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Importance of Motivating Factors for International Mobility of Students: Empirical Findings on Selected Higher Education Institutions in Europe

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This article explores the importance of motivating factors for the international mobility of undergraduate students who participated in a mobility programme and completed part of their studies at selected higher education institutions. The empirical research was conducted on a population of 3,539 mobile undergraduate students, who took part in mobility programmes between 2006 and 2011 at three selected higher education institutions in three different European countries (1 – Germany: Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Karlsruhe, 2 – Norway: University of Tromsø, 3 – Slovenia: University of Primorska, Faculty of Management). The purpose of this article is to present the underlying motivating factors in relation to the selected institution on a sample of 288 undergraduate students during the period studied. On the basis of these findings, we came to the conclusion that most of the students participated in students' mobility programmes especially to gain international study and life experiences. Furthermore, we established a statistically significant difference in the duration of a mobility period in connection with gender and the satisfaction with the mobility programme.

Key words: international mobility, mobility motivating factors, higher education institution

1 Introduction

In recent times, many Slovenian and foreign employers have given consideration and priority to graduates with international experience when it comes to employing them in their companies. During the time that students live abroad, they enrich their academic and professional lives and improve other personal competencies such as language, intercultural skills, confidence and self-awareness. In 2004 more than 2 million students were mobile worldwide (Altbach, 2004), and researchers predict (Guruz, 2008; Macready and Tucker, 2011) that by 2025 the number of mobile students will reach 8 million. This was also confirmed by a study entitled *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD indicators* (2013). OECD (2013) notes that Australia, Canada, France, Germany, United Kingdom and United States together receive more than 50% of all foreign students worldwide. Guruz (2008) points out that global mobility is expanding very quickly and that more and more countries are becoming important destinations for international students. Komljenovič (2012) defines mobility as one of the best ways to open up institutions and facilities of higher education internationally.

Based on these findings, Dessoff (2010) asserts that mobility promotes better employability. He also predicts that the countries which host the highest numbers of international students will stay in the foreground of progress and will compete aggressively in the future as well. Another researcher, Guruz (2008), finds that international academic mobility has greatly contributed to the formation of both the worldwide education and labour markets. Čepar (2010) draws attention to the enormous impact education has had on development, progress and prosperity, which is not limited to the educational sphere, and cannot be overlooked. Altbach and Teichler (2001) point out the fact that methods of exchange, university connections, mobility patterns, and international as well as regional arrangements between universities are changing.

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According to data acquired by Bhandari et al. (2011) in 2009, six countries hosted over 60% of worldwide student mobility at the tertiary level: the USA (20%), Great Britain (13%), France (8%) and Australia, Germany and China (7% each). The United States has hosted the largest share and the largest number of international students who completed part of their higher education outside their home country (690,923 students in the 2009 academic year), followed by Great Britain (415,585 students in the 2009 academic year). More recent host countries, such as China, show rapid growth in the number of international students. Some other countries, including Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand, have also increased their endeavours to attract as many international students as possible (adapted from Bray in Kwo, 2003; Drago, 2003; Chen, 2004; Ninnes and Hellsten, 2005). Students' mobility in EU countries was also examined by Wolfeil (2009), whose research concentrated on return migration of international students and in the determinants of return and what professional value the experience of studying abroad has for students.

In this article the authors present empirical findings from research dealing with the importance of motivational factors in relation to international mobility of undergraduate students who were internationally mobile and completed part of their studies in three different countries and were or still are part of a six year mobility programme in the period between 2006 and 2011: 1 – Germany: Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Karlsruhe; 2 – Norway: University of Tromsø; 3 – Slovenia: University of Primorska, Faculty of Management. These are countries or faculties which mostly receive mobile students. According to OECD data (2013), these countries, except Slovenia, are above the OECD student mobility average in tertiary education. The reason that these countries were compared in the research, was based on the fact that the authors themselves took part in the exchange programme at one of the universities and also because the International Office at the Faculty of Management, University of Primorska gave them access to data for these universities. We present the underlying motivating factors (some other authors use the term "rationales of internationalisation" – e. g. Garrett, 2004; Teichler, 2004; Knight, 2006; Altbach in Knight, 2007) that led mobile students to choose their international mobility destination, and their expectations of what they would find there. Further on, we describe theoretical definitions of the fundamental concepts which are discussed in the article.

2 Literature review

2.1 International Students' Mobility

According to some international researchers (Altbach and Teichler, 2001; Mokyr, 2002; Davis, 2003; Koh, 2003; Postiglione, 2005; Brooks and Waters, 2009, 2010), worldwide mobility in the field of higher education is a fast growing phenomenon that influences resource and student management of institutions and nations around the globe. Bhandari (2011) states that after 2000 the number of students traveling to another country for higher education increased by 65%. In their research on student mobility, Kumpikaite and Duoba (2010) concluded that the most valuable advantages students gain abroad are cultural experience, individual growth and academic knowledge. Certainly, these competencies have a great influence on finding a job in the labour market. Similar findings can be found in Reisberg (2004). As stated by Macready and Tucker (2011), Anglophone and Western European countries have historically attracted the largest number of international students. Nye (2004) states that most countries perceive international academic mobility and student exchange as a key factor in the exchange of knowledge, creation of intellectual capital and competitiveness in the globalised world. Guruz (2008) points out that global mobility is expanding very quickly and that more and more countries are becoming important destinations for international students. Braček (2007) claims that the environment in which a higher education system functions needs to be taken into account when addressing the process of mobility. The effects of international mobility on students are usually examined using self-evaluations made by students. Most studies have concentrated on only one dimension of international educational mobility (e.g. improving foreign language skills, learning about the international environment, boosting self-confidence and self-awareness, personal and cognitive development, or intercultural and global competencies).

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the number of globally mobile students increased from 2.1 million in 2002 to 3.4 million in 2009 (OECD, 2013). Choudaha et al. (2013) define global student mobility as a constant flux which higher education institutions often cannot control. Choudaha et al. (2013) also state that in 2010, the international student population reached nearly 3.6 million worldwide, soaring by almost 50% over the previous six years (2.5 million in 2004). In general, the competition for international students is becoming more intense and complex, as reflected by the diminishing global market share (Teichler, 2012). What is also of interest is that the overarching mobility trend of the new millennium has been the increase in international students at the undergraduate level (Gonzalez et al., 2001). According to Knight (2003 and 2004), the existing forms of international mobility are: 1 – international students' mobility, 2 – international mobility of pedagogic staff and researchers, 3 – international programme mobility and 4 – international mobility of higher education institutions. International students' mobility can be further divided into (as stated in Cross-border tertiary education, 2007): 1 – long-term mobility and 2 – mobility to gain ECTS points (Erasmus, CEEPUS and bilateral agreements).

2.2 Student Mobility and the Labour Market

Slatinšek (2011) emphasises that many traditional host countries have formalised the relationship between higher education and the qualified labour market by implementing a policy encouraging international graduates, especially in scientific and technical fields, to enter the labour market of the host country. Scotland, for example, published a Post Study Work scheme with the aim of attracting 8,000 foreign experts per year by 2009. The scheme gives international students who

graduated from Scottish universities the opportunity to work there for up to two years. To support the efforts of individual host countries in Europe, the EU also launched an initiative to employ researchers in the fields of science and technology from all over the world. In this way, EU countries are competing with well-financed research universities and laboratories in the United States, which are famous for attracting the best scientific and technological talents from all over the world. The United States has also expanded employment opportunities for foreign graduates of science and technology programmes by extending the period of the "supplementary practical training programme" from the initial 12 to 29 months.

Parey and Waldinger (2011) emphasise that students who take part in mobility programmes gain many new experiences with which they: 1 – stand out in the labour market, 2 – acquire new language skills, 3 –broaden their horizons. Important factors influencing the decision of Slovenian students to study abroad include financing their studies, their socio-economic background, their command of foreign languages, and support from their families. If a student decides to take part in a mobility programme, he or she has an opportunity to receive a scholarship which, however, does not cover all the expenses of studying abroad. Because students from lower social strata cannot afford to pay for international mobility exchange, they can be discouraged from going abroad. Therefore, the number of students from families with an above-average income is much higher than the number of students from families with a below-average income (West and Barham, 2009). Although 6.5 million new jobs were created in 2011, young people are still faced with unemployment. The European commission has announced that 17.4% of all young EU citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 years are unemployed, despite the creation of many new jobs (Findlay, 2011).

3 Methodology

3.1 Purpose, Aim and Research Question

In 2012, we analysed the situation of international student exchange in three European countries at three selected institutions of higher education based on a population of 3,539 undergraduate students. Our analysis of the importance of motivating factors on students' decisions regarding international mobility and the selection of destination countries and institutions is based on a sample of 288 mobile undergraduate students. The central aim of our study is to find the reasons or the factors that influence the decisions connected with students' mobility. Our final aim is to present an insight into statistical findings regarding mobility of students involved in the study and the main motivating factors that influence their decision. Our point of departure was an initially set basic hypothesis, which is, motivating factors of mobile students differ in terms of the chosen destination.

3.2 Population and the Study Sample

Our study was conducted on a population of undergraduate students who participated in higher education mobility programmes at higher education institutions in three different countries, Slovenia, Germany and Norway, between 2006 and 2011. The data was collected using an online questionnaire which was sent to students by e-mail via individual international offices at the three institutions. The international office at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Management (Slovenia) sent the e-mail to 139 students who completed part of their studies there; the international office at the University of Tromsø (Norway) to 1,800 international students; and the Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg Karlsruhe (Germany) to 1,600 international students. Altogether, the questionnaire was sent to 3,539 undergraduate students who completed part of their studies at the selected institutions during the period studied. Because the survey was conducted online, the expected response rate was relatively low, between 4 and 6%. Nonetheless, we received 288 properly filled in questionnaires, with a response rate of over 8%, which comprised the sample for further research.

3.3 Data Gathering

The data was collected using an online questionnaire that was initially written in Slovenian and later translated into English (Slatinšek, 2012). The survey period was limited to 30 days. We sent two reminders 14 days and 20 days after the beginning of the survey. The questionnaire was divided into six main sets of questions, each composed of individual sub-questions. In all, the questionnaire contained 18 detailed questions on student mobility (open and closed types). The first set of questions related to the respondents' personal data, the second to mobility duration and motivation, the third to information and help available, the fourth to accommodation and infrastructure, the fifth to costs, and the sixth to personal impressions regarding mobility. The questionnaire was comprised of clear and short questions, most of which were closed-ended. In most cases, the questions were presented as a five point Likert scale.

3.4 Statistical Data Analysis

In the first step, the data acquired was described with basic descriptive statistics and frequency distribution. In addition, the data was processed with the objective of testing the initially set hypothesis. For this purpose the t-test, the Pearson correlation coefficient and the analysis of variance (ANOVA test) were used. When analysing the differences between motivating factors in relation to the chosen study destination, the analysis of variance (ANOVA test) was employed.

4 General Characteristics of Mobile Students

4.1 Student Demographics

When analysing the data from our sample, we noticed that most students come from Germany, followed by students

from Russia, Poland, France, Spain, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic, USA, Slovakia and the Netherlands. Our sample has shown that on average, women decide to take advantage of mobility programmes more often then men.

Table 1: Sample description

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents	Subgroup	Percentage
Country of origin	Germany	17.36
	Russia	14.93
	Poland	10.42
	France	5.90
	Spain	4.86
	Italy	4.17
	Denmark	3.13
	Czech Republic	2.78
	USA	2.43
	Slovakia	2.08
	Netherlands	2.08
	Other	29.86
Country of the host institution	Norway	74.81
	Germany	13.91
	Slovenia	11.28
Gender	Male	34.15
	Female	65.85
Age	From 19 to 24	48.78
	From 25 to 30	41.11
	From 31 to 45	10.11

The surveyed students were aged between 19 to 45 years and the average age was 25. As to the duration of the stay, over half of the students surveyed (51.2%) studied at a host university for between three and six months.

4.2 Destination Choice Factors

We determined that the country's standard of living is the factor which, on average, had the greatest influence on deciding for a host country. The second most important factor was language. The status of the university and climate followed. The one factor which did not noticeably influence the destination choice was recommendations by friends. A relatively low standard deviation shows that the students surveyed were relatively uniform in the factors that influenced their decision about the mobility destination.

4.3 Source of Information for Decision-making

In most cases, the Internet was identified as the most important information source that influenced the respondent's decision about mobility (over 65%). Furthermore, on average, a majority of students (over 73%) had an opportunity to participate at least in an information meeting after their arrival at the host university. Almost four-fifths of the respondents had an opportunity to participate in a variety of events during their stay abroad, from parties, excursions, cultural and sport events to visits to museums and other sights of the host country etc. For most students (78%), the international experience was the most decisive factor in deciding to take part in a mobility programme. Other motivating factors, such as improving foreign language skills, academic reasons, career opportunities and new acquaintances, were also important in the decision to take part in a mobility programme.

4.4 Mobility Costs

Most respondents had relatively high mobility costs. Almost half indicated that their mobility costs amounted to more than 400 EUR per month. Concerning accommodation costs, we found that one-fifth did not receive any grants for mobility and that they had to finance their stay from their own resources. A good quarter received mobility grants in the amount of more than 300 EUR per month. Moreover, we wanted to find out whether the students surveyed had higher expenses during their mobility period compared to the expenses they would have had if they stayed at home. The results showed that most students had additional expenses for private purposes in the amount of 100 EUR to 300 EUR per month. Most students surveyed financed their mobility with their own savings or with the help of their parents. To a lesser extent they financed their mobility with a partner's or grandparents' contributions, university scholarships, etc.

5 Analysis of the Importance of Motivating Factors in Choice of Destination

In our analysis of the motivating factors' mean values, we determined the importance of individual motivating factors in mobile students' choice of destinations. Table 1 shows that on average, for mobile students who chose a higher education institution in Norway, the international experience was the most important factor. Other important factors that influenced the decision to choose Norway were improving foreign language skills, academic reasons and the country's standard of living. For students who chose Slovenia, the most important factors were academic reasons, the country's living standard, improving foreign language skills, career opportunities and the university's status. For those who chose Germany, the most important motivating factors were: international exchange, improving foreign language skills, academic reasons, the country's living standard and career opportunities.

Furthermore, we examined a variety of motivating factors for mobile students with respect to the chosen destination with the analysis of variance, or in other words, with the simple (one-way) ANOVA. The idea behind the analysis of variance is to prove that the variability among groups is larger than the

Table 2: Mean values of motivating factors

	Norway			Slovenia			Germany		
	AM	**N**	**SD**	**AM**	**N**	**SD**	**AM**	**N**	**SD**
Language	3.58	177	1.409	3.24	25	1.589	3.43	35	1.539
Climate	3.12	177	1.52	3.12	25	1.364	2.89	35	1.549
Friends' recommendations	2.53	173	1.383	2.52	25	1.503	2.77	35	1.61
University's status	3.21	176	1.268	3.64	25	1.469	3.06	35	1.327
Country's status of living	3.76	177	1.212	3.92	25	1.187	3.71	35	1.202
Academic reasons	3.83	178	1.234	3.8	25	1.354	3.8	35	1.302
Improving foreign language skills	3.85	178	1.363	3.8	25	1.5	3.8	35	1.451
New acquaintances	3.47	177	1.257	3.72	25	1.308	3.34	35	1.392
Career opportunities	3.69	178	1.311	3.56	25	1.417	3.71	35	1.447
International experience	4.72	178	0.629	4.64	25	0.49	4.14	35	1.264
Professors at the home university	2.39	166	1.369	2.82	22	1.68	2.47	34	1.562
Parents	2.41	168	1.364	2.64	22	1.217	2.18	34	1.359
Mobility coordinator	2.49	168	1.389	2.59	22	1.221	2.09	33	1.071
Friends	2.94	167	1.413	2.86	22	1.39	3.09	33	1.355
Nobody	2.33	100	1.747	2.15	13	1.676	1.93	15	1.486

Note: AM - arithmetic mean, SD - standard deviation, n - valid answers.

variability within these groups. In this way, we can prove that our groups are indeed those groups that do not belong to the same population or who belong to different populations which have the same arithmetic mean. We set the threshold chosen for statistical significance at 0.05; this is the threshold set in most social surveys. We found that the international experience is the most statistically significant motivating factor with a significance level of less than 5 per cent. As stated by Cramer (2000), the F-test calculated in the framework of the analysis of variance shows only whether statistically significant differences between the surveyed variables exist, and not where these differences actually are. At the second level of testing with the ANOVA test we used different post-hoc tests. The Bonferroni correction, which is an often used post-hoc method in the framework of the analysis of variance, showed precise differences between individual classes (in our case destinations).

The Bonferroni test shows exact differences between individual categories (in our case destinations). As a motivational factor, the international experience factor has been

Table 3: Examining the differences between the destinations (Bonferroni correction)

Motivating factors	**(I) Host country**	**(J) Host country**				**95% trust interval**	
			Average difference (I-J)	**SD**	**Sig.**	**Lower limit**	**Upper limit**
International experience	Norway	Slovenia	0.079	0.159	1	-0.3	0.46
		Germany	0.576*	0.138	0	0.24	0.91
	Slovenia	Norway	-0.079	0.159	1	-0.46	0.3
		Germany	0.497*	0.195	0.034	0.03	0.97
	Germany	Norway	-0.576*	0.138	0	-0.91	-0.24
		Slovenia	-0.497*	0.195	0.034	-0.97	-0.03

Note: *The difference of arithmetic means is statistically significant with a significance level of less than 5 per cent.

found to be statistically significant with a significance rate of less than 5% in regard to a host institution's country. The test has shown a statistically significant difference for the factor international experience: as regards the decision regarding destination selection, this factor played a more important role for the surveyed students who went to Germany as compared to those who went to Norway or Slovenia. The analysis shows that according to the opinion of the students surveyed, the international experience motivational factor is statistically different with regard to the destination chosen.

6 Conclusions

Student mobility is becoming increasingly important in international higher education. Each year more and more educational institutions admit new foreign students into their programmes. The trend of growing numbers of students, countries and host institutions – at the moment over 3 million mobile students per year – shows the importance of student mobility in the current academic environment. Mobile students are an ever more important factor on the labour market.

To examine the initial hypothesis in this article, we conducted a statistical test analysis of variance (ANOVA), which showed a significant difference for the factors involved in international exchange. For students who went to Germany, the international experience factor played a more important role in their decision than for students who went to Norway or Slovenia. On the basis of our analysis, we found that according to the surveyed students' opinion, the motivating factor of destination choice statistically differs. Our hypothesis was partially corroborated. The other motivating factors did not show a statistically significant influence on the destination choice.

As a point of interest, we can present our findings concerning the mobility period and the general satisfaction of students. We examined the correlation between satisfaction and mobility period with Pearson's correlation coefficient. More precisely, we examined the correlation between the length of the mobility period and satisfaction with some individual factors (studying at the host institution, information during mobility, accommodation during mobility, support of the host institution, support of the institution of origin and mobility as a whole). We found that satisfaction and length of the mobility period are correlated; in other words, the longer the mobility period lasted, the more satisfied the students were.

In general, it can be said that the international mobility of students in higher education has great potential for further growth. This also holds true for the Slovenian higher education environment. Nevertheless, there are some grounds for caution, especially in terms of further expansion and growth. In our view, a large percentage of the surveyed students will have better chances for finding work abroad after completing a mobility programme. It would be interesting to study the employability level of mobility students at home and abroad in the future. Further research should examine the employment rate of mobile students in Slovenia as well as abroad. For further research, the authors recommend the use of even more closed-ended question or questions on a numeric scale when preparing the questionnaire. There is also a lack of studies that analyse the integrated effect on the competencies of students and the effects related with labour market.

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