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A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Student Mobility: Croatian and Hungarian Experience

Abstract

The international mobility has proven to be a valuable experience for students during the course of their university study. While some students use that opportunity, many more remain distant from it. The purpose of this paper is to discuss and compare the perception, attitudes of the students of the Faculty of Law in Osijek (Croatia) and Pécs (Hungary) towards international student mobility as well as to reveal what motive them or prevent them to take more active part in the international exchange programs. Particular attention is given to the Erasmus Programme which is conducted at both faculties yet for different length of time.

For the purpose of this paper, survey among students at the Faculty of Law in Osijek was conducted in 2010, while the survey among students at the Faculty of Law in Pécs was conducted in 2011. Since findings of international researches suggest that motivation of students is not affected by the geo-political or socio-demographic conditions, main goal is to analyse possible similarities and differences between these two student groups driven by different mobility background, such as difference in the history of exchange programs or experience with Erasmus programme which differs due to the fact that University of Pécs has been longer conducting it while the University of Osijek has recently introduced it in its academic offer.

Key words *international student mobility, survey, Erasmus program, mobility motives*

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I. Introduction

Globalization has proven to have multiple impacts on various aspects of social, political and economic life. Thus, it is not surprising that its influence can be seen in the various aspects of education, particularly when it comes to higher education. International student mobility has become one of the most evident outcome of the globalization process in higher education.¹

Positive changes can be expected within Croatia after European Union (EU) membership implementation, whereby mobility by itself is going to become more represented, while Hungary can use this benefit due to being a full member of the EU.

Mobility of students can be defined by syntagme learning mobility, which represents transitional, physical and for broad range of learning purposes, be it in organised programmes or on the learners own initiative.² Characteristics of learning mobility imply learning purpose which can have various duration. When concerning transnationality, in strengthening intercultural awareness essential is crossing geographical and national borders.³ Many students for their study choose universities abroad and usually students from developing countries go to more advanced countries with a high quality of higher education.⁴ Erasmus is the European Commission higher education training programme that enables 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year, but enables also professors who want to teach abroad. Since it started in 1987 more than 2.2 million students have participated and there is no other European Union programme that have had a success at this range. Students participation in Erasmus programme enables them to gain valuable experiences: individual development in foreign languages, acquiring skills, self-awareness, and self-reliance, bettering at this way their employability. Erasmus target is to reach 3 million students in this year (2012), and it is not inapproachable target, knowing that most of the European universities participate in the Erasmus.⁵ Erasmus also had a great contribution in modernization and better quality of European Higher Education and Bologna Process.⁶ Exceptional importance within programmes and their higher education policies are in the quality of higher education institutions and English language programmes which is an

¹See more: B. Denman, 'Globalization, Globalisation and Its Impact on International University Cooperation1', (2002), Available at: http://globalization.icaap.org/content/v2.1/04_denman.html, Accessed 01 March 2012

² Mapping University Mobility of Staff and Students, Available at: <http://www.maunimo.eu/index.php/mobility-definitions>, Accessed 20 January 2012

³ Mapping University Mobility of Staff and Students, Available at: <http://www.maunimo.eu/index.php/mobility-definitions>, Accessed 20 January 2012

⁴ U. Teichler, 'Students Mobility in the Framework of Erasmus: findings of an evaluation study', Vol. 31, No. 2., *European Journal of Education*, (1996), Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1503594>, Accessed 20 January 2012

⁵ European Commission, Education & Training, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm, Accessed 31 January 2012

⁶ Erasmus-Facts, Figures and Trends, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/higher/erasmus0910_en.pdf, Accessed 31 January 2012

important tool that international students are attracted to (Kahanec, Králiková, 2011).⁷ Numerous and various reasons motivate student to participate in Erasmus programme and study abroad. There is significant impact on a labour market mobility if studying abroad and those values come up to 15 %⁸ (Parey, Waldinger, 2007). Data that point at Erasmus as recognized programme of student mobility in EU, justify this by the fact that 32 countries took part in the Erasmus which is a part of Lifelong Learning Programme since 2007. Data of students going abroad, referring on their number in academic year 2009/10, show Spain as country that sent most students abroad (31,158 students) and was most popular destination among students (35,386 students). Mostly students of social sciences, business and law have participated in the exchange.⁹

When tracking data about Erasmus student mobility in Hungary in a period 2000 – 2010, it can be seen that increasing number of Hungarian students are going to study abroad through Erasmus programme (27,576 students) compared to foreign students showing an interest to come to Hungary through the Erasmus programme (15,198 students). However, positive trend is noted in incoming foreign students willing to study in Hungary on a basis on Erasmus programme. According to available data in year of 2000, there were only 623 foreign incoming students, while in 2010 there were 2,804 of foreign students who came to Hungary as Erasmus students.¹⁰ In the survey conducted on Faculty of Law in Pécs in 2011, an aim was to describe and compare the perception, attitudes, drivers and barriers toward Erasmus program. In 2010 the same survey was conducted at Faculty of Law in Osijek. As Hungary has been participating in Erasmus programme much longer, their experience could serve as a development and implementation template for Croatian universities. Erasmus student mobility in Croatia as a part of Lifelong Learning Programme noted in academic year of 2009/10 235 students that went to study abroad.¹¹ It is still short period for Croatia regarding its involvement in Erasmus programme. Lifelong Learning Programme started in 2007 and lasts for 7 years, till 2013, and the Programme budget for the mentioned period is about 7 milliard EUR. European Union aim is to develop through Lifelong Learning

⁷ M. Kahanec, R. Králiková, 'Pulls of International Student Mobility', IZA Discussion Paper No. 6233, (2011), Available at: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6233.pdf>, Accessed 28 January 2012

⁸ Studying abroad and international labour market mobility, Available at: <http://www.voxeu.org/index.php?q=node/6287>, Accessed 20 January 2012; See more: M. Parey, F. Waldinger, 'Studying Abroad and the Effect on International Labor Market Mobility - Evidence from the Introduction of ERASMUS, CESifo Venice Summer Institute, 18-19 July 2007, Available at: http://www.cesifo-group.de/portal/page/portal/CFP_CONF/CFP_CONF_VSI/VSI%202007/vsi07_Papers_IHE/vsi07_ihe_Parey.pdf, Accessed 09 March 2012

⁹ Erasmus-Facts, Figures, Trends, Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/higher/erasmus0910_en.pdf. Accessed 31 January 2012-01-31

¹⁰ Lifelong Learning Programme, Hungary, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/0910/countries/hungary_en.pdf, Accessed 31 January 2012

¹¹ Lifelong Learning Programme, Croatia, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/0910/countries/croatia_en.pdf, Accessed 01 February 2012

Programme european society in which sustainable economic growth and more and better workplaces can be ensured.¹² Lifelong Learning Programme is one of ways to ensure for Europe convergence to the objectives of EU Strategy 2020. EU Strategy 2020 is a way for Europe to become smart, sustainable and inclusive economy and society. Mobility of students is one of ways in becoming more adjustable to all sorts of fluctuations, from institutional to labour market caused ones. In Erasmus programme universities are responsible for securing high quality in all necessary segments and all institutions that participate in Erasmus receive certain grant depending in number of student included in Erasmus.

Concerning that Croatia is relatively short period of time in the Erasmus Programme, there are some obstacles that Croatian universities have been facing. A few of them include following: i) insufficient number of courses and study programmes in foreign languages, particular in English, ii) insufficient accommodation for foreign students on Croatian campuses, iii) possible problems with the recognition of periods of study outside of the home university due to the inexperience of Croatian teachers in this area.¹³

Even tough there may be obstacles that prevent Croatian students to get more involved in the Erasmus Programme, one should focus on identifying motives which would induce students to get more interested in such a programme. The guiding idea of this research and paper is to contribute in identifying those motives and enable students to engage in the mobility in a higher degree.

For the purpose of this paper, survey among students at the Faculty of Law in Osijek was conducted in 2010, while the survey among students at the Faculty of Law in Pécs was conducted in 2011. Since findings of international researches¹⁴ suggest that motivation of students is not affected by the geo-political or socio-demographic conditions main goal is to analyse possible similarities and differences between these two student groups driven by different mobility background, such as difference in the history of exchange programs or experience with Erasmus programme which differs due to the fact that University of Pécs

¹²Lifelong Learning Programme, Guide for 2011, Available at: http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1291986088_LL_P vodica za korisnike 2011 PART I HR final.pdf, Accessed 01 February 2012

¹³Institution profiles, Available at: http://www.stipendije.info/en/scholarships/institution_profiles/ulazak_hrvatske_u_erasmus_-_najveci_i_najvazniji_program_eu_za_razmjenu_studenata_i_nastavnika, Accessed 1 February 2012

¹⁴ L. Endrizzi, 'Student mobility: between myth and reality', Available at: http://ife.ens-lyon.fr/vst/LettreVST/english/51-february-2010_en.php, Accessed 09 March 2012

has been longer conducting it while the University of Osijek has recently introduced it in its academic offer.

II. Research methodology

As stated, two waves were conducted when concerning perception of student mobility and Erasmus programme. The first wave was conducted at the Faculty of Law in Osijek during April and May of 2010. The survey was conducted using the *Paper and pencil method* (PAPI), where students were asked to fill out the questionnaires independently, with the moderator's guidance, right before their classes. The survey was conducted as a part of the EUNICOP project. The measurement instrument consisted of 34 questions, out of which 20 questions were related to student mobility and 14 questions were related to socio-demography. While most questions have been formulated in a closed manner with the predefined answers, three questions were open-ended questions which are used to get more in-depth understanding of students' attitudes on matters asked. Except of nominal scale, predefined answers were composed of ordinal scales, using the the Likert scale (from 1 to 5 points. There were two pilot studies made. The first pilot study was conducted after setting up a draft of research questions in order to detect all possible responses; the second pilot study was conducted after the finalization of the questionnaire within the sample of 30 students. After these two pilot studies were completed, the survey remained unchanged, taking into consideration that the pilot studies have shown readable and logic questions. According to survey questions, the database for the data entry was made. Initial base consisted of 323 questionnaires. After formatting, the base was used in SPSS form and served as a basis for the cleaning process and database validation. All questionnaires that have had an incomplete content or inadequate answers were disregarded. After cleaning process and database validation final database consisted of 310 questionnaires, which were further analyzed.¹⁵

The second wave was conducted at the Faculty of Law in Pécs in 2011 by the same *Paper and Pencil method* (PAPI method). The survey has been indentially conducted as in Croatia a year before.

Thus, surveying the Hungarian students has been done in the same manner: students were asked to fill out the questionnaires independently, with the moderator's guidance. There were 400 students participating in the survey at the Faculty of Law in Pécs. After cleaning and validation process of data base, the final database consisted of 382 questionnaires which are further analyzed.

¹⁵ N. Mujić, I. Barković, M. Mikrut, B. Szabó, 'International student mobility as a driver of modern University education: Croatian and Hungarian experience with the Erasmus Program', in: T. Drinóczi, T. Takács (ed.) *Cross border and EU legal issues: Hungary-Croatia*, Faculty of Law in Péch and Faculty of Law in Osijek, Pèch-Osijek, (2011), pp. 479 – 480.

The survey results related to the Faculty of Law in Pécs obtained in 2011, are shown and discussed in the next section. In order to meet a goal of this paper, the results have been compared with the results obtained from the survey conducted at the Faculty of Law in Osijek in 2010. Comparison of results enable us to discuss the perception, attitudes, motives and barriers of Hungarian and Croatian students when it comes to the international exchange, particularly in the context of the Erasmus Programme

III. Survey results

The survey was designed to capture not only mobility and Osijek and Pécs Faculty of Law students Erasmus perception, drivers and barriers but demographic profile as well. The study included a total of 382 students. Demographic characteristics of students reveal that respondents were in the age range of 18 to 30 years, where the average age of students was 21 years. The majority of the Faculty of Law in Pécs students survey are full-time students. Detailed sample structure is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the sample by socio-demographic variables in %

Age	
18-20	44,6
21-23	49,0
24 i više	6,4
Total	100,0
Type of study	
full-time student	99,5
part-time student	,5
Total	100,0
Average grade in present study	
1	1,0
2	9,3
3	50,5
4	27,8
5	11,3
Total	100,0
Plan to continue a studying after graduation	

yes, specialist study	9,0
yes, doctoral study	18,4
no	14,9
I do not know yet	57,7
Total	100,0
Settlement size	
to 5.000 inhabitants	30,2
5.000 - 10.000 inhabitants	11,4
10.000 - 50.000 inhabitants	20,8
50.000 - 100.000 inhabitants	18,3
100.000 inhabitants and more	19,3
Total	100,0
Studying in the place of residence	
yes	25,7
no	74,3
Total	100,0
Current living	
with parents	69,3
alone	6,3
with friends	18,0
with partner	6,3
Total	100,0
Standard domestic	
standard is below the Hungarian average	3,9
standard is at the level of Hungarian average	81,8
standard is above Hungarian average	14,3
Total	100,0

Student mobility is more represented in student population if students are being a member of some university organization, not necessarily Erasmus, although the most known student mobility program. At Faculty of Law in Pécs almost 84% of respondents were members of a student organization at university level and in the same percentage, students were participating as an organization member beyond university. About 10% more, almost 95% of students were participating in some other organizational effects.

Interesting were also the percentages of students ambitious regarding the workplace they would like to work after completing their studies and getting a degree. Croatian student would mostly like to work in domestic firm in Croatia (46% of respondents), about 30% of respondents in foreign firm, but in Croatia and another 24% of respondents would like to work abroad. On the other hand, 48,1% of Hungarian students would like to work in foreign company, but abroad, almost 41% would like to work in foreign company in Hungary, and only 11,1% of Hungarian students would like to work in domestic firm, but abroad. The differences are evident and it can be seen that Hungarian students are more flexible in mobility regarding employability.

Speaking of mobility, we can assume that higher rates of student mobility would lead to higher rates of employment mobility. In the questionnaire on the question *What would motivate you to participate in the international program of exchange*, the answers were graded using the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 referred to not motivating at all, and 5 referred to very motivating. The survey results concerning motivation of student for mobility is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Motives for Involvement in the International Student Exchange Program*

	CRO	HU	Std. Deviation	Median	Mod
Benefit of employment	4,55	4,46	0,700794	5	5
Language learning	4,49	4,73	0,841783	5	5
Meeting people	4,38	4,30	0,881296	5	5
Getting to know new cultures	4,26	4,23	0,970183	5	5
Potential business contacts	4,19	4,34	0,964851	4	5
Teaching profession	4,12	4,09	0,928408	4	5
Entertainment	4,09	3,88	1,089756	4	5
Gaining independence	3,95	3,28	1,165867	4	5
Possible political contacts	3,39	2,97	1,316186	3	5

It is evident from the Table 2 that all motives scored relatively high grade. The rank for Croatia was average rating between 3,39 and 4,55 and for Hungary between 2,97 and 4,73. *Employment benefit* and *language learning*, were for both, Croatian and Hungarian students motives with grades above 4,4, meaning that these motives are motivating for them. However, differences exist. For example, the lowest importance of participation in

international exchange for Croatian students was concerning *possible political contacts* (grade 3,39) as well as for Hungarian students (2,97), but the difference in grading is evident. On the other hand, the biggest difference between these two universities is in *independence*, where difference is 0,67 of the grade. As it can be seen, independence is for Croatian students motivating (3,95), while Hungarian students are indifferent concerning this motive (3,28).

When deciding what information was necessary for students in order to decide whether to participate in an international exchange programme or not, students had to grade their answers from grades 1 to 5, where 1 meant *does not matter at all* and 5 meant *very important*. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Importance of Information Required to Make a Decision on Participation in International Exchange

	HU	CRO
Am I going alone or with a group?	4,14	3,92
What is the planned length of stay?	4,30	3,99
Do I have health insurance?	4,21	4,00
What conditions do I have to satisfy for application?	3,81	4,07
What are the criteria for an exchange student selection?	3,73	4,08
What is the language of communication?	4,26	4,18
Who covers all expenses abroad (e.g. travelling, accommodation, food)	4,30	4,22
Do I get a certificate about the participation along my diploma?	3,78	4,26
Are my student rights prolonged for a time spent in the int. exchange program?	4,36	4,38
Will I be able to pass all exams necessary for fulfilling a condition for a higher year ?	3,96	4,44
Are the passed exams recognized at (home) university?	4,05	4,45

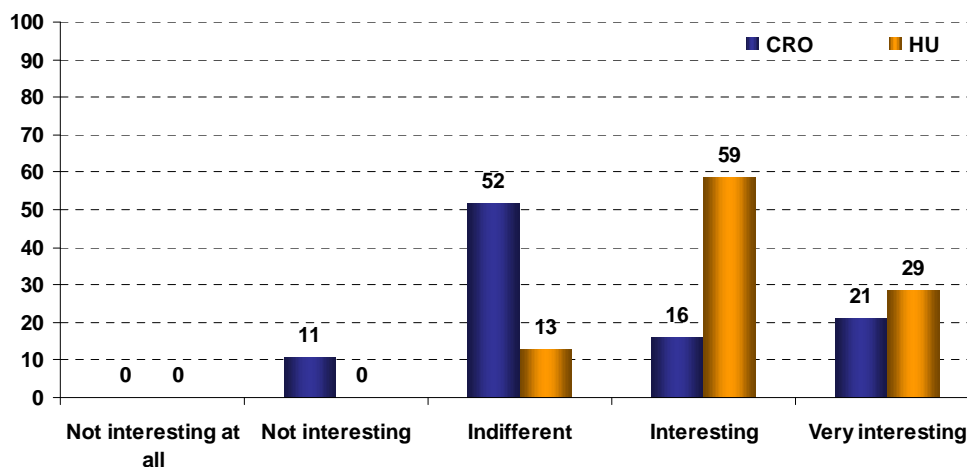
The grades were again relatively high for Croatian as well as Hungarian students. However, the most important information for Croatian students was one related to passing exams and exams being recognized at the home university (4,45), while most important information for Hungarian students was if their students' rights are going to be prolonged for a time spent abroad (4,36). The biggest difference between Croatian and Hungarian students regarding importance of information was concerning the certificate about the participation in the

mobility program, which for Croatian students was much more important (4,26) than for Hungarian students (3,78).

An important aspect of mobility programmes is the awareness of students about the existence of the programme. The percentages significantly differ. While there are only about 20% of Croatian respondents who have heard of the Erasmus programmes, there are approximately 17% of Hungarian respondents who did not hear for that programme. Hungarian students have been mostly informed about Erasmus programme through the note board (51,2%) and fellow students (33,5%). It is surprising that only 13,4% of students got the information on Erasmus programme via Internet, and a very small number of respondents indicated their professors or assistants being a source of information about the Erasmus program

When analyzing how interesting students find the Erasmus programme, it is evident that Hungarian students are much more interested in the programme than Croatian students. Regarding the question *How interesting you personally find the Erasmus program*, on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant *not interesting at all*, and 5 meant *very interesting*, almost 80% of Hungarian students were interested or very interested in the program, while Croatian students were mostly indifferent to the program (Graph 1.). One of the reasons for such a big difference can be a different tradition of these programmes in Croatia and Hungary. While the Erasmus program exists in the Hungary since 1998, it is relatively a new program in Croatia that started in 2007.

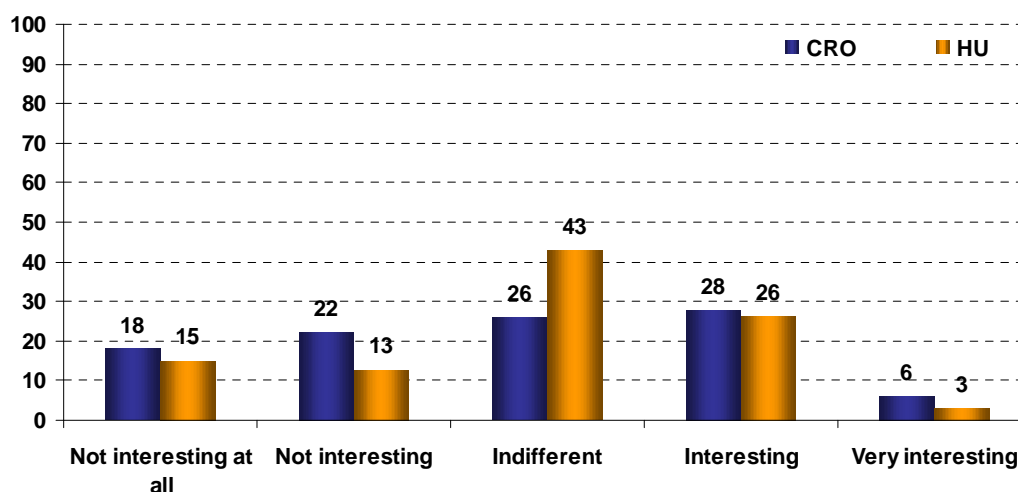
Graph 1. How interesting you personally find the ERASMUS program?



As seen in the Table 3, the length of mobility programme and planned duration of stay in another country was for Croatian and Hungarian students important, although somewhat more important for Hungarian students. Most of Hungarian students were ready to stay abroad from few days up to 3 months (44,1%), somewhat less respondents were ready to stay up to 6 months (36,5%) and the least number of respondents were willing to stay abroad more then 6 months (19,4%).

Possible Croatian/Hungarian student exchange and student mobility between these two universities is supported by the above mentioned percentage of respondents that are willing to take part in an international exchange mobility programme and to study abroad. The Graph 2 displays interests of Croatian and Hungarian student for a student exchange between two Faculties of Law in Pécs and Osijek. Regarding the question *How much are you interested in student exchange (visiting) the Faculty of Law in Pécs/Osijek*, respondents scale the grades from 1 to 5, where 1 meant *not at all*, and 5 meant *very interested*, 43% of Hungarian students and 26% of Croatian students were indifferent to the possible student exchange between these two universities, but there were over 30% of Croatian students interested in mobility program of exchange, particular participation in exchange concerning the Faculty of Law in Pécs, and something less then 30% of Hungarian student willing to participate in the exchange program, concerning the Faculty of Law in Osijek.

Graph 2. How much are you interested in student exchange (visiting) the Faculty of Law in Pécs /Osijek?



IV. Conclusion and suggestions

Student mobility is a good way for making better students competences and different ways of learning. Also, cooperation of Faculty of Law in Osijek and Faculty of Law in Pécs can be a good basis for students that have a desire to participate in the exchange programme, but still do not want to travel to far from its home, relatives and family.

Student mobility can be a good way in achieving skills necessary for labor market and better employability, because of language and social skills. Furthermore, mobility programme offers an opportunity of meeting new cultures and potential business contacts. In a certain way participation in mobility programme gains students independence.

Comparing Croatian and Hungarian students' perception, attitudes, motives and barriers, it is evident that background of mobility experience is an important part of student participation in Erasmus programme or any other student exchange mobility programme.

Information about concrete mobility programmes should be better presented to students and to be more available. Academic staff should be also included in mobility programmes as an important part of the whole programme, as well as they become in that way an important source of information about the international exchange programmes.

Students have similar motives and are looking for similar information regardless of the residence. This means that the geo-political impact is not significant at global level and there are also many similar factors that may contribute in keeping students away from involving themselves into mobility programmes. There is significant number of Hungarian students studying abroad. The number of outgoing students is rising and the strategy should be consisted of continuous enlargement of incoming students. Experience obtained through the

Erasmus program has resulted in better programme awareness in Hungary which is not surprising since Hungary has longer tradition in the Erasmus Programme. Croatia does not have such a long Erasmus tradition, but by informing its students on a right way and defining mobility programmes by academic community it certainly can be improved in a short period.

Importance of these two conducted surveys is in a fact that almost equally number of students that participated in the survey from Osijek/ Pèch show interests for Pèch/Osijek residence. In that manner exchange experience of Faculty of Law in Pèch can contribute to better promotion of the mobility in Croatia, and could be even improved through cooperation of these two Faculties.