

The Coimbra Group – Eurail pilot programme

The Coimbra Group and Eurail, the company behind the Interrail Pass, developed a pilot initiative during the academic year 2021/2022. In practice, Erasmus+ exchange students and staff from 28 Coimbra Group universities were able to take advantage of a unique opportunity to align the Erasmus+ Programme with the Green Deal principles.

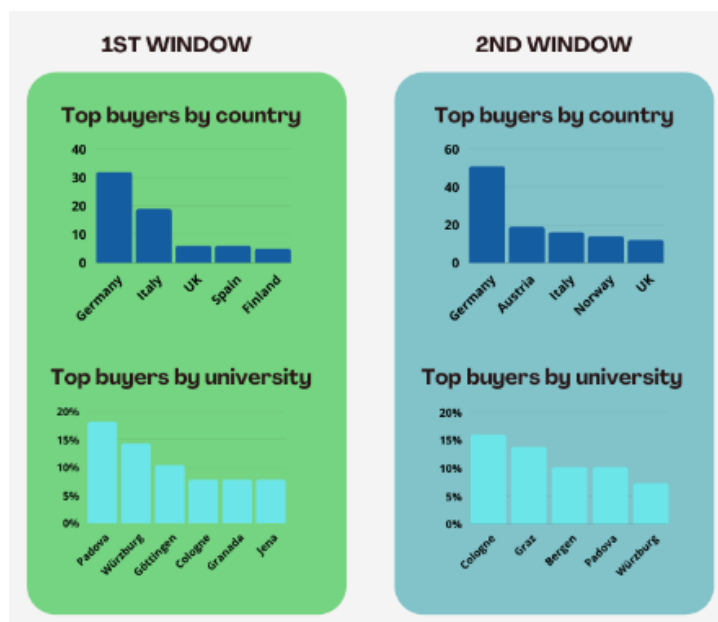
Throughout this academic year, students and staff members of the 28 Universities participating in the pilot could purchase online the discounted interrail passes, on a dedicated landing page which was available in two different booking windows: from August 24th to September 19th 2021 and from 5 to 8 November 2021.

Beneficiaries could then use their interrail pass to travel by train to and/or from host university, as well as to use the pass to explore the richness that their host country (and beyond!) had to offer.

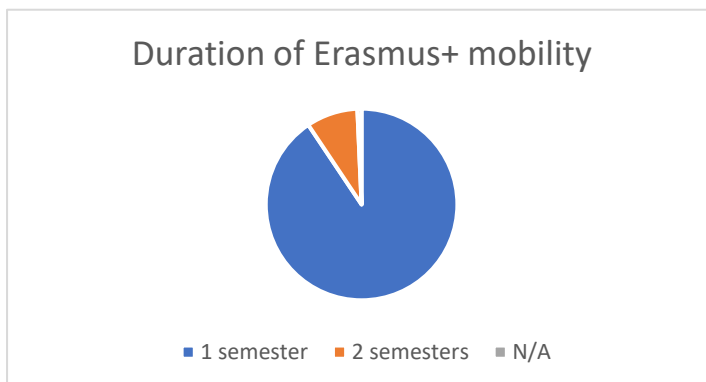
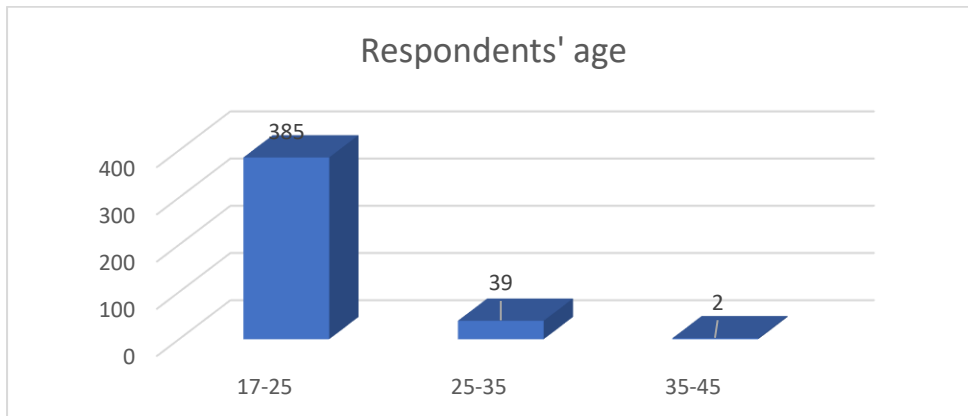
Aarhus University (DK)
 Åbo Akademi University (FI)
 University of Barcelona (ES)
 University of Bergen (NO)
 University of Bristol (UK)
 University of Coimbra (PT)
 University of Cologne (DE)
 Durham University (UK)
 University of Edinburgh (UK)
 Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (DE)
 University of Granada (ES)
 University of Graz (AT)
 University of Groningen (NL)
 Heidelberg University (DE)

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași (RO)
 Friedrich Schiller University Jena (DE)
 Jagiellonian University in Kraków (PL)
 Leiden University (NL)
 KU Leuven (BE)
 Université catholique de Louvain (BE)
 University of Padova (IT)
 University of Pavia (IT)
 University of Poitiers (FR)
 University of Siena (IT)
 University of Tartu (EE)
 University of Turku (FI)
 Vilnius University (LT)
 Julius-Maximilian-Universität Würzburg (DE)

In total, 336 buyers acquired 359 Interrail passes.



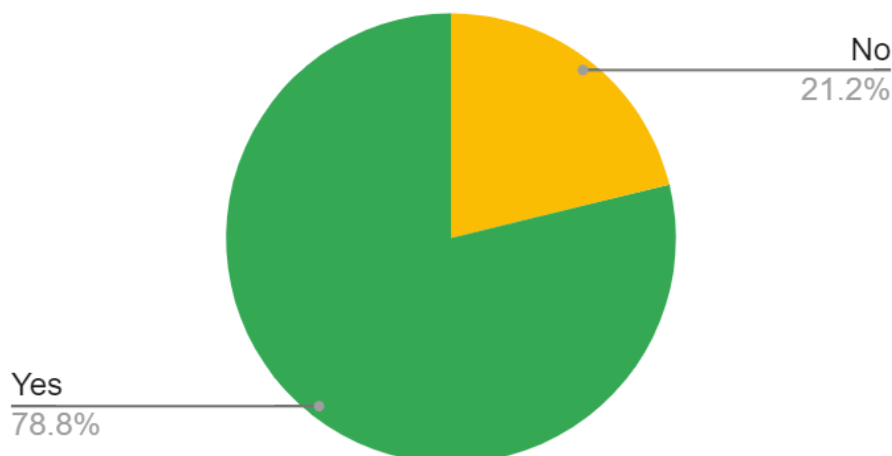
At the end of this pilot programme, we decided to take on a survey among Erasmus students in the participating Coimbra Group universities, having been or not on an interrail mobility experience. The idea was to find out about their travel behavior, their level of concern with their ecological footprint and about other funding resources available at their home institution to fund their travel experience. Respondents could also evaluate the concept of this pilot project as well as to provide their opinion and suggestions to promote a greener mobility among Erasmus exchange students and staff.



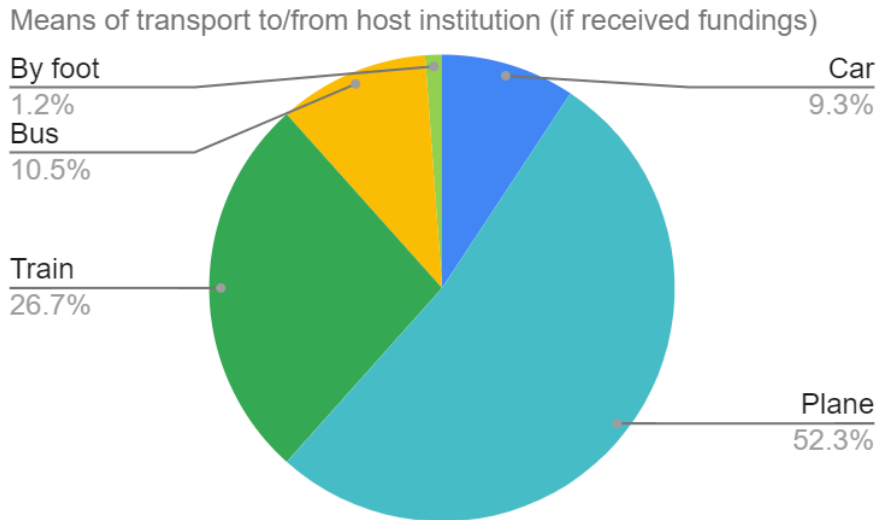
The survey took place in December 2021-Jan 2022. In total we received 426 answers from Erasmus students in participating universities. A vast majority of repliers are between 17-25 years old and are doing a bachelor or a masters degree. For most of them, their Erasmus mobility lasted one semester.

The respondents have generally shown to have a green conscience in their everyday behaviour, and they affirm to worry about the environment when choosing their transportation.

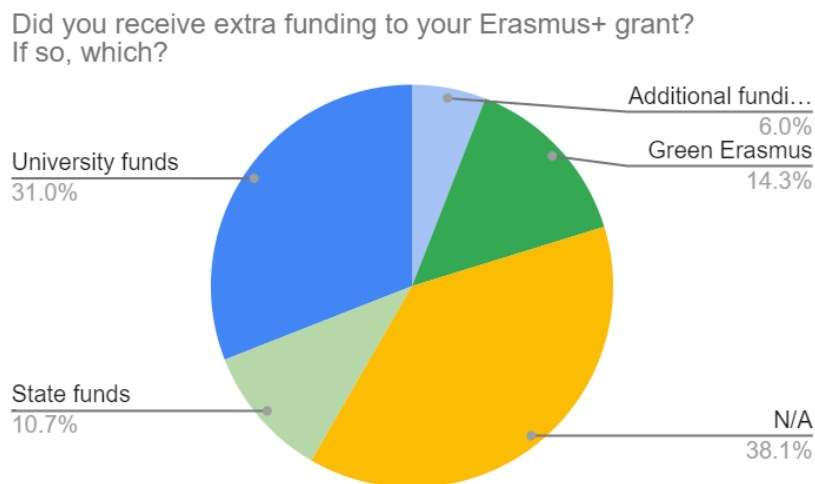
Do you consider your environment footprint when choosing your international transportation options?



However, when we look at the number of travellers that chose the plane as their means of transportation for their mobility period abroad, the reality is that the numbers don't seem to match the intentions.



This apparent contradiction can only be explained by the reasons that convinced respondents to choose the plane over the train, and those are connected to only one reason, which is the financial aspect.



Despite the success of this pilot project we can conclude that the financial support to mobility plays a very important role in the choice of the transportation.

Another takeaway message to use in future initiatives of the kind is that the concept of the Interrail pass is not flexible. This successful product includes 10 days of unlimited train travel to use at any time within 2 months of the start date. This is not always suitable to the period of studies of an Erasmus Student.

Quotes extracted from the survey regarding the pilot project:

- ✓ **“This is what we need.** We truly need a system shift which starts in the mind... it starts with the choices we make. **It's important to travel with sustainable modes of transportation at young age since that will promote the use of this kind of transportation over the years.** Once someone takes the train within Europe, they won't shift back to plane for these short distances anymore.”
- ✓ **“It is a great way to promote environmental friendly ways of travelling.** I have done an Interrail a couple years ago, since then I am way more conscious about my footprint.”
- ✓ **“I think it is an excellent measure to incentivise environmentally friendly travel”**
- ✓ **“Good idea, as students often want to make greener decisions but don't have the money for it,** a discount would encourage students to take, for example, the train more often”

Quotes extracted from the survey concerning suggestions for future:

- ✓ **“It is more attractive if it is cheaper than the plane”**
- ✓ **“Make more discounts** in order to make the students, who in general have less money, prefer a train ticket instead of a cheap flight”
- ✓ **“Include more universities.** I told some friends I met during my mobility about the offer but they could not join because their university isn't a part (yet) of the offer”
- ✓ **“lowering the price and making more advertising** about it”
- ✓ **“Offer students a bigger discount,** since travelling with train and/or bus is so much more expensive than travelling with airplane”
- ✓ **“Make it more about the travel to and from the home and host institution rather than mid-term trains = period needs to be longer than 2 months”**
- ✓ **Make the booking process even easier.** A simple click-order-receive.