

The Macrotheme Review

A multidisciplinary journal of global macro trends

ERASMUS STUDENTS – The New Tourism Force

Matina Durovic and Sonja Lovrentjev
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Abstract

During the last few decades more and more students are joining ERASMUS programme. Students are leaving their permanent residences and staying abroad for a several months. During that time their family, relatives and friends are traveling to visit them. Considering the amount of students joint in ERASMUS programme, the number of people who are “following them” is significant. This brings a relatively new and unexplored field of tourism. This paper discuss tourist who are visiting ERASMUS students at the destination, using accommodation like hotels and hostels as well as other segments of tourist offer such as restaurants, museums, galleries etc. Furthermore this paper emphasizes the importance of ERASMUS student as a promoter of the culture and destinations during their program and after. In order to empirically research this topic, method used in this paper is an on-line questionnaire distributed on social networks as well as paper form of questionnaire aiming ERASMUS students staying in Prague, Czech Republic during summer semester of 2014/2015 academic year. The results are showing a strong impact of ERASMUS students on tourist trips of their family, relatives and friends. This can be considered as a new tourist phenomenon, which should get more attention from the tourist boards of destinations as well as scholars and experts in the field of tourism.

Keywords: ERASMUS students, Tourist trip, Promoting destination

1. Erasmus program

The Erasmus programme is an integral part of the European Lifelong Learning Programme, developed in 1987 to facilitate cooperation between individual universities and enrich students' opportunities for exchanging cultural, professional and personal experience in Europe each year. It provides a platform for further cooperation between universities and various other organisations and companies.

The Programme is named after the humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536) who travelled Europe, from Paris to Cambridge to expand his knowledge and gain new insights. Erasmus is also acronym meaning *Eu*Ropean community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

The program supports co-operation actions between higher education institutions across Europe. Currently the following countries are participating in the Lifelong Learning Program: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France,

Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Republic of Macedonia.

The program caters not only for students, but also for professors and business staff who want to teach abroad and for university staff who want to be trained abroad (European Union 2015.). The objectives of program aim to:

1. Achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, while ensuring equality of opportunity for male and female students as regards participation in such mobility;
2. Promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities;
3. Harness the full intellectual potential of the universities;
4. Strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States;
5. Ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra - Community cooperation (Council of Ministers, 1987).

In order to participate in the program, students must be enrolled in an accredited Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, or Doctoral Degree study program at a university that is participating in the Erasmus program for at least one year. The length of internship program ranges from three months to a whole academic year and do not pay extra tuition fees to the university that they visit. Also they can apply for a special Erasmus grant to cover additional costs.

There are three types of activities that student can choose:

- Study Stays allow students to participate in academic activities at partner universities abroad for the duration of one or two semesters;
- Internships offer students an opportunity to work for an international company, educational or research centre or any other qualified organization for the duration of 3 to 12 months;
- Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) - provide students with a unique opportunity to study a less widely spoken language prior to the commencement of the study stay for duration of a maximum of 6 weeks.

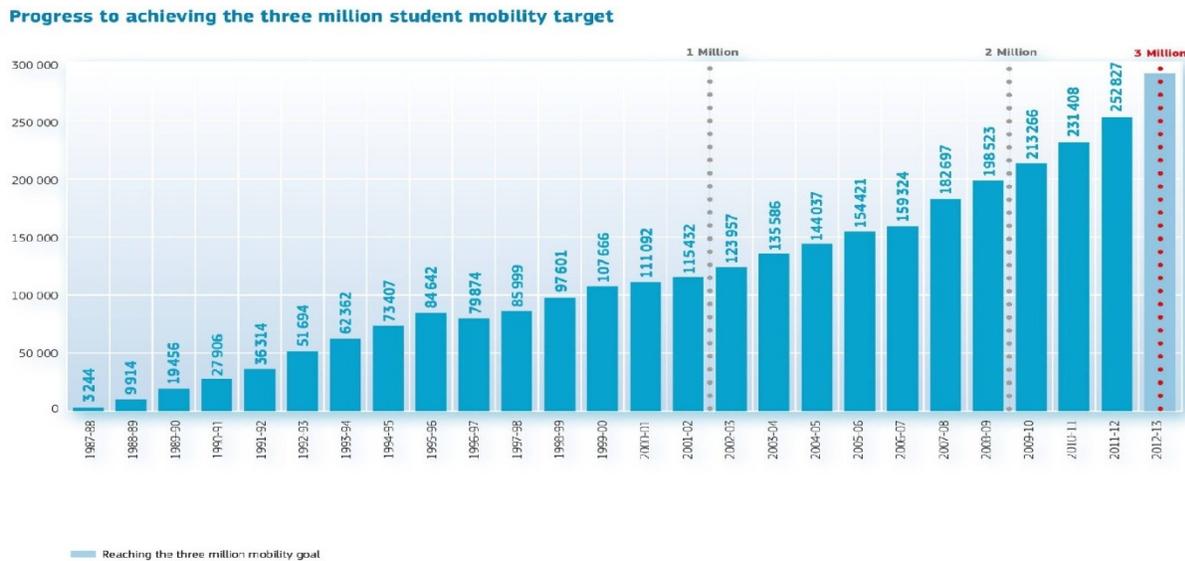
During the program each individual has an opportunity for professional and personal development. Some authors (e.g., Daly 2011; Findlay et al. 2010; Gonzalez et al. 2011; Keogh and Russel-Roberts 2009; Pyvis and Chapman 2007; Teichler 2004; Van Hoof and Verbeeten 2005) have identified in their research major benefits of Erasmus program such as:

- To learn a foreign language
- To experience and appreciate different cultures
- To increase their self-confidence
- To get a new horizons
- To grow as a person
- To learn academic or profession-specific skills
- To experience adventure
- To have a good time

- To travel as key motivators to stimulate international students' exchange

The number of students involved in the Erasmus program is increasing each year more and more. Since the program has been launched in 1987, the number of participants has reached three million. The Erasmus figures that the European Commission published in 2013 also show that the program has enabled more than 250 000 Erasmus students to spend part of their higher education studies abroad or to take up a job placement with a foreign company in 2011-2012, which is an increase of 7.5% compared to 2010-11. Assuming that the average study duration in higher education institutions is 4-5 years, it can be estimated that around 4.5% of all European students received Erasmus grants at some stage during their studies.

Chart 1: Number of Erasmus students per year 1987/88- 2011/12



Source: (European Commission 2013b).

The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) and the World Youth Student Educational Travel Consideration (WYSE), indicated that for young travellers, the single most important motivation was “discovering other cultures” (Richards 2007:15). Erasmus students often choose to study abroad because they personally want to experience things they have previously only heard or read about, so they choose the places that are particularly interesting to them and which they want to get to know. While they are at the destination, they want to explore the culture, places and they do that in various ways: sightseeing, meeting the local community, partying and shopping. They take different roles during their stay from student to visitor and at the end as a host for families and friends who are on the visit.

2. Methodology

In order to research traveling habits of ERASMUS students while on student exchange, as well as the traveling habits of their family and friends a questionnaire was created. The questionnaire was distributed online among ERASMUS students in Prague. Several groups on social network were contacted, such as ERASMUS in Prague 2014/2015, Erasmus Prague 2014/2015, Erasmus in Prague SUMMER 2015 in order to find adequate respondents. The members of these groups are

students engaged in ERASMUS program in summer semester 2014/2015 studying in Prague, Czech Republic. The survey was conducted in the April of 2015 on total sample of 126 students. For analysing results descriptive statistics were used.

In order to explore the influence of ERASMUS students, several assumptions were made. First of them is that students will keep or develop their traveling habits while participating in exchange program. Students were questioned about their traveling habits in the last two years and while there are on the program. It was expected that students would travel during the exchange program at least as they did in the last two years.

The following assumption was that friends and families of participating students are coming to destination to visit them. Students were questioned about visits they had or will have from their families and friends. It was assumed that most of students will have visit without regards of resident country in terms of economic situation and distance from resident city and city where they are participating in the exchange program.

And finally, it was expected that students will be willing to promote the destination during and after their stay in exchange programs. Students were questioned about activities they did with their family and friends during their visit. It was assumed that students will promote culture in destination and emphasise tourist attractions while spending time with family and friends who are visiting them. Furthermore, after finishing their exchange program and going back home they will promote the destination among others who haven't visited them.

3. Results

Total sample of 126 students (n=126) participated in the survey. 93 (73.8%) were female and 33 (26.2%) male students. Ratio of respondents does not imply the share of female and male students but rather shows that women are more likely to participate in the questionnaire surveys (Curtin et al., 2000, Moore & Tarnai, 2002, Singer et al., 2000). The respondent's ages are between 19 and 31 with mean 22.71. Students can participate in the exchange program at three levels of education and 46.8% (59) is participating at undergraduate level (bachelor), 45.2% (57) at graduate level (master) and 8.7% (11) at postgraduate level.

The majority of students, 97.6% have received scholarship for their exchange program for all months spent abroad (84.9%) or just partly (12.7%). 58.7% (74) of them is participating just for one semester and 41.3% (52) is staying the whole academic year in the place of current residence. Students could rent a bed in dormitories provided by universities (55.6%) or rent a flat or a room in a flat with other students or working young people (46%).

When asked about experiences and sightseeing, students responded as following: 94.4% said they got to know local culture in a sense of local food, local festivals and similar. 65.9% of students met local people and through them got to know the local specialists and culture. 97.6% of students claimed they visited major cultural sights in Prague, 91.3% went to the restaurant with traditional food. Furthermore students showed less interest, but still high in galleries (50%) and museums (62.7%). This shows relatively high level of involvement in local culture and cultural attractions in the destination. While having the visit from their relatives or friends, students will take them to the traditional restaurants (69%), museum or gallery (23.8%) and they will buy some souvenirs (69%). Students will take them for a sightseeing tour (98.4%) and family and friend will explore and enjoy tourist experience in destination.

According to the survey results, almost all students had a visit from their family or friends (97.6%) during the time they spent abroad, in Prague. More than half of students (64.3%) claimed that their families and friends stayed in a hotel, hostel or other paid accommodation unit. The duration of stay was mostly longer than 3 days (66.6%). This is noteworthy information considering that most visits to ERASMUS students are exceeding the tourist average length of stay. According to the Czech statistical office, average length of stay in 2014 was 2.4 nights, 2.5 for foreign tourists. Taking into account the length of stay and activities that would be taken part in, the contribution to over-all inbound tourism is substantial.

Regarding the traveling habits before joining the Erasmus program, students travelled couple of times a year with average expenditure between 101 and 300 EUR. In the survey 96% of students indicated that they travel and explore the country of current residence and neighbouring countries while they are on the program. When looking at the results and comparing with numbers before participating in the program, the number is notably higher. The following table 1. Student's travels before and during the program shows the distribution of traveling before and during the participation in the exchange program. Table 2. Student's expenditure shows an average expenditure per trip before and during the participation in the exchange program.

Table 1. Student's travels before and during the program

	Just a visit	1 - 3 days	Over 3 days
Before	3.2% (4)	31% (39)	72.2% (91)
During	12.7% (16)	69.8.% (88)	27% (34)

Table 2. Student's expenditure

	Up to 100 EUR	101 – 300 EUR	Over 301 EUR
Before	20.6% (26)	61.1% (77)	27% (34)
During	45.2% (57)	53.2% (67)	7.1% (9)

The data clearly shows some changes in traveling habits of ERASMUS students. More students are traveling while participating in the program than when they are at home. Trips are shorter and one-day tour visit has increased. The lower average expenditure per trip is understandable in context of shorter trips. The majority of ERASMUS students are traveling out of the country of their current residence (81.7%). They are mostly traveling to the neighbouring countries.

Finally, 75.4% of students would come back to the Prague for holidays. Even higher number of students 88.1% would recommend to their family and friends to visit Prague.

4. Conclusion

This paper gave an introduction to new tourism force – ERASMUS students. Those students are eager for new experiences, new knowledge and by traveling and studying abroad for certain period they are not just exploring destination but they are attracting others to come to visit them to that destination. They are a new tourism force and important promotion tool, which each destination needs to recognize and take the opportunity to benefit from it.

The online survey was conducted on students participating in exchange program in summer semester 2014/2015 in Prague, Czech Republic. Results of survey are showing that students do have traveling habits and while they are on the program they are continuously developing them. While they are on the program they travel but trips are relatively shorter and mostly one day tour or if visiting some neighbouring country they stay up to three days with average expenditure up to 300 EUR. The trips are mostly out of the Czech Republic. Moreover, the survey showed some very interesting facts about the ERASMUS students. They are interested in exploring local culture by visiting museums, historical monuments, but as well tasting local food. Students are visiting traditional restaurants, museums and galleries and meeting local people in order to get to know the culture of the place of their temporary residence. Furthermore, while they are in the program, they have a visit from their relatives and friends. More than half of visitors are staying in paid accommodation units and they are sightseeing Prague, visiting local traditional restaurants, museums and galleries. Additionally, they are staying longer than average tourist in Prague. ERASMUS students themselves would definitely or most probably like to come back to the Prague for holidays. Also the majority of students would recommend to their families and friends to visit Prague. All those results are showing that ERASMUS students are taking important part of total tourism travels. Students who are studying abroad are reason for many people's travel and visit to the destination. Even after the exchange program, students are continuing to promote the destination at their place of permanent residence causing more people to travel. Considering the amount of students participating in ERASMUS program over the Europe their power shouldn't be overlooked. With such aim, the Erasmus program is becoming a new tourism force. The future research should be focused on student's needs and preferences in order to prepare the destination for the best possible utilization of this tourist trend.

Reference List

- Council of Ministers. (1987). *Council decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European community action scheme for the mobility of university students (ERASMUS)*. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31987D0327:EN:HTML>. Accessed April 6th, 2015.
- Curtin, R., Presser, S., & Singer, E. (2000). The effects of response rate changes on the index of consumer sentiment. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(4), 413–428.
- Daly, A. (2011). Determinants of participating in Australian university student exchange programmes. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 10(1), 58–70.
- European Commission (2012). Erasmus programme in 2011-12: the figures explained. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-647_en.htm Accessed April 7th, 2015.
- European Union. (2014). *Erasmus fact, figures and trends*. http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/statistics/ay-12-13/facts-figures_en.pdf. Accessed 12 April 2015.

- Findlay, A. M., King, R., Geddes, A., Smith, F., Stam, A., Dunne, M., & Ahrens, M. (2010). Motivations and experiences of UK students studying abroad: *BIS Research Paper No. 8. Dundee, England: University of Dundee*.
- Gonzalez, C. R., Mesanza, R. B., & Mariel, P. (2011). The determinants of international student mobility flows: An empirical study on the Erasmus programme. *Higher Education*, 62(4), 413–430.
- Keogh, J., & Russel-Roberts, E. (2009). Exchange programmes and student mobility: Meeting student's expectations or an expensive holidays. *Nurse Education Today*, 29(1), 108–116.
- Moore, D. L., & Tarnai, J. (2002). Evaluating nonresponse error in mail surveys. In: Groves, R. M., Dillman, D. A., Eltinge, J. L., and Little, R. J. A. (eds.), *Survey Nonresponse*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 197–211.
- Pyvis, D., & Chapman, A. (2007). Why university students choose an international education: A case study in Malaysia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(2), 235–246.
- Richards G. (2007) "Introduction: Global Trends in Cultural Tourism", in Richards, G. (ed.) *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 1-19
- Singer, E., van Hoewyk, J., & Maher, M. P. (2000). Experiments with incentives in telephone surveys. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(2), 171–188.
- Teichler, U. (2004). Temporary study abroad: The life of ERASMUS students. *European Journal of Education*, 39(4), 395–408.
- Van Hoof, H. B., & Verbeeten, M. J. (2005). Wine is for drinking, water is for washing: Student opinions about international exchange programs. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9(1), 42–61.