

**THE EUROPEAN SINGLE MARKET:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURS –
THE CASE OF ERASMUS FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS**

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Abstract

The "Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs" programme (EYE), part of the larger context of the European Single Market bringing a series of opportunities to the SME sector, was launched by the European Commission in 2008 with the stated purpose to develop and strengthen the culture and spirit of entrepreneurship in the EU member states. This study contains an analysis of the effects the programme has had on entrepreneurship in terms of achieved objectives, benefits brought to entrepreneurs following their participation in the programme and processes facilitated by the programme.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, EU.

JEL Classification: L26, M13

1. Premises

At present, The European Single Market provides companies in the members states access to 28 national markets, namely to 510 million potential clients, thus facilitating their business through: the principle of mutual recognition; the standardisation of technical or quality criteria for products, services and production processes; the adoption of new regulation for service provision (in the view of eliminating the existing barriers); administrative burden reduction; easier access to public procurement

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markets (in the other member states); an increased protection of intellectual property rights.¹

Over time, the European economy has faced major structural challenges, namely competitiveness and growth on the one hand, the hurdles of entrepreneurship on the other hand, accompanied by the impact of a major economic crisis that started manifesting itself in 2008. Such was the context that saw the birth of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Its stated priorities are: smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation; sustainable growth: promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy and inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.²

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European economy has been highlighted in numerous official documents, the main arguments relating to the added value brought by this sector (including its share in the total added value at market level), the number of jobs created (which, in turn, represent over half of the total number of jobs in the market) and the large share of micro-enterprises (in terms of number) in the non-financial sector. Thus, at EU28 level, in 2014 SMEs represented 99.8% of the total number of enterprises in the non-financial business sector, with over 90 million employees (that is 67% of the total number of employees) and they generated 58% of the value added.³ These positive results kept throughout 2015 thus: “... just under 23 million SMEs generated €3.9 trillion in value added and employed 90 million people. They accounted in 2015 for two thirds of EU28 employment and slightly less than three fifths of EU28 value added in the non-financial business sector”⁴. Moreover,

¹ European Commission, 20 Years on the European Single Market, 2012, p. 32, [http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/publications/docs/20years/achievements-web_en.pdf], 24 June 2016.

² European Commission, Europe 2020. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM(2010) 2020, Brussels, p. 7, [<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

³ European Commission, Annual Report of European SMEs 2014/2015 SME start hiring again, 2015, p. 3.

⁴ European Commission, Annual Report of European SMEs 2015/2016 SME recovery continues, 2016, p. 6.

entrepreneurial activity is among of the major drivers of economic growth⁵. Our interest in mobility in the framework of entrepreneurship is due to the multiple dimensions of this concept: mobility of people, mobility of knowledge, mobility of ideas, mobility of infrastructure and social mobility⁶. This study is restricted to only one of the dimensions implied by the mobility of people and that is the exposure of entrepreneurs to an international business environment by their physical presence in a SME in another country for a period of 1-6 months. The main purpose of this study is to analyse the effect that the *Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs* (EYE) programme has had on entrepreneurship in the context of the efforts made by the EU institutions to create a favourable environment for the development of entrepreneurship. This research falls into the category of evaluative research⁷, being oriented towards determining the effects of certain actions, more specifically, a European programme which targets entrepreneurs. In fact, this is a qualitative research, which we consider to be the most appropriate option (the alternative being a quantitative research), knowing that this type of research can be targeted at identifying the way in which the mobility of people can influence entrepreneurship⁸. The research comes under the category of grounded theory, an inductive methodology, which uses unstructured techniques, namely document content analysis – the analysis of those official documents that show statistics referring to the EYE programme and of the testimonials of EYE participants, which can be found on the official website.

This paper is structured as follows: a presentation of the evolution of entrepreneurship in the general context of official actions by the EU institutions, a description of the EYE programme followed by an analysis of

⁵ Dominiek, Post; Han, van der Meer; Matthijs, Hammer, "Organizational Blueprints for Growth in Service Firms", in On-line Journal *Modelling the New Europe*, Issue no. 16/2015, p. 105, [<http://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/On-line-Journal-No.-16-September-20151.pdf>], 22 June 2016.

⁶ Erik, Lundmark; Asa, Waern, "What is mobile in entrepreneurship?", HELIX Working Paper, Linköpings Universitet, UniTryck 2008, p. 16, [<http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:757772/FULLTEXT01.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

⁷ Miller, 1991 quoted by Sorin Dan Şandor, *Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale*, Bucureşti: Tritonic Books, 2013, p. 61.

⁸ Erik, Lundmark; Asa, Waern, "What is mobile in entrepreneurship?", HELIX Working Paper, Linköpings universitet, UniTryck 2008, p. 18, [<http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:757772/FULLTEXT01.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

its effect on entrepreneurship in terms of objectives achieved, benefits to entrepreneurs following their participation in this programme and processes facilitated by the programme, followed by a set of conclusions.

2. Entrepreneurship – a long-standing goal of the EU

Stimulating entrepreneurship is one of the main challenges in all EU member states. The benefits brought by entrepreneurship are economic as well as social. The diversity of definitions of entrepreneurship is due to the diversity of perspectives from which it can be approached; in fact, it is a *multifaceted phenomenon*. In the official EU and OECD documents we identify the following definitions of entrepreneurship:

- Entrepreneurship is the mindset as well as the process of creating and developing economic activity, risk-taking, creativity and/or innovation, as well as a good management of the whole process, whether it be a new or existing organisation⁹. We consider that the value of this definition resides in the identification of several aspects related to entrepreneurship: mindset and action from entrepreneurs (seen as a heterogeneous group, regardless of the criteria used, which are age, gender, training level, etc.) and scope (any sector or type of business, whether self-employed or companies, which can be at various stages of the business life-cycle: pre-start, growth, transfer, re-start or exit).
- Entrepreneurship is a creative capacity at individual level which manifests itself regardless of whether the individual works independently or is part of an organisation, in the form of being able to identify opportunities and take them in order to produce new value or have economic success.¹⁰ Pursuant to this approach, the creativity associated to entrepreneurship is vital to the competitiveness of enterprises, regardless of the type of market (existing or emerging) or sector that they activate in. We consider

⁹ Commission of the European Communities, Green Paper Entrepreneurship in Europe, Brussels, 21.1.2003 COM (2003) 27 final, p. 6, [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/entrepreneurship_europe.pdf], 20 July 2016.

¹⁰ Entrepreneurship in Europe, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3An26023>], 24 July 2016.

that the value of this definition resides in mentioning the newly-created value besides economic success.

- Entrepreneurship is an entrepreneurial activity, meaning the entrepreneurial action of a human being whose aim is to generate value via the creation or expansion of the economic activity, the identification and exploitation of new products, processes or markets not restricted to creating financial well-being, with other possible results being: increasing employment, tackling inequalities or environmental issues¹¹. This definition appears in the publications of OECD-Eurostat Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme (EIP), which was launched in 2006, with the aim of developing the various dimensions of measuring entrepreneurship and the main drivers of this phenomenon.

If we analyse the aforementioned definitions, we are able to identify two major dimensions of entrepreneurship and those are *mindset* (also comprising capacity) and *action* (or process), both being essential to its success in the market.

At EU level, entrepreneurship as a component of the SME field is a priority which dates back to the 80s, when the year 1983 was declared the “European Year of the small and medium-sized enterprises and craft trades”¹². According to this document, the governments of the member states of the European Community (what the European Union was called back then) were asked to make additional efforts for: improving the conditions of SMEs creation; eliminating administrative and technical barriers that can constitute a disadvantage to the trade activity of SMEs; creating or extending the existing schemes of consultancy services for the consultancy of SMEs in clearly-defined fields; promoting the innovation capacity of SMEs through the strengthening of their technical competence. By analysing these government requirements, we notice that part of them

¹¹ OECD, Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2016, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016, pp. 12-13, [<http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/3016021e.pdf?expires=1479569564&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=586B3D8AC838667345AD6B64C502037C>], 30 September 2016.

¹² Parliamentary Assembly, 1983 “European Year of the small and medium-sized enterprises and craft trades”, Resolution 798, 1983, p.1, [<http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=16209&lang=en>], 20 July 2016.

are still valid now, 30 years on. There is still the need to improve the access of SMEs to funding, to ensure consultancy services for SMEs, to make sustained efforts to develop and strengthen their capacity for innovation, even though the general context is a lot different due to EU's current size (there are now 28 member states, compared to 10 in 1983) and the rapid development of information technology and communications.

The history of the SME sector at EU policies level starts in 1989, when "a separate Directorate General for SMEs (DG XXIII) was created, with the role to administer a series of SMEs-focused measures (which formed the embryo of the EU's enterprise policy)"¹³. DG XXIII's remit spanned the craft and SMEs sector, and together with DG Industry, DG XXIII acted in the field of enterprise policy¹⁴. The importance of this directorate not only resides in its novelty, but also in its approach. Thus, DG XXIII, which has the advantage of having close connections with the trade associations in the member states, organised numerous meetings with SMEs representatives throughout the 90s in order to identify their specific needs.

In 2000, The European Charter for Small Enterprises is adopted (within the "General Affairs" Council in Lisbon on 13th June 2000, and approved at the European Council held in Feira on 19th and 20th June 2000). Thus, SMEs are seen as a driving force for innovation and job creation in Europe, with their main characteristics being, on the one hand, the so-called sensitivity to changes in the market and on the other hand, their dynamism, especially when it comes to providing new services, creating new jobs and encouraging social and regional development¹⁵. What is more, the document highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in the context of a new economy where certain values are strong: knowledge, commitment and flexibility. Going through the ten lines of action in this document, we notice

¹³ Debra Johnson, Colin Turner, *European Business: Policy Challenges for the New Commercial Environment*, Routledge, 2005, p. 134.

¹⁴ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Decision 2000/819/EC on a multiannual programme for enterprise and entrepreneurship, and in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (2001-2005) COM(2004) 781 final — 2004/0272 (COD), Official Journal of the European Union, 2005, p. 1, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52005AE0245>], 20 July 2016.

¹⁵ European Council, *European Charter for Small Enterprises*, 2000, p. 1, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3An26002>], 22 July 2016.

that a lower importance is attributed to mindset than to process or action in entrepreneurship; there we can only find two principles: education and training for entrepreneurship and availability of skills. This focus on entrepreneurship as process or action is to be found in the Lisbon strategy (2000), with one of the priority areas for action in this sector (proposed by the Commission after revision, in 2005) being unlocking the business potential, which implied stimulating the business climate, encouraging start-ups, reducing red tape and taking positive actions to streamline the access to funding¹⁶. An important step on the European agenda regarding entrepreneurship was the publishing by the Commission of the Green Paper “Entrepreneurship in Europe”, where entrepreneurship performance at EU level is defined as “people’s attitudes towards entrepreneurs or the number of actual entrepreneurs, ... also .. dynamism in entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurs’ performance”¹⁷. As an answer to the 10 questions in the document focusing on two fundamental aspects for Europe: ‘How to produce more entrepreneurs?’ and ‘How to get more firms to grow?’, the Commission adopts the Action Plan: The European agenda for Entrepreneurship, in 2014, as a strategy framework to spur entrepreneurship in the context of an insufficient exploitation of the entrepreneurial potential and even a deficit thereof, as well as a deficit in the process of encouraging European citizens to become entrepreneurs¹⁸.

In 2008 the European Commission adopts the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) with the general aim to improve the approach of the overall policy concerning SMEs. “ ... *Small Business Act* aims to improve the overall policy approach to entrepreneurship, to irreversibly anchor the “Think Small First” principle in policymaking from regulation to public service, and to promote SMEs’ growth by helping them tackle the remaining problems

¹⁶ European Parliament, DG for Internal Policies, The Lisbon Strategy 2000- 2010 An analysis and evaluation of methods used and results achieved, Final Report, 2010, p. 82.

¹⁷ Commission of the European Communities, Green Paper Entrepreneurship in Europe, Brussels, 21.1.2003 COM(2003) 27 final, p. 8, [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/entrepreneurship_europe.pdf], 20 July 2016.

¹⁸ Commission of the European Communities, Action Plan: The European Agenda for Entrepreneurship, Brussels, 11.02.2004 COM(2004) 70 final, p. 4, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004DC0070&from=EN>], 20 July 2016.

which hamper their development”.¹⁹ According to the SBA, an essential factor of SMEs development in the EU is a proper environment, which implies that the perception of the role of entrepreneurs and risk-taking change and more precisely, that entrepreneurship and the will to take risks should be appreciated by all players in society, whether it be politicians, administrations, citizens, the media, etc.²⁰ The SBA comprises a set of 10 principles referring to the design and implementation of policies at EU level and at member state level; a set of new legislative proposals based on the “Think Small first” principle (covering state aid, VAT, late payments, etc.) and a set of new strategic measures for the implementation of the 10 principles. The SBA relates to the present study in the sense that it is the framework that defines a series of programmes that target the development and strengthening of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial culture, such as the European SME Week, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors.

A step forward at EU level is taken in 2013, when the *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan. Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe* is adopted, comprising the idea “Our challenge – more entrepreneurs for Europe”²¹. This document mentions the exchange between knowledgeable entrepreneurs from various countries should be fostered, an aspect present also in the EYE programme.

¹⁹ Commission of the European Communities, “Think Small First” A “Small Business Act” for Europe, Brussels, 25.6.2008 COM(2008) 394 final, p. 4, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0394&from=EN>], 24 June 2016.

²⁰ Commission of the European Communities, “Think Small First” A “Small Business Act” for Europe, Brussels, 25.6.2008 COM(2008) 394 final, p. 5, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0394&from=EN>], 24 June 2016.

²¹ European Commission, *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan. Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe*, Brussels, 9.1.2013 COM(2012) 795 final, p. 3, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004DC0070&from=EN>], 22 June 2016.

3. Erasmus for Young entrepreneurs (EYE) – a successful initiative of the EU

3.1. The EYE Programme – objectives and functioning

The EYE Programme came about as an action that implements the first principle of the SBA - "Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded"-, the stated aim being "to promote exchanges of experience and training by giving nascent entrepreneurs the possibility to learn from experienced host entrepreneurs and improve their language skills"²². When it was launched, the stated purpose was clarified: "It aims at helping new entrepreneurs to acquire relevant skills for managing a small or medium-sized enterprise by spending time in an enterprise in another EU country"²³. What is desired through this exchange and training programme that ensures the physical access of entrepreneurs in the European market is to develop and strengthen entrepreneurship, as well as foster the professional and personal development of the beneficiaries of the programme.

EYE is a cross-border exchange programme which has one overall objective and four specific objectives, the participants to the programme being new entrepreneurs (NEs) and host entrepreneurs (HEs) (see *Figure 1*).

According to the Guide of the programme²⁴ the NEs category includes nascent (i.e. "would-be") entrepreneurs, who are at the stage of actually planning on starting their own business based on a realistic business plan, and the entrepreneurs who have recently started their own business (which has been operating for under 3 years), while the HEs category includes successful and experienced entrepreneurs (ideally owners of small-scale or micro-enterprises) or persons who are directly involved in entrepreneurship as managers of SMEs. In order to achieve these objectives

²² Commission of the European Communities, "Think Small First" A "Small Business Act" for Europe, Brussels, 25.6.2008 COM(2008) 394 final, pp. 5, 7, [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0394&from=EN>], 24 June 2016.

²³ European Commission, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. Programme Guide, pp. 2-3, [<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/upload/Programme%20Guide%20EN%20May%202015.pdf>], 22 June 2016.

²⁴ European Commission, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. Programme Guide, pp. 5, [<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/upload/Programme%20Guide%20EN%20May%202015.pdf>], 22 June 2016.

(see Figure 1), the EYE Programme provides practical and financial help for NEs to stay with an HE in another EU country; the bodies that facilitate this process are called *intermediary organisations* (IOs) and the *Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Support Office* (SO).

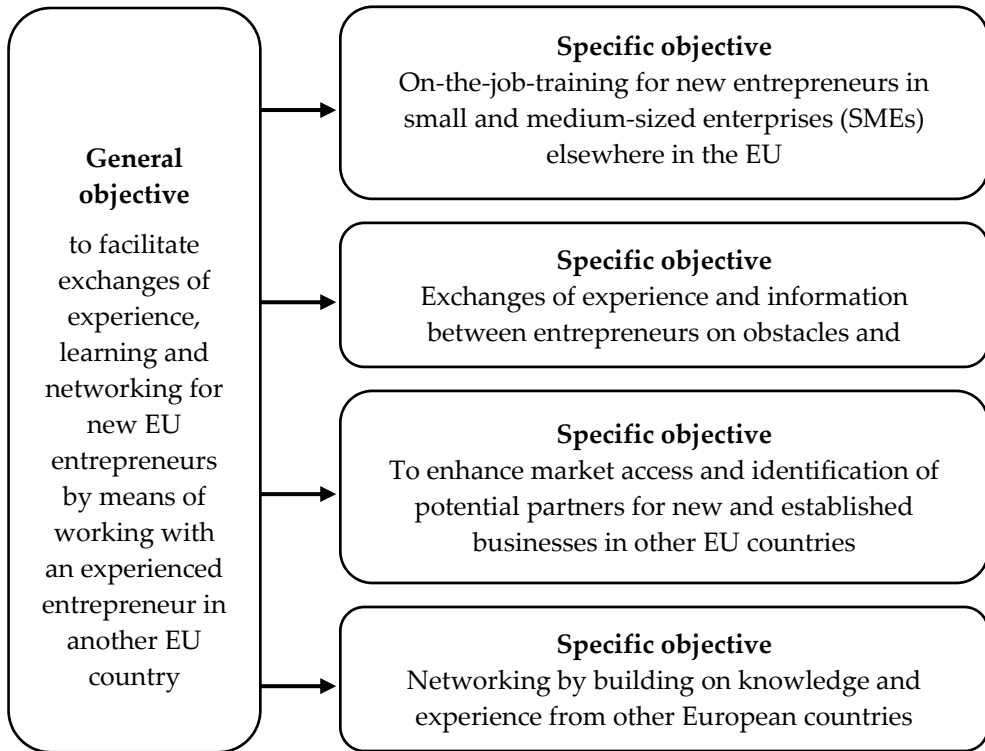


Figure 1. The objectives of Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs²⁵

Financial support is given to NEs to contribute to the travel expenses to and from the HE country, the accommodation and living costs throughout the stay. Procedure-wise, the European Commission, currently via the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) (initially via the Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General) launches calls for project funding at IOs level (the first was launched in 2008 with a budget

²⁵ European Commission, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. Programme Guide, pp. 2-3, [<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/upload/Programme%20Guide%20EN%20May%202015.pdf>], 22 June 2016.

of €2.85 million, followed by many others in 2011, 2014 and 2015, the budget going up from call to call, to €6 million in 2015²⁶). In time, the EYE Programme has known real strengthening, growing from a pilot-programme to being part of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP), part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) and then of the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium Enterprises (COSME), a programme led by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). In 2016 a whole new level of implementation of the EYE programme was reached when the call for concluding the Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) for 2016-2020 was launched, with the follow-up selection of consortia by the IOs, which in turn will put forward work programmes for the 5-year period²⁷.

We consider that one of the key-points of the EYE programme is the activity of the IOs, which are selected directly by the European Commission. The IOs are organised as partnerships between EU member states, which help them carry out their main task, that is to facilitate building successful relationships between NEs and HEs and to provide services in the process of matching an NE with an HE (for instance, through promotion, information, induction, validation of application, establishing contacts, issuing contracts,

²⁶ European Commission, Enterprise and Industry Directorate – General, Pilot Project “ERASMUS for young entrepreneurs” Call for Proposals ENT/ERA/08/311 Grant Programme 2008, p. 12, [http://euro-rdt.cstb.fr/Documents/Textes/T1182_ENT_ERA_08_311call.pdf], 24 June, 2016; European Commission, Enterprise and Industry Directorate – General, Preparatory action ‘ERASMUS for young entrepreneurs’ 21/G/ENT/ERA/11/311A, Grant Programme 2011, p. 12, [http://euro-rdt.cstb.fr/Documents/Textes/T1542_call_text_en_6800.pdf], 24 June, 2016; European Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME), Call for Proposal – COS-WP2014-4-05 Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, pp. 7-8, [<http://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/documents/erasmus-for-young-entrepreneurs-call-for-proposals-2014.pdf>], 24 June 2016; European Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME), Call for Proposals Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs COS-EYE-2015-4-01 (Call-ID), pp. 7-8, [<http://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/documents/Call%20for%20proposals.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

²⁷ European Commission, EASME, Call for Proposals Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) 2016-2021, COS-EYE-FPA-2016-4-01, p. 5, [https://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/documents/call_for_proposals_erasmus_young_entrepreneurs_2016.pdf], 24 June 2016.

logistic support, etc.). Basically, as their name says, these organisations broker the relationship between NEs and HEs (2 IOs are involved, one for each entrepreneur's country), thus being an important guarantor of the quality of the results obtained. The duration of stay of an NE with an HE is of 1-6 months, with the possibility of breaking it down into smaller time units (with a minimum duration of one week over the course of 12 consecutive months)²⁸.

3.2 *EYE Programme – outcomes and outputs*

As mentioned before, in order to achieve our goal we adopt a qualitative research methodology, which is part of the inductive-type grounded theory, resorting to unstructured techniques, namely an analysis of the official documents which comprise statistics referring to the EYE programme and testimonials of the participants, which can be found on the official website of the programme (<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/>). Given that the EYE programme was launched with a specific purpose in mind, namely a set of specific objectives (see Figure 1), the assessment of its effects on entrepreneurship will be correlated with them. More precisely, in what follows we will analyse the output and outcomes of this programme starting from the idea that output refers to what is produced by a business (goods, services) and outcome refers to the changes and benefits brought by the output to clients and even the enterprise.²⁹ For the EYE programme the outputs and outcomes are defined as follows:

- the number of NEs and HEs who applied, the number of NEs and HEs who were accepted, the number of relationships (given by the number of NEs who benefited from a mobility) – all these being outputs;
- the experience gained, the skills developed or even acquired, the information taken in by the NEs – all these being outcomes.

²⁸ European Commission, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. Programme Guide, pp. 2-3, [<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/upload/Programme%20Guide%20EN%20May%202015.pdf>], 22 June 2016.

²⁹ Deborah, Mills-Scofield, "It's Not Just Semantics: Managing Outcomes versus Outputs", in Harvard Business Review, November 26, 2012, p. 1, [<https://hbr.org/2012/11/its-not-just-semantics-managing-outcomes>], 24 June 2016.

As for the effect of the EYE programme on entrepreneurship in terms of outputs, an analysis of the published data (see Table no. 1) leads us to the following conclusions:

- the analysed programme has reached its overall goal, the total number of NEs who benefited from an internship with an HE in another EU state during the analysed period (2009-2015) being of 3, 256, showing a great increase compared to base year 2009 (with a peak of 7 times bigger in 2014);
- the manifestation of entrepreneurship has known an upwards tendency if we refer to the total number of applications received – 12, 353 (with a starting point of 1,201 applications in 2009) and to their growth rate (compared to 2009), which started at 2.1% in 2010 and reached 42% in 2012 and even 101% in 2014;
- the interest shown by NEs in the programme surpasses that of the HEs, with the number of applications by NEs representing 61.15% of the total number of applications received during the analysed period, the same percentage being found at annual level, as well (with a margin of $\pm 5\%$);
- the quality of applications by NEs has improved over time, the share of applications received turned into mobilities has been on the rise (except 2015, as according to the Call that year³⁰, visits would only start on 1st January 2016).

Outputs	Year							Total
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Total number of applications received (NEs and HEs)	1,201	1,228	1,314	1,706	2,114	2,414	2,376	12,353
Annual growth rate of applications received (%)	Base year	2.1	9.4	42.04	76.01	101%	97.83	

³⁰ European Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME), Call for Proposals Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs COS-EYE-2015-4-01 (Call-ID), pp. 7-8, [<http://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/documents/Call%20for%20proposals.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

Total number of applications received (NEs)	792	758	833	996	1,248	1,449	1,478	7,554
Total number of mobilities (finished exchanges)	102	309	342	540	715	819	429	3,256

Table no. 1 – EYE results (2009 – 2015)³¹

So as to determine the success rate of the EYE programme in terms of results, we have made a qualitative content research, a research method that “represents a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena³²”. Within the preparation stage we decided upon the following: to use the data on the official EYE programme website (<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/>), section Success Stories and take the testimonials of entrepreneurs as a unit of analysis. Thus, we have analysed 69 testimonials by 40 NEs and 29 HEs (unfortunately, 11 of the HEs targeted by the NEs did not have testimonials on the website), all participants in the programme in the period 2009-2015 and coming from 22 countries of the 28 EU member states.

During the organisation stage, the analysis was done through open coding for the content of testimonials and in the end all similar codes were grouped within one major theme (each having sub-themes).

In what follows we present the final stage, that of reporting the results of our qualitative content research. The analysis of the content of testimonials by NEs and HEs has led to the identification of two major themes, each having several sub-themes, as follows:

- benefits of participating in the EYE programme:
 - personal development – for NEs;

³¹ Erasmus for Young Entrepreneur, The European Entrepreneur Exchange Programme, Facts, January 2016, p. 1.

³² Schreier, M. 2012, quoted by Satu Elo et al., “Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness, SAGE Open, January-March 2014, p. 1, [<http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/spsgo/4/1/2158244014522633.full.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

- own business development and future start-up development – for NEs;
- access to valuable human resources – for HEs;
- preparation for or even presence in the international market – for HEs.
- processes facilitated by the programme:
 - sharing of experience and ideas, sharing of expertise, information exchange, knowledge exchange.

In the following we will briefly describe each of the above-mentioned sub-themes.

In the case of NEs, personal development as a benefit of participating in the EYE programme had several aspects: entrepreneurial mindset; personal, business and entrepreneurial skills; knowledge (including culture and other aspects specific to business strategies, from innovative ideas to details very specific to the field of the HE's business, like business models and ways of conducting business); trust (in one's own business project, in one's ability to put ideas into practice).

In the case of the chosen sub-theme, the development of own business or future start-up for NEs, we have identified several elements: the connections made during the participation in the EYE programme, which facilitate the presence in the HEs market; the possibility of digital exports; the development of innovative projects together with HEs; implementing own project and defining the business strategy; possible future professional collaborations with HEs.

An important category of benefits brought to HEs by the EYE programme is access to a valuable human resource, with the following elements mentioned: referring to a NE as an *aspiring entrepreneur willing to cooperate, share knowledge and learn*; good business relationships developed; the enthusiasm and breath of fresh air brought by NEs; the help offered by NEs; the new ideas brought by NEs, that have contributed to new perspectives for the HE's business.

Regarding preparation for or even presence in the international market of HEs as an impact of the EYE programme, the aspects mentioned were the actual presence of the HE's business in the domestic market of the NE; access to information concerning the NE market and the developing of a partnership with the NE; the launch of a business partnership by the HE

with the NE, which materialised in the expansion in the international market of the HE's business; the increase of opportunities for collaboration and presence of the HE's business in the NE's host country market; joining a network, increasing promotional activity and opening up new channels of distribution in the view of gaining presence in the international market.

With regards to the major theme identified following the content analysis of the testimonials by the entrepreneurs participating in the EYE programme, called *processes facilitated by the programme* (the sub-themes being: share experience and ideas, share expertise, exchange information, exchange knowledge), we notice that all these are made possible by the relationships between NEs and HEs, which leads us to conclude that we are facing a win-win situation.

Taking into account the results of the content analysis, we appreciate that the EYE programme has a major impact on entrepreneurship, with outputs and outcomes being both part of that.

4. Conclusions

In the context of EU priorities - smart, sustainable and inclusive growth³³, the role of SMEs in the European economy is extremely important.

This sector brings a significant contribution as added value (including its share in the total added value), number of jobs created (these are over half of the total number of jobs in the market) and presence in the non-financial sector (the share of micro-enterprises, number-wise, being of over 90% in 2015³⁴).

The mobility of persons as a component of mobility in an entrepreneurial context, together with the mobility of knowledge, mobility of ideas, mobility of infrastructure and social mobility³⁵, is the general framework in which this study places the access of NEs to the international

³³ European Commission, Europe 2020. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM (2010) 2020, Brussels, p. 7, [<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

³⁴ European Commission, Annual Report of European SMEs 2015/2016 SME recovery continues, 2016, p. 6.

³⁵ Erik, Lundmark; Asa, Waern, "What is mobile in entrepreneurship?", HELIX Working Paper, Linköpings Universitet, UniTryck 2008, p. 16, [<http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:757772/FULLTEXT01.pdf>], 24 June 2016.

business environment, through the physical presence at a HEs in a country different from that of origin, for a period of 1-6 months. In this context, the main purpose of this study is to analyse the effect that the EYE programme has had on entrepreneurship given EU's efforts to create a favourable environment for the development of the small business sector. In order to reach our purpose, we made an evaluative research³⁶ targeted on determining the effect of the EYE programme on entrepreneurship. This research falls within the category of an inductive-type grounded theory and uses unstructured techniques like document content analysis. The documents analysed were official documents (which present statistics referring to the outcomes of the programme analysed) and testimonials by participating entrepreneurs, which can be found on the official website of the programme.

Referring to our purpose, the main conclusion of this study is that the EYE programme has a major positive effect on entrepreneurship and that the overall objective has been reached (see Figure no. 1) and so have the specific objectives derived from it. In terms of outputs, the results of the programme are impressive, with a total number of NEs that benefited from a traineeship in a different EU country over the analysed period (2009-2015) of 3, 256, a figure that steadily increased (with a maximum of 7 times in 2014 compared to 2009).

In terms of outcomes, the results of the programme are extremely valuable for both categories of entrepreneurs (new and host). They include personal development, the development of the business or future business (this includes the perception of NEs and HEs as a valuable resource and the preparation for or even presence in the international market of the business owned by the HE).

Therefore, we appreciate that the EYE programme is a successful one. This programme is made possible by the existence of the European Single Market and by funding through the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium Enterprises (COSME) and the mechanism of calls for IOs, which starting this year have a 5-year approach through Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs).

³⁶ Miller, 1991 quoted by Sorin Dan Şandor, *Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale*, București: Tritonic Books, 2013, p. 61.

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