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Resident Directors in Europe: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract in English

Resident directors (RDs) in Europe manage a university in a microcosm–overseeing academic affairs, student affairs, finances, facilities, human resources, legal issues, and health and safety. Literature on the RD role remains scarce, and we sought to fill this gap by examining the lived experiences of 22 RDs in Europe. Our phenomenological study uncovered a distinct phenomenon: the evolving voice and role of RDs amidst a changing landscape. Although many RDs feel overburdened and undervalued, our research reveals a shift towards recognition and empowerment. Country-based and regional international education associations have emerged as vital platforms that amplify the RD voice, foster community, and contribute to knowledge and skill development. We detail the intricacies of the RD role and offer practical recommendations for continuing to amplify the RD voice and support on-site staff.

Abstract in French

Les directeur·rice·s résident·e·s (*RDs*) en Europe doivent gérer une véritable micro-université, au sein de laquelle il·elle·s sont chargé·e·s non seulement du bon déroulement des composantes pédagogiques et culturelles, mais aussi responsables des finances, des ressources humaines et des questions de législation, de santé et de sécurité. Constatant le peu de littérature scientifique publiée sur ce rôle, nous avons cherché à combler ce vide en examinant les expériences vécues de 22 directeur-ices de programme en Europe. Notre étude phénoménologique a révélé un phénomène bien tangible : la voix et le rôle des RD sont en pleine évolution, dans un contexte qui lui-même se transforme. Bien que beaucoup de RD se disent surchargé·es et sous-valorisé·es, nos recherches

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permettent de mettre au jour un mouvement vers davantage de reconnaissance et d'affirmation de leur rôle essentiel. Les associations nationales et régionales qui ont émergé ces dernières décennies offrent des espaces fondamentaux pour amplifier la voix des RD, favoriser leur appartenance à une communauté soudée et développer leurs connaissances et leurs compétences. Dans cet article, nous mettrons en lumière les spécificités du rôle des RD et proposerons un certain nombre de mesures concrètes visant à soutenir les équipes sur place.

Keywords

Europe; on-site; phenomenology; resident directors; study abroad

1. Introduction

The role of an on-site resident director[1] (RD) in Europe is a complicated one. RDs manage study abroad schools, programs or centers affiliated with universities, providers, or consortia. RDs host U.S. students, develop and run programs, manage buildings and staff, establish and maintain local relationships, respond to emergencies, and report back to their home campus or organization. They wear many hats in their day-to-day job, often work outside of regular office hours, and are very often on-call for emergencies. As one resident director put it, "we run a university in a microcosm." Academics, student life, facilities, business management, human resources, navigating local relationships and contexts, and health and safety (amongst others; see Robinson et al., 2020) are all rolled into often just one position. With such a broad scope of work and responsibilities, resident directors face complex daily challenges that cause stress and anxiety. Most RDs have staff to support them and the programs, but it is the RD who holds the overall responsibility for program success on site.

There is no set training route to becoming a resident director, and RDs may come from myriad backgrounds, including the academic or business worlds (Robinson et al., 2020). Some come from the U.S. and are products of its educational system, and some are local to the host country and have had to learn the U.S. approach to higher education. But several things unite resident directors, including their diverse responsibilities, the multitude of skills they must possess or develop in order to run effective programs, the stresses and challenges that come with such great responsibility, the struggle to find their voice and place in the study abroad sector, and the rewards of playing an impactful role in students' lives.

[1] We use the term 'resident director' with full recognition that other titles for this role may be in use in the sector, including director, program director, center director, or on-site director.

Very little has been written about the role or its place in the study abroad sector. Given the broad range of backgrounds from which RDs come and the different types of programs that they run across the continent, we set out to capture the lived experiences of on-site RDs in Europe through a series of interviews. After summarizing the extant literature on the role of RDs, we detail the structure of our phenomenological study and present our findings. We conclude with a discussion of a new phenomenon that we identified and our recommendations for practice.

2. Literature Review

There is little existing literature around the role and contributions of RDs of U.S. study abroad programs. Ziegler (2006) interviewed on-site study abroad staff in France in order to assess the preparation for the role as international educators and how they facilitate cultural learning. Ziegler (2006) found that while many on-site international educators, including RDs, may have substantial intercultural living and work experience, their levels of formal intercultural training varied significantly, something Ziegler (2006) termed as 'experience rich and theory-limited' (p. 114). Also noted was that while the study abroad sector had emphasized the empirical assessment of academic, cultural, and learning outcomes, there was very little literature on how this is incorporated into programming by on-site staff. Ziegler (2006) added that:

> on-site study abroad staff in their role as intercultural educators must bring to bear a great deal of knowledge, skill, and wisdom as they guide students through the process of developing the intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity desired by program providers, university educators, and ultimately the students themselves. (p. 5)

Notably, several of the interviewees in the study commented that whatever intercultural training they had came on the job and through learning from more experienced colleagues.

The role's stresses and challenges were highlighted by Lucas (2009), especially in terms of dealing with student mental health issues. Lucas (2009) further noted that many RDs are often trained as academics, and rarely have the training or background to deal with the complexity of student mental health issues. This combined with a need to always be on call in case of emergency can result in stress and burnout.

Deyo (2018) found that there was little academic discussion on study abroad from the viewpoint of the resident directors who often design, shape, and influence the programs. To add their voices to the literature, she interviewed numerous U.S.-based staff and on-site resident directors affiliated

with the University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC), an education abroad provider, related to creating study abroad programs for U.S. students, and more specifically on their professional responsibilities, the goals and objectives of study abroad, and student needs. One resident director commented that "[resident directors] have to know how everything works – budgets, administration, host families" (Deyo, 2018, p. 70). Deyo further clarified:

> They manage academics, field trips, onsite orientations, internships, volunteer opportunities, and communications at their program sites. They work with host families, often providing them with cultural tips and knowledge of the incoming students including new trends and topics students might discuss. When necessary, RDs accompany students to the hospital and are on call providing 24-hour support for emergencies" (Deyo, 2018, p. 70).

Deyo (2018) also noted that "it is the implied responsibility of the study abroad staff to help bridge the cultural divides that might exist" (p. 5) for the study abroad student.

While NAFSA's Guide to Education Abroad for Advisors and Administrators (Wiedenhoft & Henke, 2022) is certainly focused on the U.S. administration perspective, one chapter is written on working with students on site from the RD perspective (Robinson, 2022), and several others (e.g., Doughty, 2022; Nota, 2022) take the RD perspective and role into account. Robinson (2022) commented that while RDs bear significant responsibility for students and operations in the host country, they are often left out of the overall discourse surrounding the sector. Robinson (2022) also noted that on-site staff form a unique subset of the international education community, working in small groups often remote from their sending institutions or provider headquarters. This on-site European community has developed its own network of in-country associations (e.g., Association des Programmes Universitaires Américains en France or APUAF, Asociación de Programas Universitarios Norteamericanos en España or APUNE, Association of American College and University Programs in Italy or AACUPI) and pan-European (e.g., European Association of Study Abroad or EUASA) based on the need for information sharing, support, networking, professional training, and workshops concerning best practices and the logistics of operating programs abroad within Europe. These associations play an important role in bridging the gap between the larger education abroad community and the European on-site programs.

Several U.S. universities have published guides on being a resident director (e.g., Ohio State University, 2024; Indiana State University, n.d.). Although they contain valuable information about the role, they tend to be

geared to U.S faculty leading short-term programs abroad, not directors residing in the host country.

In 2019, EUASA members surveyed 218 Europe-based resident directors on topics such as roles and responsibilities, job preparation and training, job satisfaction, and the benefits and challenges of being an on-site resident director in Europe (Robinson et al., 2020). The results of this survey pointed out that the number of different responsibilities involved in leading a program on the ground is immense. Acquired expertise or training is needed in many different fields, such as budgeting and accounting, human resources, academics, legal issues, student life, mental health, tour guiding, property management, emergency response, leadership, liaising with partners, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The participants noted adequate preparation in some areas (e.g., academic mentoring, emergency response, managing physical spaces, budgeting, and accounting) and less preparation in other areas (e.g., critical mental health issues, local corporation laws and regulations, first aid, local labor laws; Robinson et al., 2020). While the roles are broad in scope, the responsibilities immense, and the work-life balance a challenge, the survey results also noted a low level of respect and recognition for the work that goes into running a program. In short, many RDs feel that their role is poorly understood and their voice is not heard, whether by their institution or by the sector as a whole. At the same time, the study illuminated significant advantages to the role, like the independence RDs have in their work and their impact on students. RDs value their role as a cultural ambassador and key part of transformational global learning.

Although the EUASA survey was insightful, we identified a need for more qualitative data to balance the quantitative data. This phenomenological research study–a methodology that prioritizes the voice of participants–successfully captured the nuances of the on-site role while also amplifying the voice of resident directors.

3. Methods

The following research question guided our phenomenological study: What is the lived experience of resident directors in Europe? To better understand this phenomenon, we interviewed 22 resident directors in six European countries.

3.1. Phenomenology

The role of resident directors is multifaceted, involving various responsibilities and challenges. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of this nuanced reality. The purpose of phenomenological research

is to describe the common meaning or universal essence for several individuals of their lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is appropriate for studying how humans make meaning from interacting with the ordinary, everyday world. We relied on the 12 steps of the Vancouver-School of Doing Philosophy (Halldorsdottir, 2000) to structure our study as follows:

1. Choose participants who have experienced the phenomenon,
2. Ponder the phenomenon by means of reflective silence (Thomas & Sohn, 2023),
3. Collect data from the participants,
4. Begin data analysis alongside data collection,
5. Code and begin considering the essence,
6. Construct the essence of the phenomenon for each participant,
7. Verify the case construction with each participant,
8. Construct the essence of the phenomenon from all the cases,
9. Compare the essence with the data,
10. Interpret the meaning of the phenomenon,
11. Verify the essence with some participants; and
12. Write up the findings.

3.2. Participants

Our research team consisted of three current Europe-based resident directors and one former Europe-based resident director. With the goal of recruiting a diverse pool of participants in terms of geographic location, years of experience, and education abroad program type, we began by purposefully selecting 32 resident directors across seven countries with whom we had personal and professional connections. We sent an initial email invitation, and then administered a participant consent form to the resident directors who expressed interest in participating in our study.

In the end, 22 resident directors from Czechia (2), France (7), Ireland (3), Italy (5), Spain (4), and the United Kingdom (1) shared their lived experiences with us. Twelve participants worked on the abroad campus of a U.S. institution, and 10 were with third party providers. Although phenomenological research typically includes five to 15 participants (Halldorsdottir, 2000), we wanted to ensure that we had a sufficient range of experiences with the phenomenon and a saturation of information.

To respect confidentiality, we explained to the participants that we would not identify their institution, organization, or country. Additionally, when the participants completed the participant consent form, they selected a pseudonym.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection in phenomenological research typically involves interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As a team of four researchers, we identified the participants with whom we had the strongest connection. Establishing rapport and trust are critical in qualitative research (Jones et al., 2014), and we felt that the participants would be more candid and open speaking with a close colleague with whom they already had a sound interpersonal foundation.

We conducted a single one-on-one virtual interview with each participant. The interviews, which lasted 45-60 minutes on average, took place from February to April 2024. Our semi-structured interview protocol helped us gather rich, in-depth insights while allowing for the flexibility to traverse unexpected avenues (Appendix A). Our questions concentrated on key themes such as professional background, current role, work-life balance, the professionalization of the field, career development, and the evolution of education abroad. In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, the semi-structured protocol served as a point of departure, allowing participants' narratives to guide the direction of each interview.

3.4. Data Analysis

The Vancouver-School served as our guide for our data analysis. As we continued to collect data, we began our data analysis by simply reading and re-reading the transcripts of the interviews. Since each of us interviewed different participants, it was necessary to familiarize ourselves with the interviews conducted by our co-researchers. We then collaborated on a shared document in which we identified key themes and statements for each participant. After establishing the essential structure of the phenomenon for each case, we crafted a metasynthesis that wove throughout the 22 cases. Bracketing in phenomenological research is incredibly challenging (Thomas & Sohn, 2023). It is nearly impossible for us, as fellow RDs, to set aside our personal feelings, beliefs, experiences, and preconceptions especially as we have experienced many of the stories that we heard. Meeting virtually as a team of co-researchers on a biweekly basis helped us refine the essential structure of the phenomenon. These meetings and the reading of all transcripts helped us all to make strong efforts to suspend our pre-judgements and focus our analysis on the data and stories presented.

3.5. Research Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to confidence in the research findings (Jones et al., 2014), and credibility specifically focuses on the extent to which the findings

are congruent with reality (Guba, 1981). To heighten the quality of our study and to adhere to the Vancouver-School's steps (Halldorsdottir, 2000), we shared our initial findings with four participants. We gave these participants two weeks to provide us with their feedback. Pablo, who expressed gratification for "giving amplification to the voice of those who may not be heard enough," affirmed, "I can recognize here many of my own struggles in the reported experiences of others." Angelo responded positively to the robust integration of the RD voice, which "makes the report readable" and "brings it authenticity." Eliza, hinting at a more universal nature of the RD role, added that "RDs in other parts of the world will find many of [the] topics and traits relevant to them." Beyond this positive feedback, each participant also provided us with thoughtful comments and questions that prompted us to clarify and expand upon the content in our findings and discussions sections.

4. Findings

Our interviews resulted in a wealth of information related to the lived experiences of RDs in Europe. While it is impossible to cover all of the topics discussed, we noted a series of trends that were raised on multiple occasions through careful reading of the interview transcripts. Thus, our paper concentrates on the following themes:

1. The unique skillset and competencies required of resident directors,
2. The challenges and stresses of being a resident director,
3. Finding our voice and support in community; and
4. Defining experiences to justify the challenges.

4.1. The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of Resident Directors

European-based RDs utilize a vast array of skills and competencies in their daily work. They must possess personal competencies such as empathy, critical thinking, active listening, problem-solving, time management, and leadership, combined with professional competencies like language proficiency, understanding local laws and customs, financial planning and reporting, and managing human resources. As trusted on-site experts, RDs must make student-centric decisions that align with institutional practices, cultural norms, and local legal realities. The RD serves as the eyes and ears, and sometimes the legal representative and translator of legal realities in the host country for the home institution, and vice versa.

4.1.1. The Professional Pathway to the Europe-Based RD Position

Europe-based resident directors found their professional pathway through various means. Regardless of the route, all felt the diverse pathways

were essential in informing their philosophy of leadership. Some rose through the ranks, starting as U.S.-based study abroad advisors or faculty members. Others studied abroad and, through their passion for living abroad, managed to find work at the same institution or another institution in the same country. A smaller number came from outside the study abroad sector entirely, such as journalism or private business, before taking on the role of RD. As Mike pointed out, "So, it was never my goal. It was never something I dreamed of being." In fact, none of the RDs interviewed envisioned becoming an RD early in their careers. Gene explained his pathway as a series of coincidences:

> I worked in the private business industry in my previous life, and due to a series of coincidences, [US institution] came to [European city] in the year 2000, and due to another series of coincidences, we got to meet each other. So, they came with a proposal, and we came to an agreement.

Sid summed up his circuitous route to the RD role in a positive light:

> I've been in the field for over 12 years now, and I think a lot of people probably found international education almost by accident. I worked in journalism before this. So how did I end up in international education? I don't know, but I did, and I'm very happy to be here now.

Alexander suggested that although the RD position was not an initial career goal, the trajectory was logical in hindsight:

> When I started 30 years ago, our field was not as structured and as professional as it is now. So, it kind of started by chance. I worked for [non-European institution] before this and for [large provider program] before this, and for [European university], and in international fields before this. So, it's always been the same field. So, I feel every role that I've had has led to where I am now.

Mike agreed and noted how the accumulation of experience enhanced their effectiveness as an RD:

> So, it's been this very gradual journey and picking up lots of different things along the way… it does feel like the journey to being the director has been like I've been in 10 different jobs, but within the security of being in the same university and company.

Regardless of the professional or academic background that led the RD to the role, those experiences combined with newly acquired skill sets, which were mostly learned on the job, form the foundation or building blocks of the traditional RD skill set. Peter summed it up appropriately,

> I guess in all roles, that experience helps bring your own inner self confidence… If you're more self-assured, then even when a crisis comes

> up, you may have dealt with something similar enough that you can pull from that experience and know how to deal with it.

However, times are changing, and the professionalization of the RD role is imminent. As Angelo pointed out, formal training for the RD position was limited until recently:

> Though I don't think there is any training for what I do… 20 years ago it was an emerging field, and all the conferences were gearing up and the organizations like NAFSA and The Forum were getting stronger and stronger. And now I think we can begin to talk about a professional (role), talk about a profession.

Alexander emphatically agreed and highlighted both the qualifications and the challenges of being an effective RD:

> We're very highly qualified professionals that are able to navigate a massive amount of complexities and think on our feet. We have accumulated incredibly complex skills. So, I think if you put any of us in other fields, we would survive.

Regardless of how they arrived at the RD position, RDs see the role as a profession, ultimately the product of the passion to transform young lives. "It might be a job for some but for me, it's certainly a profession that I choose to participate in and I'm proud to be a part of," proclaimed Diana.

4.1.2. Core Competencies as a Resident Director

To be a successful RD requires several core competencies, ranging from day-to-day problem-solving to envisioning the future of the program. Diana made precisely this point:

> I think being a problem-solver is vital. I think being able to see the big picture [is important]. And a good director has to be able to look ahead and plan, anticipate, problem solve, and then guide their team clearly.

Leadership is clearly a skill that most RDs think is important, as Diana pointed out: "I do think that educational programs are shaped by the vision and philosophy of the leader. If that person is open, then the program itself can adapt and grow."

Akin to the leadership role, RDs engage with students and manage staff by empathizing with their concerns and actively listening to their issues. In fact, several RDs emphasized the importance of active listening. Alexander made the point:

> Another very rewarding moment is when I'm able to make a difference, you know, to help a person who maybe doesn't like her job. And I move

> her into a new position and she flourishes, you know, and she blossoms."

Margaret claimed that the RD must "… be able to listen. I mean not only to listen to your colleagues or to your boss, but also to be able to listen to the students." Another participant, Diana, claimed:

> Being student-centered and having a notion of student development and empathy and concern and an interest in student development is really valuable. They're the reason we're here. Right?

It was clear in the interviews that RDs value their staff immensely and consider them an integral part of what constitutes a healthy program. Managing and leading multiple teams across time zones and varied mandates is both important and sometimes difficult and requires sensitive human resource skills as well as leadership acumen. Helen said,

> For me it's very important that the people who come to the office in the morning are happy. They come to work knowing the mission of the company and the program. We're here to work hard, but also to have fun.

Em used the word "loyalty" to highlight her sentiment: "I'll go back to my team, and the loyalty that I feel to them. It's hard for me to see myself doing anything else, so that's part of it. That's what keeps me doing it." Natasha and several others noted that managing staff presented real challenges: "The hardest part for me is definitely staff management… the hardest thing is having enough left to take care of the people that are supposed to be taking care of… the students."

Most RDs noted their skill set operates in a framework that might appear "paradoxical" or in "a world of opposites." Natasha clarified,

> You have to be resilient but also sensitive. You have to be somebody who can take things in and feel them. You have to feel empathy. You have to be able to put yourself in the shoes of a student… but then you have to also be able to sort of put that aside and deal with it on discipline, empathy, resilience and sensitivity. Caring, but detachment. Friendly, but not friends.

Angelo suggested that it takes a steady hand to navigate complex decision-making scenarios, "I would say it requires some kind of authority or self-confidence in multiple areas. Multiple areas! And decision-making ability in these multiple areas." In Margaret's judgment, understanding how to reconcile complex and nuanced situations requires "… a will to learn and a will to adapt and to change... and to think critically. I think these are the main abilities a good director should have." RDs must have a keen sense of the details to distinguish a typical situation from a critical one and to lead accordingly.

The participants in the study had some interesting thoughts on the importance of a PhD as part of the skill set of running what is essentially an academic institution abroad. Nicole's comments reflect the changing qualifications of the RD over time. She stated, "… there was a time when academic credentials were considered highly desirable and an asset. No longer, apparently. Administrative and managerial skills are clearly viewed as more critical. I could cite several examples in [European country] of this downgrading." Diana was even more adamant, but to the contrary:

> I don't believe that a Ph.D. is necessary to being an effective resident director. In fact, I think it can be a hindrance. I think there's something to be said for choosing this career and having the expertise to deal with students, which is a different skill set from being able to complete a doctoral dissertation and do that level of specific research. I think those are two different skill sets.

Angelo spoke to how the expectations of the RD might be changing–what many call the "professionalization" of the role–by adding,

> Maybe I'm a product of the older way of getting into the field because I have a Ph.D., which has nothing to do with education. And then just went from teacher to administrator to program director. I think that's how it used to happen. It's maybe a good thing that it won't be happening like that in the future. I think it will eventually shift to certificates and qualifications.

4.1.3. What Hat Will I Wear Today?

Several participants compared their typical day's activities to "wearing many hats" or being "a jack of all trades." Each day brings a series of different challenges that over the course of a semester are as varied as any university campus in the United States. The difference is stark, however, as Alexander pointed out,

> We alone cover the heads of many offices on main campus. Typically, on campus you have a person for privacy and legal, a person for facilities, a person for student services–actually not a person–but a unit for academics, emergencies, diversity. Because we do have that kind of big portfolio.

Charles concurred with a bit more detail, "we once did a list with a former colleague of all of these on-campus services and offices that we were expected to replicate here in the office in [European city]. And it was at least 20-some offices, as well." Angelo mentioned that they have "added responsibilities on my shoulders" in addition to running the abroad campus, including travel to the U.S. for recruitment and enrollment activities, as the study abroad office on the main campus is a one-person office.

However, though the hats fly on and off, it is the endless variety that keeps many RDs engaged and professionally nimble. Charles captured the sentiment aptly, mentioning that "…I really like the unexpected nature of our day to day [activities]. I like that I don't necessarily know exactly what 's going to happen at every hour of every day." Alexander concurred, noting that "I love the fact that every day is different, and I think it's what's keeping me in the job!" Sid pointed out a darker side to the obligations that come with being at the epicenter of the study abroad experience,

> You can be taken advantage of, I think, sometimes in this field as a result of that because then the expectation builds that you can wear 15 different hats and that somehow you have the tools and be able to manage things like mental health fallout, or health issues, or accidents. And I think that's unrealistic and unfair.

Being the leader who wears many hats can also be exhausting, or as one RD noted, "relentless."

Resident directors must be culturally empathetic, familiar with local customs, and cognizant of expectations from the U.S. perspective of higher education. They operate in two different worlds, much like diplomats, but without immunity. Eliza pointed out the multiple pressures that shape an RD's decision-making and the importance of a diplomatic temperament:

> We operate on a political level institutionally, between the politics of working with the host institution and what that requires in terms of diplomacy, and then being the moderator between all these different stakeholders or participants, such as the parents, the study abroad office at the home campus, the students, the host institution, the medical insurance... There's so many!

Nicole concurred, "I think that [the home institution] underestimate[s] sometimes the importance of diplomatic relations. Listening to the host institution's point of view or understanding where the host institution is coming from on certain issues." Nicole clarified why a diplomatic temperament is so important:

> I think that sometimes decisions are made…institutional decisions are made…that don't always make sense from an on-site perspective or that haven't taken into account certain on-site realities. Whether it's hiring people or setting the terms of staff contracts in accordance with local laws as opposed to the way that Americans would like it to be.

Perhaps in a tip of the hat to the future of the RD role, Alexander adroitly pointed out the importance of the RD to not just follow policies generated from the U.S. home institution, but rather to inform institutional policy from a Euro-

perspective and to be an active participant in that policy-making process. Alexander stated,

> Management and senior management in the States, in general, is driven heavily by anxiety and a lack of cross-cultural competence. So there has to be a lot of education and bottom-up management on our end to educate and to ensure that instead of getting the 'We do it this way, you should do it this way', but rather, 'You do it that way, we do it this way, let's see where we can find a compromise'.

These comments suggest that RDs are not merely "on-the-ground experts" whose understanding of the local culture is unassailable; they are expected to translate that expertise into a coherent and unified set of policies and decisions that are clear and concise. In fact, RDs are at the nexus point of the study abroad experience by ensuring students are provided a transformative, high-impact experience that builds stronger interpersonal bonds, facilitates cultural empathy, and fosters personal growth. Resident directors are "fundamental to the educational philosophy of the program," according to Diana, while Alexander noted how competent RDs are, being "very highly qualified professionals that are able to navigate massive amounts of complexities and think on our feet. We are incredibly good managers collectively."

4.2. Challenges and Stresses of Being a Resident Director

With the multiple responsibilities noted above, the nature of the resident director's role is often qualified by participants as unreasonable and the pressure as "constant." Most feel they are carrying their programs, with emergency on-call responsibilities, student mental health issues, and human resource issues among the greatest stressors cited.

4.2.1. Emergency On-Call and the 24/7 Responsibility

Resident directors often share the on-call emergency responsibilities with other staff members, but even when not holding the emergency phone physically, they are often called upon at all possible hours to support their students and staff in case of an emergency. Programs with only one staff member often have that person on-call the entire time. Multiple resident directors commented on the inability to completely switch off as leading to a source of stress and even burnout. Several participants also mentioned that being on-call was the worst part of their job. While U.S. institutions may have a campus police, counselors, or a public safety department to handle such emergencies, study abroad programs in Europe have a much smaller on-site team that becomes the responsible parties. A call to the emergency phone may turn into a trip to the hospital, the police station, or the student residence, and

it often involves liaising with local authorities, medical personnel, and the main campus or central office.

To define the pressure that comes with the job, Nicole explained "we are constantly on heightened alert." A sense of dread or impending danger permeated many of these interviews. The potential phone call that can come anytime, requiring on-the-spot action, is a significant source of worry for RDs, and it can impact their emotional stability and their personal lives. Paul noted that:

> I feel like saying, you know what, when you (U.S. administrators) go home at night, nobody's calling you on the emergency phone, are they? There is absolutely no way they can understand the amount of stress that that puts upon us, particularly if you are a one-person show.

Franky referred to "constant fear," while Paul shared that he has handled "some pretty terrible, pretty tragic situations." For the past 20 years Eliza has been on call 24/7 to respond to emergencies and considers this "the worst part of the job." And even when not officially on call herself, Eliza must still be available to provide staff support. Mike always has his phone on and "feels the need to know what is going on," which "can impact work/life balance." Pablo agreed, and described himself as "thankful" that the phone does not ring very often, attributing much of this to the way emergency response is framed at student orientation sessions. Helen highlighted the pressure that comes with a successful resolution to emergency situations, clarifying that there is a fear that the sending institution will "go elsewhere" in a competitive study abroad environment.

Natasha noted that there "is no structural obligation or any contractual anything that makes me have to be available 24/7," but she has accepted it as a part of the job. Several interviewees noted that junior staff members are often surprised or opposed to the on-call nature of the job, perhaps as a result of a stronger sense of being able to 'switch off' in European labor law and societal norms. "I don't know what's going to happen when there isn't someone on-call 24/7 anymore because everyone says 'it's not me', and that nobody wants to do it anymore," Natasha continued, characterizing herself as a "dying breed." "I'm on call 24/7. That's my–what's the word–destiny," remarked Angelo. Franky was thankful that their institution had "nipped this one in the bud" by outsourcing emergency calls to a service that screens calls, although she "still has the cell phone on, of course, because if something happens they're going to call me."

While not speaking specifically about being on call, Em commented that the long and unpredictable hours means that "I hardly ever see my kid.

Something's got to change." With the bar being set so high, Giulia felt that "everything is on the RD's shoulders" and that she must be "always available in the office and also outside," which she finds exhausting.

4.2.2. Management and Human Resources Challenges

Many RDs find themselves in a position of hiring and managing local staff, with all of the accompanying challenges and responsibilities. In many cases this is outside the RD's area of training. Diana commented that she has "been saddled with the responsibility of HR, payroll and financial administration over the years," and further stated that "it is not my expertise, nor is it my interest." She went on to say that her strengths lie in working with students and building programs, and what she cannot do is "decipher [country] contracts and [country] labor law." Similarly, Eliza felt that she was never trained in budget management and admitted to doing it "by the seat of the pants" early in her career. Meanwhile, Franky developed leadership and management skills through hiring a professional coach.

Understanding labor law in different jurisdictions "wasn't on the list of the skills listed in any job description, but you need it to be successful in a career in international education," remarked Natasha, adding that local training in these aspects has helped her develop more expertise. The challenge for Gene, who runs a large program with numerous staff, is "making sure I handle all the team and all the faculty in the proper way. It's probably more challenging than the students. With the students I know what to do." But being on the "thin line between the [country] labor laws and the American influence" is more difficult.

Furthermore, insufficient staffing is a major issue, so the pressure of keeping all plates spinning is compounded. Em considered that she "has to do it or manage it all with limited staff versus the home campus," and Vanessa "has always been understaffed and never had a real HR person for support with staff issues before recently."

4.2.3. Other Challenges for the Resident Director

Other challenges that were mentioned by the interviewees, but less often than the two above examples, include enrollment pressures on the program, changes in students themselves, in terms of their needs and level of resilience, the rise in popularity of short-term programs, and the customer service approach to study abroad that has developed.

Margaret and Cass both mentioned that enrollment pressures are a source of concern. In Cass's case, the program needs to be self-funded, and for Margaret the challenge in enrollment is attributed to the home campus not

“having a culture of study abroad.” Pablo commented on the trend toward shorter programs as a challenge, and the pressure that puts upon securing student housing. The rise in the number of programs year-round means there is no longer a “fallow period” for staff to get a significant break.

Pablo flagged a significant post-COVID rise in the number of students with self-declared mental health issues that require on-site support. He was surprised that some students are “getting sign off for travel from their homeschools.” Mike agreed that more and more students are coming with prescribed psychiatric medications and are self-disclosing conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression, or eating disorders. He viewed this as something positive, however, as these challenges no longer provide barriers to studying abroad.

Peter remarked on an increase in student “emotional immaturity post-COVID” that often manifests itself in challenges with interpersonal issues, particularly with roommates. “I think we're seeing a slightly less resilient individual and a slightly more reliant individual in terms of their expectation on staff to solve their problems,” Peter continued. Guilia also has noticed a shift in students in recent years that affects her role, including students who lack independence and need detailed instruction. “But they don't put in an effort anymore. They want to have you there to tell them how and what to do,” she commented, adding that student support “is the most difficult thing that we do.” Several other RDs commented on how the customer service model common in U.S. institutions has crept into study abroad programs, including Franky’s comments that programs do “too much hand-holding,” which is not healthy for student development and wellbeing. She continued that “sometimes, you know, letting them do their own thing is just as important.” Nicole commented that “in the last 10 years or so I've often felt more like a customer service rep than an educator, or that it was somehow an expectation."

4.3. Finding our Voice and Support in Community

> I always say the only people who really understand this job are the ones who've done it and that applies, of course, to all the people we work for. Most people we work for from the States have never done this job. - Eliza

RDs in Europe are indeed in a unique position. They are in charge of a program and revolving U.S. student cohorts in another country. They must adhere to the laws, customs, and regulations of the host country, while also navigating the often conflicting expectations of U.S. students and institutions. It can be a tough balancing act to get right and, often with a small team on site, a difficult and lonely job.

4.3.1. The Missing Voice of the Resident Director

The job of the resident director can be a lonely one, and many RDs feel that their voice is not heard, solicited, or even respected within the overall study abroad community. Although RDs are trusted to oversee their programs and make the magic happen on the ground, many RDs feel undervalued in terms of influence in the sector (Robinson et al., 2020).

When we asked the participants about the voice of the RD, Eliza commented that it is "muffled, maybe. It's there, but there are so many other opinions that are louder than theirs. Mainly from the States, I think." Pablo commented that the voice is "lost… but that might be a bit harsh. In a network of stakeholders, I think the opinions and the experiences of the Resident Director often come further down that list." "I think a very flippant response would be out of sight, out of mind," Charles said. Continuing, he added,

> but I think that if you dig into that a little deeper, it is very unusual that someone on campus, someone overseeing us or responsible for deciding our pay grade or our benefits, etc., would have an actual physical knowledge of what our day-to-day looks like and what our week-to-week or month to month looks like.

Sid felt that the role was "misunderstood" and when they have an issue, "they're often seen as a problem." Eliza also noted that "the important issue is not recognizing us as individuals, but recognizing the impact of our work on the students that we're serving."

Although the participants highlighted the challenges, Natasha noted that the voice of the RD "is louder than it has been in the past," with a lot of that owing to the rising profile of the national associations in Europe. Paul felt "definitely recognized as the expert on the ground," while Charles thought that their voice was "important and essential," and "more present and more respected now than it had been in the past." The voice of the RD is "fundamental and crucial," according to Margaret, who said,

> since we not only represent an institution in another country, but also we take care of the lives and education of the students. I mean, we are a crucial piece in this puzzle and also we are a bridge to promote cultural, educational, and international collaboration.

In many cases, resident directors (and the rest of the on-site staff, it must be acknowledged) are front-and-center and influential in a very transformative experience for students. RDs get to know and understand this subset of students because they are so deeply involved in academics, student life, housing, and cultural programming. Sid shared that "these are the people who are at the coalface who probably have a deeper relationship with this group of students

than any of their professors will in the space of a four-year undergraduate degree." RDs have "a completely captive audience at this magical moment in the students' life playing this really huge guiding role," Sid continued. Yet, RDs still feel misunderstood and marginalized within the broader study abroad conversations.

So why aren't RDs much more influential or prominent in the sector as a whole, considering the important roles that they play? Perhaps it's an "out of sight, out of mind" and distance issue, as Charles indicated. Perhaps it's the U.S dominance of the sector at play, or the "imperialist and colonialist" way of doing things, as noted by Franky. Professional development has been dominated largely by U.S.-based conferences that RDs may not have funding or time to attend, according to Eliza, although that may be changing with events such as the Forum on Education Abroad's European, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) conferences and the European Institute. Angelo indicated that in terms of professional development, "resident directors are very important and should be heard more and contribute more to the theory of what we do." Perhaps we are too busy to get more deeply involved in the sector, "sometimes there's not enough hours in the day," as Mike suggested.

Much of the training that RDs receive can be U.S.-centric, for example with Title IX; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and even human resources and management styles. However, these need to be adapted to on-site situations in Europe in order to be properly implemented. As Alexander remarked,

> Because as we know in our field, the biggest problem is that all the training that comes to us is heavy on the U.S perspective, which is not always helpful," remarked Alexander. "So the training now needs to be updated and we're working on it.

In her participant review of our draft, Eliza commented that "perspectives and expectations around professional/staff development are culturally very different… encouraging [local] staff to think about and/or take advantage professional development opportunities is not as easy as one might think."

4.3.2. Developing a Community for Resident Directors

But how can RDs do this effectively, given that U.S.-based leadership teams may not understand the complexities and culture of running a program abroad? Do they work in a silo, struggling away independently and hoping that they hit upon the answer? No. Instead, RDs collaborate with people in similar situations, those running abroad programs for U.S. institutions within the same country or region, to make the whole sector better. With a rough estimate of about 500 U.S. study abroad programs operating in Europe, the logical way forward is for programs and staff to work together to solve issues, provide the

European on-site context, professionalize, and provide support and mentorship to on-site staff. This need to collaborate could be attributed to the lack of formal, or appropriate and logistically convenient (given time zones), training opportunities critical to everyone's success. Thus, with training and support for RDs sometimes lacking, expensive, or from an overly U.S. perspective, the on-site community has turned inwards for many of these resources, including intentional interactions with fellow RDs, both in-country and across the continent.

The development of a network and a sense of camaraderie is important for resident directors. Paul indicated "just how important it is for us to have each other." He proceeded to saying,

> friendship was not in our [country association] organizational statutes and it should be. …. It's so important for us to be surrounded by people who understand the kind of problems we have, the kind of life we live, the kind of job we do.

Collaboration amongst on-site staff and programs is now well established across Europe, but really started to be structured with the establishment of the Asociación de Programas Universitarios Norteamericanos en España (APUNE) in 1968, the Association of American Colleges and University Programs in Italy (AACUPI) in 1978, and the Association of American Study Abroad Programs/United Kingdom (AASAP/UK) in 1991. Other country associations followed, including the Association des Programmes Universitaires Américains en France (APUAF) in 2008 and the Association of Study Abroad Providers in Ireland (ASAPI) in 2013. These associations have influenced and professionalized the sector significantly. "So, I think that organizations like [country association] and our sister organizations in other countries are essential and have completely changed the way we do things," commented Charles. "I saw the difference between being a young professional 20 years ago and now the young professionals who are coming in there's a lot of support between colleagues that was not there before."

Each of these associations was founded to discuss topics such as human resources and immigration, share best practices, and lobby for the sector. Several country associations hold conferences, workshops, training, and social gatherings, and some have also conducted economic impact studies for the U.S. study abroad sector (e.g., Duranti et al., 2024; Southern Cross Consulting, 2018). Diana reflected that:

> the [country association] workshops are valuable and the annual meetings are excellent. I do rely on them for an emotional kind of support, like you said earlier knowing that other people are going through the same thing just to make sure that I'm not going crazy.

Natasha summarized the important role that these associations play:

> When [country association] was started, it was so much about voices from the field. We need a seat at the table. The Forum [on Education Abroad] is not working for us. They're working for the U.S., who has forgotten that we are the product, and we are also the conception of the product, and also the realization of the product. The important part is to not to put that on the side and make decisions without considering that there are a lot of talented and qualified people out there in the field, and that wasn't the case.

In 2016, nine country associations came together to form an umbrella association called the European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA). This pan-European group allows for expanded collaboration, networking and support, and virtual and in-person workshops and conferences, thus bringing together the European on-site practitioner voice for the study abroad sector.

4.4. Defining Experiences to Justify the Challenges

Despite the numerous responsibilities, myriad challenges, and relentless nature of the emergency phone, the participants highlighted several experiences that sustain them. These small but special moments relate to helping students flourish and opportunities for self-growth.

4.4.1. Playing a Positive Role in a Young Person's Life

When we asked the participants what keeps them in the role, their answer was simple: the students. Natasha shared that "the most rewarding thing is helping students." She added, "I don't think you can do this job if that doesn't bring you some kind of satisfaction." Eliza echoed this sentiment.

For some RDs, the value of this human interaction attracted them to the role. Paul, who had once considered working in finance, values the positive impact that he can make in students' lives. "That is so gratifying and there's just no other feeling like it," he expressed. For other RDs, the vibrant energy that permeates these interactions sustains their work. "I think that this job is always interesting and always fun because we work with the students, with the young generation, and I keep feeling young," reflected Guilia. Peter shared a similar sentiment, adding that students "come with a freshness that sometimes reinvigorates you as an individual." We found that students' sense of discovery and curiosity serves as a source of renewal for RDs. Diana mused, "I really enjoy being around this age group. They're figuring out who they are and what they want to do and who they want to be. And to accompany them on that journey, I still find it fun."

4.4.2. "That Light Bulb Moment"

The transformative power of these human interactions surfaced in our conversations with RDs. We found that the magic often lies in the "aha moments"—the instances when students realize profound insights. Eliza remarked, "If I can play a tiny part in their development and where this path takes them later, that's a really rewarding experience." Charles explained, "It's amazing to be able to see that understanding, that light bulb moment for students."

Europe-based RDs enjoy enriching the lives of others and witnessing the positive impact that they have on students' lives. Em affirmed, "I am contributing to something important." Paul agreed, noting, "I can't think of anything better than when a student tells you they've had a life-changing experience."

Nicole cautioned that this growth is not universal. "What's extremely rewarding is to see students' personal growth and development and maturity when it happens. It doesn't always happen." Additionally, Mike and Vanessa flagged that many students need to first encounter discomfort before realizing this growth. Mike explained that the most rewarding part of his work is "to see a student overcome a serious crisis and to be with them on that journey." Vanessa found fulfillment in supporting students who arrive with limited cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills "grow and explore and get enthusiastic and excited."

One dimension of student growth that many RDs mentioned was the development of a more well-rounded worldview. The participants celebrated expanding students' perspectives beyond their U.S.-centric views. Paul found it extremely gratifying that students "have a better sense of their place in the world" and "understand that the American way of life isn't the only way." Charles shared this sentiment, commenting on the importance of "going back to the United States and remembering or realizing that America is not the center of the universe and that life is different elsewhere."

4.4.3. "It's Not Always About the Classroom"

Many RDs also emphasized the significance of informal interactions with students. The heart of Margaret's connection with students lies in the shared moments outside of the classroom. "It's about sitting with the students outside of a restaurant with a glass of wine or a beer or a coffee. … I just love that." Angelo agreed, noting, "I love just sitting down sometimes with some students in the library or the corridor or at the coffee bar or whatever and just talking to them." He added, "When you see an impact like just a few little

encounters like that can have on students, I think it is a lesson for us and how important we can be to students."

Sid also cherishes the moments when students want to share something positive with him. "I still get a buzz from that and the idea of playing a very small role in a young person's life." When Franky engages with students in these informal spaces, she takes a very candid approach. "I try to lead by example." She shares stories from "my personal life and my personal challenges, how I made friends, and how I had issues with bilingualism."

4.4.4. A "Thank-You Note" and the Ultimate Thank You

The participants expressed how much delight they experience when receiving expressions of gratitude from students. For some RDs, this took the form of a physical card or letter. "To get a thank-you note from a student at the end of the semester … and to have students tell you how much your contributions made to them … it doesn't get any better than that," said Paul. Eliza agreed that the "occasional card or letter that you get … makes all the difference." Gene shared in this delight, especially when students express how an education abroad experience "has been so important for their life." In their comments during the participant review of our draft, Paul remarked that

> the ultimate thank you for me is when students tell me they think I have the best job in the world or later get in touch to ask for advice on how to go about engaging with this profession. It brings home how important our role can be for students.

In addition to these signs of appreciation, RDs characterized the students' ongoing engagement with the host country and their own long-term connections with the students as the ultimate thank you. Pablo explained, "We've had several students come back to do their master's degrees," which illustrates that "they've enjoyed the experience enough … to come back and experience it again." Charles agreed, commenting that "it's extremely enriching and rewarding to see students coming back to [European country]." Nicole also finds it extremely rewarding when "you have students who develop a lifelong love of [their host country] and want to come back again."

Gene drew attention to these long-term social connections with former students. "The amount of former students contacting me is beautiful," he affirmed. Franky explained, "I keep up with my 3,000 alumni as much as I can … via LinkedIn, and then when they come back to work and live in [European country]." Angelo characterized his meetings with alumni in the United States as "the magic moments."

4.4.5. The Variety of Work and Self-Growth

In addition to facilitating student growth, we found that the dynamic nature of resident directors' work brought happiness and fostered self-growth. Emphasizing the unpredictability of his daily work, Peter shared, "Across a semester, you're having such a variety of experiences. I do enjoy that." This is exactly what motivates Giulia, who commented, "There is always something that you cannot predict. And I think this is exactly what makes me motivated to learn and to continue to stay with the same organization."

Franky and Alexander also enjoy the ever-changing landscape of their work. Franky noted, "You just don't know what's coming your way. … we do a little bit of everything, which makes it fun and also kind of crazy." She added, "I think that's why a lot of people in our field love the job, otherwise they leave." Alexander agreed with this point. Highlighting that each day is different, he commented, "I love my job, and even if I stayed in this job until I retire, I'd be okay. I'd be happy."

Some RDs highlighted specific aspects of their work they love. For those who teach, like Angelo and Alexander, the classroom becomes a space for challenge, creativity, and growth. Although the experiential learning method that Angelo employs exhausts him, he added, "it's rewarding for me when I see that students benefit a lot from that instead of just reading and memorizing. I love that." Alexander commented on the satisfaction derived "when you see the students' eyes light up and they have that 'aha moment'" in the classroom. Paul remarked, "I can't think of anything better than when a student tells you they've had a life changing experience. And that just, wow, it just does me in every time. It's so wonderful to hear."

Nicholas explained that as students change, education abroad programs need to adapt. The necessity of continuous improvement brings him joy. "You need to work constantly on finding new things, new inspirations, new teachers, new people, new ideas. That's the benefit that I feel is great." Similarly, Mike finds satisfaction in "fine-tuning and tweaking" and "knowing that we can do that each semester" to improve the program. The engagement with new groups and generations of students serves as a catalyst for self-improvement among RDs. "There are always students with whom I could connect and learn from," Eliza reflected, underscoring the reciprocal nature of her interactions. Nicholas emphasized that he is "constantly learning things" and "meeting very interesting people on the way."

5. Discussion

The findings of our phenomenological study align with many of the themes that surfaced in the limited research on the experiences of resident directors. At the same time, we also uncovered a unique phenomenon taking shape in the international education community in Europe: the evolving voice and role of RDs amidst a changing landscape.

Robinson et al. (2020) underscored that Europe-based RDs feel undervalued, and we heard several stories across cultural contexts that support this point. Despite the breadth of responsibilities that RDs undertake and the critical role that they play in the education abroad lifecycle, the participants used terms and phrases like *muffled, lost*, and *misunderstood* to describe the voice of the RD. However, we also discovered that some progress is being made. Natasha, for example, articulated that the voice of the resident director "is louder than it has been in the past." Charles added that "my voice is more present and more respected now than it had been in the past."

We identified a number of interconnected factors that are influencing this trend. The on-site challenges that Lucas (2009) drew attention to over a decade ago have not gone away. With heightened expectations from myriad stakeholders, a more complex health and safety landscape, increased popularity in bespoke short-term programs, and enrollment pressures, these challenges have become even more intense. Hinting at the customer-service culture that has trickled down from U.S. higher education to U.S. education abroad, Giulia expressed that "everything is on the RD's shoulders" to "guarantee the students a fantastic experience."

We discovered an active and collective European interest in addressing these challenges. Naturally, education abroad professionals would turn to the major professional organizations in the field—NAFSA: Association of International Educators and The Forum of Education Abroad—or their home university/organization to help overcome these challenges. Although some resident directors shared stories about fruitful engagement with NAFSA, The Forum, and their home office, we found that many RDs valued country-based associations like APUAF, APUNE, or AACUPI, or pan-European associations like EUASA to a higher degree.

One of the key reasons RDs are turning to these Europe-based associations is because the frameworks, approaches, and discussions are rooted in local and European ways of thinking. Positively, The Forum on Education Abroad has made a concerted effort to amplify education abroad voices outside of the United States, as evidenced by the inaugural European Institute (in collaboration with EUASA) in 2023 and the evolution of the

biennial European Conference to the European, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) Conference.

The extant literature (e.g., Deyo, 2018; Lucas, 2009; Robinson et al., 2020; Ziegler, 2006) drew attention to the immense responsibilities and complex challenges that RDs face. Our research moves the discussion forward with the discovery that RDs in Europe are engaging in a form of grassroots professional development that serves multiple functions. Europe-based associations create a space for RDs to be heard, discuss and process their experiences, and quickly develop knowledge and skills that can address immediate on-site challenges.

The participants in our study described the various paths that led them to the resident director role. Most Europe-based RDs did not navigate through a higher education administration or international education graduate program. Instead, many of the participants in our study arrived with academic and professional backgrounds in the arts, business, journalism, and languages. We observed that the associations leverage the diverse strengths of its members to design and facilitate thoughtful programming that builds capacity and addresses critical needs. As our participants explained, when one is required to be "a jack of all trades," the development of new knowledge and skills enhances one's effectiveness.

Many of the RDs in the study articulated that human interaction, especially with students, but also with each other, sustains their work. Building on a comment from Paul about "just how important it is for us to have each other," we found that engagement with local and regional education abroad professionals might be just as fruitful for RDs. By fostering collaborative relationships and sharing insights with like-minded colleagues, RDs not only gain valuable resources and support, but also reaffirm the significance of interpersonal connections in their professional practice.

6. Recommendations for Practice

Our findings clearly point to the necessity of amplifying the RD voice and supporting them with challenges that they face on site. We offer three recommendations for practice that align with these goals.

First, we recommend that resident directors and on-site staff find voice and a community of practice (Lave, 1991) in regional and country-based associations. Many of our participants celebrated the benefit of engaging with these associations, especially the relevancy of their professional development opportunities with like-minded educators. We found that Europe-based RDs come from myriad backgrounds, and this has incredible potential for skill development within the broader community of international educators in

Europe. RDs should also be able to participate and have members of their teams participate in our local organizations' workshops and in conferences. RDs should allocate time and funding for their team to participate in these fruitful professional development opportunities.

Second, although the field of education abroad prioritizes student wellness, the wellness of international educators is often overlooked. In addition to the stress that comes with carrying the emergency phone, RDs and other on-site staff members often deal with secondary trauma: "the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1999, p. 10). Giulia, for instance, shared a story about supporting a student with an eating disorder during COVID. Describing it as "the most challenging experience that I faced in [my] 15 years," she contemplated changing professions after the incident was resolved. Sid commented that even though he felt "capable when it comes to managing the fallout of situations… it does take a piece of me each time." The mental health of RDs and their teams should be a significant concern for stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic. Although most programs provide mental health opportunities to students in need, similar resources should also be made available to RDs and their staff. Additionally, institutions and organizations should critically examine their emergency phone policy, which can be a significant cause of stress for on-site staff. Guidance from regional and country-based associations could inform these discussions.

Third, a heightened level of engagement and collaboration between the European associations and the major professional organizations (i.e., NAFSA and The Forum on Education Abroad) would greatly benefit the sector. In November 2023, EUASA and The Forum co-hosted the European Institute in Strasbourg, which was a good space to amplify the voices of mostly Europe-based international educators. One attendee stated that it was "absolutely the most valuable 2 day conférence I have ever attended," while another stated that it was an "incredibly valuable opportunity to have these conversations together as a field in a more intimate / targeted way–generally for onsite professionals, by onsite professionals." The success of this institute should serve as a point of departure for future collaborations.

7. Limitations

While we aimed to recruit a diverse sample of resident directors from across Europe, the findings may not be generalizable to all RDs due to the limited sample size and geographic scope of the study. Our research only included perspectives from RDs in Czechia, France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, which may not fully represent the experiences of RDs in

other countries. Additionally, phenomenology prioritizes prolonged engagement between the researcher(s) and the participants. Although we collected rich data through our virtual interviews, our narrow scope of engagement is another limitation.

Further, the subjective nature of phenomenological research means that findings are inherently influenced by the perspectives of both the researcher(s) and participants. As a team of researchers, our cumulative experience as on-site resident directors worked for and against us. We leveraged our professional backgrounds to inform the design of our study. As we collected and analyzed our data, we honored the phenomenological commitment to bracketing–the suspension of judgment–to ensure that the participants' stories guided our study.

8. Conclusion

Our study illuminates the complex and often underexplored role of resident directors (RDs) in Europe, highlighting the diverse backgrounds, multifaceted responsibilities, and profound commitment to student success that characterize their experiences. Amidst a dearth of existing literature on the subject, our research underscores the need to amplify the voices of RDs and recognize their invaluable contributions to education abroad programs in Europe. As we navigate the evolving landscape of international education, it is essential to strengthen support systems for RDs and elevate their role in shaping the experiences of students abroad. By shedding light on their lived experiences, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges, rewards, and enduring significance of their work in cultivating global citizenship.

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Appendix A: Resident Director Interviews - Key Questions and Themes

General Notes

- Send Participant Consent Form several days in advance of the interview.
- We're conducting semi-structured interviews, which means that the protocol allows for flexibility and spontaneity
    - Follow the story where it takes you
    - Don't feel obliged to ask every question
    - Ask new questions if they fit with the interview journey
- Rephrase important points back to the participant
- Probe for depth to enrich an important point
- Respect silence–allowing the participant to gather thoughts before answering

Procedures Before the Interview

- Welcome and introductions
- Thank the participant for taking the time to complete the interview
    - Remind them that this is an empowering opportunity to share their stories with a diverse audience
- Explain
    - Research question: What is the lived experience of Resident Directors in Europe? (i.e., better understand the <u>essence</u> of being a European RD)
    - Logistics of the interview
        - Roughly 30 to 45 (?) minutes in length
        - Focus will be on the participant's lived experiences
- Ask for the participant's permission to record the interview
    - Interview will be digitally recorded, and then transcribed by us (the researchers)
    - The findings of our study will illuminate the on-site reality, which will be insightful for many of the stakeholders with whom we engage
- Begin recording

Your story

1. Job title, organisation, and length of time as a Resident Director
2. What was your pathway to becoming a Resident Director?
3. How many students do you host per year?
4. How many staff and/or faculty do you supervise?
5. Do you consider this a 'job' or a 'profession'.
6. Describe a typical day on the job.

Work - Personal Life Balance

1. What are the sources and degree of any stress you may feel that is owing to your job?
2. Does your program have adequate on-site staffing to provide all of the services expected of the program?
3. How do you find ways to disconnect? Is it vacation or other activities?
4. What, if any, institutional support do you receive? What support would you like to receive?

Professionalising the Field

1. What sort of professional training have you done, or do you regularly update?
2. What is missing, in your view, from your training to do your job effectively?
3. Are you afforded enough opportunities for professional development? Is it stressed as a part of your job?
4. In what ways do you actively collaborate with other Resident Directors in Europe for things such as professional development, networking, or information sharing?
5. To what extent does your institution/organisation value this collaboration?
6. Finish the sentence: Within the field of international education, the voice of the Resident Director is _____

Career Development

1. What opportunities for career advancement have you experienced within your current institution/organisation?
2. Do you feel that remuneration (pay and benefits) are fair and in line with your responsibilities? OR Imagine that you're meeting with your HR director to discuss your remuneration (pay and benefits). What would the discussion look like?

Study abroad changes through time

1. Can you discuss any changes or trends you've observed in the resident population or the nature of residential life during your tenure as a resident director?
2. How have you seen the study abroad sector as a whole change through time?

Benefits and Challenges

1. Reflecting on your experiences, what do you consider the most rewarding aspects of being a resident director?
2. Reflecting on your experiences, what do you consider the most challenging aspects of being a resident director?

Author Biography

Stephen Robinson, PhD, is Director and Professor with Champlain College's campus in Dublin, Ireland. Stephen is an environmental geoscientist with a PhD from McGill University in Montréal, Canada, and he previously held the Chapin Chair in Geology at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. He advocates for the perspectives of on-site study abroad staff in Europe, and for climate action in international education. He is the Chair of EUASA and board member of ASAPI.

Jeremy Doughty, PhD, is an academic innovation and research specialist with the University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC). In this role, he focuses on curriculum integration, program development, and trends analysis. Jeremy received his PhD in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University and his M.A. in international education from the SIT Graduate Institute.

Kirk Duclaux, MA, is the founding Director of the University of Oklahoma in Arezzo (OUA), Italy, leading the Study Center since its inception. With over 15 years of European experience, he specializes in international education, Renaissance Art History, Art and Activism, and Cultural Heritage Trafficking. Kirk holds an M.A. in Italian Renaissance Art History from Syracuse University in Florence, Italy, combining academic expertise with a deep understanding of cross-cultural and administrative challenges

MaryAnn Letellier, PhD, is the Director of CUPA, a French immersion program in Paris. Since her arrival as Academic Director in 1999, she has provided support on all levels for students, while also developing the program curriculum and existing partnerships. Mary Ann has an MA in French Literature from New York University and a *Doctorat* from Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle and has held teaching positions at the Sorbonne Nouvelle and Université de Lille.