



Adaptive Strategies in Crisis: The Case of ESN Lisboa

Inês Coelho

Dissertation written under the supervision of professor Nuno Cardeal

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the International
MSc in Management with Specialization in Strategy and Consulting, at the
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, May 2021.

Abstract

The following thesis, presented in the form of a case study, focuses on the example of ESN Lisboa, a non-profit student organization that supports Erasmus students in their integration into the academic and social life in Lisbon. Due to the Covid-19, the association witnessed a fall of its target audience and faced the impossibility of operating as before. The case study tells the story of how the organization adapted and the strategic decisions made throughout the pandemic. This case study works as a teaching instrument for students to apply theoretical methodologies in a real organizational scenario.

First, some theoretical concepts are presented, which will afterwards lead the understanding of the case study. The information in the case study was gathered through interviews with several volunteers in the organization, internal documents, and online sources.

The case study, together with the resolution notes, explores the adaptations and the strategic motivations of ESN Lisboa while encouraging students to understand the context and obstacles faced. It analyses the organization, questioning its purpose and stakeholders' orientation, and the external forces, while challenging the decisions made.

Title: Adaptive Strategies in Crisis: The Case of ESN Lisboa

Author: Inês Oliveira Coelho

Keywords: strategy; crisis; dynamic capabilities; non-profit organizations; resources and capabilities; Covid-19; adaptation; mission statement, stakeholders

Resumo

A presente tese, apresentada sob a forma de um caso de estudo, foca-se no exemplo da ESN Lisboa, uma organização de estudantes sem fins lucrativos que dá apoio aos alunos de Erasmus na sua integração na vida académica e social em Lisboa. Em consequência do Covid-19, a associação sentiu uma redução abrupta do seu público alvo e deparou-se com a impossibilidade de realizar eventos como fazia anteriormente. O caso de estudo relata o modo como a organização se adaptou e as decisões estratégicas tomadas ao longo da pandemia. Este caso de estudo funciona como element pedagógico para os estudantes aplicarem as metodologias e conceitos teóricos numa situação organizacional real.

Primeiro apresentam-se alguns conceitos teóricos, que irão posteriormente guiar a compreensão do caso de estudo. A informação presente no caso de estudo foi obtida através de entrevistas com vários voluntários da organização, documentos internos e websites.

O caso de estudo, em conjunto com a sua resolução, explora as adaptações e as motivações estratégicas da ESN Lisboa, ao mesmo tempo que incentiva os estudantes a compreenderem o contexto e as dificuldades enfrentadas. É feita uma análise da organização, do seu propósito e orientação para os beneficiários, e das forças exógenas, e questionam-se as decisões tomadas.

Título: Adaptação de estratégia em tempos de crise: o caso da ESN Lisboa

Autor: Inês Oliveira Coelho

Palavras-chave: estratégia; crise; capacidades dinâmicas; organizações sem fins lucrativos; recursos e capacidades; Covid-19; adaptação; missão, stakeholders

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank ESN Lisboa, for inspiring me to do this thesis about it and for its cooperation. In particular, I highlight Rita Dias, Miguel Esteves, Júlia Cavalcante and João Costa, the subjects of my interviews, who very patiently responded to all my questions, curiosities and critiques. I recognize that I am demanding and hard on you, but to my knowledge, you did work your best to get ESN Lisboa through the pandemic and still support the Erasmus students in the uncertainties. Your dedication to them and the organization was not left unnoticed.

Next, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Nuno Cardeal, who guided me in the completion of this thesis and provided very useful insights and comments along the way.

Lastly, I would like to extend my special thanks to my family, for standing beside me and hearing my complaints and despairs about this thesis, even though now I know were exaggerated. I deeply appreciate you showing interest and helping me untangle the puzzle of putting this thesis together, although we both know that you did not always understand what I was talking about. This thesis is for the five of you.

Table of Contents

- 1. Literature review 9**
 - 1.1. The specific case of non-profit organizations 9**
 - 1.2. Mission statement 9**
 - 1.3. Stakeholder theory 10**
 - 1.4. SWOT 11**
 - 1.5. Dynamic capabilities 11**
- 2. Case study 13**
 - 2.1. ESN AISBL 13**
 - 2.2. ESN Lisboa 14**
 - 2.2.1. History 14**
 - 2.2.2. Events 14**
 - 2.2.3. Internal structure 15**
 - 2.2.4. ESNcard 15**
 - 2.3. Strategy before Covid-19 16**
 - 2.4. The primary impact of Covid-19 17**
 - 2.5. Adaptation of strategy 18**
 - 2.5.1. 1st Phase 18**
 - 2.5.2. 2nd Phase 19**
 - 2.5.3. 3rd Phase 20**
 - 2.6. Adaptation in practice 20**
 - 2.6.1. Events for Erasmus 21**
 - 2.6.2. ESN Lisboa internal activities 21**
 - 2.6.3. Office 22**
 - 2.6.4. Communication 23**
 - 2.7. Conclusion 24**
- 3. Teaching note 25**

3.1. The use of the case	25
3.2. Synopsis	25
3.3. Pedagogical objectives	25
3.4. Process of analysis	26
3.5. Analysis of the case	27
4. Conclusion and limitations	39
5. References	41
6. Appendix	44
6.1. Transcript of interviews	49

List of abbreviations

AAUL – Academic Association of the University of Lisbon

ComCom – Communication

Covid-19 - Corona Virus Disease 2019

EC – European Commission

ESN – Erasmus Student Network

ESN AISBL – Erasmus Student Network *Association Internationale sans but lucrative*

ICE – Integration and Cultural Events

IGTV – Instagram TV

NERI – Network, Education and Institutional Relations

Strips – Sports and Trips

List of exhibits

Table 1: Session timeline and activity distribution [Source: Author]	27
Figure 1: Values of ESN [Source: W.1].....	14
Figure 2: SWOT analysis summary table [Source: Author]	29
Figure 3: Interest-power grid of ESN Lisboa [Source: Author].....	35
Figure 4: Causes of ESN [Source: W.3]	44
Figure 5: Events Calendar for February 2021 [Source: D.5]	45
Figure 6: Events Calendar for September 2020 [Source: D.5]	46
Figure 7: Events Calendar for February 2020 [Source: D.5]	47
Figure 8: Events Calendar for September 2019 [Source: D.5]	48

1. Literature review

1.1. The specific case of non-profit organizations

Drucker (1989) wrote an assessment of how non-profits work, and how businesses could learn from their success. He points out that traditionally, the best management practices were in businesses and so non-profit organizations were incentivized to build on those best practices. However, the author mentioned that the relationship has reversed and that instead non-profits' motivation and productivity of workers are management examples.

An important decision-making process is also commented on by Drucker (1990), similar to the one seen in businesses. As such, in formulating their operations, non-profits must also often find an equilibrium point between focusing their resources and diversifying; between extreme prudence and reckless faith; and between opportunity and risk, as these decisions have very significant implications in their operations and future.

1.2. Mission statement

One important factor to be considered is the mission statement (Drucker, 1989), as it is one of the most used management tools (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2018) and it is considered to have greater importance in non-profit organizations (Kirk & Nolan, 2010). Indeed, the mission of non-profit organizations is not comparable to that of businesses, as the former aims for changes in human life (Drucker, 1990), instead of financial remuneration. The mission statement is seen as a clear purpose and guidance to activities (Kirk & Nolan, 2010), that drives the organization to efficiency while creating a measure of success and performance and fostering innovative ideas (Drucker, 1990).

Analysing this construct, many have researched the relationship between the mission statement and the organizational performance in non-profit organizations, battling back and forward whether this relationship was positive or inconclusive (Patel, et al., 2015; Kirk & Nolan, 2010). Indeed this relationship is particularly difficult to analyse due to the subjectivity of the measures of performance in non-profit organizations. One of the latest studies has shown that the mission statement has a positive effect on performance in non-profits and that it is mediated by organizational commitment as an intermediary variable (Patel, et al., 2015).

Drucker (1990) mentions that mission statements for non-profit organizations are built around three important elements: the capabilities of the organization (those that will lead to good

performance), opportunities of the environment (possibilities of responding to the needs of the population) and commitment of its members (a mission in which the volunteers will truly believe). With these elements considered, the mission statement will represent a clear goal for the entire organization and its activities.

The book from Drucker (Ibid) also comments that when faced with environmental changes, non-profits are, in general terms, able to adapt accordingly, as they are focused on the results intended, instead of the operations themselves (which can be more complicated to change).

1.3. Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory, firstly introduced by Freeman in 1984, analyses how different stakeholders, identified as a person or entity who affects or is affected by the activities of the organization, can influence and change an organization's strategic management decisions (Ackermann & Eden, 2011).

The stakeholder matrix maps stakeholders' influence to shape the strategic choices of organizations and depends on mainly two factors: power (ability to influence key organizational decisions) and interest (the desire to influence organizational decisions). Based on these two axes, four quadrants and stakeholder categories are created:

- Key players: those that have a significant interest (or stake) and a high degree of power, important for the high potential benefit and harm they can cause in the organization and thus deserve sustained attention;
- Subjects: those that have a significant interest, but low degree of power;
- Context setters: those that may have a high degree of power, but have low interest;
- Crowds: those with neither considerable interest nor power to influence.

This simple matrix serves primarily as a tool to understand the stakeholder environment but additionally presents as a basis for formulating the actions to manage each stakeholder according to their position (Ackermann & Eden, 2011). Indeed, according to Ackerman and Eden (2011), managing a defined set of stakeholders is likely to contribute to an organization fulfilling its strategic goals.

The stakeholder theory perspective is also applicable for the case of non-profit organizations, where stakeholder structure does influence strategic planning and decisions. Following the stakeholder analysis, a study on non-profit basketball clubs was able to contradict the claim that

“non-profit organizations are mostly controlled by those stakeholders who wish to provide benefit to the vulnerable segments of the population” (Ivašković, 2019, p. 1472), that is the donors, which is a long recurrent assumption for stakeholders in non-profit organizations.

1.4. SWOT

The SWOT analysis is a strategic analysis tool known for its popularity and simplicity and can be used to assess the efficacy of a strategy, as well as to craft a strategy that capitalizes on the strengths and opportunities while minimizing other factors (Thompson, 2009). The acronym stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats which are then separated by the internal factors, i.e. those that an organization can control, Strengths and Weaknesses, and the external factors in opposition, Opportunities and Threats.

Based on this framework, an organization can match its resources and capabilities to the market opportunities and evaluate how urgent the correction of weaknesses is to protect from external threats (Gurel & Tat, 2017). In this aspect, it can be considered as connected to the resources and capabilities view (Barney, 1991).

In its development, the SWOT analysis has become more dynamic, reinforcing the idea that it should be used as a starting point for strategic thinking and as a reassessment tool (Gurel & Tat, 2017), rather than an end in itself.

1.5. Dynamic capabilities

Dynamic capabilities were first introduced by Teece et al. (1997) as a solution to how some firms would effectively respond to successive environmental shocks. As such, it was first defined as *“the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”* (Teece, et al., 1997, p. 516), and as what could be defined by others as an extension of the resource-based view (Barney, 1991). More recently, the first author has adjusted its definition of dynamic capabilities to

“the capacity (1) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) to seize opportunities, and (3) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting and, when necessary, reconfiguring the business enterprise’s intangible and tangible assets” (Teece, 2007, p. 1319),

which already encompasses more dimensions within dynamic capabilities. Nevertheless, this more recent concept did not incorporate the diverse research contributions and was still vulnerable to criticism.

Therefore, Barreto (2010) later combined multiple research on dynamic capabilities, questioning its fundamentals and the developments made since its inception in 1997. Collectively, he tried to connect several views on dynamic capabilities in one definition, more robust than the ones previously presented. The following definition was created:

“A dynamic capability is the firm’s potential to systematically solve problems, formed by its propensity to sense opportunities and threats, to make timely and market-oriented decisions, and to change its resource base” (Barreto, 2010, p. 271).

In his article, Barreto (2010) analyses the relevance of the context for the development of dynamic capabilities, acknowledging a split between those researchers that assign dynamic capabilities only to highly dynamic environments and those that accept other circumstances, whether that is less dynamic environments or even stable contexts.

For example, the original definition proposed by Teece et al. (1997, p. 516) is particularly straightforward, as it refers to *“rapidly changing environments”*. Nevertheless, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) defend the relevance of dynamic capabilities in moderately dynamic environments though expressing different characteristics than those developed in highly dynamic contexts. Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 343) supported this view, stating that dynamic capabilities can be observed even in firms’ environments *“subject to lower rates of change”*. Zahra et al. (2006) consider that even though these may have greater importance in unpredictable markets, volatility is not a necessary condition for dynamic capabilities.

Moreover, in the development of the definition, and the relevant context that should be included, Barreto (2010, p. 270) questions the inclusion of *“a reference to any kind of “relevant” environment”*, and indeed does not position the proposed definition clearly in this matter.

2. Case study

2.1. ESN AISBL

The Erasmus Student Network AISBL (*Association Internationale sans but lucratif*) is a non-profit student organization supported by the European Commission in the light of the Erasmus programme. It was created in 1989 driven by a group of homecoming Erasmus students who wanted to help the local exchange students in their academic and social integration process, and some years after local ESN sections started flourishing throughout Europe (W.2). ESN AISBL works as a global speaker for the experience of Erasmus students and aims to reflect that knowledge into influencing decision-makers (European Commission and Parliament delegates) to improve future Erasmus opportunities. It is committed to improving international education and providing self-development opportunities to young people, fostering intercultural understanding, and creating positive change in society.

ESN is present on three levels:

- International, represented by ESN AISBL, headquartered in Brussels;
- National, a representation for each of the 42 countries included in the network, who coordinate the work of local level sections;
- Local, composed of more than 500 ESN sections, where the volunteers interact directly with international, exchange, and local students, with a focus on integrating the foreign students in the local community and encouraging local students to go abroad (W.3).

ESN AISBL is the non-profit equivalent of a franchisor towards all ESN sections, it provides the basis for operating, making ESN brand known while working on higher-level causes like influencing the European Commission's decisions regarding the present and future of the Erasmus program (see Exhibit 1 in the appendix for the causes of ESN).

In ESN (in its three levels), all members stand for and work towards the common values displayed in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Values of ESN [Source: W.1]

2.2. ESN Lisboa

2.2.1. History

Erasmus Student Network Lisboa, part of the ESN network, is the largest section in Portugal. It was founded in September 2008 by a small group of Portuguese students who had just returned from their Erasmus exchange programmes (W.1). From then on it grew on to incorporating more than 50 volunteers providing support to over 2 000 students in Lisbon yearly. This team of volunteers shares an interest in intercultural exchanges, travelling, and showing their city (W.1).

2.2.2. Events

ESN Lisboa's primary focus is on organizing events to exchange students, making the most out of the Erasmus experience while reflecting the mission and values of ESN AISBL. The events are diversified, including:

- Social activities
- Sports
- Trips
- Parties
- Integration and Cultural activities

Please see in the Appendix examples of the calendar of activities for the welcome months of September 2019 (Exhibit 5) and February 2020 (Exhibit 4).

Nevertheless, ESN Lisboa's goal is not only restricted to provide activities to Erasmus students, but also empower its volunteers, cooperate with other ESN sections, and strengthen the association's relationship with higher education institutions. Following ESN AISBL's vision, ESN Lisboa contributes to creating a better experience for the current and future Erasmus students and its volunteers.

2.2.3. Internal structure

As an organization, ESN Lisboa has a formal structure supporting its activity. The main body is the Board (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Local Representative, and Events Manager), responsible for the executive functions and higher-level responsibilities, supported by Department Coordinators (Projects and Causes, Strips, Parties, ICE, NERI, ComCom, and Partnerships), which organize the daily events for Erasmus students. Parallel to these, there is a Chairing Team and Audit Team, who are more active on the bureaucratic side of the association (D.4). This structure, even though subject to changes every year, is indeed the basis for the section, as it contributes to good management and smoothness and efficiency of events.

2.2.4. ESNcard

The ESNcard is the primary financing source of ESN Lisboa, followed by grants given by institutions supporting youth associations. The ESNcard is the Erasmus student membership card for the local sections within the ESN network. With this membership card the Erasmus students can participate in the events organized by ESN, and on top of that, take advantage of the many discounts associated with the card, on a local, national, and European level.

The commercial partnerships benefit the Erasmus students in more than just price discounts. Exchange students are new in the city and often do not know where to go, which hairdresser, gym, accommodation, doctor, bank or telecommunications company, therefore they can look into ESN Lisboa's local partnerships and let themselves be guided. On the other side, ESN Lisboa makes sure that the Erasmus students are getting quality and affordable service with that partner, as explained by the Head of Partnerships (I.6).

To support the value of the membership card, ESN Lisboa works to set agreements with commercial partners adapted to the Erasmus students' interests, as well as giving businesses

visibility to Erasmus students. In parallel, the international section, ESN AISBL, negotiates with the bigger European companies, like Ryanair, to provide the best discounts for all ESNcard holders.

Nevertheless, for the organization to be able to introduce itself to the Erasmus students (which will afterwards allow selling ESNcards), it is dependent on the higher education institutions, since commonly ESN Lisboa presents itself to the exchange students in the universities' Welcome Days. Taking that into consideration, ESN Lisboa has put a significant effort into fostering good relationships with these institutions.

2.3. Strategy before Covid-19

The strategy of ESN AISBL was primarily focused on the expansion and improvement of the support and opportunities created for the international and local students, the "Erasmus Generation" (D.3). On a local level, sections incorporate the international orientations, adapting them to their specific reality. Indeed, ESN Lisboa continued to have the same main objective, to provide events for Erasmus students, to the extent that the international priorities are incorporated in the way they do those events and in parallel activities.

ESN Lisboa organizes its strategy in different areas and for each one, several specific objectives are afterwards established:

- Education and institutional relationships: strengthening the cooperation with institutional partners, to promote and professionalize the brand of ESN Lisboa;
- Events: creating and promoting events that provide the best possible experience to international students;
- ESN Network: promote the participation of its volunteers in events within the ESN sections' network;
- Internal development: professionalize its volunteers by optimizing their skills;
- Commercial partnerships: thrive for new partnerships that are in the best interest of the international students;
- Communication: participate more intensively in digital platforms and leverage them to promote ESN Lisboa's values, activities, and partners (D.1; D.2).

On top of the mentioned objectives, there was an intention to develop a sense of unity within the association. The current President of ESN Lisboa mentioned that the section welcomes new volunteers every semester, and so they have to constantly guarantee that there are strong bonds

within the team to work at their best and share with the Erasmus students that sense of belongingness and union (I.1). It is thus considered that the connections between the volunteers reflect on the interactions with the Erasmus students. Since the organization prides itself on tight and strong ties with its exchange students, team building was at the top of the section's priorities.

Moreover, ESN Lisboa puts effort to contribute to the social causes, objectives, and programmes of ESN AISBL, like promoting mobility, social activism, culture, and enthusiasm for travelling (D.1). Overall, ESN Lisboa's strategy, aligned with ESN AISBL's vision, was to continue to grow, that is to attract more international students to their activities, adapting and creating events tailored to Erasmus students' evolving needs and provide them with better support with the help of more capable volunteers. It is important to note that effectively the 6 areas described above do need to work together to provide the best support and events, as each one is a different piece in the Erasmus experience.

2.4. The primary impact of Covid-19

On March 11th, 2020 the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 as a pandemic, and from then on the epidemiological, economic, and social crisis developed (AJMC, 2021).

Similar to most organizations, Covid-19 brought tremendous obstacles to operations, and ESN Lisboa was not left out. However, we first need to understand the impact of the pandemic in the Erasmus programme, as it is the base for ESN Lisboa's activities.

Covid-19 caused significant difficulties in the Erasmus + programme. Indeed, some students that in mid-March 2020 were in their host universities returned home, some continued with online classes, while others interrupted their Erasmus semester. Those that did not return were faced with many uncertainties and, as many universities did, adapted to online classes (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, it is important to mention that as borders closed between several countries, students faced increased difficulties going to and returning from their Erasmus experiences.

The European Commission's response to the situation was to increase flexibility, incentivising higher education institutions to find the best solution for the students, creating opportunities for students to reschedule their exchange semesters, and appealing for remote learning to be fully recognized (European Commission, 2021).

Mobility was increasingly restricted between countries, and universities themselves were questioning if it was prudent to accept international students in those challenging times (Fogarty, 2020; Cullen, 2020). Considering that the pandemic was present through more than one academic semester, those students who, at that time, were planning on going for Erasmus, were left wondering about the terms and the actual continuance of the programme (Erasmus Magazine, 2020). During this period, even though the Erasmus programme continued to exist, it was reduced to a very limited version, which meant fewer Erasmus students.

This was one of the major impacts felt by ESN Lisboa, as the number of exchange students in Lisbon was significantly lower. As an example, there were only approximately 1 400 students registered to start their mobility in Lisbon in September 2020, compared to around 3 300 students in the homologous period (Agência Nacional Erasmus + EF, 2021).

Secondly, the government enforced measures to fight the spread of the virus, which, as a general rule, meant that people should stay at home and restrict their outside activities to basic needs only. With this strict measure, ESN Lisboa's activities were not authorized to occur and neither the volunteers nor the existent international students could engage in activities. ESN Lisboa was forced to cancel all its events and wait till further developments.

2.5. Adaptation of strategy

This chapter will be disaggregated into three segments, each representing different phases of government restrictions and consequently stages of adjustments for ESN Lisboa's activity. The phases are described as:

- 1st phase: from March 2020 to August 2020, where the in-person activities of the association were none existent;
- 2nd phase: from September 2020 to October 2020, where face-to-face events were allowed;
- 3rd phase: from November 2020 to April 2021, where restrictions were tightened once more and events prohibited.

Following, ESN Lisboa's objectives and activities during each one of the phases are presented.

2.5.1. 1st Phase

Like everyone, the board was caught off guard with the pandemic and was not entirely sure how to act; yet acknowledging the risks they quickly decided to cancel all the events on the 19th

March. After this decision, there was still the hope that quarantine would only be for a short period, and so “*we found ourselves changing the internal events calendar fortnightly, and then the semester was over*”, mentions the Events Manager (I.3). Following this mindset, shifting to online events was not considered during this phase.

Instead, ESN Lisboa took a different direction, “*one of the first decisions was to transpose the activities we had to communication events*” (I.3). So, during this phase, the team created several long-form videos on Instagram (also known as IGTV) incorporating workouts given by a personal trainer and some cooking workshops created by the volunteers.

Looking back the board acknowledges that it was a chaotic and confusing phase, as no one was expecting it and did not fully know how to react. In the words of the President of ESN Lisboa, “*changes were occurring at the three levels of ESN at the same time, which made it hard for ESN Portugal to give orientations to ESN Lisboa*” (I.4). It was a period for reflection, to stop, assess the situation, and from that think about what could be done. Thus, a time characterized by planning and reflection, caused by the undefinition felt during this period.

2.5.2. 2nd Phase

In September and October 2020 the situation was quite different. The Events Manager of the organization mentioned that “*considering the restrictions, we knew we had to adapt, but more than that, we had to innovate, creating new events that made sense given the situation*” (I.3). At this point, there was a clear understanding that the association could not go back to its pre-Covid calendar of activities, rather adapting the most to what was allowed.

Additionally, considering that ESN Lisboa was doing in-person events, it considered adequate to define contingency plans, as a safeguard towards the future. Accordingly, the organization created the ‘*Kit Covid*’, which incorporated a thermometer and alcohol gel, that would be used by every participant at the beginning of each event. Plus, it provided its volunteers with protective masks, guarantying the safety of everyone while returning to in-person events.

In this transition, they took into consideration not only the risks that the events could impose on the volunteers and Erasmus students, but also on the image of ESN, and thus it acted with prudence and conscience. The specific changes in the Events are more thoroughly explained in chapter 2.6.1.

The association was mostly concerned about the Erasmus students, “*that they would not be attentive to ESN’s protective measures, though surprisingly they all respected and obeyed them*”, comments the Events Manager (I.3). Indeed, the board recognizes that it was more difficult to re-educate the volunteers to the new context of events, and their new rules.

The main goal during this period was again to fulfil the ESN Lisboa’s mission but incorporating masks and social distancing rules. Hence, the office was likewise forced to adapt and receive only a limited number of Erasmus and volunteers at a time.

2.5.3. 3rd Phase

The starting point for this phase was different, as ESN Lisboa had the experience of the 1st phase lockdown. As they mention, “*we already knew how restrictions had evolved in the previous semester, so we knew we had to crack on with online events, while in-person events were not allowed*” (I.3). Thus, building on the accumulated knowledge, a few weeks into November, ESN Lisboa was already doing some online events. Nevertheless, it was not straightforward the type of online events that Erasmus students wanted, and so it took a few tries to understand that the focus should be only on integration events, where Erasmus students can talk and meet each other.

During this period ESN Lisboa was conscient that the Erasmus experience was significantly limited and so it tried its best to still show support to the students and provide them with some entertaining and socializing activities.

In parallel, as there were fewer activities, the volunteers had more availability towards ESN Lisboa, and so the organization took the advantage to do internal changes and improvements for which it did not have time during ‘normal semesters’, such as adapting documents and creating new practices.

It is important to notice as well that during this phase the board was no longer reactive to the developments of the pandemic, but rather created plans for each possible scenario, which contrasts with the decision-making process during the 1st phase.

2.6. Adaptation in practice

In this part, major modifications in the operations of ESN Lisboa are presented, which incorporate a summary of the many small developments which occurred during the pandemic.

2.6.1. Events for Erasmus

ESN Lisboa was from the start of the pandemic very conscious about the situation, and thus reluctant to resume all the in-person events when these were allowed. Recognizing its role and image in the Erasmus Generation, ESN Lisboa showed a concerned and responsible mindset, deterring any behaviour that could risk public health.

In the period that the physical events were indeed allowed, ESN Lisboa used the opportunity to cultivate relationships with the Erasmus students. Overall, the diversity and dimension of the events were considerably different, there were no trips, sports were limited to outdoor activities and most events were restricted in terms of the number of participants and had extra safety and protection rules. However, there were still events like Flag City Rally, Welcome Dinners, Surf Days, Tours to several neighbourhoods in Lisbon, and an Integration Weekend. Additionally, there was a new opportunity for smaller events, which would not have been feasible in the typical cramped events calendar, but that became relevant in this new context, like visiting the Oceanarium or themed dinners. Please see Exhibit 3 in the appendix for the calendar of events of September 2020.

For the period when in-person events were prohibited, it promoted digital events, such as Quiz nights, Cooking Workshops, Game nights, Movie nights, Speed Friending among others. Please see Exhibit 2 in the appendix for the calendar of events of February 2021. However, the association recognized that these digital events adaptation did not occur on a timely basis when the pandemic hit in March 2020, and they were only more thoroughly implemented in November 2020. The digital events proved to be a big challenge for the section, as the Erasmus students were not very interested (as they were thriving for physical human interaction) and the volunteers were demotivated as well. Nevertheless, it was an example of an organization trying to adapt its activities to what was permitted.

2.6.2. ESN Lisboa internal activities

ESN Lisboa's internal activities incorporated team-building activities, the informal weekly internal meetings, general assemblies, and internal workshops, for example, which with the lockdown were not possible anymore. On top of that, driven by the impossibility of doing activities with the Erasmus students, the volunteers' motivation suffered a huge cut, which in the words of the Vice-president "*made it more difficult for the section to react quickly*" to the changing environment (I.2).

As mentioned, during this period, team building and integration activities were not allowed. Hence, this introduced a very important challenge, since it was still needed to generate the sense of team and cooperation within the volunteers, which was weaker due to distance and undeniable demotivation. To tackle this, the Human Resources department created a new concept, “ESN Lisboa on Lockdown” which was an informal online hangout created for the volunteers of the section (I.2). Its purpose was to strengthen the bonds between the members and integrate new volunteers, besides creating a fun moment to oppose the boredom felt by many during quarantine. This project was implemented weekly starting in January 2021 and was overall very much enjoyed by the section.

The informal internal weekly meetings were at first (1st phase) considered unnecessary as these would be usually used to provide and discuss feedback on events, which no longer existed. However, these were later (2nd and 3rd phase) restructured and reintroduced online on a fortnight basis, and more than that included updated information on non-Erasmus-related activities, like institutional partnerships, cooperation with other sections, and some small workshops. Similarly, the general assembly meetings were adapted to a digital form, and the voting process was adapted accordingly, in parallel with the Statutes.

Another relevant adaptation was the creation of working groups, to improve certain areas of the organization for which there was no availability at regular times, but that can have a significant impact on the future of the association. Therefore, the following working groups were developed in November 2020: Grants Application, Events Guidelines, LinkedIn Development and Website Development, which further allowed for volunteers to be engaged with ESN Lisboa and apply their diverse competencies.

In the words of the Vice-President, overall responsible for the internal activities of the organization, *“this [the Covid-19 crisis] was an opportunity to develop ourselves internally, partially shifting the focus to our members”* (I.2).

2.6.3. Office

The office of ESN Lisboa suffered multiple significant changes throughout the pandemic crisis.

In the 1st phase, since the activities of ESN Lisboa were suspended and the office could not be open, the board saw a good opportunity to renovate it. According to the Treasurer, the mindset was *“let’s do it while we have time because in a short time everything will go back to normal and we need the office in good conditions”* (I.5). The renovation was as well an objective of the

previous boards, as the space in Bairro Alto indeed required much-needed fixing, though the right moment for it had not been found. Therefore, at the beginning of September 2020, the office received an entirely new floor, new painting, and furniture, which gave it a fresh look with the hope that in a short time it could receive Erasmus students. It is worthwhile mentioning that this project was only possible with the help of the volunteers, who restlessly dedicated their time to improving the space. Nevertheless, as the pandemic evolved in the opposite direction than what the board predicted, the renovated office only stayed open for around 10 weeks.

By the end of March 2021, the office took a different turn. The Treasurer of ESN Lisboa was forced to announce to the section that there was an urgent need to change the office location, as there were no financial means to sustain it. As the board slowly realized throughout the crisis, with no activities to offer to Erasmus students the cash income stream reduced abruptly, and consequently keeping the fixed cost of the office rental posed a major threat to the survival of the organization. Indeed this became an obvious matter in January 2021, when the board started to look for alternatives. It is important to note that changing the office location was similarly considered by the previous boards, but its urgency was only increased with this unprecedented crisis.

Nevertheless, there had been several meetings with the organization that represents the student associations in the University of Lisbon (AAUL), which has a space central to the university campus (Caleidoscópio). They offered ESN Lisboa an office there at no cost, and with better conditions than the previous one. Even though the volunteers still had a strong connection to the office in Bairro Alto, they all understood the need to change location, primarily caused by the financial distress of the section induced by the pandemic, and so the change was approved.

2.6.4. Communication

Communication in ESN Lisboa had always had the primary role of providing information, like promoting the organization's events to Erasmus (ex: creating fliers with events calendar) and promoting Lisbon, and in this way, its presence in the social media was mainly for that purpose. Additionally, other information was occasionally created to raise awareness of the ESN brand and celebrate important dates, like Europe Day or Human Rights Day.

Nonetheless, "*with no events occurring during the 1st phase and the volunteers with much more free time, communication grew exponentially*", says the Events Manager (I.3), and it assumed a different role for Erasmus students.

It moved to an interactive presence, not only would it give the most important information, such as sharing the government decisions and good practices of individual protection during that period, but also encouraging the viewers to act on it, creating question boxes, pools and quizzes. It must be acknowledged that during quarantine, ESN Lisboa's presence in social media was the main point of contact of Erasmus students with the association. During this period, ESN Lisboa kept on suggesting different activities that students could do at home (movies, crafts, physical exercises), trying to make quarantine less limitative. Furthermore, the organization leveraged this active communication and used it to educate and raise the conscience of Erasmus students on Mental Health, a topic that became more relevant during this crisis.

Another aspect stood out, as ESN Lisboa wanted to show through communication that they were available to respond to any question, that they were present in the Erasmus' experience. Their interactive posts on social media were ESN Lisboa's way to show support to those students restricted from their authentic Erasmus experience.

2.7. Conclusion

Interestingly, asking the board of the organization questions on the developments through the pandemic somewhat forced them to reflect on the decisions taken at that time, and be critical of their actions, which leads to important learning.

Hence, the organization recognizes things that could have been done differently. One of these was cancelling the events sooner, since the association did an *Euronight Italy* at the beginning of March (an event which attracted many recently arrived Italian Erasmus students), while Italy was already suffering deeply from the virus. On top of this, they assume that possibly the online events could have started some weeks earlier but believe that it would not have made a significant difference.

More importantly, the organization looks back and considers that the resilience and sense of sacrifice from the board and heads of department were the most important characteristics that kept the section and its activities going and constantly adapting to the pandemic context. The President of ESN Lisboa added that "*we still have international students, so we need to continue supporting them somehow, even without events*", calling out a new way of fulfilling ESN's mission (I.4).

3. Teaching note

3.1. The use of the case

The goal of this case is to guide students to apply strategic management concepts and skills in concrete real scenarios. The Covid-19 crisis forced leaders to constantly adapt to a range of conditions, and so the case study focuses on business administration concepts in the context of non-profit organizations and on making quick and appropriate decisions in a changing environment.

This case study is adequate for undergraduate and master students, used in a class where students will have access to all its information. This section is addressed to the teacher, to assist the case analysis. The case's purpose is to instigate discussion and questioning from the students, therefore the answers provided here are indicative and can differ from the student's approaches. Different approaches and views on the events described should be valued.

Lastly, this case was developed from February till May 2021, thus it is based on the information available at the time. More recent information will lead to different conclusions on the analysis of the case.

3.2. Synopsis

The case study focuses on ESN Lisboa, a non-profit student organization that welcomes the Erasmus students and creates activities for integration and to discover the wonders of Lisbon and Portugal. Caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Erasmus programme was severely affected, and the incoming students in Lisbon were reduced by half, on top of the impossibility of doing any activities imposed by the government. The association was then forced to adapt its operations to the new context, partially modifying its events to online activities, and shifting the focus from supporting Erasmus students to developing the internal organization. The case details the obstacles posed to the association during the pandemic and the measures taken to overcome them.

3.3. Pedagogical objectives

First of all, students are asked to develop a SWOT analysis, where they gather an overview of the main forces in the organization and external context. This analysis will generate insights that will be used in the following questions. Next, students will have to identify the resources

and capabilities of the organization, and from these discuss the existence of a dynamic capability. In this process, students will refer back to the opportunities identified in the first question. Afterwards, students perform a stakeholder analysis, identifying all the involved parties, mapping them, and suggesting actions to manage the most important stakeholders. Lastly, students are required to construct a mission statement for the organization, which incorporates their knowledge built over the case resolution.

3.4. Process of analysis

This case should be allocated to approximately 80 minutes in a class. Students are expected to read the case before the class. The professor can as well previously point towards the theoretical concepts that will be explored with the case so that students are guided to think about them when reading the case. However, the case resolution should occur in class.

At the beginning of the class, the professor can opt to share an introduction [video](#), which presents the Erasmus Student Network AISBL, the mother organization from where ESN Lisboa was created. This short presentation will give an overview of the network, as well as make students feel the purpose, values and motivation of the volunteers, sensations that the case study itself is not able to transmit. Afterwards, the professor should reinforce the idea that the case study will be about a local section of ESN in specific, ESN Lisboa.

To immerse the students within the conditions felt within ESN Lisboa, the case resolution should occur in groups of about 3 to 4 students, which will foster cooperation. Thus, the group solves the proposed questions, one at a time, alternating with class discussions. This approach is important given that the questions are interlinked.

The suggested time allocation is the following:

	Introduction video	5 minutes
Question 1	Group work	10 minutes
	Class Discussion	5 minutes
Question 2	Group work	10 minutes
	Class Discussion	10 minutes
Question 3	Group work	15 minutes

	Class Discussion	10 minutes
Question 4	Group work	10 minutes
	Class Discussion	5 minutes

Table 1: Session timeline and activity distribution [Source: Author]

3.5. Analysis of the case

The following questions aim to reflect the theoretical frameworks, presented in the literature review, on the case, helping students to apply business strategy concepts learnt in class to a real context.

Question 1. Perform a SWOT analysis of the organization.

This question aims to get an overview of the factors influencing ESN Lisboa's activities and to encourage the distinction of internal and external strategic perspectives. The case gives important insights into the functioning of the organization, and the context that surrounds it, thus leading the students to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. While some may not be clearly mentioned, the students are incentivized to question whether some aspects would represent strengths or weaknesses, and discuss which fundamental players might be missing, thus including further ideas. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are explained below.

Regarding the strengths of the association, one of the aspects that stands out first is the strong connection with the Erasmus students, especially since it is something that they are proud of and that sustains the constant attractiveness of the activities. Moreover, the case also mentions the mindset and values of the volunteers and the organization itself, such as their responsibility towards the pandemic but also their interests in travelling, which makes it appealing for the international students. Additionally, there are two more important aspects of the volunteers, which are the diverse competencies that contribute to the development of the organization, on top of the resilience shown by the board (also volunteers). Next, we must recognize the importance of the brand, particularly because it is common through all ESN sections, and so the Erasmus might recognize it when they arrive in Lisbon and when they go home, which means that the brand remains present for them. As mentioned, the good relationships with higher education institutions, is a focal point for the section, since these are the source of the

contacts with the international students. Lastly, the formal structure on which the association is built also presents itself as a strength, since it provides a good base for the organization.

Nevertheless, similar to every business, the organization has weaknesses on which it works to improve. An important one is the rotation of the volunteer base, which means that competencies and experiences are not kept in the organization and are held only by the volunteers. Furthermore, the faded bonds and demotivation felt during the crisis period posed a very significant weakness of the association, in particular since it threatens the strength of the relationships with the Erasmus students. The last crucial weakness relates to the financial distress, the lack of funds to pursue the typical calendar of the organization, which had a considerable impact on the office.

Opportunities are a bit more tricky to identify since the case is more descriptive about the internal conditions of the organization and the threats posed by the external environment. Thus students are encouraged to question the fundamentals of ESN Lisboa, primarily the Erasmus programme, and think about what opportunities can arise from it. Regarding the Erasmus programme, students might identify, among others, the possibility of engaging with other forms of this programme, which are not as explored by ESN Lisboa, such as younger students or volunteers. Furthermore, the case mentions the objective of professionalization of the volunteers, which, if achieved in the short run (due to rotation), can be a good opportunity for the organization to develop from a student association to a more professional non-profit organization. Moreover, aligned with their vision, there is potential to have a very significant impact on society considering the significant base of Erasmus students. For example, if those students could be mobilized at one moment to act for a social cause, the result could be powerful. In parallel with this topic, another opportunity is indeed social awareness, since it is an existent trend, which the organization can take advantage of.

The environment in which ESN Lisboa is set poses additional relevant threats. The most critical one is the dependency on the Erasmus programme, which became evident with the described crisis and the reduced affluence of students. Even though inherent to its foundation, it is still considered a threat. Related to this, students should consider the trends on mobility, which usually would be considered an opportunity, but given the restrictions imposed between countries, it assumes the opposite position. Considering that the students are discouraged from participating in an exchange programme, and the ones that still go to Lisbon face many difficulties, mobility truly represents a threat to ESN Lisboa. Likewise, the rotation of Erasmus

students poses an obstacle, since when a good group of Erasmus is built, the semester ends, they return home and the organization must renew its efforts to build it again. Although not mentioned in the case, students are incentivized to think of competitors, businesses or non-profits, that offer similar support and activities to Erasmus students, as these do exist.

Based on this, the summary of the SWOT analysis can be presented,

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with Erasmus • Mindset and values of volunteers • Responsibility of volunteers (Covid-19) • Skills of volunteers • Resilience of the board • ESN common brand • Relationship with higher education institutions 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotation of volunteers • Faded bonds within section • Demotivation of volunteers • Financial distress
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalization of volunteers • Big impact on society • Social awareness trend • Other Erasmus programmes 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependency on Erasmus programme • Barriers on mobility • Rotation of Erasmus students • Competitors

Figure 2: SWOT analysis summary table [Source: Author]

Question 2. Identify the resources and capabilities of the organization and consider how these have changed during the period described. Discuss the existence of a dynamic capability.

In this question students are expected to analyse the case of the organization, building on the previous analysis on the strengths and weaknesses, to derive its resources and capabilities. The identified resources and capabilities are listed below.

Resources:

- Office;
- Organizational support from ESN Network;
- Internal know-how/experience and competence of volunteers;
- Leadership team;
- Access to Erasmus students;
- Awareness and reputation of the brand;

- Commercial partnerships.

Capabilities:

- Satisfy Erasmus students' multiple interests, with different types of events;
- Create useful protocols with higher education institutions and associations;
- Welcome and support the Erasmus students in parallel to the activities;
- Provide an enriching environment for its volunteers;
- Ensure trust in the safety of its events.

It is expected that the students identify the resources listed above, and possibly suggest a few others, such as disaggregation of the characteristics of the volunteers or the leadership team. With regard to capabilities, students might organize the resources into different capabilities. However, the fundamentals of the organization must be reflected in those suggested capabilities, which are the support and activities with Erasmus students, relationships with higher education institutions and with volunteers.

Next, students are encouraged to think about how these resources and capabilities have changed with the pandemic. From the case study, readers can see that, for example, the capability of satisfying Erasmus students with events has weakened throughout the crisis, as the organization was not able to adapt events quickly or satisfying that need with other forms of activities. Moreover, the resource access to Erasmus students was considerably diminished as well, since probably online Welcome Days did not provide ESN Lisboa with similar exposure and interactions as in-person did. In the same line, the capability support to Erasmus faced a barrier since that first access was not guaranteed, which meant that Erasmus students did not know or have the same confidence to openly ask questions to ESN Lisboa, as they would otherwise. Lastly, the capability of ensuring trust in the safety of the events is a capability provoked by the pandemic crisis, yet with only limited in-person events occurring it is not strongly developed.

After analysing the resources and capabilities, students should remind themselves of the definition of a dynamic capability,

“A dynamic capability is the firm’s potential to systematically solve problems, formed by its propensity to sense opportunities and threats, to make timely and market-oriented decisions, and to change its resource base” (Barreto, 2010, p. 271).

This definition breaks the exercise of identifying dynamic capabilities into three parts, which are: sense opportunities; make timely and market-oriented decisions (seize opportunities) and

lastly change its resource base (align with the opportunities). Consequently, students should question whether the organization presents resources and capabilities that enable each part to function in the organization. It should be considered that this approach takes a procedural and disaggregated perspective of the definition of dynamic capabilities introduced by Barreto (2010), thus analysing each component individually. Afterwards, a complementary analysis is presented, highlighting the original perspective of dynamic capabilities introduced by Teece et al. (1997), which contemplates that these are only developed in response to highly changing environments.

The first question then is whether the association has sensed opportunities. Looking at the opportunities identified in the previous question, the section's objectives and the non-profit organizations' environment, we can say that ESN Lisboa has indeed sensed that to grow it will have to build on the existent capabilities of the volunteers, besides creating them. That means, for example, that to develop its communication it will need to use the volunteers who already have studies on topics around communication, including those that have design or marketing skills, and put these to use to develop the organization. Indeed, this acts on the trend that "*more and more volunteers are becoming 'unpaid staff', taking over the professional and managerial tasks in their organizations*" (Drucker, 1989, p. 88). Analysing further this capability, one should question whether they have seized this opportunity by making timely and market-oriented decisions. Considering that this trend had been already identified by David Drucker in 1989, we can say that the opportunity was not seized promptly, and with that conclude that this does not represent a dynamic capability.

We can then consider the other opportunities, specifically the trend on social awareness and the possibility of having a big impact on society. Considering the causes for which ESN AISBL stands for (Exhibit 1 in the Appendix) and the social activities usually done by ESN Lisboa (see Exhibits 4 and 5 in the Appendix), we can say that ESN and ESN Lisboa were aware of (sensed) this opportunity and are acting towards it (seizing it). Nevertheless, there is no reference to changes to align the resource base with this opportunity and so it should not be considered a dynamic capability either.

The last opportunity, exploring Erasmus programmes other than students in higher education institutions, is something not mentioned in the case study. From this, we can interpret that even if ESN Lisboa has sensed this opportunity, it still has not acted on it (seized it). Therefore, there is no dynamic capability associated with this opportunity either.

Another possible resolution would be to start with the identified capabilities, and question if these are constructed to sense, seize and adapt to opportunities. However, the opportunities linked with the organization's capabilities should be the ones presented in the opportunities section of the SWOT analysis, and so, both paths should lead to the same conclusion. For students not to be left wondering what possible opportunities are linked with each capability, the proposed resolution is preferred.

Now assuming the other perspective and considering that dynamic capabilities are considered verifiable only when firms are exposed to exogenous forces caused by rapidly changing environments, students should question if when facing the pandemic crisis (the major change in the context) ESN Lisboa developed a dynamic capability. Building on the definition, investigate whether it has adapted promptly its resources and capabilities in response to the changing environment. Taking the information available in the case, students might consider that indeed the organization has effectively adjusted its activities and events, internal organization and communication to the new environment. However, it should be queried if those changes occurred alongside the changes in the environment. Taking that into consideration a dynamic capability cannot be verified, since ESN Lisboa only started with online events (the most significant adaptation in response to the crisis) in the 3rd phase.

In conclusion, in both approaches, no dynamic capability could be associated with ESN Lisboa.

Question 3. Identify the relevant stakeholders of ESN Lisboa and discuss examples of their influence on the strategy of ESN Lisboa. Map them according to their influence and propose specific actions to manage the most relevant relationships.

This question is proposed for students to understand the multiple stakeholders that affect the organization, and how their influence can be felt in practice. Moreover, students are expected to suggest actions to manage the most important stakeholders.

Below an extensive list of all ESN Lisboa's stakeholders is presented, but students are not expected to think of them all.

Stakeholders:

- Incoming Erasmus students: as the principal beneficiary of ESN Lisboa's activities, these are one of the key stakeholders. Indeed, they have high interest, but they can also exert significant power since they can influence each other into creating other activities instead

of going to ESN Lisboa's, similar to the influence of a customer. A specific example would be for quite a few students to organize a trip to Algarve just before ESN Lisboa's trip, which would 'steal' participants. If there is a strong intention, Erasmus students are capable of repetitively harm ESN Lisboa by diverging participants from its events.

- Outgoing Erasmus students: little influence in practice.
- Volunteers: these are the ones that are typically more interested in ESN Lisboa, as the organization of which they are part. However, without volunteers, ESN Lisboa would not be capable of operating, so these have significant power and influence over the decisions of ESN Lisboa.
- Students/ Potential volunteers: little influence.
- Competitors: even though not specified in the case, students are encouraged to think of competitors for ESN Lisboa, which are entities that to some extent provide a similar service. These would contemplate tourism activities providers (trips and tours), but also student support organizations. From these, there is a high interest, but not much power since ESN Lisboa is concerned about being more appealing to Erasmus students, but will not take any specific actions on the sole basis of its competitors.
- Commercial Partners (can potentially be disaggregated by type): commercial partners are part of what initially attracts Erasmus students to join ESN Lisboa, and so the biggest partners, like Ryanair, do have very significant power. However, overall the power is less significant, because local partners usually have more interest in ESN Lisboa, for the visibility given to Erasmus students.
- Higher education institutions: the first contact of the Erasmus students with ESN Lisboa is usually through Welcome Days in the universities, where the organization might just be present or even be able to give a presentation. When this is not possible, it becomes harder to connect to the Erasmus students of that university, and so, even though their interest in ESN Lisboa is medium, their power is very high. ESN Lisboa's strategy always encompasses strengthening the relationships with these institutions, which shows their importance.
- Student associations: the relationship with these is similar to that with higher education institutions, as for some universities it is the student association that welcomes the Erasmus students. Nevertheless, they are less relevant, since their power and interest is lower.
- Municipalities: even though their interest in the organization is relatively low, they can be of benefit to ESN Lisboa. More specifically, when ESN Lisboa has to organize network events (within ESN sections), the support of the municipalities is of great importance, as

these can provide conference spaces or similar, and without that support, a huge obstacle is created. Moreover, municipalities could also be able to offer ESN Lisboa office space, which contributes to their power.

- AAUL: relatively high power since it has provided the new office for the association, a decision that benefited the organization in a great deed, but overall not very influential.
- ESN AISBL: as the ‘mother’ organization that sets the standards, guidelines and basis for all the organizations, it has great power over the sections overall, yet low interest for ESN Lisboa individually.
- ESN Portugal: similar to ESN AISBL, but more influential, as the relationship is closer and it has control of the membership of ESN Lisboa.
- Other local sections (ESN Porto, ESN Aveiro, ESN Coimbra, etc.): have a medium interest in ESN Lisboa as it is the largest section in Portugal, partially because when they visit Lisbon they appreciate ESN Lisboa to guide them through it. Nevertheless, their power is limited.
- European Commission and National Agency for Erasmus +: as the creators and developers of the Erasmus programme, they have significant power in ESN Lisboa, as they can shift the trend of the affluence of students. Similarly, they do have an interest in ESN, since ESN provides analysis and suggestions about the Erasmus programme, but not ESN Lisboa specifically.
- Media: despite not having much interest in the organization, they can harm the reputation of the brand, by degrading the Erasmus experience reputation, and so their power is relevant.
- Other student organizations: little influence.
- Local community: little influence.
- Government: very little interest, but very high power, since the measures of confinement forced ESN Lisboa to modify its strategy and cease operations.

Next, the interest-power matrix with the mapping of each stakeholder is presented.

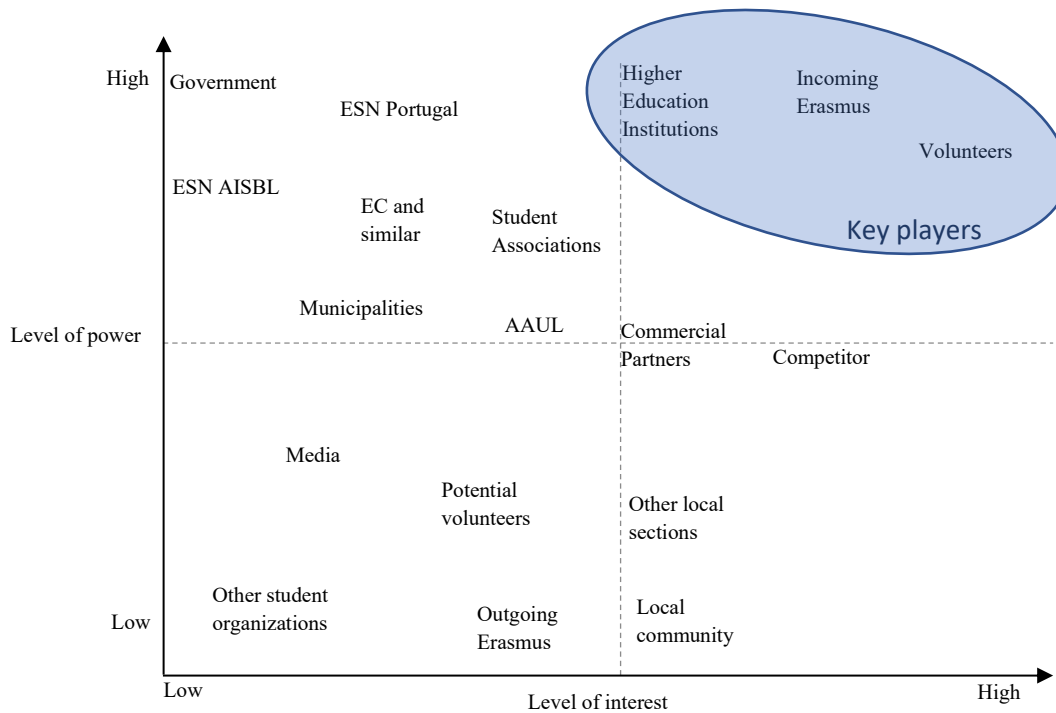


Figure 3: Interest-power grid of ESN Lisboa [Source: Author]

Given the mapping of the stakeholders, the most relevant ones will be those in the top right quadrant, the key stakeholders, characterized by their high interest and power. These are at the core of the functioning of the organization and should be the focus of the strategy of ESN Lisboa.

Therefore, examples of actions to manage those important stakeholders are presented hereafter. It should be considered that many other possible examples might be suggested by the students.

When it comes to higher education institutions, no miracle can be done overnight. The relationship should be built slowly and sustained over time. Every semester there should be contact with each faculty to understand Erasmus' welcoming activities and how ESN Lisboa can be present. To take those relationships further, the association can also, for example, offer its support to the outgoing Erasmus sessions, by clarifying students' questions or guiding them to their host ESN section. Alongside this, there should also be continuous communication, to understand what else can be done or improved for the students. Another opportunity that one might think of is taking advantage of the increased availability of the international offices of the universities while the pandemic is still present, to better prepare the initiatives for when the Erasmus programme has greater affluence again.

Regarding the incoming Erasmus students, ESN Lisboa's volunteers can connect with them in and outside of events, as that will create tighter bonds and will proportionate a better experience for the Erasmus. Besides that, the organization should always be attentive to the Erasmus student's reactions to the events, to understand what they would like to see done differently, what else they would like or why they are not interested in a specific activity. As expected, this capability of addressing their interests will be dependent on the relationships of the volunteers with the Erasmus students, which even though can be encouraged, cannot be controlled by ESN Lisboa.

Lastly, ESN Lisboa is composed of volunteers and so these are at the centre of its priorities as well. Hence, the organization must guarantee that the volunteers are motivated, which is usually linked to participating in the events with Erasmus students, but also that they are supported inside the section. As such, ESN Lisboa can do simple workshops and team building activities so that the volunteers know how to plan the events and with whom they are doing them. Moreover, feedback should also take part in this relationship, as the organization should make sure that the volunteers feel appreciated and are congratulated for their accomplishments. This way, they will feel important in the students' Erasmus experience, but also in the organization itself.

The general guidance for the stakeholders in the top left quadrant is to keep these satisfied since they do have significant power over the organization. One example of this would be to keep ESN Portugal constantly updated on ESN Lisboa's activities and provide them with the information and reports requested. If this is not the case, then ESN Portugal would have the power to impose sanctions over ESN Lisboa, limiting its operations.

For the bottom right quadrant, the stakeholders with high interest in the organization but little power, it is in the best interest of ESN Lisboa to keep them informed, to continually foster their interest in the organization.

Lastly, the bottom left quadrant is not important for the strategy of ESN Lisboa since the influence of these stakeholders is low.

Question 4. Taking into consideration the strategy, vision and activities of the organization, create a mission statement for ESN Lisboa.

As considered in the literature review, for non-profit organizations the mission statement should reflect the capabilities of the organization, the opportunities of the environment and the

commitment of its members. If the students are not familiarized with the construction of mission statements for the specific case of non-profit organizations, then this structure should be given to them initially. On top of these elements, students are also incentivised to review the strategy and vision of the organization, to refresh their minds beyond the modifications that occurred during the pandemic.

This is an exploratory open question, which means that all answers from the students should be considered and compared to other suggestions. Nonetheless, a guide for debriefing about this topic is presented below, so that professors can assist students if there are stuck in a given point.

A good point to start is on the element 'commitment of the members', so, what drives these volunteers? Is it the connection to the international students, the friendship created, is it just fun moments, is it expanding the horizons by listening to different stories and perspectives, or is it making a difference for them? This motivation should be included in the mission statement. More specifically, when the mission statement is defined volunteers should see their motivation reflected in it. The reason for this is that volunteers commit to an organization when they want to be a part of achieving that mission, when interests are aligned.

Some ideas might come up, like supporting international students; interchanging cultures; expanding the Erasmus feeling; making a difference through exchange students.

Next, we can take the capabilities of the organization, which were explored in question 2. What is the organization good at? Is it welcoming students, is it organizing activities, is it supporting the universities in their connection with the exchange students, is it developing the volunteers? The mission statement has to include what the organization is good at since it reflects the impact that the organization wants to have as a consequence of the work done daily, i.e. the underlying motivation.

More ideas should come from this step, such as: making Erasmus students happy; providing extraordinary events every day; making exchange students come back; transforming the volunteers.

Finally, the opportunities, which were explored similarly in question 1. How is the organization responding to the needs of the population, students, community, local businesses and universities? Comprehensively, the capabilities of the organization are only sustainable if they respond to an existing need.

A few extra ideas can be added: integrating newcomers: expanding the reach of local businesses; show individuals contrasting mindsets and realities.

After going through these three different steps, students now should be able to conjugate the different perspectives into one mission statement for ESN Lisboa.

As the last exercise, the professor can contrast the mission statements proposed by students with the official one of ESN Lisboa (and ESN in general), which is “*Enrichment of society through international students*” (W.1).

4. Conclusion and limitations

The purpose of this dissertation was to prepare a case study for students, which describes a non-profit organization, ESN Lisboa, adapting to the Covid-19 crisis. It provides insights into how the organization functioned and the multiple decisions it took to adapt to the pandemic context.

The case explains the changes in the environment, such as the reduction in Erasmus students, but also the restrictions imposed by the health authorities that limited the association's activities. The most important takeaway, in this case, is that an organization feels blocked when the fundamentals of its operations are restricted and questioned. For ESN Lisboa, neither could it organize events, nor did it have a significant number of Erasmus students, its target audience. Nevertheless, it should focus on its purpose, its mission, and find a new way to accomplish them.

Another important lesson given by the case was that initially, the organization thought the changes in its context (the restrictions) were only temporary, and therefore decided to not act on them, waiting for it to go back to normal. However, organizations should acquire a more agile way of working, where they do not fear constant change and are willing to adapt even if it is temporarily.

The case should, nevertheless, be analysed under some limitations. The first is that the information was mainly obtained with interviews with the board of the organization, which, even though it reflects the perspective of the decision-makers, might be different from the view of the remaining volunteers. In particular, considerations on how successful the adaptation was and what could have been done differently could be distinct in the opinion of the other volunteers.

Another relevant limitation is that, as the author, and volunteer of the organization, it was challenging to provide an unbiased perspective. Although I purposely used critical judgment during the interviews and restricted my opinion when writing the case, I assume the possibility that the case study may reflect my view on the developments during the crisis. Nonetheless, the case was also analysed by the board of ESN Lisboa, as a confirmation that the comments represent the reality of the association.

The last limitation refers to the applicability of the case study to other contexts. It must be considered that the conclusions from the case are very specific to the organization depicted, and thus are not directly transferable to other non-profit organizations or student associations. The

main takeaway for students should rather be how the business concepts learned in class can also be applied in non-business contexts.

5. References

Bibliography

- Ackermann, F. & Eden, C., 2011. Strategic Management of Stakeholders: Theory and Practice. *Long Range Planning*, 44(3), pp. 179-196.
- Barney, J., 1991. Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), pp. 99-120.
- Barreto, I., 2010. Dynamic Capabilities: A Review of Past Research and an Agenda for the Future. *Journal of Management*, 36(1), pp. 256-280.
- Drucker, P. F., 1989. What Business Can Learn from Nonprofits. *Harvard Business Review*, 1 July, pp. 88-93.
- Drucker, P. F., 1990. *Managing the Non-profit organization*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. & Martin, J. A., 2000. Dynamic Capabilities: What Are They?. *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10/11), pp. 1105-1121.
- Gurel, E. & Tat, M., 2017. SWOT analysis: a theoretical review. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 10(51), pp. 994-1006.
- Ivašković, I., 2019. The stakeholder-strategy relationship in non-profit basketball clubs. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 32(1), pp. 1457-1475.
- Kirk, G. & Nolan, S. B., 2010. Nonprofit Mission Statement Focus and Financial Performance. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 20(4), pp. 473-490.
- Patel, B. S., Booker, L. D., Ramos, H. M. & Bart, C., 2015. Mission statements and performance in non-profit organizations. *Corporate Governance*, 15(5), pp. 759-774.
- Teece, D. J., 2007. Explicating dynamic capabilities: the nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), pp. 1319-1350.
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G. & Shuen, A., 1997. Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), pp. 509-533.
- Thompson, A. A., 2009. *Crafting & Executing Strategy: The Quest for Competitive Advantage*. 17th ed. USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Zahra, S. A., Sapienza, H. J. & Davidsson, P., 2006. Entrepreneurship and Dynamic Capabilities: A Review, Model and Research Agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4), pp. 917-955.
- Zollo, M. & Winter, S., 2002. Deliberate Learning and the Evolution of Dynamic Capabilities. *Organization Science*, 13(3), pp. 339-351.

Other external sources

Agência Nacional Erasmus + EF, 2021. *Registered Erasmus incoming students to Lisbon, per month, per origin, 2014-2020*. s.l.:s.n.

AJMC, 2021. *A Timeline of Covid-19 Developments in 2020*. [Online]
Available at: [AJMC. 2021. A Timeline of Covid-19 Developments in 2020. \[online\]](https://www.ajmc.com/view/a-timeline-of-covid19-developments-in-2020)
Available at: <https://www.ajmc.com/view/a-timeline-of-covid19-developments-in-2020>
[Accessed 19 April 2021].
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

Cullen, R., 2020. *Uncertainty remains for prospective Erasmus students as universities struggle to cope in unprecedented times*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.oxygen.ie/uncertainty-remains-for-prospective-erasmus-students-as-universities-struggle-to-cope-in-unprecedented-times/>
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

Erasmus Magazine, 2020. *Dutch students in uncertainty about studying abroad*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2020/06/25/dutch-students-in-uncertainty-about-studying-abroad/>
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

Erasmus Student Network, 2014. *#THISisESN - the Erasmus Student Network*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQ071yzhUxI>
[Accessed 06 May 2021].

European Commission, 2020. *Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on learning mobility*. [Online]
Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/coronavirus-learning-mobilities-impact-survey-results_en
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

European Commission, 2021. *Coronavirus - essential practical advice on Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps mobility*. [Online]
Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/coronavirus-practical-factsheet_en
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

Fogarty, S., 2020. *Uncertainty for Trinity Students Over Erasmus and Study Abroad Next Year*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2020/05/uncertainty-for-trinity-students-over-erasmus-and-study-abroad-next-year/>
[Accessed 19 April 2021].

Rigby, D. & Bilodeau, B., 2018. *Bain & Company: Management Tools & Trends*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.bain.com/insights/management-tools-and-trends-2017/>
[Accessed 16 04 2021].

Organizational Sources:

W - Websites:

W.1 - www.esnlisboa.org

W.2 – www.esn.org

W.3 – www.wiki.esn.org

D – Internal Documents:

D.1 - Activities plan and budget 2019/2020 of ESN Lisboa

D.2 – Activities and accounting report 2019/2020 of ESN Lisboa

D.3 - ESN Mission, Vision and Strategic priorities 2019-2025 of ESN AISBL

D.4 – Statues of ESN Lisboa

D.5 – Events calendar for the months of February 2021, September 2020, February 2020 and September 2019 of ESN Lisboa

I - Interviews:

I.1 - Interview with President ESN Lisboa, 19th of April 2021 18h

I.2 - Interview with Vice-President ESN Lisboa, 20th of April 2021 18h

I.3 – Interview with Events Manager ESN Lisboa, 23rd of April 16h

I.4 – Interview with President ESN Lisboa, 25th of April 14h

I.5 – Interview with Treasurer ESN Lisboa, 26th of April 21h

I.6 – Interview with Head of Partnerships ESN Lisboa, 06th of May 22h

6. Appendix

Exhibit 1: Causes of ESN

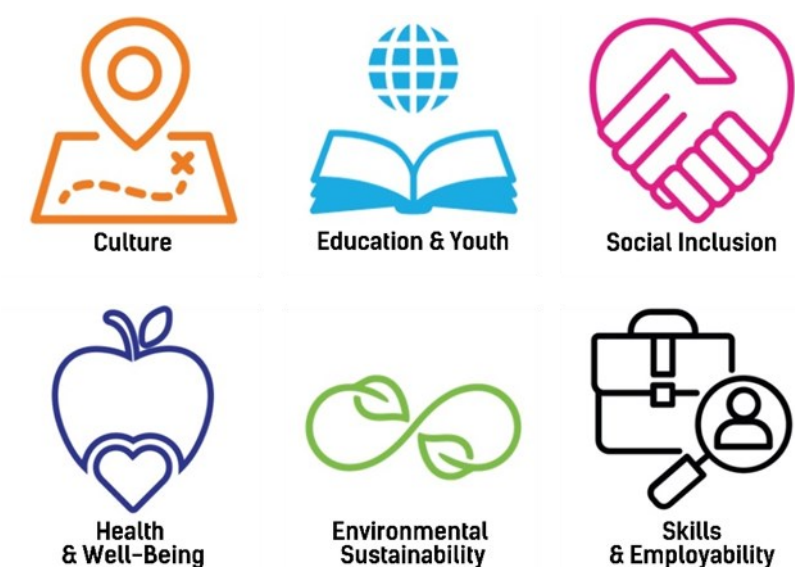


Figure 4: Causes of ESN [Source: W.3]

Exhibit 2: Events Calendar - February 2021



Figure 5: Events Calendar for February 2021 [Source: D.5]

Exhibit 3: Events Calendar - September 2020



Figure 6: Events Calendar for September 2020 [Source: D.5]

Exhibit 4: Events Calendar - February 2020

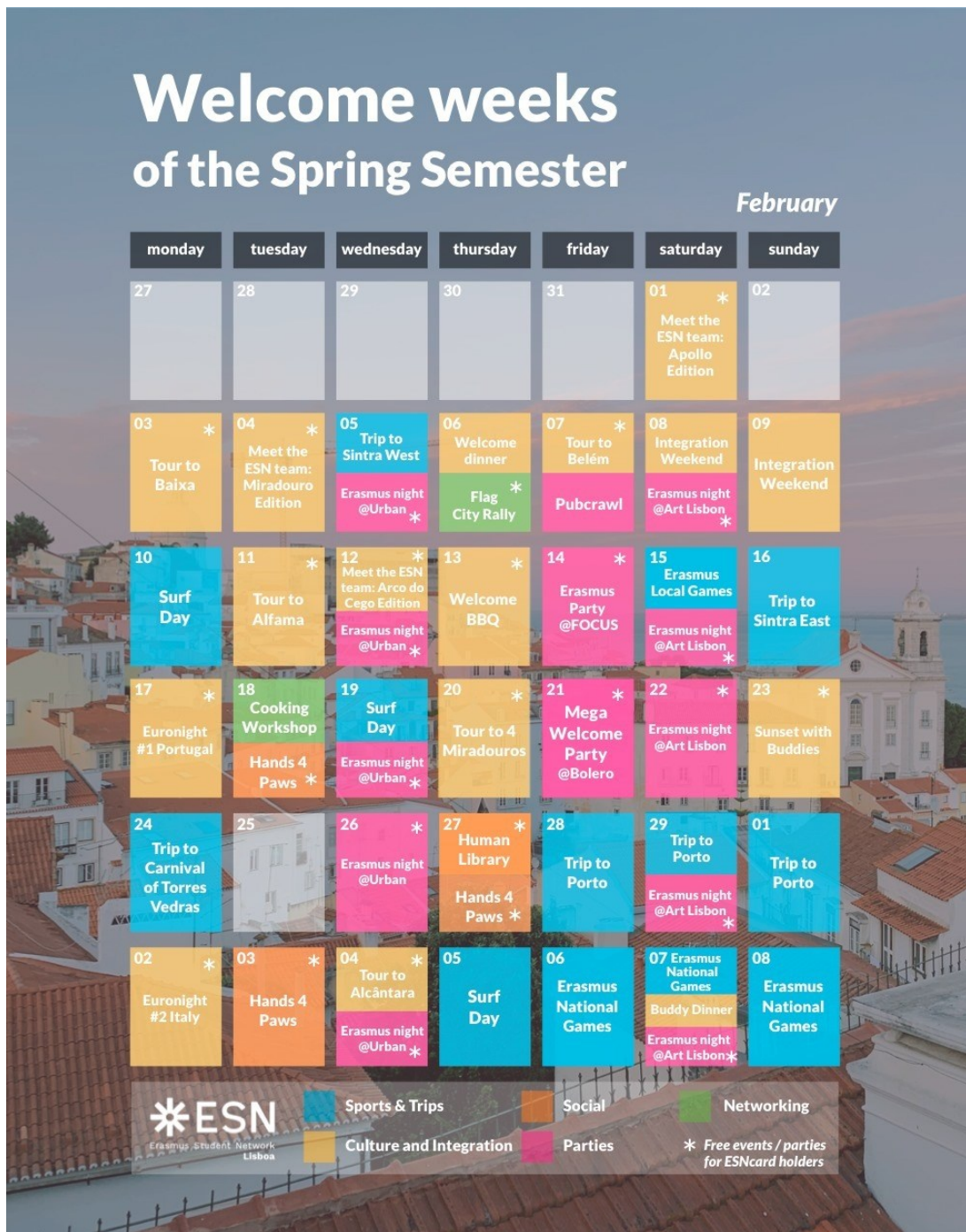


Figure 7: Events Calendar for February 2020 [Source: D.5]

Exhibit 5: Events Calendar - September 2019



Figure 8: Events Calendar for September 2019 [Source: D.5]

6.1. Transcript of interviews

I.1 - Interview with President ESN Lisboa, 19th of April 2021 18h

Due to technical errors, this interview was not possible to be recorded, therefore no transcript is included. However, the questions asked to the President of ESN are presented next, which attempted to understand the strategy of the organization before the pandemic.

Question: How would you explain ESN is a simplified version?

Question: Going back to the semesters before Covid-19, what were the main objectives of ESN? Its ambitions and strategy for the following years, internally and externally?

Question: How were those objectives reflected in the daily activities of the organization?

Question: What number of Erasmus students does the organization usually receive per year (given by the number of ESNcards sold)?

Question: What were the greatest difficulties of the organization at that time?

Question: What is the mission statement of ESN Lisboa?

Question: How is the relationship between ESN AISBL and the European Commission?

I.2 - Interview with Vice-President ESN Lisboa, 20th of April 2021 18h

Question: How did you keep the volunteers motivated during this period?

Answer: Clearly there was a big impact on the members' motivation, any of the members. We all felt this impact, some more than others, there were some members that even wanted to quit, but it was something that we needed to know how to turn around since it made it more difficult for the section to react quickly.

It was mostly done through the dynamics of the Human Resources department, which started with online hangouts. No, actually let me correct myself, the online hangouts started later, as we tried other techniques for motivation before, such as calling the members to participate in the online events, the few that we are doing. Only when the members did not adhere to this did we moved on to the virtual hangouts.

Question: When did the online hangouts start?

Answer: We started the initiative around the 20th of January, with the email from Francisca [Head of HR] on the 18th of January, which means that in practice an entire semester went off without us changing to this form of motivation, with hangouts and leading people to meet each other and doing more to know each other more deeply. I believe that it was very productive, we had great adherence from the newer members, mainly, which was what was expected. In my opinion, the more senior members only wanted the in-person part of the activities.

Question: Did these hangouts also work to integrate the new volunteers into the organization?

Answer: Yes, definitely. Considering that we could not do in-person events, primarily our team buildings or the newbies Bootcamp, that we started this [academic] year [20/21] and even did one in-person edition in the 1st semester, the online hangout was a good way to integrate them. At least they get to know most of the team that will be working with them, so the event also did that purpose of integrating them with the other volunteers.

Question: Going back to the other techniques you used to motivate the volunteers, could you explain them further?

Answer: It was mostly trying to get the more senior members to do and participate in the online events, which did not happen, we did not get a positive answer from them because these were people that were very used to the in-person events, that are not so tightly connected when the fun decreases. Truth is that with online events the biggest part of the fun is gone, and most of the volunteers in the organization wanted to have fun, and not as much the bureaucratic side or exchanging cultures while really getting to know them.

Question: Regarding the internal informal meetings, did these continue to occur right when the pandemic started?

Answer: There were none until the new academic year.

Question: What was then your new purpose of the internal informal meetings knowing that there would not be as many events to discuss about?

Answer: We started with exactly that, there would not be as many events to talk about, so we first thought about including some workshops, which we did in the beginning about ESN in general and about events. But even if we did not have those events there were still things to discuss with the section. This was an opportunity to develop ourselves internally, partially shifting the focus to our members, and trying to teach them rather than just reporting what happened in the events. Honestly, that part was greatly lost with the online events, we did not talk much about them in these meetings, especially because there was not much to say about them, they occurred and the Erasmus students liked them.

Question: What was the greatest difficulty that you felt during this process?

Answer: Honestly, I had a plan pretty much set until everything was shut down again [October 2020]. The plan followed a great deal of what the previous Vice-President did in his mandate, which was to be in the office as much time as possible, be present for the interns, talk with the members, help them and more. This was not possible because we had to close the office and could not circulate [between municipalities], which lead me to stay at home and most of that

in-person work was lost. I was only going to the office occasionally and did not have significant contact with the other members.

Question: What was the situation of the interns in the middle of the pandemic crisis like?

Answer: Honestly not very bad. I believe that I was still able to do good tutoring in the beginning, explaining their tasks, what they should and shouldn't do, how to behave, how to respond to Erasmus, what were the most typical questions. And taking advantage of the fact that we had to be confined, made it possible for me and the Treasurer to be able to do a guide to the interns, with all the tasks they had to do so that they could work their way out of struggles while they're working.

I.3 – Interview with Events Manager ESN Lisboa, 23rd of April 16h

Question: Starting in March 2020, how were the events changing?

Answer: The beginning of the pandemic was, in my opinion, the most chaotic phase, because no one was expecting it. We did not have a quick reaction in adapting the events, we only had a quick reaction in cancelling them, we cancelled them as soon as cases in Portugal started. We cancelled all the events at once, and I believe that we also closed the office right away. But then we realised, what will we do now? And we ended up not adapting the events to a virtual format immediately because everyone was expecting it to be only 15 days. So one of the first decisions was to transpose the activities we had to communication events, and some things that we would do in events, we do it in communication, and afterwards, we would see. We found ourselves changing the internal events calendar fortnightly, and then the semester was over. It was mostly about working in communication what we intended. We substituted dense workshops that we would have in-person with IGTV (Instagram TV), we substituted events related to sports with lives in Instagram with a personal trainer, changing the type of exercises. Those workshops were now cooking workshops, that we had once a week. We also shared a few dance workshops. We had a calendar for these promotions, movies to watch, things to do in quarantine. We even did a workshop on arts and crafts. Deep down we wanted to show things to do at home during the quarantine. It was with that purpose that we did the campaign for Mental Health week, which was very successful, since all around the world mental health was not at its best after 2 months inside the house, so we thought it was good to talk about this topic. We covered different subjects within Mental Health, such as eating disorders, that also increased a lot, anxiety, depression, bipolarity. This campaign occurred in May. Overall, that semester was worked around communication, from March to August.

Meanwhile, the new semester came, and since many restrictions were lifted, we started with in-person events. What we thought was considering the restrictions, we knew we had to adapt, but more than that, we had to innovate, creating new events that made sense given the situation. Events that we would probably not do if it wasn't for Covid-19, but that in this new context do make sense. That was when we decided to create the 'Kit Covid', which included the thermometer and alcohol gel. It was also when we decided to create masks for our volunteers to be able to attend the events, but also increase the quantity and sell them, and we started to adapt the events.

Those events that we already had and adapted were the Tours, that we simply reduced, and we keep on trying to change things around. For example, we had hangouts/chillouts, which is just people meeting each other, where even though we cannot control the number of participants, because it's an outdoor event, we still controlled the group gatherings that evolved. As the groups were reaching 10 people we would form another group. We were afraid that they would not be attentive to ESN's protective measures, though surprisingly they all respected and obeyed them. We also did a Welcome Dinner with fewer people. We decided to recreate the Euronights, which was, in essence, a party, to more cultural dinners in a typical restaurant, where we could also play a few games and related activities, which was offered to a very limited number of participants, only 9 plus one ESNER per table, and we had 2 tables. What else? We had before an event called Museum Day, which did not work very well, that's why we decided to stop doing it. But we decided to bring it back, so we had Cultural Sundays, where we would go on a Sunday to a tourist point, whether that is a museum, a castle, and other cultural points. We were also going to have a visit to the Oceanarium. We adapted all the party events, actually, all the events turned to be entertaining events, and we still did a Roulette Rally, with only 5-6 people per team. We were also going to do a cocktail workshop, also for a reduced number of people.

Question: Which were then those events that you created?

Answer: The Cultural Sunday, because it is usually an event that would not have many people interested, and since our calendar would be cramped, it was hard to include it. Also the visit to the Oceanarium, which was more by luck, since there was a promotion, so we decided to incentivize the Erasmus to go.

The International Dinners are actually a new event, not as much an adaptation of the Euronights, because they are completely different, but it was more or less that. It was mostly adapting to what was possible.

Question: Still in the in-person events, was it your intention to have a calendar equally diverse as before?

Answer: There were some changes yes. Honestly, parties were not the events that had more changes, because in reality parties had just a few events normally, you would have 2 events per month plus the club entries. The department that suffered more changes was sports and trips, which is actually more trips than sports, and we really did not want to do as many trips, incentivising trips, changing municipalities, when we knew that each municipality had different rules, we did not want to promote that. In the end, we would have to agglomerate people to do any trip, because even if the group was afterwards split, they would have to gather to enter the bus, in the bus, the meeting point would be very close to a partner university, which was something that we really wanted to avoid. We had already planned a few trips on a very smaller scale, to only around 20 people, which would then be split into 2 in the destination. However, these were planned for October and we had to cancel them.

Question: What lead you to be reticent on doing those trips? Was it more about the risks involved or more because of the image of ESN?

Answer: It was 80% risk, 20% image. We really did not want to incur those risks, we didn't want to expose our members to Covid-19 as we didn't want to be a source of contagion, as we also did not want to be associated with an Erasmus association that would only be promoting parties when there is still Covid. It was a bit of both sides.

Question: Ok, and afterwards, everything closed again, how were the next events?

Answer: Exactly, everything closed again and then we said, we already knew how restrictions had evolved in the previous semester, so we knew we had to crack on with online events, while in-person events were not allowed. In the beginning, we still tried to do some events that were not as much to socialize, such as Talks, about current polemic topics, but there were not many people joining, so we decided to focus only on integration events. We did Netflix Parties, Quiz Nights. In the first semester, it ended up not working that well, so we did not do as many events. The thing was, everything closed down in the middle of October, the Erasmus we had come at the beginning of September, in one month and a half they already had their own groups and would not go as much to virtual events of associations in general, they would just meet up between them, they no longer had the will and need to meet people especially people that they might not see in-person anymore. So it did not work that well. We also started these online events a bit late, 2 to 3 weeks after everything closed down, but honestly, I don't believe that would have made a great difference.

In the 2nd semester, we decided that we had to start the events straightaway because the rules will be even more restrictive. Considering that the Erasmus students would be arriving, or close to it, that's when they want more to socialize. We decided to start early so that those students still in their home country would already be able to meet people. So we started early and did mostly events to socialize, like the Netflix Party, which worked more or less ok, but then realized it is not the best platform for the activity. We did a Speed Friending, which was an event with more people joining, more than 20 people participating, several Quiz Nights, we repeated the Speed Friending, hangouts and Game Nights as well. Some worked better than others, but it was better than the previous experience because indeed they did not meet each other and wanted to. Even when we had only a few participants we would still do the event, for example, there was a Quiz Night with only 3 participants, but that stayed talking for over 4 hours because they wanted to talk and meet people and perhaps since they were in a small group they felt more at ease to chat. We decided that as long as there were two participants, we would have the event, only 1 would not work exactly.

Even now [end of April] that we can do limited in-person events we want to continue and have at least one online event per week, since there are Erasmus students that are not in Lisbon, there will be Erasmus students with Covid-19 that will have to do quarantine and just be home, there are students that are not entirely comfortable in going to in-person events. Also because we cannot be sure if we'll have to close down again, so this way we are already used to, no one loses that method.

Question: The fact that you don't have many people participating in the online events, was this something that concerns you or was it like whatever the number of participants we are doing this for them?

Answer: More than a concern it is something that discourages. We had a generalized demotivation in the section and now those that are organizing the events are always the same people. Just imagine, you organize an event, it's cancelled, you organize another, it's cancelled as well, eventually it is normal that demotivation settles in, and that was also the main concern. We want to continue to do events, we want them to be good, for the events to be good we need motivated volunteers, and that is complicated. Because if the events are not cancelled, and have just a few participants, the members and participants finish the event quite happy. That's why our concern is to have a minimum of people in the event so that it can be good, that we can distract them for around 2-3 hours.

Question: Curious how the events before wanted the Erasmus to have fun, then in the first online period entertainment was what mattered, and lastly you just wanted them to socialize.

Answer: A lot changed, and I believe that now we don't feel it as much. The first changes were all at once, and afterwards slow changes only, after one year you are more than used to. But yes, a lot changed, and we believe that it will take even more time to go back to how it was before, especially in indoor spaces and with people that they don't know. It will take time as well for the partners that we had to recover and reinvent themselves. Normalize, I only believe it will happen in 2024. It is extremely relevant in the whole Erasmus programme, which will be severely affected. It changed the dynamic of the Erasmus experience, we feel that they are closing in smaller groups, understandably, wanting more just someone to have a walk with, and not as much partying. It's an adaptation, and I believe that those that came to Lisbon around September could not expect anything different, possibly wanted, but could not expect it.

Question: Now regarding communication, you had mentioned that starting in March the communication replaced the events, trying to still create an interaction with the students.

Answer: Yes, in reality, that was the boom of communication in ESN Lisboa, and it was how we attracted more members because we were only 2 before plus an intern. But when the new volunteers joined, with no events occurring during the 1st phase and the volunteers with much more free time, communication grew exponentially. It was at that moment that the community was created because we received many messages every day, so we tried our hardest for the communication to be interactive because it was mostly informative before.

Question: Exactly my next point, as I sensed communication before it was mostly to share the events, and sometimes those important days, but that was it.

Answer: Yes, our communication was very informative, so it circled around events, photos from Lisbon, some partners, a special date. But even those it was very informative, like 'look today it's book day', whereas it had to be changed to 'look today it's book day, here are some suggestions, these from Portuguese authors. Our communication from then became way more interactive. On Instagram, we moved on to doing a lot more question boxes, polls, quizzes, and make it the most interactive possible so that the Erasmus students would come to talk to us and would feel that we were present in their mobility even though we could not be physically together.

Question: Communication transformed to also include the updates on restrictions imposed by the government?

Answer: Yes, in that regard we tried to be as fast as possible, even though the Erasmus felt it was not fast enough for them, as they wanted everything in the next minute, but overall in the next day they would have all the information available. We tried to be the most correct, to make sure we were giving the right message, because there is not much news in English in Portugal,

and there are also a lot of them that are not correct. And many times they would translate with Google Translate which would return much wrong information, it also happened that they would only translate the title or summary of the news and then create a drama around it. We wanted to not scare anyone and as much as possible give them the correct information.

Question: And those interactive posts were maintained in the 1st semester?

Answer: Yes, they were maintained, but we cut loose the pressure because the truth is communication would not be able to handle in-person events and all of that at the same time, particularly because a big part of the department are coordinators. But we still continue to try to post interactive things. For example, now that there are Quiz Nights, we are not going to do as many quizzes on Instagram, as they are not needed as much, are being explored in different ways, it does not make sense for communication to continue. But we still try for interactive communication and that the essential information reaches the Erasmus quickly and the correct ones.

Question: In that interactive communication, was there an intention to motivate and inspiring more?

Answer: None of us deliberately decided to include such language, it was more going for what we were feeling. But inevitably, Mafalda's language is very hyped up and positive, as has always been like this. But yes, overall the language was quite positive. It was something that was more discussed within the board, that we did not want the Erasmus to panic at all, and instead give the message that everything will be alright. Even when we knew that negative news was coming, we did not want to introduce the information abruptly, but rather very smoothly.

Question: In what way do you think communication contributed to compensating the different Erasmus experience?

Answer: Tried, but honestly did not compensate that difference, only show that ESN Lisboa was available and present for what they needed and that we were trying to give them a form of entertainment. It was more or less that, there was way no way to replace 99% of the experience, so we worked on that 1%.

Question: Through this process, did you feel that anything should have been done before, a mistake that needed fixing or do you believe that if you went back you would react the same way?

Answer: At the beginning of the pandemic I believe we had an appropriate reaction, and that honestly, we could have cancelled the events sooner, Italy was already suffering from the pandemic when we did a Euronight Italia, with hundreds of Erasmus students that had recently arrived from Italy.

I also believe that the Erasmus National Games should not have occurred, but that was a decision from ESN Portugal, not as much from us.

We could have started the online events a bit earlier, but more than that I don't believe there is much we could have done differently.

I.4 – Interview with President ESN Lisboa, 25th of April 14h

Question: Going back to March 2020, did you decide to close the office when the government imposed the confinement or did you close it before?

Answer: We closed before that, actually we had 2 days until our teambuilding when we decided to cancel everything because there already were quite a few cases in Portugal and was becoming something serious. Our last event was an Euronight Italia, and after that, there were already some confirmed cases so we decided to cancel everything. We were expecting it to be just one month but eventually extended beyond that.

Question: So when you decided to close the office were you already planning to close it for one month or was it just closing it for the moment?

Answer: No, our idea was to close the office for one month, which was the predicted time and then we were just forced to prolong that closing.

Question: After cancelling the activities, was there any intention of adapting the activities during that time?

Answer: We started by feeling a bit unsettled, confused, because we really did not know what to do at that moment, and I think there was an extensive period of reflection, where we stopped and thought about what we were going to do. And then we first started with adapting the informal internal meetings to an online version, as well as the General Assembly. This forced us to change our Standing Orders for that to be possible because it was very explicit that the meetings had to be in-person.

Question: Indeed, from what I have learnt about the adaptations, the General Assemblies moving to an online version end up being one of the easiest changes, even if that involved changing documents.

Answer: Exactly, the big changes happened from the last year to this one, i.e. I believe there was a lot of planning and reflection in the last year and actually only this year were the changes made.

Question: So indeed you felt that that initial period at the beginning of the pandemic was characterized by reflection rather than adjustments?

Answer: Yes, because there was a significant indeterminacy about whether this would be a prolonged thing or just in the short run. And we really did think that after some months we would return to normal activity, which really did not happen.

Question: Moving forward to September, when in-person events were already allowed, what was your objective? Was it returning to 'normal' activity?

Answer: No, because it was never possible, we could not return like that because there were always limitations for gatherings. Our objective was to be attentive to what the health authorities and government were saying and try to adapt to the most what we could do within those rules. But we could only do events of a smaller dimension and way fewer events in number.

Question: It was more or less around this time that you did the contingency plans, what was their primary goal?

Answer: Those plans were something that the companies were obliged to do, nevertheless as we are an association that does in-person events we thought it was good to do them as well. Even though we had no contact with the regional health delegation, other section of ESN did have that contact and were asked to do it. So we followed what was being asked of the other sections and did it as well. Nevertheless, I can say that today I sent an email to the health authorities with those contingency plans, together with our calendar for May and June.

Question: Still in this period, September and October, what was the section's biggest difficulty?

Answer: I believe it was getting the members used to the situation. The Erasmus students had no idea of how ESN was before Covid, so I do think it was to educate the members of the organization that this was a new reality, of the rules of doing the events then, needing to get the Covid Kit from the office, fill in the forms and respect all the rules. One of the difficulties I felt the most was that the members were very used to in free events just joining, as there was no problem. For example, in a tour, if there were 5-7 people from ESN it was all ok and they could join at any moment because that's how we did and the events allowed it, the more people there were from ESN in the event the better. Nowadays that is not how things work and the volunteers are really not used to that. Sometimes we had a few ESNers showing up to free events randomly, without their presence being required, which was going against the norms that we had established for the event. So there had to be an education for the safety and responsibility of the members.

Question: In your opinion, do you consider that the adaptation and the diversity of events were good?

Answer: Yes, it was done, and it went all good. Why? Because the international students had just arrived and needed to be integrated, so they joined ESN, which is not happening right now, because we are going to do in-person events in the middle of the semester. We had to educate the ESNers, but now that they are educated for in-person events, few people are participating because the Erasmus already have their own groups or attend other events, and are used to managing on their own.

Question: In October, when everything had to close down again, did the board already have the mindset that it needed to online events?

Answer: Yes, we returned with online events, but in my opinion, we were better off with not doing them because that same thing happened, in the first semester you could do in-person events, from the moment we had the 2nd confinement we had to stop and go online, however since they already had their groups they did not adhere to the online events. And the opposite now, they went to the online events because they needed to be integrated, and now that they are integrated they do not want to go to in-person events. Overall, I think that it was good that we tried, but I am not sure if I would do it again with the same consistency as we were, because in practice we are investing resources and time of our volunteers. Maybe I would have done an event per month or something similar, but not pressure into having determined events that did not work as well and did not have many participants.

Question: I find that interesting because from my perspective it was ESN's way to still support the Erasmus students.

Answer: It's one of the ways, yes, but right now the students need a lot of support in terms of information, that we respond in the WhatsApp groups, that the students are comfortable in talking with us and asking questions, that's very important in my opinion because we are still supporting them, not with events, but with information that they need. I receive daily messages asking about the Covid, flights, events of ESN recently, partnerships, helping with accommodation, and so much more. This information would be given in the office, but now turned to messages.

Question: How do you compare the situation of ESN after October, when the quarantine was reinstated, with the first quarantine in March 2020? Was there any resemblance?

Answer: What stayed the same was the demotivation of the associate members, that was something that continued to exist. I don't believe there was demotivation from the members junior and newbies, because they have already entered a section that was already facing a pandemic, so they are used to this kind of dynamics. Another resemblance, little adhesion from the international students, not exactly little but not comparable to what we had before pré Covid.

In terms of organization and education, the section is also different, we already know what not to do in certain types of events, because there al always error that happen when things have to be changed, and since we have already committed some error in the first quarantine, I believe that now we won't make them.

For example, the fact that online events do not work, Julia discovered right away that certain events were not fit for online, that it had to be very informal events and with many games, of meeting other people, because they were not joining the other kind of events. I believe that was an error that we learned. Maybe certain types of events in the in-person format we should not do either, that was very risky to do, and in a way, we have changed our view on that, and so we are being more careful in the new phase. Let me just say that we had no problems with the events we had, there was only one dinner with 1 student that had Covid and eventually transmitted to a lot of the participants in that dinner, but that was the only problem that existed. Maybe we understood that doing it in another way was safer than what we were doing.

Question: Besides the office, the communication, the events, and our internal activities is there any big change that you would like to stand out?

Answer: I believe there is something in ESN that everyone is doing on a national and international level as well, which is ESN is taking advantage of this time to do things that it can't when we are doing in-person events, which in this case is altering rules and internal norms, implementing new best practices, and change somethings that we thought were bad and were impossible to change because people were so used to them. And at this moment a big rotation in the members is occurring. That is, now most of the members have a different idea about what is ESN without the pandemic, which are the ones that are leaving, and a big renovation is happening. So what the boards, on a local, national and international level, are doing is taking advantage of that to implement changes. For example, we implemented Slack, Google Drive, changed the minimum requirements, because they were not adequate, and these type of changes in an in-person context are a lot harder to do. First, because you cannot get people's attention because there is so much to do, there is less willingness even from the boar because they are also focused on other problems. But since now there is time and space, it was important for us to sit together and discuss what do we think is wrong and what we can do about it. For example, the Working Group for the Website is very important, the one for the Grants we will be now finally applying to them because the applications are starting now; the LinkedIn was also something that we choose to revitalize, and that normally we would not have time for. In conclusion, everything that is administrative work, creating instruments, frameworks and documents is something that will really come in handy. Another example, having a document

that explains how a Spanish Invasion is done, is something that is very useful to future boards, and is also something that we would not have time for if we were doing in-person events.

Question: How did ESN AISBL and ESN Portugal support the sections throughout this period and changes?

Answer: Yes, some guidelines were given, now not as much, but there was a time where there were a lot of guidelines and recommendations being given by ESN Portugal. What happens is the following, the international did not send that many recommendations because it is complicated to predict the situation of each country. So I think each country would talk about its situation with AISBL and would receive back some recommendations on how it should act, who to contact, etc. On a national level that support existed, several meetings were made with the local boards. Actually, we just had one recently to share the contingency plan of ESN Portugal for every section that they made. Also, every time that we reached to someone on the national level there was support given for any question we had. But also I think something that happened was that just like we had to adapt, so did they, and there was a time where no one really knew what to do, so yes there was support, but changes were occurring at the three levels of ESN at the same time, which made it hard for ESN Portugal to give orientations to ESN Lisboa, when not even they know very well what to do, only now more support is being given and I have no complaints.

There was a lot of work in between sections, which was as well really good. For example, ESN Coimbra had to do a contingency plan for the event they organized, the Local Boards Meeting, and we and other sections ended up taking that document and adapting it to our section, from which our contingency plan was created. We had a meeting with the other sections, discussed what we liked about it and then adapted to our local reality.

Question: What competency of the section do you think was more important throughout this time?

Answer: Resilience and spirit of sacrifice. I think for the board and the coordinators it is really sad because I think it is a really good team and it cannot 'see the daylight', but I really do think it was the right team to take over these positions because it is an extremely difficult year for those managing it, not easy at all, some people might think that it is easier because there are no events, but forget that the events are our motivation to work and without them, there is not as much motivation. I think resilience is indeed the most important, and from the volunteers as well, especially taking into account how ESN was before and how it is now. But overall, I think that the resilience of the board and coordinators was really important, and sacrifice, because really there is no board without it.

Question: Do you think that the fact that is a youth organization contributed?

Answer: I do think that if there is someone that was more affected by the pandemic it was the youth because it is particularly at this age that you can do the exact things that are being prohibited right now. Yes, there is a greater spirit of adaptation when you are young, but I did not see that from all the members. I think it was more the fact that we still have international students, so we need to continue supporting them somehow, even without events. I think it is about continuing to do what ESN stands for. Some people might think that ESN is all about events, but there is a lot of support given to students that are not about events.

Question: Do you believe the section was reactive to what was going on, or did it plan ahead for the possible scenarios?

Answer: That question always raises. Last year more than now, like ‘if this opens we can do a Pool Party’, right now the mentality is ‘guys, this is not going to happen, very conscious about the reality, so our best scenario possible is this. We are always thinking about possible scenarios. Right now we are thinking about it less because the financial limitations are greater, even if there was a possibility of doing a Pool Party, there is no cash for it. And we are also trying to squeeze out from our partnerships. For example now for the LBM, even though it is a break-even event, we do not want there to be low liquidity even in the short run, so when we discussed with one of our partners to do the event, because they also need us, are more considerate on our need, lower prices and some other perks, so I believe there has been a good work with our partners as well.

Actually, our naivety is reflected in the office. We really really thought that we would be better in this semester, that things would be more open and that we would not have had to close those first months, which are more important to sell ESNcards. We really did not think that would happen again, that we might have to close but not during those months. And you can tell that our mentality was that things would get better more than we were expecting, and were not as pessimistic, whereas now we are a lot more pessimistic. I know it was a bad call on our side, but it was really hard to predict what was going to happen, which is better sustained now. We expect that ESN can only return to the full range of its normal activities in 2 years, because of the expected evolution of the pandemic, the vaccine and the protective measures. We did do several risky decisions, and that one was the one that went bad, one of them had to. You can see it as good because it has created a good opportunity which is a free office, with full liberty of exploring the office. That was the good side, but there is money that we spent renovating it that we cannot get back. I also think it is important to know that even those that are managing the organization make mistakes, maybe now we have greater transparency about the situation,

but I am aware of many errors from the past that were never exposed, and big financial losses as well.

Question: Do you think the organization would be better prepared to face radical changes as it has now?

Answer: Yes, more than yes. I usually say that ESN is a bubble, where is something a bit different happens everyone gets suspicious. It was a bubble of happiness, parties and events, which burst because what people liked to do in ESN, those that were in ESN, was not possible anymore. In a way, those that will now take over and lead the section are people with an entirely different mentality, already joined the section in a time of pandemic, and from that everything that comes next is great.

I believe that something that contributes to that is transfers between positions because that does not happen overnight, during the first semester you have to be by their side because you want to avoid a situation where the new person does not want to ask for help. It's a mentality that has to be changed, there is nothing wrong with asking for help from past members, it is better than screwing up and repeating errors of the past positions. For that, we are creating a guide for that transition of positions, which is not the same as a conversion, but if people struggle a lot, at least they have something that exists and from which the person can base on. And lastly encourage trust between those that are leaving and those that are taking over, because, without it, the error repeat themselves

I.5 – Interview with Treasurer ESN Lisboa, 26th of April 21h

Question: I have considered that both the renovation and the change of the office are big changes for ESN that happened as a consequence of Covid.

Answer: True, regarding the renovations, it was needed before. In a normal situation, we would open the office sooner than we did, for example, the last president opened in the middle of August, whereas we opened in middle September. And the results were because it did not have as much impact as we expected.

Question: How do you think the volunteers felt when the office was renovated?

Answer: I believe there were two different moments, the moment before, which particularly those that are more up to date of the costs and liquidity available suffered more with this decision. For example, the previous Vice-President was more reticent to that renovation even though he was aware that it was needed. It depended from person to person, and their mentality. But for the common member, the mentality was that the office was indeed needing that renovation. You can say that yes, it meant a little moment of hope in the middle of the pandemic.

People would think that ‘yes, we know that situation right now is bad, but we are preparing the office for when it gets better. There was a general idea of let’s do it while we have time because in a short time everything will go back to normal and we need the office in good conditions. Yes, so maybe there was an expectation that we were good, that we had a good financial situation to do the renovation, and let's take advantage that besides that financial situation we have time to do it, and that’s it. I believe that represented the spirit of everyone, let’s go that in a moment things are good again. And then the office was open from middle September to middle December. That was not so good, especially because it was not enough time to benefit from the investment done.

Question: And sometime after, it is suggested to change office, so that break in the sense of hope comes again.

Answer: In a way, I believe that the volunteers did not suffer as much with the change of office because you move to a place that is not worse. To some, it is simply not worse, whereas for others it is better. So even for those that really like Bairro Alto, all recognized that the office was good for its location only, not the office itself, because the office, as much as we want it to look nice, it is what it is, if you look through one of the windows you notice that the first floor is falling, no exaggeration. That is the downside of the space, everyone likes it because it is very well located, we have a very big space, two rooms and two storage spaces, which is something no other ESN has. It is hard to let go of a space like that and is even harder for those that helped renovate the office. I was the one that spent more time helping with the renovations of the office, I was there from the moment that we took out the furniture with Chico, wait, before that as well, with cleaning with Rita. After that we painted the space, which was nice, I was the one who bought them. Then we started to ask more people to help because we realized that it would take a long time. After that, we refurnished again and built and bought new furniture from IKEA, where we also had the help of a lot of people to do that. And that was it, it was a lot of time if we put all together it sums easily to 2 weeks.

Question: And doesn’t it feel like a punch in the stomach that you renovated the office with hopes of a good first semester, which did not happen, and in the end not be able to go back to the renovated office and having to change.

Answer: It’s complicated indeed. For me, it was especially complicated because I was aware of the money invested in the office and I wanted it to pay off. That’s why we bought a good table, shelves for the walls, and the result was nice, really nice, and was exactly like we wanted, was perfect. But the reality is what it is, and we also recognize above all and considering that I was the person that spent more time to renovate it, I am the person with more legitimacy to say

that no matter how good the office is and how much we want to stay there, it does not make sense anymore. It does not make sense for many reasons, it is not only because we are struggling financially, it about all other components that some members do not understand as much. Imagine, there are arguments for both sides. It makes sense for us to stay in Bairro Alto for several reasons, all of that discussion that we already had. But we have to weigh more the fact that we are a non-profit organization that should reduce its fixed expenses to the maximum, and above all should have a space that reflects what the organization represents, and that is in a place that represents what it does. And if we are in Bairro Alto we are too much associated with a simple organization that does events, it's a bit like that. And you are in a place much more representative of what ESN Lisboa can be in Campo Grande than in Bairro Alto because you are close to the academic association, you are close to the universities, you are in a space that is well known by Portuguese students, which is also important. It's a thing that you only notice when you are on the board, the continuity of the association, you need that the organization be, more than known in the international context by the Erasmus students, it is very important that it is known by Portuguese students, and for the type of Portuguese students that you want. It's not any volunteer anymore. You see the volunteer that is now joining ESN is different from the one joining 4 years ago.

Question: That goes in the same direction of what is identified in the literature as well, that the volunteers are competent.

Answer: Exactly. You have a big problem, which is something that I have only realized when assuming the position of Treasurer, it is in the more technical positions and that involve a component that requires a background that you realize that it cannot be anyone that assumes a position in the board. I believe that anyone that be a coordinator, he can learn, but it cannot be anyone that goes on the board, it cannot be, and most people are not aware of that, they think it is only a student association, not even I fully understood this before starting. Truth is that you can learn in the position, but it is not anyone that can learn like that because you have different people, that deal with things differently. You have those that when faced with the position take it slowly, and believe that it is possible to learn how to do it, you have others that panic, and then you have the others that just don't care. And there are some positions where you just cannot have those type of people, Treasurer is one of them, President as well, but Treasurer is critical because if do not have a Treasurer that does not have the rigour of accompanying the accounts and the expenses, pay to the tax authorities, speak regularly with our accountant, things that you do not dream about when you join an association but are things that you need to do. That is why it is important that you look for competent people and with different objectives, and that

is the structural base of the association, that's where Human Resources comes in, and the focus that we now have in Human Resources, that before was overlooked. Today, what I do is that these decisions go all to human resources, because that's the most important thing you have, to focus on the people of the organization, having a filter that before was non-existent and that today more than filtering people you transmit the notion of what the volunteer of ESN is like, and that is really important. You have people today that are in the second round of newbies, the newest round is impressive, they are amazing, but even the one before you have a different mentality, different objectives, they all have LinkedIn, they look for taking over support positions, and 'what else can I do'. They are not as focused on the events, if there are events they do them, if there are not then they do something else.

Question: But those newbies entered the organization in a situation where there were no events, so they knew what they were getting into.

Answer: Yes, that is true, that helped in the filtering process. But the way the organization is structured is very important, if you look carefully the organization is very different now than it was before. The big difference that exists now and allows me to be confident of the future of ESN is indeed when you show that you are not that concerned about the events. Why? One might think that what we do are events. But we were focused on what is shown to the exterior, and you can not devote so much, and so much human resources to the events. It's the same thing as trying to do a football team without a coach or technical support team, it's the same thing as saying that these are very good players, they don't need a coach, they'll be fine on their own, so get ready for the next game. You see, it doesn't work. And it is very much like that. You look at, and I know I am taking on football examples for some reason, Belenenses SAD and Bolenenses Club, the Belenenses SAD is in the premier league, but Bolenenses Club was the one that got the players back then. That's the logic. The important thing is that you have an organization that is concerned with, can say 'guys, we are concerned about the structure, about guaranteeing that things are well done, and after that come the events'.

Question: Now talking more about the change of office, do you think it was a direct consequence of the pandemic or that it would occur anyway?

Answer: Good question. The change of office was driven by several aspects, one of them an opportunity transformed in a format of necessity. It came in the format of an opportunity and was transmitted in the form of a necessity. So we needed to change office, and the main objective that was transmitted to the members was the financial distress, and effectively it is. But in a situation that we did not have financial struggles, we would want to change office anyway. Our financial struggles were something bad that turned out good. It accelerated a

decision that would certainly be taken by the association, but in a situation of financial stability would be much more difficult to accept. To me and the board, the solution was only changing office, however, it would be a proposal considered anyway but with other arguments that could be not as convincing.

The pandemic accelerated a process that sooner or later if everything turned out ok, would happen. I can even say more, the decision of us renovating the office's floor, it was not a decision taken overnight. What happened was that before I took over the position of Treasurer, one of the ideas I had was that I would like to change the floor. Then after I started, one of the things I talked about with the previous Vice-President was, he told me that I had several options on the table, that I should start to think about them. Effectively we had the option of, changing the office's floor then, changing the office's floor later or, something that I considered as well, what if we change office? And indeed he said that it was something considered about the previous boards, that every year the boards would propose to change the office into a space from the Lisbon city hall. And back then I talked with the President to ask if that would be possible if we could talk to them so that they would give us an office space, but she replied 'our relationship with them is too weak, it's not possible. Then what about with Técnico? With them is also not possible. We started testing things out and realised that we did not have at that moment institutional partnerships strong enough that we can ask them for a space. So I asked her what was the prevision for us to get a new space for us. And she said 'for us to get to institutional relationships strong enough for me to ask anyone for a space I need at least one year. And then the thing was, will we wait one year, then moving to another board that will maybe not do them? Will we wait one year till we change the office? Will we wait one year till we change the flooring? Or do we change the flooring now and expect the change of office in around 3 years? And that was what was defined. Because our idea when we renovated the office was not of renovating now and the next year changing office, no. The objective was never to say that it would be our space for the years to come, the objective was always to maintain the office with minimally acceptable conditions, because it is disgusting, while we don't change to a decent space. Because that space was always a temporary objective, we went thereafter we were thrown out of a space owned by the city hall.

Question: Actually that was one of my questions, how do you say that the previous boards wanted to renovate the office and the previous boards also wanted to change office? How do these two realities coexist? But now that is clearer, you wanted to renovate the office in the short run and change office in the long run.

Answer: That is exactly the logic, in the medium run. What happens is, and that is something that we tried to do then, why did we change the flooring. Because the place where you are, repeating the idea I said before, is very representative of what you are, it was one of the things that we more spoke about when we were discussing the floor. When I went to the recruiting in ESN, I entered the room and thought ‘what is this? This place is falling apart, what am I getting into? Different sofas, duck tape in the floor, some garbage’, but thought ok, just deal with it. But it does give in an idea of how ‘smarty pants’ the organization was, if the floor is taped together with duck tape, then the organization should be as well. That is it, it does not matter how much we try, the looks count. We considered that it was a valid investment because it was to be done for at least 2 years.

Question: When was the moment when you realised that a change really was necessary? That is, was it that the proposal was made and then you realized that you needed to accept it because of the lack of money? Or was it the opposite, where money was short so you started looking for alternatives?

Answer: How did this go? Clearly, there was a scenario where we would not change office and the association would still exist. I did not tell the volunteers about that scenario, but it existed, because I had to think about it, that’s my job. We reduced the rent by leaving one of the storages spaces, which already reduced the rent, and then did a moratorium to reduce the rent and pay only an amount of 250€, which would maintain for how long we wanted. And the landlord also said that if there was the need to get even lower it could, but to a minimum of 200€ only, not less. But what happens when you are doing this is that you are postponing your problem. It is not that it cannot work out, because that scenarios always exists, that the next semester we have more revenue and a good part of it is allocated to fixed expenses. But by postponing this problem you would be conditioning the future of the next board and the board after that. You would have a non-profit organization accumulating debt, which is not sustainable. You would reduce the rent from 620 to 250 and then from one moment to another when you’d have more revenue, you would have rent of 900-1000€ of expenses of space only. That was definitely not the ideal scenario, it was possible and was what we had, and that was perfectly assembled till the moment that the possibility to change to the other office appeared. So the scenario that would occur if we did not change offices, would be that, an accumulation of debt that would start to be paid in 2022, which was what I asked the landlord, that we needed at least a reduction till the end of 2021, and from then on we would pay it progressively.

Question: So you asked for the moratorium before you had received the proposal for the new office?

Answer: Yes, I asked for the moratorium..... So it was agreed officially, I talked to him before, on the 9th of February. And we had till the end of the month of February to empty the small storage space, from March onwards there was a reduction of 50€ and we started to pay less for rent. We started to pay those 250€ starting in March officially. And in February we already paid a little less, because it was agreed verbally that we could. So technically it started in February, but I started to talk with him before this, like ‘Sr. Rodrigo, let’s consider some possibilities, I want to inform you in advance that we will reach a point where we are not able to pay all the rent. What can we do’. And that was it, he was very considerate and said that all we needed was to send an email, we settle the details and we reduce the amount.

And before that, in the months of January and February, I was looking for subsidies from the city hall to support the rent, because subsidies were being given to the companies that had a fall of revenues of more than 25%, but what happens is that it is dependent on the CAE (classification of the economic activities) and ours of cultural and recreative association does not fit in those subsidies of the state for that break in revenue. Not being a business, and a non-profit organization, there is a gap in the legislation where they support the companies but not the associations. They probably assume that the organizations already have that support, or that it already has its office given by the city hall or similar, and so that support does not exist. So we did not get that support. We still tried for other subsidies, but the same situation happened, it was more oriented to restaurants, stores and local businesses, and we did not fit. So there were all those complications, there was a situation where we spent a lot of time thinking let’s try these subsidies, we would talk with the accountant and it would not fit, we talked with the landlord if he could forgive some part, and that went on till he did the moratorium.

Question: And then when did you receive the proposal from the academic association?

Answer: Our meeting with the academic association was at the beginning of March.

Question: So there was still some time where you had reduced the rent and were accumulating debt.

Answer: There was another situation that was being accumulated, why was this even more important at the beginning of the year? Because we paid an amount of 1 800 to Gota de Agua regarding the Surf Days and Surf Weekends, that obviously I was expecting, but that had to be paid, and we had to pay a tax of a higher amount, and we also had to pay 1 100 to ESN Portugal for the first year of the platform of the card. It was a pack of very high amounts, and then also the notary. It was this group of amounts that were paid during that time, that reduced a lot of our liquidity.

Question: So it was in January that you realized this?

Answer: Everything was in January, it was exactly in January that I started to realize that we would reach a point of immense difficulty. But you are also in a scenario in which it is really hard to make predictions. Just before starting the 2nd semester, everyone thought that it was going to be a semester similar to the 1st, it was legit. In the 1st semester, we sold 500 cards, which is awful, but well also not bad, it's money. In the 2nd semester, we are not very happy with 150 cards sold, you see? And that is very limitative because it is not only the cards, it's the commissions from partners, the events that you can't do, and all of that was very limitative. So the decision of reducing the rent was taken at the beginning of the year, rather the importance of reducing the rent was taken at the beginning of the year, more or less in the middle of January we noticed that it had to happen. Then at the beginning of February, it was agreed with the landlord that that reduction would happen, in the month of February I already paid less, around 320. And after that, we had a meeting with the academic association at the beginning of March. After that meeting, and this was very progressive, me and the President had the meeting with him, that possibility was open, I then called the President to ask if we were going for it. When the meeting was over, this question was put in the future, like one day we might talk to you to maybe change to your space, but then I did the math and realized it had to be now. So I called the President, who agreed that that change had to be for now, after we arranged a board meeting, where it was agreed as well, then heads and boards meeting, everyone agreed as well. Then we realized that this topic had to be discussed in the General Assembly, and so we started preparing everything, the document, the email, the argumentation, and that was the process, with culminated with the approval on the 9th April.

Question: Was there a situation where you searched for other potential offices?

Answer: Yes, I did look, they were not free though, because you do not have other offices, other space to go to. In the last scenario of despair we could go to the Study in Lisbon, but the space is really small, you would only have a table and eventually, storage, so that would be something really temporary, we would not be capable of fitting there all of our things, so that would not work. But I did search around, I exchanged emails with a company, like a Uniplaces but for offices, desk scout or similar, and even looked into some prices, which were below that of our office, not much but some, around 400-500. But that was clearly not a solution.

We were only really faced with reality after that meeting, because until then we were in a scenario of containing, surviving for the longer we could. We were in a route for collision, everyone is aware of that, and that the duration of the organization was dependent on sooner or later having revenue that would compensate for our expenses, it was exactly that.

I.6 – Interview with Head of Partnerships ESN Lisboa, 06th of May 22h

Question: When was the ESNcard created?

Answer: I don't know it by heart, but I can tell you if you need. What happened was, the first section, which was... in the Netherlands, some 40 years ago, they did not have the card. Only when it became international did they effectively started to use the card, for the price of the events to be lower.

Question: Regarding the benefit of the ESNcard concerning external parties, is it simply about discounts, or are there other benefits?

Answer: More or less yes, or mostly yes, or at least what they see yes, but it is more than that. For example, when you have the card you can join special packs of some of the partners, it's not necessarily a discount, but exclusive access. One example a shot Sardines on Fire in a bar, partner of ESN, it will not be cheaper, it is cheap by nature, but not cheaper with the card. But when you show the card you get access to that type of products. It's true that we do bet a lot on it, we prefer the discount because it is more visual, but there are some partners where we can do that, that ok we'll have that discount with that partner, but besides that have an exclusive pack that no one else can have.

Question: I had thought about that more than the discount when they did not know what to choose, they were guided.

Answer: That is a very good answer, and effectively that was what I was thinking about because my method in partnerships is exactly like that. Before we wanted abundance, several partners, whereas now we go to only one, one for each type. When you look into a partner, the priority is that it is of quality, that represents us and with whom we have good relationships, and only then do we discuss the conditions. So yes, that is exactly that, the Erasmus students talk with us and ask where they can get their hair cut, and we just point, this one hairdresser, you have x% of discount and that's the best hairdresser you can find in Lisbon, a guarantee of quality.

Question: Considering that ESN receives money from selling the cards, which is justified by the discount that you get from the partners, aren't you abusing when you also receive commissions from the partners?

Answer: No one had ever asked me that, that's a very good question. No, because most of our partners does not involve commissions. The ones that give commissions are the ones that give particularly more work, and that effectively have that potential of financing without compromising the discount of the Erasmus student. What we do always is, when we do have that commission we are not stealing the discount of the Erasmus. Because what happens most

times is, and this happened recently as well with a Language School, with them we have a margin of 15% for discount plus commission, and we are the ones that decide how much we want of commission, if we wanted 15% commission and 0 discount we could also have it, what they set is the 15% total. We decided to have a 10% discount plus a 5% discount. But we also know that they are more willing to accept 10+5 than 15 discount. Let me explain why. If they give us 15% discount to us they would have to give it to all partners, that's how it works. That had happened now with the car renting, that we have 20% discount with Madlobos and ELL has only 15%, and so the next day they went and complained that also wanted 20%. There are a lot of partners that we had where they have more restrictions in giving us discounts than commissions. You are not worsening the conditions of the Erasmus student to improve our funding. In the accommodation we see that a lot, Uniplaces does with us 25% discount, and we have a commission of 15€ per activation, I could tell them to use those 15€ to increase the discount, but they do not accept it, not at all. Or even given them more 5€ of discount, no way, they do not accept it, because it is 25% off discount to all their premium partners.

Question: So just to confirm you do have partners with both those components, discount and commission?

Answer: Yes, we do have several partners where we have discount and commission. Actually, we do have a little group of partners in accommodation with whom we only have commissions, but because they do not want to give discounts. In most situations, if we have a commission we have discounts and the discount is greater. We are always giving priority over the partner that does better conditions for the Erasmus student, than the commission. For example, if we had a partner, a language school, that would give us 20€ commission, and another that would give 5€, but the one that gives 20€ is not good, we do not choose it. We must take into account that the partners of ESN are also the image of ESN, which is something that people forget about, and that is why we cannot force to get partners or partners that only give us great conditions. We have to find good partners, even if they are a bit more expensive. The Collegiate is our partner, you know how many activations we had since I started? 2. But they continue to be our partners because they like us very much, and we like them very much because their installations are incredible. But we also know that anytime, without Covid, we use of their spaces for 15 people and do a cooking workshop, or their cinema room, for 40 people and you do an amazing party. You see, that is the logic, quality.

Question: How is ESN working towards its mission, “Enrichment of society through international students”, through the partnerships created?

Answer: It depends on the projects, you have different objectives in the partnerships. You have partnerships whose pure and single objective is to give better conditions to Erasmus to do what they were already going to do, for example, services. The only purpose in services is the Erasmus have needs (hairdresser, barber, mobile repair, car rental, trolley rental, etc.), which are things that they were already going to need, but we give them the best partner and on top of that give them a discount, with luck a commission, and we have the full service, great. We have other partners whose goal is to develop dynamics that in a way can.... The best example I can give is Jobs for Erasmus. Even though in its concept it was also thought to get commissions, its main goal is to find a way for the international students to stay in Lisbon if that is their desire, given their conditions to have a job minimally stable and trustworthy for them to be able to settle down until they can speak Portuguese or stay for as long as they want and move forward in life. And then we have other partners, like Doctorino, which is basically medical appointments online and at home, that besides having that logic of discount, we have a dynamic with them where they'll give lectures with us in Mental Talks that we organize, they make professionals available to give workshops, which are good to transmit knowledge to people. One workshop that we'll have with them in the future is a psychologist giving a workshop on mental health, which is very important to the youth nowadays because of anxiety. You see. So in general the partners are not oriented to fulfil the mission of ESN, but rather oriented to just satisfy the needs of the Erasmus. Those that are possible we guide it to contribute to the evolution of the Erasmus.

Partnerships in their essence support the fulfilment of the mission, it is an important department to make the section more sustainable financially, without requiring that money from the Erasmus students. In a situation where you have the partnerships very well developed, receiving commissions on accommodation, on transportation, on rents of whatever, you can effectively and considerably reduce the cost of events. For example, a Mega Party, if you can finance it partially, you can either do a better event or not charge the entrance. In an Erasmus Local Games, if you can get funding, either you give a better participant kit or a better snack, or you can charge less for the fee. That's the logic. It looks all very commercial, but it's commercial-oriented for Erasmus to pay less, for the non-profit aspect.