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Abstract

This article examines the role that education plays in European Union (EU) integration. We ask whether efforts which historically have been designed to endow European students with a 'knowledge of Europe' in terms of an understanding of culture, politics and sensibility have been circumscribed by, or augmented, by the recently inaugurated Europe of Knowledge project. We argue that the renowned Erasmus mobility programme, a flagship of European higher education innovation, may, in light of critical challenges to the Eurozone and the EU project, be recasting itself along its initial 1987 objectives: enhancing a sense of European identity amongst participating exchange students while endowing them with transferrable skills designed to strengthen current weaknesses in the European internal market. We suggest that the initial, integration-fostering, identity-building goals of Erasmus concomitant with 'growing a Union', have since 2009 and in the continuation of the Eurozone financial crisis, been progressively replaced by the acquisition of transferable skills necessary to boost employability and drive economic recovery through enhanced labour mobility. As the majority of

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European labour markets struggle to regain their momentum, we question whether European students participating in the Erasmus programme emerge as merely 'skilled' rather than 'schooled' in a wider knowledge of Europe intended by the programme's founders. Surveying students regarding their perceptions of European and national identities, this article concludes that education through mobility remains a highly significant and viable means of constructing and reconstructing identity and European integration, even in a time of economic crisis. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)