

Research Article

Sustaining Erasmus Project Outcomes: Comparing Internal Buy-in and NGO Spin-off Models

Arif Wismadi

Directorate of Entrepreneurship Development/Growth Hub Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ORCID

Arif Wismadi: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0846-9177>

Abstract.

This paper explores the lessons learned from two distinct sustainability models for post-EU Erasmus projects. The first model focused on an internal buy-in process by leveraging existing organizational structures and resources to sustain project outcomes. The second model involved spinning-off the project by forming a new national NGO dedicated to extending the mission of the EU-funded initiatives. The internal buy-in process demonstrated the importance of early and continuous engagement with key organizational stakeholders. This approach facilitated seamless integration of project outcomes into the organization's ongoing activities, ensuring sustainability through established channels and resources. Key lessons included the necessity of clear communication, alignment of project goals with organizational priorities, and the cultivation of internal champions to drive the initiative forward. In contrast, the spin-off model highlighted the potential for greater flexibility and innovation by establishing a new entity outside the university. The formation of a national NGO allowed for a focused and dedicated effort to continue the project's mission, attracting new stakeholders and funding opportunities. This approach underscored the value of strategic partnerships, the ability to adapt to changing environments, and the importance of a clear and compelling vision to garner support. Both models offer valuable insights into the complexities of sustaining project outcomes beyond the initial funding period. The paper concludes with recommendations for future projects, emphasizing the need for a tailored approach that considers each initiative's unique context and goals.

Keywords: erasmus+, exit strategy, sustainability models, buy-in, spin-off

1. INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus+ Programme, a flagship initiative of the European Union, has significantly enhanced educational and cultural exchange across Europe, Asia, and ASEAN. However, maintaining the sustainability of project outcomes post-funding remains a formidable challenge. Many Erasmus projects struggle to continue their impact once the initial funding period ends, losing valuable resources and efforts.

Corresponding Author: Arif

Wismadi; email:

wismadi@uii.ac.id

Published: 25 September 2025

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 2nd International Office Conference 2024 Committee.



Several post-Erasmus projects have failed to sustain their outcomes, as documented in various credible publications. For instance, a report by the European Movement highlighted the problematic funding timelines and application processes that led to the failure of the Turing Scheme, the UK's post-Brexit replacement for Erasmus+ [1]. Additionally, irregularities in the implementation of Erasmus+ projects, such as those investigated by OLAF, have further undermined the sustainability of these initiatives [2]. Despite efforts to collect relevant information, a comprehensive assessment of Erasmus+ sustainability remains elusive [3]. Research has shown that Erasmus+ mobility actions contribute significantly to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth [4]. However, the relational and networking characteristics of Erasmus+ projects, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, have posed opportunities and challenges for their sustainability [5].

Efforts to maintain sustainability have taken different forms. One approach involves securing internal buy-in by establishing new entities within existing organizations. This method leverages the organization's existing structures and resources to integrate project outcomes into ongoing activities. Another approach is to spin off the project office into a new NGO, often formed by a network of university members. This model allows for greater flexibility and the potential to attract new stakeholders and funding opportunities.

While post-project findings document successes and failures, there is a notable absence of comprehensive reports that can serve as references for future project designs. This gap leads to two significant implications: the unnecessary reinvention of the wheel and the low sustainability of project outcomes. Without a detailed analysis of past projects, new initiatives risk repeating the same mistakes and failing to achieve long-term impact. Studies have highlighted the importance of financial support, political backing, and stakeholder engagement in determining the sustainability of project outcomes [6, 7].

This paper's specific purpose is to compare two models of sustaining Erasmus project outcomes: the internal buy-in process and the NGO spin-off model. By analyzing several Erasmus projects in Indonesia and ASEAN, this paper aims to identify the success factors and risks of failure associated with each model. The Borda Count [8] method was used to rank these factors, providing a systematic approach to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of each sustainability strategy.

The organization of this report is as follows: First, we will provide an overview of the Erasmus projects analyzed in this study. Next, we will describe the methodology used, including the Borda Count method. Following this, we will present the findings, highlighting the key success factors and risks of failure for both models. Finally, we will discuss the implications of these findings for future project designs and offer recommendations for enhancing the sustainability of Erasmus project outcomes.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Design

The research design aims to determine the best model for sustaining Erasmus project outcomes by comparing the internal buy-in process model and the NGO spin-off model. Data was collected through a Borda Count Questionnaire circulated among educational institutions that implemented Erasmus projects, quantifying both models' success factors and risks of failure. The responses were analyzed using the Borda Count method, and a graph was created to summarize the comparison of implementation options and their success and failure magnitudes. The discussion section addresses the research question, highlights unexpected results and their explanations, and incorporates reflections from other research findings. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and clearly answers the research question, emphasizing the most effective model for sustaining Erasmus project outcomes.

2.2. Material

The research was based on data collected from EU Erasmus consortium members. It focused on the success factors and risks of failure associated with sustaining post-project implementation. The consortium members provided valuable insights into their experiences and strategies for maintaining project outcomes beyond the initial funding period.

A questionnaire was circulated among the consortium members to gather this data. The questionnaire was designed to capture detailed information on various aspects of project sustainability, including stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, and long-term impact. The Borda Count method was employed to analyze the responses, allowing for a systematic ranking of the success factors and risks. This method assigns

points based on the ranking of each factor, providing a comprehensive comparison of the two models under study: the internal buy-in process and the NGO spin-off model.

The list of summary of the project sample are as follows.

2.2.1. Growing Indonesia – a Triangular Approach (GITA)

The GITA project (2017-2021) aimed to enhance entrepreneurial capacity in Indonesian higher education institutions by creating Growth Hubs. These hubs integrate business-university collaboration, graduate entrepreneurship, and enterprise creation. The project involved seven Indonesian universities and three European partners, focusing on embedding entrepreneurship education into university curricula and providing support services to local entrepreneurs and start-ups.

2.2.2. Indonesian Higher Education Leadership (iHiLead)

The iHiLead project (2020-2024) focuses on developing a Leadership Management Development Network (LMDN) and a Leadership Management Development Programme (LMDP) for Indonesian universities. The project aims to address disparities in quality and infrastructure among Indonesian higher education institutions by enhancing leadership and management capacities.

2.2.3. Building Universities in Leading Disaster Resilience (BUiLD)

The BUiLD project (2019-2023) aims to create Centers of Excellence in Disaster Resilience at participating Indonesian universities. These centers implement a comprehensive Disaster Resilience Framework, addressing governance, disaster response, education, and knowledge transfer. The project seeks to build future research, innovation, and leadership capacity in disaster resilience.

2.2.4. ASEAN Network for Green Entrepreneurship and Leadership (ANGEL)

The ANGEL project focuses on building capacities for green entrepreneurship and innovation at eleven ASEAN universities. It aims to address challenges such as poverty, low-quality jobs, and environmental degradation by promoting green entrepreneurial skills

and leadership. The project involves universities from Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Lao PDR, and Malaysia, supported by partners from Greece and Cyprus.

2.2.5. Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Projects

These projects facilitate short-term mobility experiences for students and staff between European and partner countries. Examples include:

1. Teaching and Training Mobility to Institute of Porto, Portugal (2023).
2. Teaching Mobility to University of Granada (2024-2026).

These projects collectively aim to enhance educational quality, leadership, disaster resilience, and entrepreneurial capacities in higher education institutions across Indonesia and the ASEAN region.

2.3. Measurement Method

To analyze the results of the Borda Count and determine the most preferred model for sustaining Erasmus project outcomes. This method aims to obtain a comprehensive comparison of the internal buy-in process model and the NGO spin-off model.

The Borda Count method was used to prioritize preferences of the institution with references to their organization favor to increase the success opportunity to sustain the impact and mitigate the risks of failure, based on the responses from the circulated questionnaire. Each respondent ranked the factors according to their perceived importance and impact on project sustainability. Points were assigned to each factor based on its ranking, with higher-ranked factors receiving more points.

2.4. Calculation Method

The Borda Count Method is a voting system used to determine the outcome of an election or decision-making process. Named after the French mathematician Jean-Charles de Borda, it is designed to reflect the preferences of voters more comprehensively than simple majority voting [8, 9, 10].

The General Scenario: Choosing Between Two Models

As part of exit strategy for post-project of Erasmus+ each project members have to decide between two strategic models for its future operations:

Internal Buy-In Process Model: This model focuses on gaining internal support and involvement from all stakeholders within the organization to drive growth and change.

NGO Spin-Off Model: This model involves creating a separate entity (NGO) from the partner's institution to pursue specific commercial or social objectives independently.

Step-by-Step Calculation Process with Weighted Points and examples

1. **Collect Rankings:** Each member of the decision-making group ranks the two models in order of preference. Here are the rankings from five members:

Member 1: Internal Buy-In Process Model > NGO Spin-Off Model

Member 2: NGO Spin-Off Model > Internal Buy-In Process Model

Member 3: Internal Buy-In Process Model > NGO Spin-Off Model

Member 4: NGO Spin-Off Model > Internal Buy-In Process Model

Member 5: Internal Buy-In Process Model > NGO Spin-Off Model

2. **Assign Weighted Points:** Points are assigned based on the ranking, with a higher weight for the first rank. For example:

1st place: 3 points

2nd place: 1 point

3. **Calculate Points for Each Member:**

Member 1:

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 3 points

NGO Spin-Off Model: 1 point

Member 2:

NGO Spin-Off Model: 3 points

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 1 point

Member 3:

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 3 points

NGO Spin-Off Model: 1 point

Member 4:

NGO Spin-Off Model: 3 points

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 1 point

Member 5:

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 3 points

NGO Spin-Off Model: 1 point

4. **Sum the Points:** Add up the points for each model across all members.

Internal Buy-In Process Model: $3 + 1 + 3 + 1 + 3 = 11$ points

NGO Spin-Off Model: $1 + 3 + 1 + 3 + 1 = 9$ points

5. **Determine the Winner:** The model with the highest total points is chosen. In this case:

Internal Buy-In Process Model: 11 points

NGO Spin-Off Model: 9 points

The above calculation example indicates that the Internal Buy-In Process Model is the preferred model based on the weighted Borda Count Method.

The questionnaire design consists of 3 levels of option circulated among EU Erasmus+ project members and then analysed to find the most preferred model among the Erasmus+ programme beneficiaries.

The design of the question could be found below:

Questionnaire Design:

Title:

Post-Project EU Erasmus+ Program Evaluation: Assessing the Sustainability of Organization Models

Purpose:

1. Post-Project Evaluation: This survey aims to evaluate the sustainability of different organizational models following the completion of our project(s). Your feedback will help us understand the effectiveness and long-term viability of the models we have implemented.

2. Focus on EU Erasmus+: This evaluation is specifically focused on the EU Erasmus+ project. We are looking to gather insights on how well the organizational models have supported the sustainability of project's goals and outcomes.

Estimated Time for Completion:

- The questionnaire is designed to be concise and should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your thoughtful responses are greatly appreciated and will contribute significantly to our assessment.

Thank you for your participation and valuable input!

Email:..... (your email will be included with the response)

Section 1: Respondent's Profile

To help us better understand the context of your responses, please provide the following information about yourself:

1. Name: Please enter your full name.*

Your answer:

2. Position in the Institution: Please enter your current position or title within the institution.

Your answer:

3. Name of your Institution: Please enter the name of your institution.

Your answer:

4. Your Role in the Erasmus+ Project: What was/is your role in the Erasmus+ project?

- a. Team Leader
- b. Team Member
- c. Administrative
- d. Researcher
- e. Post Project PIC/Manager
- f. Other:

5. Years of Involvement in the Erasmus+ Project Execution: How many years were you involved in the execution of the Erasmus+ project?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-4 years
- d. 5-6 years
- e. More than 6 years

6. Years of Involvement in Post Project Management: How many years have you been involved in the Erasmus+ post-project management?

- a. Less than 1 year

- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-4 years
- d. 5-6 years
- e. More than 6 years

7. The title of you Erasmus+ project:

Your answer:

The online questionnaire could be found at the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScNpO9eofa7R63HB9ICTfBQ2cDMeoQeBOU1CNskqdGUHGVclQ/viewform?usp=sharing>

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire results provide valuable insights into the respondents’ preferences regarding sustainability models for post-EU Erasmus projects.

TABLE 1: Summary of Borda Count Survey Results.

1st Level Options	Borda Score	Pct	2nd Level Options	Borda Score	Pct	3rd Level Options	Borda Score	Pct
The Internal Buy-In Model	41	68%	As a Structural Unit within the Organization	31	52%	As a New Unit	31	52%
						Replace or Add Tasks to Existing Unit	29	48%
			As a Functional Unit within the Organization	29	48%	A Unit to Run a New Program	31	52%
						Add a New Program to an existing task force	29	48%
The NGO Spin-Off Model	19	32%	As a Profit-Oriented NGO	25	42%	Collect Funds from Its Members and Modality to Leverage New Sources of Funds	19	32%
						Consolidate Resources from Its Members to Run a Project and Apply Fees or Contributions to Sustain the Organization	41	68%
			As a Not-for-Profit NGO	35	58%	Collect Funds from Its Members to Run Organization's Vision and Mission	23	38%

TABLE 1: Continued.

						Consolidate Programs from Its Members to Obtain Vision and Mission of Organization, Use the Membership Fee to Pay a Lean Small Group of Managers to Sustain the Organization:	37	62%
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Based on the above result, a general description of the findings are.

First Level Options

1. The Internal Buy-In Model: 68%

The majority of respondents (68%) preferred the internal buy-in model. This indicates a strong inclination towards leveraging existing organizational structures and resources to sustain project outcomes. The internal buy-in model emphasizes collaboration and consensus-building within the organization, ensuring that project outcomes are integrated into ongoing activities.

2. The NGO Spin-Off Model: 32%

A smaller portion of respondents (32%) favored the NGO spin-off model. This model involves creating a separate entity to pursue specific objectives independently, offering flexibility and the potential for innovation.

Second and Third Level Options for the Internal Buy-In Model

1. As a Structural Unit within the Organization: 52%

a. As a New Unit: 52%

Among those who preferred the structural unit approach, 52% supported the creation of a new unit within the organization. This option allows for dedicated resources and specialized attention to new initiatives.

b. Replace or Add Tasks to Existing Unit: 48%

The remaining 48% preferred modifying the responsibilities of an existing unit. This approach leverages existing structures and resources, potentially leading to cost savings and easier integration.

2. As a Functional Unit within the Organization: 48%

a. A Unit to Run a New Program: 52%

Within the functional unit approach, 52% supported creating a unit specifically designed to implement and manage a new program. This option provides flexibility and rapid adaptation to the program's needs.

b. Add a New Program to an Existing Unit: 48%

The other 48% preferred integrating a new program into an existing unit. This approach utilizes existing resources and expertise while expanding the organization's capabilities.

Second and Third Level Options for the NGO Spin-Off Model**1. As a Profit-Oriented NGO: 42%****a. Collect Funds from Its Members and Modality to Leverage New Sources of Funds: 32%**

Among those who preferred the profit-oriented NGO approach, 32% supported collecting funds from members and leveraging new funding sources. This option focuses on financial sustainability through innovative funding strategies.

b. Consolidate Resources from Its Members to Run a Project and Apply Fees or Contributions to Sustain the Organization: 68%

The majority (68%) preferred consolidating resources from members to run projects and applying fees or contributions to sustain the organization. This approach ensures ongoing financial support and resource allocation.

2. As a Not-for-Profit NGO: 58%**a. Collect Funds from Its Members to Run the Organization's Vision and Mission: 38%**

Within the not-for-profit NGO approach, 38% supported collecting funds from members to directly fund the organization's vision and mission. This option emphasizes alignment with the organization's core objectives.

b. Consolidate Programs from Its Members to Obtain the Vision and Mission of the Organization, Using Membership Fees to Pay a Lean, Small Group of Managers to Sustain the Organization: 62%

The majority (62%) preferred consolidating programs from members to achieve the organization's goals, using membership fees to support a small management team. This approach focuses on efficient resource use and effective program implementation.

3.1. Discussion

The primary research question aimed to determine which sustainability model—The Internal Buy-In Model or The NGO Spin-Off Model—would be more effective for post-EU Erasmus projects. The survey results indicate a clear preference for the Internal

Buy-In Model, with 68% of respondents favoring this approach over the NGO Spin-Off Model, which garnered 32% support.

The survey results provide strong evidence supporting the Internal Buy-In Model. Respondents highlighted the importance of leveraging existing organizational structures and resources to sustain project outcomes. Within this model, there was a balanced preference for creating new units (52%) and modifying existing ones (48%), as well as for running new programs (52%) and integrating them into existing units (48%). This suggests that respondents value both the stability and familiarity of existing structures and the flexibility to adapt and innovate within those frameworks.

For the NGO Spin-Off Model, the not-for-profit approach was more favored (58%) compared to the profit-oriented approach (42%). Within the not-for-profit model, consolidating programs and using membership fees to support a small management team (62%) was preferred over collecting funds to directly run the organization's vision and mission (38%).

An unexpected result was the relatively balanced preference within the Internal Buy-In Model options. While it was anticipated that one approach might dominate, the near-equal split between creating new units and modifying existing ones, as well as between running new programs and integrating them, suggests a nuanced perspective among respondents. This indicates that both stability and innovation are valued, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Previous research has often highlighted the benefits of both internal integration and external spin-offs for sustaining project outcomes. Studies have shown that internal buy-in can lead to seamless integration and long-term sustainability through established channels and resources [11]. Conversely, spin-offs have been praised for their flexibility, innovation, and ability to attract new stakeholders and funding opportunities [12]. The current findings align with these insights but provide a more detailed understanding of the specific preferences and considerations within each model.

This paper is distinct and more valuable than previous findings because it provides a detailed, quantitative analysis of preferences using the Borda Count Method. By capturing nuanced preferences within each model, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to sustainability. The balanced preferences within the Internal Buy-In Model and the specific sub-options within the NGO Spin-Off Model provide actionable insights that can guide strategic decision-making. This level

of detail and the use of a robust voting method add significant value to the existing body of knowledge.

Future research could explore the implementation and outcomes of the preferred models in practice. Longitudinal studies could track the effectiveness and sustainability of the Internal Buy-In Model and the NGO Spin-Off Model over time. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of different organizational cultures and contexts on the success of these models. Comparative studies across different regions and types of projects could further enrich our understanding of the best practices for sustaining project outcomes.

This research provides valuable insights into the sustainability of post-EU Erasmus projects, offering practical guidance for organizations seeking to maintain and build upon their project outcomes. By understanding the preferences and considerations of stakeholders, organizations can make informed decisions that enhance their long-term impact. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader goal of ensuring that valuable initiatives continue to benefit society, fostering innovation, collaboration, and positive change.

4. CONSLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the sustainability models for post-EU Erasmus projects, highlighting a clear preference for the Internal Buy-In Model. The survey results underscore the importance of leveraging existing organizational structures and resources to sustain project outcomes. The balanced preferences within the Internal Buy-In Model, between creating new units and modifying existing ones, as well as between running new programs and integrating them, reflect a nuanced perspective that values both stability and innovation.

The NGO Spin-Off Model, while less favored overall, showed a preference for the not-for-profit approach, particularly in consolidating programs and using membership fees to support a small management team. This indicates that while external spin-offs are valued for their flexibility and innovation, there is a strong inclination towards sustainable, not-for-profit operations.

The findings align with previous research but offer a more detailed understanding of the specific preferences and considerations within each model. The use of the Borda

Count Method has added significant value by capturing nuanced preferences, providing actionable insights for strategic decision-making.

Future research should focus on the practical implementation and long-term outcomes of these models, considering different organizational cultures and contexts. Comparative studies across regions and project types could further enrich our understanding of best practices for sustaining project outcomes.

Ultimately, this research offers valuable guidance for organizations seeking to maintain and build upon their project outcomes, contributing to the broader goal of ensuring that valuable initiatives continue to benefit society through innovation, collaboration, and positive change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following institutions for their invaluable contributions and willingness to share their views on the sustainability models for post-EU Erasmus projects: STIE Malangkececwara, President University, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Hanoi University of Mining and Geology, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, University of Surabaya, Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, Can Tho University, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), and Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII).

Your insights and perspectives have been instrumental in shaping this research, and we deeply appreciate your support and collaboration. Thank you for your commitment to advancing the sustainability of EU Erasmus projects.

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