



Guide of good practices

How to strengthen the action of local authorities in providing support for international mobility ?

FOREWORD

This guide of good practices is addressed to local authorities members of the European Network of University Towns aiming to develop their actions and support mechanisms for outgoing or incoming mobility on their territory. This document provides an inventory of a large number of initiatives intended to ensure that international mobility is a more accessible and inclusive experience, while at the same time strengthening its anchorage in the territories.

The elaboration of the guide of good practices is part of the network's first commitment to strengthen the sharing of good practices and contact between local authorities. It seems, today more than ever, essential to think about international mobility adapted to the evolutions and issues, whether they be social, economic, environmental, health-related, and obviously, educational.

Drafted by the AVUF, the good practices guide is meant to be a reference instrument, gradually updated, and a vector of global reflections between local authorities on a European scale. The transversality of the information referenced as well as the communication of relevant contacts to be reached will enable dialogue and cooperation between all members of the European Network of University Towns.

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NUITS DES ÉTUDIANTS DU MONDE

In France, around 300,000 international students undertake international mobility each year. However, their reception conditions are sometimes an issue. To overcome this, it seems essential to improve the reception of international students by dedicating an event to them.

The Initiative

Every year, about twenty French cities organise an edition of the Nuits des Étudiants du Monde. This welcome event aims to encourage the integration of international students in the territory, to show them the attractiveness of the territory but also to create intercultural links. Completely free of charge, this event symbolises the attachment of the local authorities to the international students present on their territory.

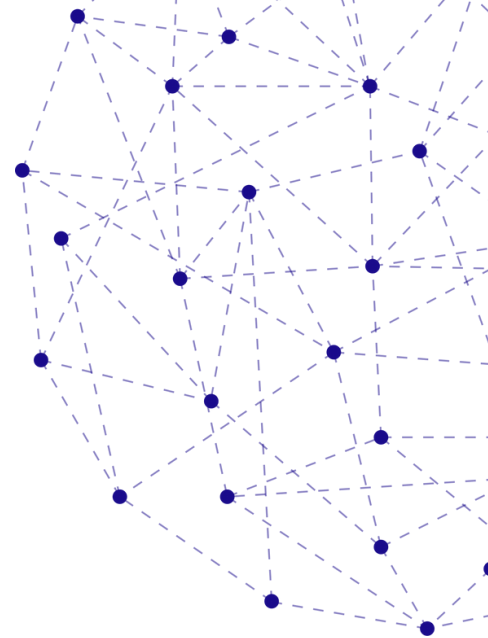
The Nuits des Étudiants du Monde differs from one territory to another. However, each event must be convivial and the activities must take place totally or partially at night. The invited international students are welcomed in an official and solemn manner through a speech by the mayor or one of his deputies, usually at the Town Hall. Festive, musical and cultural activities may then be held, lasting until late at night.

“
With these Nuits des Étudiants du Monde, local authorities want to demonstrate their commitment to international students with a unique event that is like no other.
”

A large number of cities in ENUT organise this large-scale event such as Amiens, Brest, Clermont-Ferrand, Le Havre, Orléans, Poitiers, Reims, Rouen, Saint-Etienne, Pessac, and Strasbourg, thus honouring their cultural, artistic and economic assets.

Actors Involved

The organisation of the Nuit des Étudiants du Monde requires the collaboration of many different actors. These events were developed by the two organisations AVUF and Erasmus Student Network. They assist the cities willing to prepare this welcoming event. The organisation of these editions is also done in partnership with the Crous and the agency Campus France and France Universités. Naturally, there is also collaboration with the higher education institutions that provide the information to the invited students.



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DIFFICULTIES

The Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down the organisation of such in-person events. After two years of the pandemic, it can sometimes be difficult to rebuild dynamics. Also, the holding of these events depends on the willingness of the communities to organise a large-scale event for the reception of international students.

REGENSBURG'S OFFICIAL WELCOME RECEPTION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students are attached to their host university. However, establishing a link between them and the territory in which they are mobile is essential.

The Initiative

Every year, at the beginning of the academic year, the city of Regensburg organises a large welcome reception for foreign students on international mobility. This reception is organised in a symbolic place of the city, the old town hall. This building has notably hosted the parliamentary authorities. The invitation to a spectacular location promotes the rich heritage of Regensburg and its surroundings.

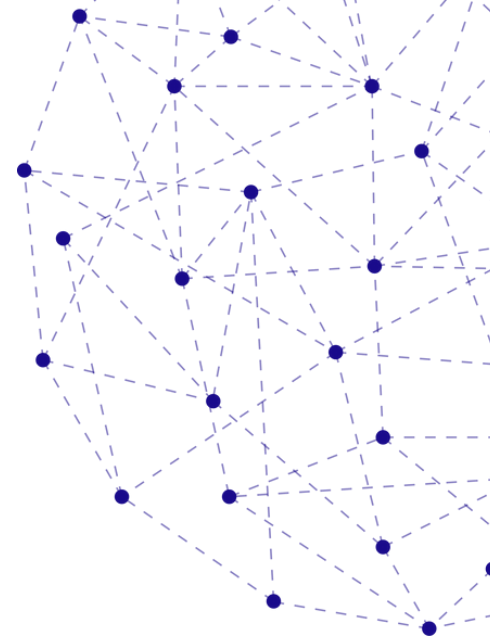
The reception is a festive moment, allowing more than 200 students to meet and start their international mobility in the city. The event takes place in the evening, and starts with an official speech by the mayor, in English. The mayor talks about the city, its culture, its economic prosperity and gives some practical advice to the students. The evening continues with a drink to introduce the international students to the local culinary specialities.

“ ***The official reception, assured in English, is highly appreciated by international students who do not have such an experience in other territories.*** ”

This celebration is similar to what some French local authorities, members of the AVUF, organise as part of the Nuit des Étudiants du monde (world students' night). Brest, Orléans, Amiens, Le Havre, Reims, Rouen, Clermont-Ferrand, Poitiers, Saint-Etienne and others are putting in place this convivial event which is a real asset for the municipality.

Actors Involved

This reception is organised by the services of the municipality. In order to reach as many people as possible, other actors are involved, such as some departments of higher education institutions but also some organisations and associations accompanying international students.



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DIFFICULTIES

The period of Covid-19 has slowed down such initiatives considerably. This can make it difficult to revive projects that were in operation before the epidemic.

REIMS' INTERNATIONAL AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME

Keeping in touch with international students to invite them to discover the territory after the marking welcoming events is a recurring point of discussion. Beyond the discovery of the area, the problem lies in the commitment of these international students to the promotion of the territory throughout their mobility on the campuses of Reims but also on their return to their home university.

The Initiative

Reims has set up a program of young ambassadors of international students doing mobility on the campus of Reims. The objective is to extend the international influence of the territory through a tourist, economic and cultural promotion of it. Through this initiative, 15 international students will act as part of information relays on the attractiveness of the Reims area and its surroundings and will potentially promote their Reims experience upon their return to their home university.

To do so, they discover the region through exclusive activities, once or twice a month. These tourist and cultural activities are organised by the city in collaboration with partners. In exchange, international students commit to regularly post their experiences on the social network account dedicated to this purpose.

“ *As a territorial anchorage of its international students, this programme tends to be extended to other higher education institutions and can be adapted to the specificities of another territory.* ”

In order to support them in their activity as communication relays, the international students are given training in the use of social networks. Although students use these communication tools on a daily basis, digital training will allow them to adopt an effective strategy, while increasing their skills in this area.

Actors Involved

This program is a large-scale project, particularly because of the large number of players involved. This project, initiated in collaboration with the Sciences Po Paris campus in Reims, also includes the communication and legal departments. The latter is particularly essential for supervising the contractualization of students and its terms. Finally, this project is managed in close collaboration with the tourist office, which organizes certain special events that can be integrated into the range of exclusive activities offered to students.



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DIFFICULTIES

The international ambassador program faces certain difficulties. Firstly, the multitude of actors involved remains challenging. Indeed, mobilizing the various departments is a time-consuming process. Moreover, consensus must be reached despite the different operational procedures within the actors involved.

In addition, the international ambassadors, upon their return to their home universities, would continue to promote the territory of Reims only on a voluntary basis. This program is only a partial response to the issue of the region's international influence, which is found to be variable in its geometry.

WELCOME DESKS

International students have limited information compared to their local peers. And yet, they need individual support during their mobility in order to be able to carry out their administrative procedures or to access the services they may need.

The Initiative

The Welcome Desk is an initiative aimed at improving the reception of international students and reinforcing their integration in the local area. It can be located on the university campus in order to have a better visibility and a better access to the targeted public. This system is free and the services are provided in English so that everyone can benefit from it.

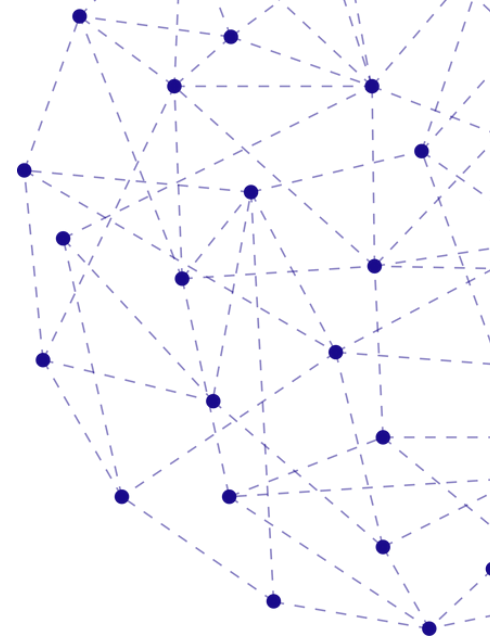
International students can go to the Welcome Desk to obtain information of various nature. They can seek advice on finding accommodation, accessing health care, but also on the administrative procedures they may have to deal with. In addition, they are provided with practical information about the city. This space is also a way of showing cultural, economic, heritage and gastronomic opportunities to foreign students and thus promoting the diversity of the territory in which they are staying.

“*The welcome desk is an efficient means of providing support for international students in their daily administrative, health and accommodation procedures.*”

This specific space already exists in several cities in the network, such as Montpellier, Orléans, Amiens and Clermont-Ferrand. In addition to assisting international students for whom certain procedures and information are difficult to access, the Welcome Desk maintains a link with international students and ensures that they have all the tools they need to enjoy a successful international experience.

Actors Involved

Welcome Desks are often set up through cooperation between the local authority and higher education institutions. The participation of student associations, but also of the CROUS or the regions can also be observed in some Welcome Desks.



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DIFFICULTIES

The main difficulty lies in the visibility of this initiative. Some international students are unaware of this dedicated service, and communication with the actors must be fluid so that the public is informed of this service.

Moreover, some of the welcome desks are temporary, lasting only the first month of each semester/academic year, making it more difficult for international students to access services throughout their mobility.

BREST'S PROFESSIONALISATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In some degree schemes, doing an internship is a compulsory prerogative to validate one's academic year and degree. However, this work experience is sometimes complicated for international students. They often lack information regarding the opportunities of integration into the French labour market.

The Initiative

Brest provides special support for international students who are required to do an internship as part of their course of study, by giving them the keys to the French working world and to the economic assets of the region.

Thus, thematic meetings are proposed at the Maison de l'International. The aim of these meetings is to provide international students with information on how to find a successful internship. Theme-based workshops on cover letters, curriculum vitae and corporate culture help to orientate international students and transfer professional tools for them to use in their internship search.

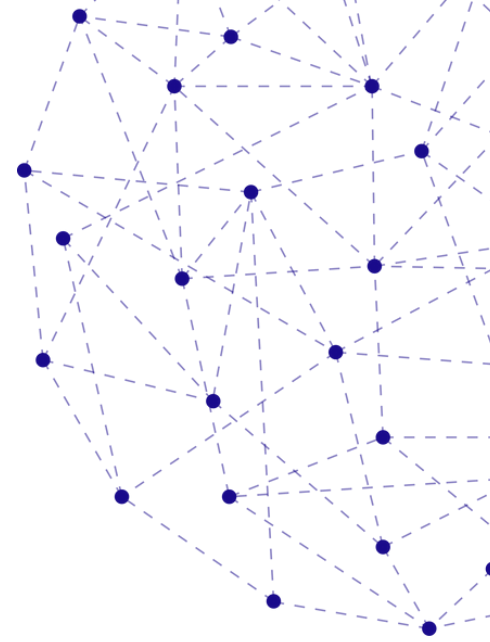
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During these meetings, international students are informed of the structures for hosting them in the region, but also of important dates such as job forums and contacts with socio-economic players in the region.
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These meetings are massively attended by international students. They are full of resources, but also testimonies from former international students, companies and associations, which can support them in their professional development.

Actors Involved

These moments of exchange are enriching due to the panel of actors involved. Brest Metropole is responsible for meeting the participants, whether they come from the student, business or association sectors.

This initiative is also a place for cooperation with higher education institutions. The universities and schools relay information about the holding of these meetings.



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DIFFICULTIES

There is a massive response from students to the organisation of these workshops. However, the major difficulty with this initiative is the communication challenge between all the actors involved. The success of this programme depends on information relays for international students.

MONTPELLIER'S HOST FAMILY SYSTEM

Loneliness during international mobility is a concern shared by students eager to have an experience abroad. Far away from their relatives, some young people ask for reassurance and support in order to fully experience their mobility in complete peace of mind.

The Initiative

In partnership with higher education institutions, the city of Montpellier has been running a host family system for over 10 years. This system connects Montpellier families with international students who come to Montpellier for international mobility.

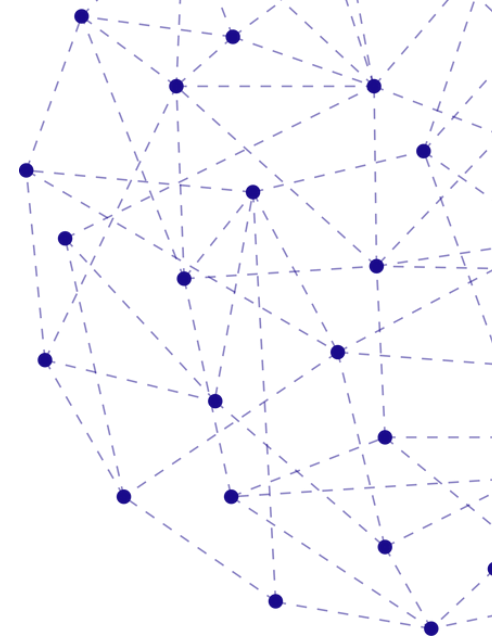
The families do not provide accommodation for the students. They are more like friendship families who will support and guide a student during his/her international mobility. For example, a family welcomes a student on arrival at the airport or train station. They will then help the student find accommodation, assist with administrative procedures and be present if the student encounters any problems during the year. In addition, students and families are encouraged to share a convivial moment each week, such as a meal or an activity, in order to strengthen their bond and encourage intercultural exchange.

“**The presence of host families in Montpellier can encourage some students who are hesitant to undertake international mobility through trustworthy support.**”

This arrangement is an asset in the strategy for welcoming international students. The presence of a family on site can facilitate the concretisation of international mobility. A safe and regular support reassures the students and their relatives. Thanks to this system, students will have a complete international experience, and can keep a close contact with the territory when they return to their hometown.

Actors Involved

This project is coordinated with higher education institutions. The higher education institutions organised the system by launching a call for volunteers in the local media. Nowadays, the system works well enough that there is hardly any need for publicity.



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DIFFICULTIES

There were no particular difficulties with the programme. Over the years, a strong network of families has been built up. Their commitment is often continuous from one year to the next. Once a year, a convivial event bringing together the host families is organised before the start of the academic year. This festive event helps to strengthen the network's ties.

Moreover, communication with the higher education institutions is essential for the sustainability of the programme.

SCEAUX'S INCLUSION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Students constitute more than a quarter of the population of Sceaux. They have their own needs and problems. It is therefore necessary to consult them and gather their opinions on subjects that concern them, especially for international students, with whom it is sometimes difficult to maintain contact throughout their mobility in our territories.

The Initiative

In 2021, Sceaux implemented a consultative committee on student life. The main objective of such a body is to promote the integration of students into the life of the territory. Chaired by the mayor, this committee focuses on issues concerning students, such as housing, work spaces, food, etc.

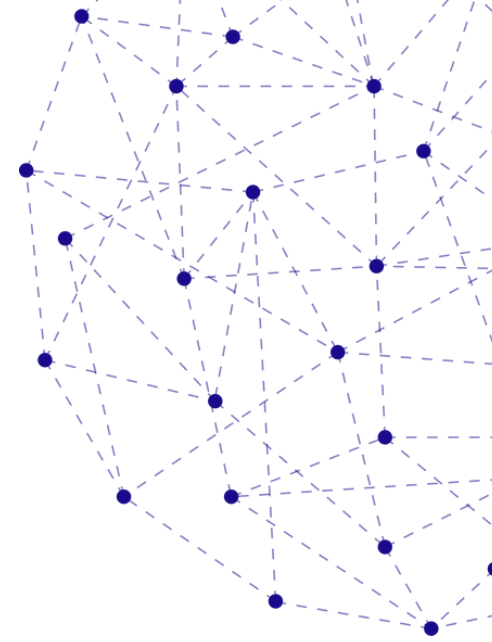
Students feel a particular attachment to their higher education institution and the city in which they study. The consultative committee on student life is open to all, especially to international students who are studying in the town of Sceaux. International students have a real desire to get involved in their host town. Their integration is all the more relevant as it allows an intercultural dialogue of this committee and the sharing of needs and problems specific to this public.

“*International students are a captive audience willing to discover their host town but also to be engaged in civic life.*”

The development of transversal relations between international and non-international students, inhabitants and higher education institutions can be a vector for projects of common interest and group work allowing for a better reception and support of students in the city.

Actors Involved

The transversality of the exchanges is inherently linked to the panel of actors involved in this consultative committee. During the second edition in October 2022, 28 people were present, half of whom were students, including 2 who were on an international mobility programme in Sceaux. We also contributing the directors of the higher education establishments present in the City, representatives of student residences and representatives of student associations.



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DIFFICULTIES

The integration of international students has not been a source of difficulties. They are curious about the territory and strongly inclined to participate in its development. However, complications may arise due to problems in communicating the existence of this committee to the students.

INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY

International professional mobility remains largely dependent on the ability of students to finance their mobility experience abroad. However, doing an internship abroad is a real asset for students, providing them with the opportunity to enter the labour market while developing their skills in an intercultural context.

The Initiative

Mobility grant or programme can be set up in the framework of a longer or shorter mobility. Some financial aid or city programmes are dedicated to mobility for professional integration purposes, in particular internships abroad. This applies to certain cities in the European Network of University Towns such as Clermont-Ferrand, Brest and Montpellier.

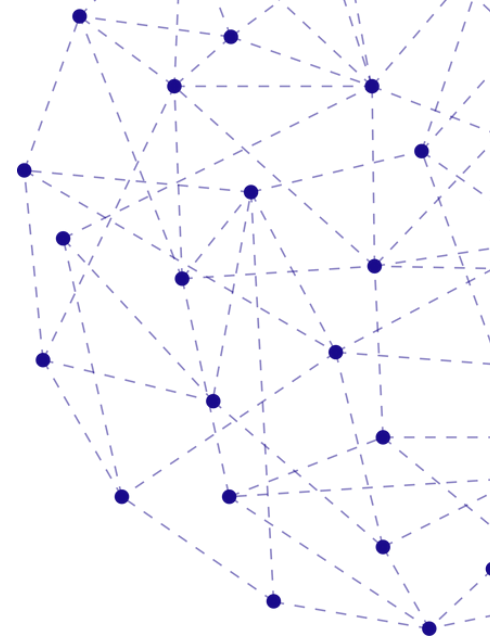
In cooperation with its twin city of Louisville, Montpellier is sending a small number of Montpellier students across the Atlantic to do an internship in social, humanitarian or governmental organisations in Louisville for a period of one month (programme currently being restructured). Clermont-Ferrand provides financial assistance for students wishing to go abroad to one of the cities in its Michelin network. Finally, Brest has set up a grant funding scheme for an internship in a foreign company or laboratory, with a bonus depending on the partners.

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Support for outgoing mobility must also be provided for professional experiences through financial or institutional support.
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International mobility for professional purposes is still little approached by local authorities. However, doing an internship abroad is a real asset for students, who are now seeking to discover professional and cultural mechanisms.

Actors Involved

These partnership and financial support programmes are generated in close collaboration with the foreign authorities of the cities. Higher education institutions are also involved in communicating mobility opportunities to students. Finally, some local authorities work closely with partner companies, but also with associations and services that can host students for an internship abroad.



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DIFFICULTIES

These programmes are sometimes difficult to make visible to students. Close collaboration with higher education institutions is necessary to ensure that information is relayed effectively and that students have all the relevant information to carry out their international project.

CLERMONT-FERRAND'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

The willingness of students to go on international mobility is still hindered by financial factors. Although university mobility grants exist, the cost of mobility remains expensive and, de facto, excludes some students who wish to have an international experience.

The Initiative

As part of providing better support for students, the City of Clermont-Ferrand awards grants to students from Clermont-Ferrand's higher education institutions who are studying or doing an internship in one of the cities with which it is twinned or has signed a cooperation agreement. This financial aid is complementary to the financial aid granted by other organizations (Region, Erasmus +...).

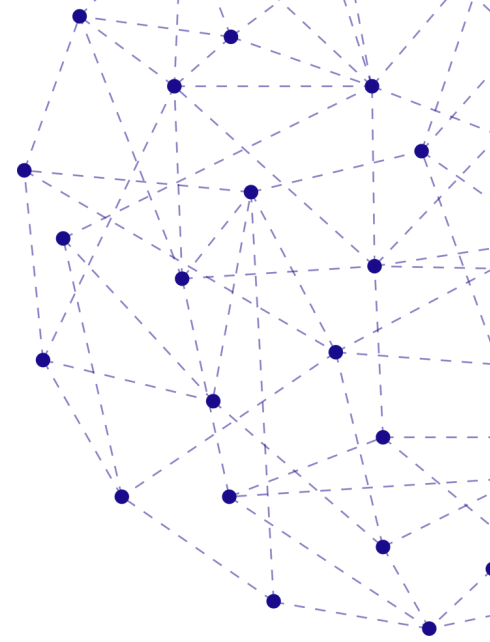
This inclusion scheme for international mobility is granted according to a set of selection criteria. First, the eligibility of the student is based on the amount of his/her family quotient, which must be less than 1500 euros. International mobility must be an integral part of the student's educational program (the gap year cannot be taken into account). Each student can only receive one scholarship throughout his or her academic career. Each student's application is examined by the committee and the city council.

“ *The mobility grant is a real financial boost for students wishing to have an international experience.* ”

After international mobility, the students who receive the grant may be asked to participate in certain actions at the request of the City of Clermont-Ferrand. Through exchanges, the student will be able to share his/her experience and transmit his/her observations through written or oral testimonies. Missions to accompany future students in international mobility can also be organized.

Actors Involved

The implementation of this financial aid support requires close collaboration between the city's services and university services. Indeed, if the city implements this programme, each component of the university and the Grandes Ecoles present on the territory of the Clermont-Ferrand area is involved. In doing so, the higher education actors act as information relays and collect the students' application files, which are then transmitted to the city's services, which check the eligibility of each student.



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DIFFICULTIES

Although the initiative is successful, some difficulties have arisen. The major issue is the communication of this initiative. Many students are not aware of the existence of this financial support for international mobility. Communication is not necessarily homogeneous in all university components.

Given this difficulty, it is possible for students to apply for financial aid after their mobility. Students only need to demonstrate that they have completed an internship or academic mobility in one of the partner cities. While granting financial support, this possibility can be an incentive for further international mobility.

POITIERS' ECO-FRIENDLY INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY CHALLENGE

The modalities of international mobility are sometimes challenged by environmental concerns. Indeed, air travel remains the fastest and, above all, the least expensive means of transport. For these financial reasons, students going on international mobility prefer it. However, international mobility is not determined to be in contradiction with the protection of our environment. Thus, the city of Poitiers has set up an initiative to financially help students on international mobility to favour alternative and less polluting means of transport.

The Initiative

The cities of Coimbra and Poitiers have been twinned since 1979. They both form part of the Coimbra Group, a network of renowned European universities that promotes excellence in higher education. For the second time, in 2022, the city of Poitiers launched an eco-responsible challenge to students going on international mobility. In small groups, the students had to reach the city of Coimbra by means of transport with low greenhouse gas emissions. Bicycle, train, bus or hitchhiking were the preferred alternatives to travel the 1250 km that separate the two cities.

20 young people, aged 18 to 30, took part in this eco-responsible initiative. In addition to helping them discover new territories throughout their journey, the students' eco-responsible trip helps to raise awareness among the general public, and particularly among young people, of the need for greener mobility at a lower cost.

“ ***The eco-responsible challenge is an initiative to combine international student mobility with environmental awareness.*** ”

The city of Poitiers financed 80% of the students' total budget for their trip. This subsidy took the form of direct funding or the granting of holiday vouchers.

NOTES

