

## STUDENT MOBILITY AT THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES IN PRAGUE

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### Abstract

The article is dedicated to cross-border student mobility under the Erasmus+ programme, with main attention concentrated at the interests and experience of the Faculty of Economics and Management Czech University of Life Sciences (FEM CULS) in Prague students. The empirical part is based on statistical analysis of the numbers and structure development of students incoming and outgoing over the period of 2001-2007 years. Using appropriate time series models the indicators' development during the two years following has been forecasted. The paper is exploiting the outcomes of questionnaire survey, too, done on the set of FEM students and aimed at perception and assessment of the programme. The survey has shown that, students understand the cross-border mobility as a benefit able to offer them a competition advantage later on the labour market. A comparison of the analyses with other studies' results has been contained in the paper, too, and recommendations added in order to improve cross-border mobility promotion.

**Keywords:** Erasmus, Erasmus Plus, student mobility, education, university study, questionnaire survey, time series

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the enlargement of European Union and creation of the Schengen Area, facilitation of movement between the states of Europe appeared and weakening of importance of the borders within the continent, what brought about an increase of intensity of various forms of mobility. The changes affected the student cross-border mobility, too, and student mobility programmes development. Foreign study participation became simplified in particular by the European student mobility central control using the Union programmes facilitating bilateral exchange between partner institutions for the students. Student mobility has recorded a dynamic development over the recent decades, not only on the European continent. Student mobility is growing even four times faster than global migration. The short-term transfer of students abroad is a mechanical movement which is in close connection with the socio-economic movement. Experience from abroad helps to speed up finding a job after graduation and it increases the work mobility of young people

connected with willingness to spend a business trip or a working stay abroad. Together with mobility development the development of study programmes takes place. In 2014 merging of the previous education programmes into one Erasmus programme took place, the new Erasmus Plus (Erasmus+). The Erasmus+ programme currently is taken by the students as such that insistently belongs to University study. The aim of universities is to ensure that, each student gains a foreign experience.

The paper is demonstrating the Faculty of Economics and Management Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague (FEM CULS) economic branches students' interest in study mobilities and it is analyzing at the same time the experience of those with the benefits and expectations. There were 11 thousand students studying on average annually at the faculty. The faculty is currently the biggest economic faculty in the Czech Republic (CR).

## **2. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE CR**

The current education is passing a mighty development. The learning society is being spoken of, where not only the compulsory school education, but all the further, both formal and informal forms of education are gaining ever more importance for peoples' lives. Countries, be it both the advanced and the less advanced ones, are trying to develop the most up-to-date educational systems according to their cultural orientations and economic capacities (Průcha, 2006). The International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED has been accepted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1997 for the purpose of the educational systems international comparison. According to this norm the Czech educational system is being classified as follows (Průcha, 2006):

pre-primary education (pre-school education),

primary and basic education,

higher secondary education,

tertiary education: university and non-university,

adult education and distance education.

The tertiary education is grouped further as follows (Průcha, 2006):

ISCED 5 – the first stage of tertiary education – not aiming directly at scientific qualification (including programmes aimed at theory or practice),

ISCED 6 – the second stage of tertiary education – aiming at scientific qualification (including doctoral study programmes, scientific preparation).

There are 26 public universities, 2 State universities, 39 private universities and 5 foreign universities in the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2018).

## **3. MOBILITY IN EDUCATION**

Student mobility aimed at study abroad can be classified into seasonal migration category – temporary student's living at the university headquarters. The place of permanent residence does not change with this mobility type, it deals with a change of residence only, for a period stated ahead /statistically recorded as temporary stay (Mládek, 1992)/. However, students differ from other types of migrants by further parameters, too. One of these parameters is the fact that, students represent the group of migrants required and their mobility is even supported by a grant (scholarship). Another specific is even the fact that, students represent a group, the main target of which is the quality improvement of human capital (Martiniello and Rath, 2012)

## **4. EUROPEAN MOBILITY PROGRAMMES**

In order to satisfy their targets in the area of education and specialist preparation, the European Union permit students to depart using education programmes. In spite of the change of situation in 2014 through creation of the common programme, mobility within the EU remained heavily supported furtherly. Student mobility within the EU can be taken as still more managed and Europe differs from other parts of the world just by this. The programmes on other continents are taken more or less as national programmes. This means, students negotiate their study visits themselves (Euroskop.CZ, 2008). The Lifelong Learning Programme – LLP, aimed at support of exchange, co-operation and mobility between the 28 systems of specialist preparation and educational systems represented the principal initiative in the area of educational programmes over the previous European Union planning period (2007-2013). The Lifelong Learning Programme has been replaced over time by the Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II programmes from the

2000-2006 years period. The Lifelong Learning Programme was formed by sectoral programmes (Grundtvig, Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci) and by the Jean Monnet Programme and the Cross Section Programme (see Fig. 1). The main target of the LLP was participation in Europe's development from the viewpoint of advanced knowledge society, sustainable development of the economy, raising quantity and quality of jobs and higher social cohesion.

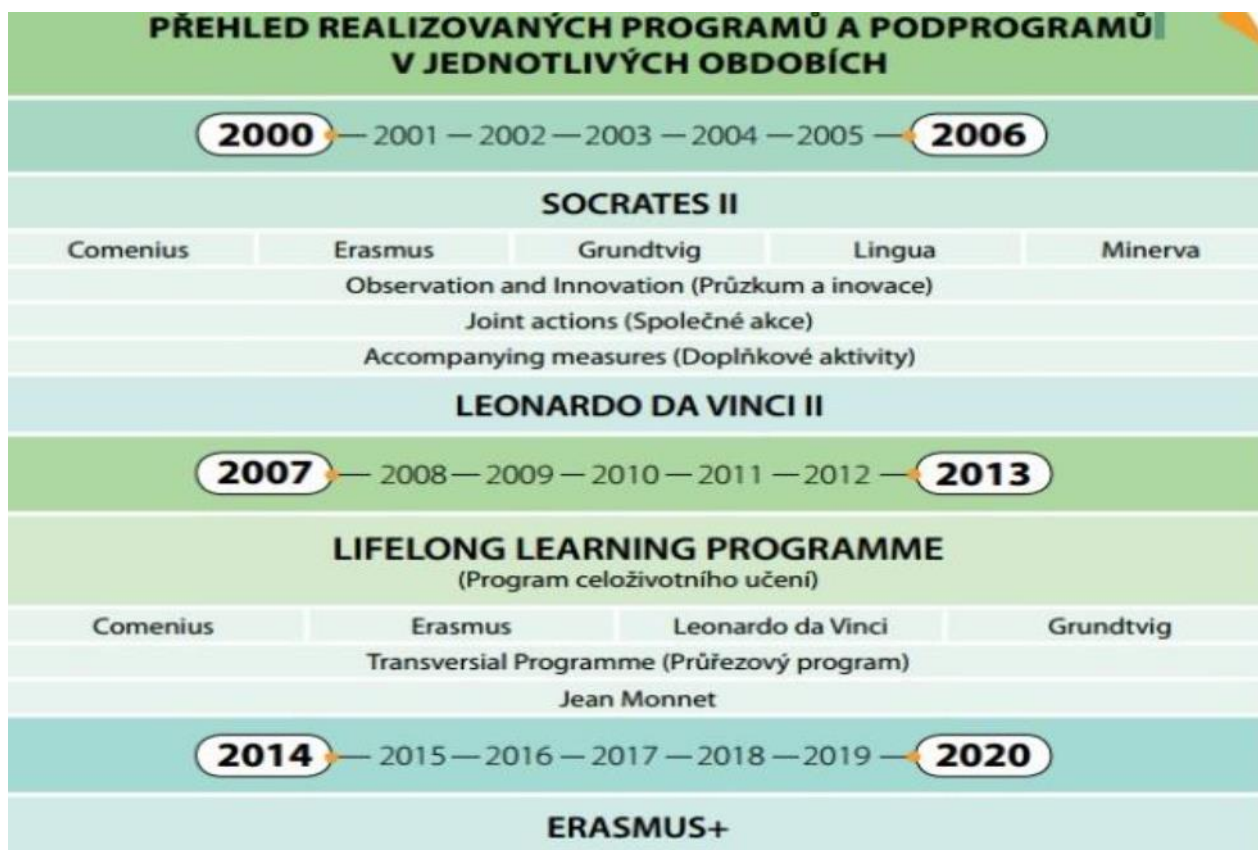


Fig. 1. Review of the programmes and sub-programmes over 2000 – 2020 (Basl et al, 2017)

For the current EU planning period (2014 – 2020) all the programmes and sub-programmes have been united into one only programme Erasmus+. Besides the Lifelong Learning Programme the Erasmus+ supplies an organisational framework for 6 further programmes – Alpha, Erasmus Mundus, Edulink, Youth in Action, Tempus and the Programme for Co-operation with Advanced Industry Countries, and finally the Sports Programme, too (European Union, 2017). In particular this step has been taken in order to simplify the administration and access to the activities presented by the programme.

## 5. ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME OUTLINE

The Erasmus+ programme belongs among the educational programmes, it is administered by the General Administration for Education and Culture under European Commission. It is aimed at education but at the area of youth training and sports, too. But it mainly allows mobility to students, employees and people traveling abroad as volunteers. The main target of Erasmus+ as such is to develop skills in young people and increase the chances of theirs to get good jobs and to modernize education, professional training and work with the youth, too.

The European Union steadily has been increasing support of education. Erasmus+ has got a total financial coverage at EUR14.774 billion under Heading 1 and EUR1.680 billion under Heading 4 and it has been scheduled over the seven-year period 2014-2020. This amount represents an increase of 40 % against the previous period (Euractiv, 2014). Figura 2 shows the countries involved in the Erasmus+ programme.



Fig. 2. Map of the States involved in Erasmus+ programme (Evropská komise, 2014)

## 6. INVOLVEMENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

The Czech Republic authorities involved themselves in the Erasmus Programme in 1997 and subsequently in 1998/1999 academic year the first students got their opportunity to travel under the programme – there were 879 of those. The biggest milestone for the CR was the 2004 year, when connected with accession to the European Union, the Czech Republic has become eligible to participate in all the activities and initiatives in the area of education. At that time the number of students traveling under the programme during one academic year made it 3 859 individuals (Dráberová, 2017). Over the recent years more than 5.5 thousand students traveled annually under the Erasmus+ programme. For the Czech Republic students the main destinations are Germany, where already 10,677 students have traveled to, since start of the monitoring, France (7,109 students) and Spain (6,337 students). To the Czech Republic students have been arriving notably from Spain (6,878 students since start of monitoring), from France (5,936 students), also from Poland (4,876 students) and Slovakia (4,479 students).

## 7. THE CULS FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT AND ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

The Erasmus+ programme agenda has been provided at the CULS Faculty of Economics and Management by the Faculty International Department. Currently the Faculty have a bilateral agreement with more than a hundred partner Universities. In 2006 had the University 152 agreements signed, by the end of 2016 there were 409 of these signed. An increase appeared in the number of universities involved, too. While in 2006 there were 101 partner universities, then ten years after there were 282 already, in 28 countries (Česká zemědělská univerzita, 2016). In the 2015/2016 academic year more than 200 foreign students studied at CULS in Prague under the programme.

The trend is rising, and just the students' participation in learning greatly enhances the Faculty developed international environment and proves the fair and satisfactory quality of English language teaching, here (Provozně ekonomická fakulta, 2018).

**Table 1. Numbers of students incoming and outgoing at CULS FEM over 2001-2017**

Academic year	No.s of students incoming	No.s of students outgoing	Share of students incoming/outgoing
2001/2002	16	53	0.302
2002/2003	21	62	0.339
2003/2004	45	110	0.409
2004/2005	42	133	0.316
2005/2006	76	129	0.589
2006/2007	78	179	0.436
2007/2008	217	175	1.240
2008/2009	220	144	1.528
2009/2010	153	211	0.725
2010/2011	145	222	0.653
2011/2012	161	169	0.953
2012/2013	180	195	0.923
2013/2014	169	246	0.687
2014/2015	224	143	1.566
2015/2016	264	184	1.435
2016/2017	315	152	2.072

Source: FEM CULS in Prague

The CULS FEM in Prague students can travel under Erasmus+ for up to 12 months, once only at each study level – Bachelor’s, Master’s and doctoral. The cross-border mobility chance has been used by some 150 – 200 students annually over the recent academic years. The Table 1 below shows the numbers of students incoming and outgoing in and from the FEM over the 2001–2017 years. At the same time it demonstrates the positive phenomenon of the Faculty internationalization, which has been a great consequence of the foreign students’ excellent experience from the Faculty in Prague.

However, Table 1 is showing, too, that the Faculty student numbers, of those interested in the cross-border mobility, is decreasing. The reason is the fact that, each year more students take part in seasonal work abroad. According to the Czech-US agency, between the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic years an increment of 14 % students occurred who took part in summer works under the Work and Travel programme. According to the agency mentioned, between the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 years even almost double increase occurred of the numbers of students who passed the summer language stays abroad. The seasonal study engagement offer has kept growing year after year. In the first quarter of 2018 the European Job Mobility Portal actually offered 2,891,979 free seasonal jobs in all the European states. On almost all the job portals work abroad can be chosen for summer months. Mostly these are jobs like: fruit picker, chambermaid, lifeguard, animator, babysitter, housekeeper or volunteer activities. Moreover, in recent years the FEM international department has facilitated travel outside the EU countries and they have offered

summer schools on the continents of Asia and America, at the same time.

## **8. THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY RESULTS**

218 respondents (CULS FEM in Prague students) participated in the questionnaire survey in the 2017/2018 academic year. Out of the total number there were 146 women, i.e., more than two thirds (67 %). Most of the respondents (167 students) studied the Master's programme (77 %), the second largest group represented were the Bachelor's programme students (47 students, i.e., 21 %). Also the doctoral study programme students took part in the survey and FEM employees, too, making it 1 % only of the total sample. More than one half of the total number of respondents took the advantage of study abroad – 62 %, i.e., 136 of the total number of 218.

### **8.1. Length of Stay**

The most frequent time of stay is a period of 3-6 months corresponding to the period of one study semester. 98 (66 %) participants chose this length of the journey. A longer period of stay (6-9 months) was chosen by 19 respondents (13 %), and a 9 months up to full year of stay have passed 25 students, i.e., 17 % of all the interviewees.

### **8.2. Journey Destination**

The questionnaire survey should have also answered the question, which of the study stay destinations under the Erasmus+ programme were those most frequently chosen by the FEM students. Spain was the most visited (15 % respondents), Portugal (13 %), Greece (12 %) and France (10 %).

### **8.3. Journey Destination Choice Criteria**

The most frequent criterion of the country choice for mobility realization was the climate. According to it, 60 students decided on the destination. As the survey has shown, students decided on the destination choices according to their friends' recommendations and to various publicly available information placed on student portals and to the country assessments by travel agencies and other information channels. Such recommendations were taken into account when deciding on the destination choice, by 56 respondents in all. Significant criteria were also advices and past experience by students who passed the study stays in the past years, and the education quality at the university chosen.

### **8.4. Motivation to Study Abroad**

The highest motivation of the respondents was to learn or to improve the foreign language. This possibility was chosen by 100 out of 136 interviewed respondents. The next reason to exit was to try one's life abroad, to hibe off and meet new people. Some of the interviewed wish to increase the likelihood of success in finding their future jobs applying their experience from abroad.

### **8.5. Erasmus+ As Compulsory Part of Study**

Almost three quarters of the respondents who passed the stay abroad think, the study stay abroad should be compulsory for all students.

### **8.6. Study Assessment at the Accepting University**

Most of the students were satisfied with teaching quality at the university they have chosen. 56 out of all 136 respondents (41 %) were completely satisfied. 2 respondents only (1 %) were dissatisfied. 67 interviewed students (49 %) have assumed, they acquired skills and abilities they would not acquire during study at their mother Faculty. Free online language support under the programme was provided to all participants, to be at hand for the entire period of study abroad. Also the chance of having ruled at least some basics of another foreign language was offered to 58 students (48 %). Before the departure students can choose subjects from a catalogue, to study during their foreign mobility. The subjects can be changed during study period. For 50 students (37 %) the offers and the choices of subjects largely matched with subjects studied at FEM CULS in Prague. 14 % of the respondents only studied subjects at the accepting university, not corresponding to their study plans at FEM CULS. For 47 % of those respondents (64 students) the expectations were mostly fulfilled they supposed to gain from the subjects chosen. On the contrary, for 14 % (8 students) the expectations were dissatisfied. Works on the projects usually are combined such for the Erasmus students, to facilitate meetings of as many people as possible from different states, so that everybody has got a chance to learn something from the others.

## **8.7. Study Quality**

The Erasmus+ programme and mobility in general is to demonstrate some different university systems and education approaches to the students. When comparing the two participating universities students mostly appraised both of them positively. More than half of the respondents were satisfied with the information obtained before departure both from the home university and from the one accepting. The employees readiness was assessed similarly at both the institutions. A slightly better appraisal was obtained by the accepting institution anyway. More than half of the respondents were satisfied with the marking system at the accepting institution, in case of the subjects recognition most respondents turned to neutral position. Subjects recognition is done using the recognition matrix constructed such that, an objective transformation of the mark obtained into the assessment system at home university is found.

## **8.8. Benefits of Passing the Erasmus+ Programme**

Study abroad enriches the student not only in terms of professional and language skills. An important aspect of the study is the increase of student's autonomy and responsibility, too. The biggest benefit to most students was the improvement in contacts and communication with people. Just the blending of different cultures was principal for 67 respondents and they learnt to perceive better the different culture values this way. Thanks to the mobility abroad 51 respondents started to get interested in the world events.

## **8.9. Students Awareness of Mobility and the Programme Promotion at FEM CULS in Prague**

Most respondents have information enough on the study abroad options. They look for this information actively themselves. In spite of this they feel the FEM should increase the mobility programmes promotion. Students suggest exhibitions and workshops in order to attract their colleagues' interest in study abroad.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Currently, education is not under way at the national level only, since the international level is getting more and more important. In this sense it is just the Erasmus+ programme representing an important instrument for Europe, by means of which the European Union tries to strengthen mobility in education, inter alia. Student mobility, especially of those from universities, shows an increasing tendency. The Czech Republic is active from both the incoming and the outgoing students viewpoints. Czech University of Life Sciences belongs among the most involved European universities, within the CR it occupies a third position as to the foreign students acceptance. Number of foreign students having chosen CULS in Prague for their mobility keeps rising every year. Just this finding proves the good position CULS has among European universities. Study quality and willingness and friendliness during completing the administrative processes connected with mobility have a great impact upon students' endeavour.

It has been found from the outcomes that, a decreasing tendency of interest in cross-border mobilities is taking place on the FEM students' side, while numbers of the incoming students are growing. Women account for 63.6 % of the total number of the outgoing. As the questionnaire survey has shown it, students present language improvements as the most significant benefit of the cross-border mobility. Besides this they have learnt better ways of communication with people abroad, started getting interested in world events, perceiving values of other cultures and they learnt openness and curiosity. The field of study coincided with the field studied at the home university at one half of students posted. Students got a chance to choose and study subjects not available at the home university. It is evident from the research that, the Erasmus+ programme offers an opportunity to young people to see new places in the world. As it concerns the destination choice students mostly decide for coastal places in the South. Just the climate is the principal criterion for FEM students for their mobility choice. Another important criterion, however, becomes the choice of university reflecting its prestige. FEM students positively assess study quality at the accepting institution. Most of them assume that, through study at the foreign university they have got knowledge and skills, the home faculty could not offer them. A big benefit was the teamwork, when colleagues of different nationalities worked on a project assigned. Just the international teams stimulate students' interest in different cultures and can facilitate forming cross-border friendships and future co-operation. After having passed the Erasmus+ programme the participants expect better own readiness to join a work process abroad.

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