theoretical frameworks offer optimistic perspectives on the transformative capacities of educational cooperation, while critical theories provide ideas of distance and caution about the reproduction of systemic inequalities in education. But, in any case, the Bologna process from which the Erasmus+ programme emerges, emerges as a paradigmatic case that illustrates how supranational regulatory frameworks can facilitate systematic educational cooperation, although their implementation requires adaptations sensitive to specific local contexts as evidenced by the Ukrainian case.

Finally, the visual diagram in image 1 presents the fundamental interconnections between the theoretical frameworks that support research on international educational cooperation and student mobility programs. In particular,

the image shows how constructivist theories connect with critical pedagogy and the Bologna process, forming an integrated conceptual network that underpins the analysis of the Erasmus+ programme in Ukraine. What is at stake here is the understanding of how different theoretical approaches complement and reinforce each other to provide a solid conceptual basis that allows for a critical analysis of international educational cooperation programs from multiple integrated academic perspectives.

## 2. Methodology

It should be clarified that this research is based on a constructivist and critical conception of education that recognizes educational processes as dynamic and intersubjective social constructions, mediated by relations of power and knowledge historically conditioned by the specific geopolitical contexts in which they are developed. Interpreting Allen's (2022) contributions, the constructivist approach allows us to understand how participants in the Erasmus+ programme actively construct new academic and cultural identities through intercultural interaction.

Indeed, the geopolitical scenarios in which Erasmus+ is being developed in Ukraine during 2016-2024 are marked by historical tensions, democratisation processes, armed conflicts and aspirations for European integration that fundamentally condition the implementation and reception of transnational educational initiatives.

This double theoretical perspective (constructivist and critical) allows us to critically analyze how European educational policies operate as *soft power* mechanisms that seek to promote liberal democratic values, while simultaneously

reproducing subtle neocolonial dynamics. Reinterpreting Derrida (1976), the constructivist-critical methodology recognizes that international cooperation programs are not politically neutral, but are inserted in hegemonic discursive frameworks that require rigorous analytical deconstruction, in order to elucidate their scope and more diverse meanings.

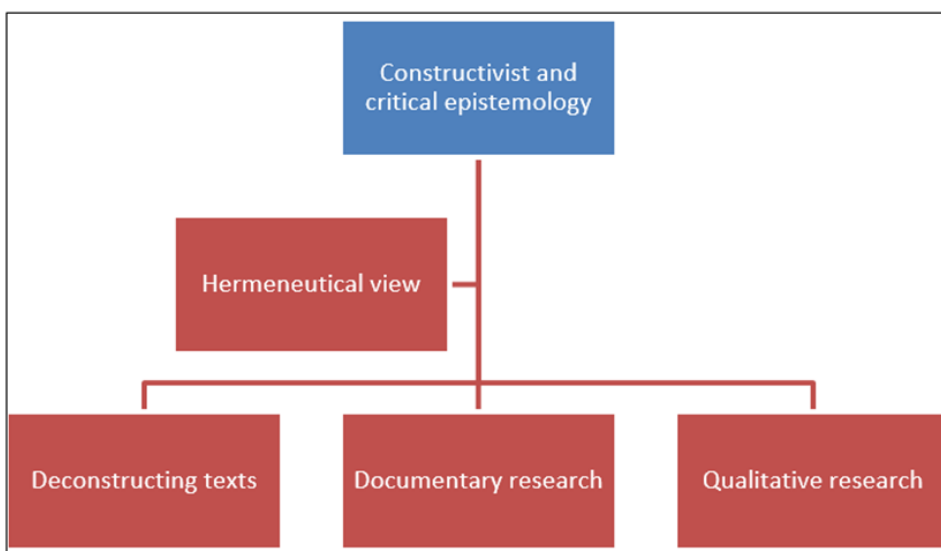
The aim here is to structure a hybrid epistemological model that facilitates the comprehensive understanding of Ukrainian educational transformations, such as complex processes of cultural negotiation, institutional resistance, and creative adaptation to international pedagogical models. The critical-constructivist analysis shows how Erasmus+ functions simultaneously as an instrument of genuine cooperation and as a mechanism of European geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space.

On the other hand, the hermeneutical methodology constitutes the interpretative core of this research, oriented towards the deep understanding of the symbols, signs and cultural meanings that emerge in the texts and contexts related to the implementation of Erasmus+, in the contemporary Ukrainian educational landscape. A hermeneutical approach is attempted that recognizes that Ukraine represents a paradigmatic case of civilizational transition, where legitimate European aspirations for educational modernization converge with the preservation of specific cultural identities and the definitive overcoming of Soviet institutional legacies.

As Hodge (2024) points out, the hermeneutical process seeks to interpret how official discourses, institutional narratives, participants' testimonies, and programmatic documents reveal the inherent tensions between the adoption of European liberal democratic values and the construction of an autonomous and

sovereign Ukrainian national identity. At the same time, this methodology also allows us to decipher the multiple layers of meaning that underlie the transnational educational policies promoted by the United States, recognizing that all educational texts are mediated by specific historical, ideological and cultural contexts, which condition their interpretation and practical application.

**Table 1.** Epistemological and methodological architecture of research



**Source:** prepared by the authors (2025).

The methodological structure presented synthesizes the conceptual and operational architecture that underpins the critical analysis of the strategic innovation of the Erasmus+ programme as a multifaceted mechanism for the development of Ukrainian human capital, coherently articulating the constructivist-critical epistemological foundations with the interpretative hermeneutical methodology and the specific procedures for qualitative data collection, analysis and validation. Table 1 illustrates how the research operates

from a dual theoretical base that combines the constructivist understanding of intercultural learning processes with the critical analysis of geopolitical power relations, allowing a sophisticated methodological approach that recognizes both the transformative capacities and the structural limitations of international educational cooperation programs.

The hermeneutic methodology is presented as the central articulating axis that connects the theoretical foundations with the operational research techniques, facilitating the deep interpretation of cultural meanings, educational symbols and institutional contexts that characterize the implementation of Erasmus+ in the specific Ukrainian context during the historical period analyzed. The procedures of hermeneutical validation guarantee academic rigor through methodological triangulation, interpretative reflexivity and systematic application of the hermeneutical circle that allows the dialectical movement between particular and holistic understanding of the phenomenon studied in a historical horizon, as Gadamer (2004) argues.

### **3. Results, analysis and discussion in a hermeneutical key**

The critical and hermeneutical analysis of the strategic innovation vision of the Erasmus+ programme during the period 2016-2024 highlights profound structural transformations in the Ukrainian education system that transcend the mere implementation of collaborative projects to constitute, essentially, a set of systematic mechanisms of institutional and cultural reconfiguration. Second data from the European Commission (2025), the innovative strategy of the programme is fundamentally articulated through three interconnected dimensions:

- Pedagogical modernization through the adoption of European standards of educational quality.
- The strengthening of institutional capacities through transnational networks of academic cooperation, and;
- The construction of social capital through the sustained exchange of students, academics and professionals.

**Image 2.** European Academic Union.



**Fuente:** European Commission, 2025.

Specifically, this multidimensional approach has generated significant quantitative impacts, demonstrated in the participation of more than 39,000 young Ukrainians in mobility programmes since 2022, as well as in the development of more than 70 human capacity building projects that have linked Ukrainian institutions with European partners in processes of comprehensive educational transformation (European Commission, 2025). At least in official data, the program has demonstrated a significant (exceptional) capacity for adaptation, in

the face of adverse contexts, maintaining its operational continuity even during periods of political crisis and armed conflict in Eastern Europe, which implies the structural consistency of its implementation mechanisms and depth of its institutional roots in the contemporary Ukrainian educational landscape.

The dimension of the development of Ukrainian human capital through Erasmus+ is manifested in qualitative transformations that exceed conventional indicators of academic mobility to encompass complex processes of construction of European professional identities and specialized cross-cultural competences. The data provided by Cytowanie (2024) research allow us to affirm, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the program has facilitated not only the curricular internationalization of Ukrainian institutions, but, fundamentally, the insertion of Ukrainian professionals in global knowledge networks that exponentially expand their opportunities for professional development and their effective contribution to national development.

Therefore, the impact on strengthening professional capacities is particularly evident in strategic sectors such as: higher education, scientific research and technological development, social spaces where program participants have assumed leadership roles in processes of institutional modernization and transfer of specialized knowledge (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2024).

Undoubtedly, it is a transformation of human capital that has distinctive characteristics that include qualitative variables such as: the development of advanced intercultural competences, proficiency in European languages, familiarity with European regulatory and methodological frameworks, and the construction of transnational professional networks that facilitate long-term collaborations (United Nations, 2023). Seen in this way, the programme has

contributed significantly to the training of a new generation of Ukrainian professionals with a European perspective, capable of serving as agents of change in processes of institutional modernisation and, most importantly in geopolitical terms, as ambassadors of democratic values and principles of international cooperation in their specific work contexts. According to qualified opinions:

**Jaco Cilliers, UNDP Resident Representative to Ukraine,** emphasized, “These data once again underscore the importance of developing human capital in Ukraine. It's not just about stimulating economic growth but also about rebuilding society after numerous challenges. We believe in the deep potential of the Ukrainian people and are committed to helping Ukraine develop and implement policies and strategies that create a conducive environment for education, health, social protection, employment opportunities, and much more.” (United Nations, 2023, para., 6)

For authors such as Trubavina et al., (2023), it should not be omitted that, in general, the Ukrainian national education landscape has undergone systemic transformations directly attributable to the sustained implementation of Erasmus+ projects, which have reconfigured both institutional structures and pedagogical practices at multiple levels of the education system.

Empirical evidence shows that the programme has catalyzed curricular modernization processes that include the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the implementation of student-centred teaching methodologies, the development of joint academic programmes with European institutions, and the strengthening of educational quality assurance systems aligned with European standards (Erasmus+ UA, 2023). Taken together, these transformations have generated multiplier effects that extend beyond the

directly beneficiary institutions, to influence national education policies and the regulatory frameworks that govern Ukrainian higher education.

Within the specific framework of the Ukrainian reality marked by the war, Erasmus+ UA serves to provide help in the following fields or activities:

- Promotion of further cooperation between institutions of school education by the EU to forcibly displaced students, in particular through the use of online platforms.
- Providing Ukrainian students with textbooks for the New Ukrainian School.
- Expanding the participation of Ukrainian educational institutions, institutions, and organizations within Erasmus+ on education, training, youth, and sports.
- Promotion of mutual recognition of academic qualifications.
- Participation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in working groups and events within the European Educational Area.
- Involvement of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in the work of the European educational information network Eurydice Network.
- Increasing the capacity of Ukrainian sports and youth organizations through new opportunities on capacity building via Erasmus+. (Erasmus+ UA, 2023, para., 3)

In the words of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2024), the transformative impact of this program can also be seen in the strengthening of vectors such as institutional autonomy, the development of strategic management capacities, the diversification of sources of international financing, and the consolidation of organizational cultures oriented

towards innovation and international collaboration. Sustained participation in European higher education networks has positioned Ukrainian institutions as relevant actors in the European Higher Education Area, facilitating their eventual full integration into formal European educational structures, although Ukraine is not yet a member of the EU. Moreover, the programme has demonstrated effectiveness in crisis contexts, maintaining educational continuity during periods of political and social disruption, underlining its strategic importance as a mechanism for institutional resilience and social cohesion in contexts of high volatility.

**Image 3.** Logo de Erasmus+



**Source:** UNESCO, N.D.

Everything indicates that the processes of educational internationalization in Ukraine develop a complex dialectic between openness to European models and the preservation of national cultural specificities that challenges simplistic conceptions of Western-type cultural homogenization (Shapovalova, 2022). However, from a personal and critical perspective, the authors of this research argue that educational internationalization, far from eroding Ukrainian cultural identity, has paradoxically contributed to its strengthening and contemporary redefinition, through processes of intercultural contrast that allow us to identify,

value and articulate distinctive elements of the national educational and cultural tradition.

Thus, the experience of Ukrainian students and scholars in European contexts generates at every moment processes of identity reflection that result in creative syntheses between universal European values and Ukrainian cultural specificities, producing hybrid identities that are simultaneously, deeply Ukrainian and genuinely European.

From a constructivist anthropological point of view, this dynamic contradicts deterministic theories about the loss of cultural authenticity in internationalization processes, evidencing instead that collective exposure to cultural diversity can strengthen national identity awareness, when it occurs in contexts of mutual respect and cultural reciprocity.

For Stefanyshyn (2024), it is clear that the preservation of historical authenticity does not require cultural isolation, but rather, informed intercultural dialogue that allows distinguishing between essential cultural elements that must be preserved and adaptable practices that can be modernized without compromising the ontological cultural integrity of the nation. Consequently, Ukrainian educational internationalization demonstrates that it is possible to build national cultural identities in dynamics that are simultaneously faithful to historical traditions and open to enriching international influences.

For the reasons stated so far, in geopolitical and geostrategic terms, transnational educational cooperation emerges as a potentially transformative instrument for the construction of peace and reconciliation, although its effectiveness depends critically on the specific conditions in which it is

implemented and the conceptual and legal frameworks that guide it. In the Ukrainian context, where education has been used both as a tool for nation-building and as an ideological battlefield in armed confrontations, international cooperation programmes such as Erasmus+ offer exceptional opportunities to develop capacities for intercultural dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, and social construction of shared understandings that transcend political, ethnic and ideological divisions.

According to data from Erasmus+ (2025), the experience of young Ukrainians in European exchange programmes provides them with comparative perspectives on the democratic management of cultural differences, institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution, and models of peaceful coexistence between diverse communities that can be creatively applied in national contexts. However, according to Stefanyshyn (2024), it is important to recognize here that transnational educational cooperation is not automatically peacebuilding, but requires intentional design, implementation sensitive to local contexts, and sustained commitment to principles of justice, equity, and inclusion to generate lasting positive impacts.

For these reasons and others, educational programs can inadvertently reproduce or exacerbate existing conflicts, if they do not adequately address asymmetrical power dynamics, structural inequalities, and historical traumas that characterize conflict contexts. Thus, effective peacebuilding through education requires holistic approaches that combine the development of technical skills with training in democratic citizenship, human rights, and constructive conflict resolution, as well as safe material and symbolic spaces for the processing of



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traumatic experiences and the construction of shared narratives about desirable futures.

Like Human Rights Watch (2024), we believe that the ethical and pedagogical limits of external educational influence in conflict-ridden nations such as Ukraine pose dilemmas in areas such as: intellectual sovereignty, cultural self-determination, and the balances between international cooperation and national autonomy that require rigorous philosophical analysis. From a Derridean perspective, it is essential to deconstruct the seemingly benevolent discourses of educational cooperation in order to identify underlying power structures, inherent asymmetries, and subtle mechanisms of cultural hegemony that can operate under the guise of mutually beneficial academic exchange.

External educational influence, regardless of its stated intentions, always involves the transmission of specific values, norms, methodologies and conceptual frameworks that reflect particular cultural and ideological contexts, raising legitimate questions about the inadvertent imposition of educational models that may not be appropriate or desirable in specific national contexts. The ethical limits of such influence are defined by principles of informed consent, genuine reciprocity, respect for cultural self-determination, and commitment to strengthening national identity and capacities for autonomous educational development.

For the undersigned, the pedagogical limits are related to the recognition that effective education must be rooted in specific cultural contexts, respond to local needs and aspirations, and contribute to the development of endogenous capacities for innovation and social transformation. Ethical international educational cooperation must therefore operate as a horizontal exchange between

equals, facilitating two-way transfers of knowledge and experiences, and strengthening the capacities that enhance the intellectual and cultural sovereignty of the participating nations.

The following is a broad analytical table containing the main ideas of the Analysis and Discussion of Results section.

**Table 2.** Analytical matrix of the sources consulted.

Analytical dimension	Central ideas (synthesis)	Key facts and evidence	Overall impact and implications
<b>Strategic vision of Innovation.</b>	Erasmus+ is conceived as a systemic platform for educational modernization and geopolitical integration that articulates mobility, strategic alliances and flexible financing for education.	At least 14 new European alliances incorporate almost 40 Ukrainian Institutes of Education Sciences (HEIs) and up to €14.4 million each. (European Union's (EU), 2024)	It strengthens Ukraine's international presence, accelerates its convergence with the European education system and consolidates EU-Ukraine education diplomacy.
<b>Human Capital Development.</b>	Mass mobility and internationally recognized training, which generates human talent with technical, intercultural and multilingual skills.	At least 33,000 Ukrainians have participated in Erasmus+ mobilities since 2022. (European Commission, 2025)	Bridge professionals emerge, with European networks that boost human capital and national employability.
<b>Curricular modernization.</b>	Curriculum alignment, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and European quality standards.	Adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and triple-cycle reforms compared to 38 Erasmus countries (Kremen et al., 2020). Linking universities to regional innovation clusters.	Recognition of qualifications, automatic recognition and academic competitiveness increase significantly.

Analytical dimension	Central ideas (synthesis)	Key facts and evidence	Overall impact and implications
<b>Strengthening institutional capacity.</b>	Strengthening of governance and strategic management through cooperation projects and training of cadres, with high professional training.	"Youth Capacity Building" projects with €300k and 5 Ukrainian counterparts. (EA, 2024)	Improves institutional resilience and diversifies sources of international financing.
<b>Academic social capital.</b>	Networks of trust. Joint publications and consortia establishing European transnational social capital.	Studies on university-regional cooperation show that European alliances multiply patents and spin-offs. (Borodiyenko et al., 2023)	It increases the density of the Ukrainian scientific network and facilitates regional innovation.
<b>Resilience and continuity in the face of crises.</b>	In Ukraine, Erasmus+ acts as an educational buffer in a difficult war context.	At least 1.5 million manuals printed in Ukrainian and continuity. académica virtual. (Erasmus+, 2025)	It ensures uninterrupted learning, reduces brain drain and sustains social cohesion through quality education.
<b>Cultural identity and hybridization.</b>	Internationalization strengthens, not dilutes, Ukrainian cultural identity through a critical dialogue with the Western European self.	Student mobility redefines values and European belonging of young people. Positive adaptation of displaced children to European international education systems (Samoilova et al., 2024).	Hybrid "Euro-Ukrainian" identities are created that combine historical authenticity with educational openness.
<b>Peacebuilding and spaces for reconciliation.</b>	Educational cooperation as <i>soft power</i> for peace and shaping European institutions and values in Ukraine.	At least 15 Erasmus+ "Building Hope for Ukraine" projects document experiences of integration and resilience. In addition, 35 university alliances sign the 2025 solidarity charter. (European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), 2025)	Fosters shared narratives, inter-university dialogue, and capacities for post-conflict national reconstruction in Ukraine.
<b>Ethical and pedagogical limits.</b>	The need to deconstruct asymmetries and avoid	Research on "Being more European" shows identity tensions in mobility. At	Principles of reciprocity, informed consent

Analytical dimension	Central ideas (synthesis)	Key facts and evidence	Overall impact and implications
	academic neocolonialism in education systems.	the same time, studies on local integration show inequalities of power (Nichifor & Cătălina Țimiraș, 2019).	and didactic co-creation are required.
<b>Digital and technological innovation.</b>	Digital transformation accelerated by the pandemic and war.	Ukrainian universities adopt the Learning Management System (LMS), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and hybrid platforms. EU project allocates €31 million to create an open digital environment. (Erasmus+ 2023 Annual Work, 2023)	Expands global access, makes pathways more flexible, and increases the resilience of the Ukrainian education system.
<b>Youth empowerment.</b>	Youth training as a vector for social reconstruction.	4 new Erasmus+ Youth projects are promoted with a total of €10 million for 37 consortia in 2024. (EU Neighbours East, 2024)	Empowers youth organizations, promotes civic leadership and digital skills.
<b>Financial and political support.</b>	Budget increase and specific funds for Ukraine.	2023 review raises Erasmus+ budget to €4.43 billion and includes €100 million more for Ukraine. (Erasmus+, 2023b)	It provides financial sustainability, a political priority for education and is a sign of the EU's commitment.

**Source:** prepared by the authors (2025).

Summing things up, for exhibition purposes, Table 2 demonstrates that Erasmus+ has functioned as a systemic catalyst connecting academic modernisation, human talent development, social resilience and peace diplomacy, on equal terms. Each dimension reinforces the others in a positive feedback effect, so that funding enables socio-educational mobility; mobility legitimizes curricular reforms; reforms strengthen European Ukrainian cultural identity and Finally, the renewed identity drives national reconstruction and peace in the region.

Ukraine is not a passive recipient of education policies, since its institutions provide creativity, resilience and digital solutions that enrich the European programme itself (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2024). In this scenario, the ethical challenge lies in maintaining reciprocity and equity, ensuring that educational cooperation remains a bridge – and not a unilateral highway – towards an inclusive Europe in solidarity with Ukraine.

### **3.1. Three concrete experiences of the Erasmus+ programme with an impact on the strengthening of Ukraine's culture, education and human capital in the period 2016-2024**

The first experience that we consider paradigmatic of the transformative impact of Erasmus+ in Ukraine is the incorporation of almost 40 Ukrainian higher education institutions into the European Universities Alliances, a process that has radically reshaped the national academic landscape during the period analyzed. This massive integration, supported by exceptional funding of up to €14.4 million per partnership over four years, has transcended international cooperation to become a systematic mechanism of institutional modernization, operating in multiple simultaneous educational dimensions (EUUA, 2024).

From an analytical perspective, this phenomenon represents a silent but profound revolution in the organizational culture of Ukrainian universities, which have had to adapt governance structures, pedagogical methodologies and academic management systems, among other aspects, to align with European standards without compromising their specific institutional identity.

Specifically, the experience reveals how educational internationalization can function as a vector of endogenous transformation, generating structural changes that emerge from within institutions. The most significant qualitative

impact is manifested in the construction of hybrid academic identities that combine Ukrainian pedagogical traditions with European methodological innovations, instituting creative syntheses that enrich both cultural contexts. This institutional transformation has positioned Ukrainian universities as active contributors to European knowledge networks, subverting traditional dynamics of academic dependence typical of the Soviet era, to establish relationships of genuine intellectual reciprocity.

The second dimension of this experience is related to the development of *European inter-university* campuses that have facilitated two-way academic mobility and the creation of joint academic programs that simultaneously respond to local Ukrainian needs, without circumventing European standards of educational quality. According to Borodiyenko et al., (2023), this type of cooperation has generated multiplier effects that exceed the directly participating institutions, influencing national educational policies and regulatory frameworks that govern Ukrainian higher education. Therefore, analytically, we observe that these inter-university experiences function as spaces for pedagogical experimentation where innovative methodologies based on the democratization of knowledge are developed, with the help of transdisciplinary approaches that are subsequently disseminated in the national education system.

The second transformative experience that was critically analyzed is the implementation of *capacity development* projects that during 2020 involved 46 Ukrainian universities and organizations with funding of more than €9 million, focusing on the modernization of educational programs in social and behavioral sciences, health, environment, engineering and the strengthening of relationships between higher education systems and the environment broader economic-social

(National office Erasmus +UA, 2020). It is an experience that reveals the strategic sophistication of Erasmus+ as an institutional development mechanism that operates through the transfer of specialized knowledge, academic management methodologies and good practices in university governance that are creatively adapted to specific institutional contexts.

From a personal perspective, the authors of this study consider that these projects have functioned as catalysts for profound cultural transformations in Ukrainian academic organizations, introducing principles of institutional autonomy, academic responsibility, and orientation towards innovation that contrast significantly with Soviet organizational legacies.

The most valuable dimension of this experience lies in its ability to generate systemic changes that transcend individual institutions to influence the national educational ecosystem, creating inter-institutional cooperation networks that always strengthen the cohesion and competitiveness of the Ukrainian university system. Here, the transformative impact is evidenced in the diversification of institutional funding sources, the development of strategic management capacities, and the consolidation of organizational cultures oriented towards international collaboration and continuous pedagogical innovation (see Table 2).

The third experience that we consider essential to understand the comprehensive impact of Erasmus+ in Ukraine are the youth empowerment and cultural capacity building projects, exemplified by initiatives such as "CivicArt – Capacity Building for Art-based Civic Education", "Countryside Studio – Empowerment of Rural Youth and Heritage Promotion" and "Digital Platform for Knowledge and Skills Development for Young People Working with migrant and refugee children", who received funding of up to €300,000 per project over three



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years for joint implementation with partners from eight European countries (EA, 2024).

For what it means, this experience transcends formal education to delve into dimensions of civic education, heritage preservation and development of digital skills that are key elements for the construction of an active and culturally aware democratic citizenship, in the European style. From our personal analysis, these projects represent a holistic approach to human development that recognizes the importance of creativity, civic participation, and digital connectivity as essential elements for the formation of modern national identities that are simultaneously culturally rooted and open to enriching international influences.

The most innovative dimension of this experience lies in its ability to combine heritage preservation with youth empowerment, generating creative syntheses that strengthen local cultural identities while developing global competencies necessary to effectively participate in contemporary democratic societies (EA, 2024). In this initiative, the transformative impact is evidenced in the formation of transnational youth networks that function as cultural bridges, facilitating two-way exchanges of knowledge, experiences and perspectives that enrich both the participating Ukrainian and European communities. It is, without a doubt, an educational experience that demonstrates that the development of human capital requires multidimensional approaches that integrate, on equal terms, technical competencies with civic training, cultural sensitivity and community leadership capacities.

## By way of conclusion: Erasmus+ readings in geopolitical key

Truly, the Ukrainian strategy of resistance initiated with the events of Euromaidan represents a fundamental ontological reconfiguration of national existence, which transcends geopolitical reorientation to constitute, rather, a concerted act of profound civilizational redefinition of its being-in-the-contemporary world. This strategy, articulated mainly through the systematic strengthening of ties with the European Union and NATO, arises as a condition of existential possibility to guarantee, not only the physical protection of the territory against a hostile and warmongering neighbor, such as the Russian Federation, but also for the preservation of national ontological autonomy in the face of hegemonic projects that seek to deny its historical and cultural specificity.

The transformative experiences of Erasmus+ must be understood, philosophically, as concrete manifestations of this broader civilizational strategy, functioning as mechanisms for the construction of alternative identities that allow us to escape the geographical and historical determinisms that seek to confine Ukraine to spheres of influence alien to its authentic democratic aspirations. European educational cooperation is thus positioned as an *act of existential resistance* that affirms Ukraine's capacity for cultural and political self-determination, subverting Russian imperialist narratives that deny its right to freely choose its civilizational affiliations.

This strategic reorientation assumes that Europeanist education is not an exclusively technical phenomenon, but a liberating praxis that allows peoples to reconstruct their collective identities from parameters of dignity, reciprocity and cultural sovereignty. In this philosophical context, Erasmus+ means *an instrument*

*of emancipation* that facilitates the construction of alternative futures based on democratic values, intercultural openness and voluntary international cooperation.

In this vein, recommendations for future lines of research in this emerging field that intertwines education, human capital and geopolitical realities involve the development of qualitative and quantitative studies that follow specific cohorts of Erasmus+ beneficiaries over extended periods to assess long-term impacts on career paths, civic participation and contributions to national development. as well as comparative research that analyzes similar experiences in other contexts of democratic transition and geopolitical conflict.

It may also be important to develop innovative methodologies that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable indicators of educational transformation and more subtle dimensions of cultural and identity change that require sophisticated hermeneutical and phenomenological approaches, involving in the reflective process the development of specific assessment instruments to assess intercultural competencies, social resilience and peacebuilding capacities in transnational educational contexts. Future research should prioritize *sine qua non* the inclusion of voices and perspectives of local Ukrainian actors, including students, academics, scholars, and community members who have been directly and indirectly impacted by educational cooperation programs, to generate more balanced and culturally sensitive approaches to the effectiveness of different modalities of international cooperation.

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