

CASE STUDIES OF FORMER ROMANIAN ERASMUS STUDENTS

Dana Maria COPOLOVICI*, Denissa Arabela POP

Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection, "Aurel Vlaicu" University, Romania, 2 Elena Dragoi St., Arad 310330, Romania

**Corresponding author email: dana.copolovici@uav.ro*

Abstract: *Student mobility, particularly Erasmus is a programme developed by European Union in 1987 aiming to increase the educational, cultural, and social interactions between young people from different universities. Many Romanian students were involved in this programme. The present study evaluated the motivation and the impact of the study stage abroad of two Romanian former students including their human development and career evolution.*

Keywords: mobility, Erasmus, motivations, capabilities

INTRODUCTION

One of the educational exchange schemes, started by European Union in 1987, is represented by the student mobility programme Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students). This is an international programme developed to support the mobility of young students throughout European universities and successfully had an impact not only in the participant's education but also helped to democratize, stabilize and reconcile the relations between local societies (Amendola and Restaino, 2017; Aramburu, 2017; Beerkens et al., 2016; Dvir and Yemini, 2017; Klemencic et al., 2017; Martinez-Usarralde et al., 2017; Stapleton et al., 2016; Tuzun and Mede, 2016). Nowadays, Erasmus continues with Erasmus+ programme, and in the last 30 years 9 million people were involved in this programme mainly for education and training

(<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/anniversary/erasmusplus-9-million>). Many questionnaires were used by researchers to evaluate the participation into a short or long study stage abroad of the students. The barriers and drivers of the students to accept or to decline the participation in this programme is similar for students from different countries. The non-participant students from Europe indicated that they are involved in family responsibilities or work commitment, therefore it is hard for them to accept even a short study abroad (Beerkens et al., 2016). The participants in the programme indicated their initial motivation to study abroad based on: career perspectives, inter-cultural experience, availability of the Erasmus grant,

available administrative support, and a good fit of the programme (Beerkens et al., 2016; Gabaudan, 2016). Amendola et al. reported that the Erasmus experience is regarded by Italian students as very important in most of the cases, because they socialized with new cultures, increased skills and competencies, learnt foreign languages or improved their knowledge, but in some cases it was negatively appreciated because it could delay the graduation (Amendola and Restaino, 2017). The main obstacle faced by students is financial, therefore the need for extra budget for the study stage abroad is emphasized (Sin et al., 2017). (Suciu et al., 2017)

This study evaluated the motivation to study abroad in Erasmus programme and its impact to the human and career development of two students from Romania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This work focused on a case study where interviewed two formally Erasmus female students: DC and DP in order to make a descriptive analysis related to Erasmus stage period that comprise the personal experiences and achievements. This exploratory study was performed to evaluate the impact of educational programme from a foreign university during a stage of 5 months on two Romanian students in two different periods: DC 31.03.2004-31.08.2008 at Institute für Anorganische und Physikalische Chemie, Bremen University, Germany; and DP 27.01.2016-02.07.2016, Universidade do Algarve, Portugal. DC was mainly involved in research as she was PhD

student at Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, “Babes-Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca, while DP attended the second semester courses: Spirit drinks from Algarve production and analysis, Industrial microbiology, Valorisation of by-products in Anglo-Food Industries, Water and environment, Traceability and food safety, Seminar, Portuguese course as she is a master student at Faculty of Food Engineering, Tourism and Environmental Protection from “Aurel Vlaicu” University. Also we want to focus on the evolution of capabilities (possibilities) of the subjects for real life projects after the Erasmus stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main reasons of the students for choosing to study abroad is to increase the opportunities to progress in their field and to live new experiences. The young students are firstly facing with the daily life problems in a new surrounding: new accommodation, university classrooms and laboratories, professors, colleagues, etc. This process is made easily and smoothly for the students to adapt as there are people in host universities that help Erasmus students to integrate and to meet with each other's. The language classes are mandatory to be attended, therefore the vocabulary and your skills in the host country language are increased (Borghetti and Beaven, 2017). Also there are many trips organized in order to visit the host country, to learn about the culture and civilisation, but nevertheless to meet people.

DP: “What I really enjoyed was the fact that excursions were organized both inside Portugal and outside. The students were keen to participate in these excursions, and the students from the Students league organized everything up to the slightest detail. Some of the places I've visited are Lagos, Sagres, Silves, Albufeira, Cabo da Rocca, Sintra, Cascais, and Lisbon.”

These experiences are leading to attaining multicultural skills such as open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, flexibility and cultural empathy (Stapleton et al., 2016) and the interview contained, in the first part, questions from the Multicultural

Personality Questionnaire developed by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (van der Zee et al., 2013; Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000). So that, the following items were increased: attention to the other's needs, listening, appreciation of other people's stories, empathy and sympathy with others, communication, work according to a plan, work according to rules, accepting and liking routine, to try out various approaches, to find solutions, to seek people from different backgrounds, to broaden the range of interests and hobbies, to start new life easily, trendsetter in social development.

Besides the multicultural skills, the professional ones are exhibited also, as these are necessary for the job requirements, as are presented in Figure 1.

DP: “I want to tell you that homework was much more difficult than the work at the institute, as master student. After school hours, you went to the library to get the books you needed. You arrived home and you had to read and prepare the materials for the next day. Sometimes I had the impression that every day you have to work enormously so you can cope with the day ahead. All lab experiments were done individually or at most two, so you had to prepare yourself intensely. What impressed me very much is that some of the students present at the institute never complained about the high volume of work or the multitude of hours spent in the lab. My Brazilian colleagues said that what we were doing was just a small part of what they had to work in their native country”.

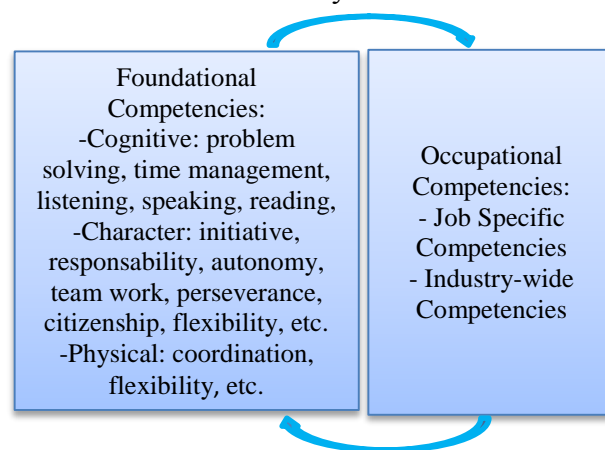


Figure 1. Competencies needed for a job requirements.

The multicultural skills are very important to be acquired during formal educational training as these will augment the person's capabilities to adapt in an international environment within a job and in a society (Figure 1). For example, DC continued to apply for other international scholarships and post-doctoral projects, meanwhile DP started to work in an international company. The students are not afraid to accept new challenges by accepting jobs in other country as well as to take into consideration the trans- and inter- disciplinarily skills needed for actual jobs.

DC: "All people, regardless of their culture or society, are the same and different, that is, the same human typologies you can meet in any international group. The probability of making friends here is much higher than at home, especially as all students find themselves in a similar situation: they are far from family and friends, they miss home, the university and all that is related to it are new, misunderstandings may arise due to language skills, etc."

Erasmus stage influenced the professional carrier of all the students, mainly in a positive pathway (Figure 1), e.g. Tiago Brandão Rodriguez, the Portuguese Minister of Education; Simona Bisboaca, a Romanian entrepreneur that develop and manufacture anti-oxidant supplements; Tania Habimana, which has a TV show in UK, etc. (<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/anniversary/>).

DP: "First of all, the Erasmus stage has enriched my resume considerably. It is very important to have internships abroad because many employers appreciate and take this into account. Second, after completing this experience, your knowledge baggage is at a much higher level."

DP: "Erasmus stage has influenced my education more than positive, it has changed my perception of education first and foremost. Education is not only about civilized behavior in society, but also about accepting that we live in a world with multiple cultural varieties and that we must accept and respect everything that surrounds us, whether we like or not. We have

benefited from all forms of education, both professionally and personally. When you return to your native country, you have the impression that everything is different, you wonder how you can stay in one place when the world is so big. Once you start to know, you are increasingly keen to visit and discover other places. Everywhere you get to change your perception of life and you cannot stay immune to things that are constantly changing around you."

DP: "Go at least once in such a mobility, regardless of the country, because the perception of life will change radically and I'm sure you will never regret this unique experience. Take the Erasmus experience as a perfect blend of hard work, fun, education, responsibility, etc."

Finally, we can state that the Romanian students appreciated the Erasmus experience, besides the attainment of multicultural skills, as well the achievement of professional capabilities, similar with that reported by Martinez-Usarralde et al. (Martinez-Usarralde et al., 2017). We name here several adaptive capabilities mentioned by these students: respect, mind-opening, efficiency, tolerance, independence, fair-play, responsibility, teamwork, empathy, problem solution, capacity to learn, negotiation, autonomy, courage, better adaptation in different environment /multidisciplinary groups, entrepreneurship, elevate resource management, use of technological competences, better communication both in native and foreign languages, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Erasmus programme is a successful educational platform that had involved during the last 30 years 9 million people. The present case study confirmed, once again, the beneficial impact of the study stage of the Romanian participants from two different universities, in diverse decades, on the future life evolution. The programme contributed to the human development and to a higher empowering of the participants, making them better prepared for the labour market.

REFERENCES

- Amendola, A., Restaino, M., 2017. An evaluation study on students' international mobility experience. *Quality & Quantity* 51, 525-544.
- Aramburu, L., 2017. Intra-European Student Mobility in International Higher Education Circuits: Europe on the Move. *International Sociology* 32, 252-255.
- Beerkens, M., Souto-Otero, M., de Wit, H., Huisman, J., 2016. Similar Students and Different Countries? An Analysis of the Barriers and Drivers for Erasmus Participation in Seven Countries. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 20, 184-204.
- Borghetti, C., Beaven, A., 2017. Lingua francas and learning mobility: reflections on students' attitudes and beliefs towards language learning and use. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 27, 221-241.
- Dvir, Y., Yemini, M., 2017. Mobility as a continuum: European commission mobility policies for schools and higher education. *Journal of Education Policy* 32, 198-210.
- Gabaudan, O., 2016. Too soon to fly the coop? Online journaling to support students' learning during their Erasmus study visit. *Recall* 28, 123-146.
- Klemencic, M., Znidarsic, M., Vavpetic, A., Martinc, M., 2017. Erasmus students' involvement in quality enhancement of Erasmus plus mobility through digital ethnography and ErasmusShouts. *Studies in Higher Education* 42, 925-932.
- Martinez-Usarralde, M.J., Pausa, J.M., Garcia-Lopez, R., 2017. The ERASMUS experience and its capacitating potential: Analysis of adaptive capabilities. *International Journal of Educational Development* 53, 101-109.
- Sin, C., Tavares, O., Neave, G., 2017. Student Mobility in Portugal: Grappling With Adversity. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 21, 120-135.
- Stapleton, A., Mecea, M., Beqiri, L., 2016. The European Union's contributions to international stability: the role of education and study mobilities. *Ai & Society* 31, 401-412.
- Suciu, S.M., Popescu, C.A., Ciumageanu, M.D., Buzoianu, A.D., 2017. Physician migration at its roots: a study on the emigration preferences and plans among medical students in Romania. *Human Resources for Health* 15.
- Tuzun, F., Mede, E., 2016. The ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility: The Perspectives and Experiences of Turkish ELT Academics. *Qualitative Report* 21, 677-694.
- van der Zee, K., van Oudenhoven, J.P., Ponterotto, J.G., Fietzer, A.W., 2013. Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: Development of a Short Form. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 95, 118-124.
- Van der Zee, K.I., Van Oudenhoven, J.P., 2000. The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire: A multidimensional instrument of multicultural effectiveness. *European Journal of Personality* 14, 291-309.