

# Benefits of Participation in the Erasmus Programme. Opinion of the Polish students

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*Abstract – The article shows the results of a study on the benefits of the Erasmus Programme which was performed with the technique of the individual interviews.*

Key words – Bologna Process, higher education, academic mobility, Erasmus Programme, interview, student.

## I. Introduction

The biggest impulse for a development of the international education was Bologna Process in the result of big changes occurred to the European higher education system. The main objective that had been specified in the Bologna Declaration [1] was setting up the European higher education area and promoting the European higher education system all around the world. One of the principal goals of the Bologna Process was to support the mobility between the different academies which was accomplished majorly. The best argument for this mobility is that in the Erasmus Programme had participated nearly three million of people.

International student exchange is the largest group of the mentioned academical mobility. The best known and the biggest among them is the Erasmus Programme [2]. That is why we decided to ask the Polish students about their opinion about taking part in such initiatives. We checked it by the individual interview technique which we believe is the fundamental in behavioral sciences and the best quality way to get the information.

The point of the elaboration was to recognize the biggest benefits of the academical mobility especially the Erasmus Programme and for their future as professionals. Questioned group are the students who have been abroad studying for at least one semester taking part in the mentioned Erasmus.

## II. Examining the benefits of the Erasmus Programme

Process of individual interviewing consisted following stages: arranging an interview, setting up the date, realization, technical expertise of the materials and its quality analyzing. Questioned person needed to answer for overall questions about himself, his opinion and also his thoughts about the programme. All the questions asked about the quality of it didn't have any representative meaning.

Since 20<sup>th</sup> of April until 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 ten interviews have taken place. We examined and questioned ten students which eight of them were women and two of them were men. Six of the respondents were students of the third year degree, three of the fourth year, and one of

the fifth year. At the moment they are studying on the following courses: International economic relations (five), Management studies (two), Tourism economy (two), Society politics(one). During the Erasmus they have been studying in the following countries: Austria (two), Netherlands (two), Germany (two), Belgium (one), France (one), Slovenia (one) and Spain (one).

During assembling the documents to take part in any of the programs you are obliged to provide certain documents, which can cause different kind of difficulties, for example with the lack of the information about the rules, the order of the applications, filling out the questionnaire. The most important role in this process obviously plays the person that is responsible for coordination of the paperwork. Fifty percent of the questioned people didn't have any problems with applying for the Erasmus Programme.

*R. 8. I didn't have any problems with applying for the project, I found all necessary information on my university website.*

Although the other half of the questioned was complaining about the big amount of the documents required or lack of the availability of example forms which was probably the reason of the programme change from "LLP/Erasmus" to "Erasmus+".

*R. 6. When I was applying for the Programme to take part in it, there was no form for Erasmus+ that's why at the beginning I had filled the old form first and after that I still had to fill the new form. Also I was trying to get the signature of my studies promotor, what finally was pointless.*

*R. 4. I think that the biggest problem with it is the bureaucracy.*

In the opinion of the respondents is not hard to get chosen to the Erasmus Programme because there is not a big competition. Nearly everyone who provided all required documents and passed the test from the language that lectures will be taking place is eligible to go for a semester abroad. However in the student's opinion is harder to be chosen to the British or Spanish university rather than to Slovenia or Lithuania.

*R. 3. It is not difficult at all to be chosen for programme. To be honest I was surprised that the people are mostly afraid of going abroad for studying. There are not so many applicants or they are changing their minds in the middle of the application process, so in fact it leaves space for the people who really want to go to study abroad.*

*R. 6. No it's not hard to join the programme, you should pass the language test which in my opinion is not really a tough challenge, and there is enough spaces so it doesn't extend the amount of people applying. Even if you don't get chosen on the first go there is always a reserve list.*

Before going for studying in a different country, many student are in doubt, mostly mentioned is the language barrier and the lack of ability to communicate in the different language. In addition many of them have a problem with accommodation, passing the exams, financial problems or adjust to a new society in the new place of study.

**R. 1.** *I was afraid that I will not meet anyone interesting, that I will not adjust to the requirements and also I was afraid that I will not pass my tests, because at home everything is in my national language and there everything is in English...*

We noticed that in reality all students' problems overlapped with their doubts before. One of the most common difficulties was public speeches in a different language.

**R. 7.** *Yes, I was nearly the only one who was studying not in English but in French. I had difficulties with French because I was going for the courses with French and Belgian students only, which every one of them knew the language perfectly. The lecturers treated me like a native which was really difficult for me. They didn't treat me leniently like the others.*

**R. 5.** *Everything was very fluent, giving the appropriate documents, choosing the lectures, university got us the accommodation, the fact that I didn't like that in the application form I had inhabitancy booked since September until February but the university booked it for me since August until January I couldn't come in August but still I had to pay for that.*

We have also asked the people about their positive and negative experiences during the expedition. Among the positives they mentioned international society, especially meeting the different people from the other cultures. Possibility to improve the language, system of education organized in a different way and also the methods of teaching focused on a practice more than on theory, small groups of students, good organization for Erasmus students, as well as bonuses from being a student.

Negative comments list is much shorter for example difficult system to adjust in a few situations, much paperwork to fill, and after finishing the lectures, not enough contact with the native speaker on the home university.

**R. 9.** *I liked the method of conveying the knowledge, the organization of the lectures, what I didn't like was the fact that after coming home I have been waiting for 3 months for the documents.*

**R. 8.** *I noticed a fact that all the lectures were organized in a small groups what allowed us to revise much more than usually but what I didn't like was that I needed to pass the test every 7 weeks because the academical year last four semesters.*

On the responders opinion we can assume that the most important goals like individual development of the student and his professional career, meeting other cultures, traditions and habits are accomplished. Students especially pay attention for the skills like communication, self-reliance, self-confidence improvement of language skills, breaking the language barrier, working in the international team as well as wider look for their professional career.

**R. 10.** *I improved my English and learnt how to cooperate in the multi-cultural team.*

**R. 3.** *I became more open-minded person, finally I could run the conversation fluently. Before Erasmus I was living with my parents in Poznan, now I can run things my way, I learnt how to organize my spare time and myself.*

Interviewers pointed that they can use the knowledge and skills in the future decision about choosing a job, specialization. It will help a lot while travelling, job interview writing a bachelor. All the students believe that these skills will be a major thing in a finding a job of their dreams. Some of them straight after coming from Erasmus Programme have got a few job offers from different employers.

**R. 6.** *I am already using the skills and the knowledge that I learnt while being on a project for writing my bachelor, working in an international team taught me to not stress during presentations in English, so I became more confident person. Many opportunities to learn different languages, to see different point of view and different opinions about the world, work etc. I got used to deadline, schedules and that you need to be responsible for you time, but the most important skill I think is the ability to cooperate. I became a team player.*

Nearly all of the student's expectations about the project have been met and for some of them it was even far over the expectations. They succeed in their plans, only two from the asked people were unsatisfied with the services of Erasmus because they were sure to take a little bit more from the project as a whole. All of them though agreed that if they were given a chance they would take part in such project once again. Four of asked students are applying second time for it and they are hardly recommending the initiative to their friends.

**R. 2.** *Yes, Erasmus is my greatest adventure during my studies.*

**R. 7.** *Yes, because it's a great fun and one of my best life experiences.*

## Conclusion

The results of Erasmus Programme and the opinion of the students give us certitude that this kind of movement between the academies gives people massive opportunities for individual progress, finding the best way in their lives and shows them different methods of teaching, and above all of this possibility to know different cultures, traditions and improve their own language skills which can be useful in their future careers, definitely helping them in being successful in life.

## References

- [1] Deklaracja Bolońska. Szkolnictwo wyższe w Europie, 19 czerwca 1999 r., Bolonia.
- [2] Erasmus+, 2015, O programie Erasmus+, <http://erasmusplus.org.pl/> [access: 05.02.2015].