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## Globalization of Higher Education by Practice Exchange

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### Abstract

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Globalisation brings an international dimension within academic environments, concept exchange and social life per se. Therefore, the universal knowledge's heritage is remodelled and the result of this is the added value among the graduates' professions. The new world of higher education is characterised by a constant competition for status, talent and resources measured against national and international values. National and international tops determine universities to prioritize their politics and practices in order to reach a higher position in the hierarchy. The paper deals with the impact ERASMUS programmes have in Romanian education and in the academic globalisation as a strategic piece for increasing prestige, competitiveness levels and fundraising.

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**Keywords:** Education; globalisation; programmes; competitiveness; mentality; fundraising.

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization is a new and complex reality of today's world, be it known or not, no matter if we like it or not, and irrespective of our approval or rejection, in continuous expansion, comprising more and more social spaces and human destinies as we speak. The faster the speed of globalization, the less material the flows. Nowadays globalization is the main subject of debate as everything has the tendency to be organized according to the following criteria: stock exchange values, monetary values, information, communication, TV programs, multimedia, cyber culture. Globalization is a total phenomenon, involving enlarged competitions at the level of all nations, dynamicity as the spirit of the world. Individuals learn by education to become citizens of the planet, but without losing their roots and continuing to play an important role in the life of their own nation and local community. Within this framework, learning and education become the main responsible factors in forming people able to deal with this challenge now and in the future.

There are many points of view regarding the globalization of higher education. Thus, it is defined as a step towards an integrated market (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), global interconnectivity (Held et al., 1999), global system (Modelski, 2003), global society, a world without boundaries (Thai et al, 2007), materializing through a flow of technology, services and products, knowledge, people, values and ideas that transgress national boundaries (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Globalization carries out a certain type of global levelling. Globalization affects each country differently, due to the diversity of the national history, traditions, culture, priorities proper to each nation. Internationalizing higher education is one of the means through which a country responds to the impact of globalization but observes the nation's individuality at the same time.

To UNESCO, education internationalization covers all the types and means of providing higher education programs, educational services through which the students are located in a different country than the institution issuing the graduation diploma or qualification. According to Knight, it is a process with two main components – “internationalization at home” and “internationalization abroad” (Knight, de Wit, 1997). Internationalizing the campus at home presupposes strategies and approaches aimed at developing activities helping students to acquire international comprehension and intercultural skills. Internationalization abroad presupposes transnational mobility for students, teachers, programs, courses, curricula and projects. But internationalization is not a purpose in itself. The main purpose of internationalization (De Wit, 2011, p. 17) is to increase the quality of education and research.

Officially inaugurated in 1987, the Erasmus (European Community Actions for the Mobility of University Students) is the most important learning and professional formation program in the European Union, in point of mobility and cooperation at the level of higher education in Europe. Romania has become part of the European programs of cooperation in the field of education. At present, the number of their beneficiaries remains globally and relatively small, in comparison to the total population included in a form of education. Although there is a lot of interest in participating in activities associated to European programs in education, budget limitations and the lack of additional financial support schemes from the government or the local community limits the number of those accessing mobility programs. Similarly, there is an apparent lack of attraction of the higher education system in Romania in point of incoming mobilities, both for students and for the teaching staff.

The present paper deals with the impact of the Erasmus programs on the Romanian university education, in the context of globalization and internationalization of the higher education system. There have been attempts at finding the right extent to which the Erasmus programs contribute to the risk of increasing the number of high-performance Romanian students migrating to the Western educational systems, with no intention to return home.

At present, internationalization is seen as a process of improving the students' training for a globalised world, the internationalization of the curriculum, improving the academic environment and consolidating the profile of higher education institutions and their international reputation. But there is also a downside: in the academic year 2015-2016, more than 45.000 young Romanians are studying abroad, at various levels, high schools or universities, which is double than in 2007 (22.069 young people), and these numbers are increasing by about 20% every year. The top fields of study of their choice are IT, business management, media and communication, hotel management and engineering, according to the IntergralEdu statistics ([www.integralEdu.ro](http://www.integralEdu.ro)).

## **2. Methodology**

In Europe, the Erasmus Program was originally initiated by the European Commission 29 years ago, in a period when the Commission did not have an education term, the community only included 11 members and the Iron Curtain was still in place. The Program continues to have a strong impact on Europe and higher education in Europe. In 1987, 3224 students spent a part of their study program in another member state. Three million students did the same in the next 25 years, and the number of the countries involved in the project grew from 11 to 33, including non-EU countries such as Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The budget of the program was 3.1 billion Euros for the period 2007-2013. In 2012-2013, almost 270000 students across Europe participated in the Erasmus exchange program.

The information used for the empirical analysis was collected from the site of the Ministry of Education and Research of Romania, the National Office of Study Scholarships Abroad (O.N.B.S.S.), the PLOTEUS portal implemented with the assistance of the European Commission, reports of the European Commission on the Erasmus+ programs, as well as the data declared by the participating universities, in view of classifying universities and hierarchising study programs published in May 2011.

The limitations of this study derive from the fact that in Romania there is no national database for the students benefiting from a mobility period. There are many reports, studies and statistical series based on various definitions of mobility according to different categories of students.

## **3. Results**

The ERASMUS program has operated in Romania since 1998, according to Decision no. 2 of the EU-Romanian Association Council in September 1997. Erasmus+ is the new program of the European Union in the field of education formation, youth and sport, to take place in 2014 –2020. The program continues the activities in the program before (Lifelong Learning, which took place within 2007 - 2013), integrating a series of prior distinct programs and actions: Gruntvig, Erasmus, Comenius,

Leonardo da Vinci, Youth in action, Erasmus Mundus, Alfa, Edulink, Jean Monnet and the sports programs.

By means of this program, students have the possibility to spend a year in another country, either to study or to perform an internship in an enterprise. The participants do not pay tuition fees to the host university and receive a grant to cover the costs of living abroad. In 2015 the sum allotted for financing was 55.419.795 Euros for 709 projects: 481 mobility projects, 220 strategic partnerships and 8 structured dialogue projects. In 2016 Romania's budget for the Erasmus+ program is 57,728,545 Euros, out of which 43,163,595 Euros for mobility projects, 13,839,774 Euros for strategic partnerships and 275,176 Euros for structured dialogue projects for young people (www.riuf.ro).

Erasmus is aimed at university students and teaching staff, other personnel members in higher education and businessmen.

In the academic year 2011-2012, the number of outgoing students that benefited from a mobility was 25.962 students (UNESCO Statistic Institute). Before Romanian joined the EU, there were 21.785 students leaving the country to study abroad for an entire academic cycle. Since 2009, the number of people studying a whole academic cycle abroad rose steadily, reaching in 2013 almost 26.000 students.

Most students leaving with study and placement mobilities belong to the licence cycle. But lately there was a slight increase of the number of master's students benefiting from SMS and SMP mobilities. The numbers per cycle are similar for the two types of mobilities, although one should mention that there is a higher number of PhD candidates participating in placement mobilities.

**Table 1.** Erasmus mobilities per study cycle (outgoing) de

Study mobilities (SMS)						
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Licence	2.569	2.410	2.274	73.3%	71.3%	71.7%
Master	889	936	890	25.4%	27.7%	28.1%
Doctorate	45	34	8	1.3%	1.0%	0.3%
Placement mobilities (SMP)						
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Licence	707	842	842	64.2%	70.3%	70.3%
Master	343	315	315	31.2%	26.3%	26.3%
Doctorate	51	40	40	4.6%	3.3%	3.3%

Source: The National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Professional Formation, MECS, 2015

Within 2005-2013 the number of foreign students enrolled in different Romanian universities rose steadily from 10.722 in 2005, reaching in the academic year 2012-2013 19.308 students. Out of these, almost half are students enrolled in governmental programs destined for Romanian ethnics.

According to the data provided by the Ministry of National Education, in the academic year 2012-2013 student mobilities (incoming) are shown in the table below:

**Table 2.** Student mobilities (incoming) academic year 2012-2013

Academic year 2012 - 2013	Licence	Master	Doctorate	Specialised courses + residency
Foreign students	10.168	434	301	488
Romanian ethnics	7.277	1.029	99	257
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.445</b>	<b>1.463</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>745</b>

#### **4. Discussions**

Notwithstanding the number of students benefiting from mobilities, the impact of the Erasmus program was on the internationalization and reform of the higher education system. Erasmus opened the way to the reform of higher education in Europe by the Bologna Process, a pilot episode for the study scheme based on transferable credits (ECTS), initiating the opening of central and Eastern European countries in the context of joining the EU, as it still does for the states aspiring to join. The program has stimulated national governments, as well as the institutions of higher education, into developing European and international strategies.

Inter-university cooperation is based on changing conceptions, accumulating new knowledge, ideas and experience leading to a change of life for the better (Bisthoven, 2009). As a result, higher education institutions are encouraged and supported to assume the role of engines of change in society, to contribute to development in general and reducing poverty in particular.

AU (The International Association of Universities) acknowledges the key-role of higher education in the general process of achieving durable development. The leaders of higher education institutions, the academic and administrative community, students, as well as other interested parties may contribute to durable development.

Following the revolution of 1989, when borders were opened, the fascination of going abroad swept across Romania. Young people with a good knowledge of foreign languages and not only have especially benefited from this opening. Developing international programs, academic partnerships, providing international students with programs all over the world, the desire of universities to go up in tops, have led to the accelerated globalization of the Romanian higher education. Thus, we cannot precisely determine when this process started, but it included the entire university elite.

Although on the increase, in comparison to the number of students in the population, Romania was last but one in the relative student mobility rate during the Lifelong Learning program among the member states of the European Union. It is because mobilities are insufficiently funded, both for students and the teaching staff. More often than not, the family also has to contribute financially to support the beneficiary of a mobility. When the national gross salary is almost 300 Euros, the lack of additional governmental or regional financial support schemes drastically limits the number of people accessing the mobilities.

The Erasmus Program of the European Union has a considerable impact on the students accessing it. Graduates with international experience have a much better chance on the labour market. The likelihood that they should be affected by long-term unemployment is reduced by half, as compared to the young people who have not studied or benefited from scholarships abroad; five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23 % lower (European Commission, The Erasmus Impact Study). The Erasmus program not only improves career perspectives, but also helps students enlarge their horizon and social bonds. The drawback of the education internationalization is the exodus of endowed young people to developed countries, with no wish to return.

Personnel mobility witnessed a markedly positive dynamics in 2007-2013. Romania ranked among the most rapidly developing countries in the Erasmus program (together with Slovenia, Poland,

Luxembourg, Turkey and Liechtenstein). France was the main source of incoming teaching staff, followed by Turkey, Hungary and Germany.

Also, universities benefited from the partnerships that took place within LLP. These benefits were connected to: the institutional image (including better recognition among European institutions with a similar specialty), improving the teaching activity (both aspects of personal development of the participants and curriculum improvement) and developing long-term cooperation. Many of these opportunities refer to the institutional dimension (participating in various consortiums, accessing projects funded by European money aiming at international partnerships, diversifying partners, cooperation to develop double-diploma programs, organizing conferences, workshops and other activities) and the individual dimension of the teaching staff (by involvement in various professional networks, experience exchanges, competitiveness increase) and the educational process (teaching cooperation) or research (common projects, shared use of research infrastructure, organising scientific activities).

The 2008 crisis brought about the decrease of funding in education and affected various countries in different manners. Thus, in the last decade the perception regarding internationalization have quickly changed (Egron-Polak, 2012). The most remarkable changes in point of internationalization perception are as follows:

- Passing from cooperation to “develop skills“ to cooperation to develop alliances in order to get ahead in the global competition;
- Shifting from providing international students access to new programs all over the world to focussing on intelligence migration in the world;
- Shifting from solidarity based on academic partnerships to strategic partnerships based on economic and geopolitical objectives;
- Tendency of higher education institutions to lay more stress on prestige and position in hierarchies– a formal approach – than on giving students value added international experience.

## **5. Conclusions**

More than the number of students benefiting from mobilities, the impact of the program is on internationalization and the reform of higher education. Erasmus paved the way to the reform of higher education in Europe through the Bologna Process, the pilot for the study scheme based on transferable credits (ECTS) and initiated the opening towards the countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of joining the EU, as well as the countries aspiring to join the EU. It has stimulated both national governments, as well as the higher education institutions to develop European and international strategies.

In order to achieve durable development by means of the durable development of higher education, prestigious universities should contribute to consolidating the competence of universities in developing countries, and the quality standards remitted to these countries should not be below those in developed countries. They should support the development process, not exploit this market. Unfortunately we are witnessing the fact that all universities in developing countries have to face the externalisation of benefits and an internalisation of costs because of the grey matter exodus. It may be said that the ever

wider gap between the rich and the poor is gradually turning into a gap between the educated and the uneducated.

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