

## WHO ARE STUDENTS WITH INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES? THE CASE OF THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES\*\*

**Abstract.** *The Erasmus programme advocates short-term student mobility in order to broaden educational experience. Longitudinal trends at the University of Ljubljana show how the Erasmus programme's popularity is rising for incoming students, while for outgoing ones it remains the same or is decreasing. In both cases, Erasmus students seem to be a privileged minority. The article presents the results of a quantitative online survey conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences, analysing the students' social background, parental education, and career ambitions. The article shows to what extent institutionalised student mobility is a leveller of the social inequalities found in other studies.*

**Keywords:** *Institutional student mobility, social status, future careers, Erasmus students, non-Erasmus students*

### Introduction

The Erasmus programme advocates and promotes temporary student mobility in order to broaden students' educational experience, improve their international understanding, expand and improve their foreign language skills, and prepare them for the world of work in which these skills are expected to play an increasing role (Teichler and Janson, 2007). According to several studies (e.g. Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006; Ballatore and Ferede, 2013), Erasmus students tend to be privileged students who have better access to study abroad because of their stronger financial opportunities. On the other hand, students who decide to study abroad also have some other characteristics which distinguish them from non-Erasmus students: they tend to be more open to moving abroad for work and more open to learning new languages. In this sense, some findings support the

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\*\* The authors received public financial support from research grants P5-0136 and P5-0399 administered through the Slovenian Research Agency.

idea that “the program participation is used to signal privilege and should be understood as a way to mark distinction” (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 525). The purpose of this article is namely to explore if the same also applies to students at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana (FSS-UL). Since we know little about the students who choose to study abroad, we conducted exploratory analyses in order to understand their main motivations for deciding to study abroad, what is important for their future, and what is their social, economic and cultural character.

In this article, we first examine longitudinal trends of the popularity of the Erasmus programme at the University of Ljubljana, showing the trends of rises and falls in the number of students who decide to either move or study away from home, as well as in the number of students who decide to undertake a study exchange in Ljubljana. For this purpose, official data from the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Social Sciences are used. On a second level, the aim of this article is to identify the social and economic background of the Erasmus students at the FSS-UL and their career aspirations. In particular, we examine specific social, economic and cultural differences between mobile and non-mobile students. A large-scale study of more than 21,000 Erasmus and non-Erasmus students (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 526) found financial constraints being cited as the most important reason for non-participation. Using parental occupation, education, and income to capture socio-economic status, Souto-Otero (2008) found that on average those who participated in Erasmus in 2004/2005 came from socially more privileged backgrounds. In our study, we also present the results of a quantitative online survey on a sample of Erasmus and non-Erasmus students, analysing their social background, parental education, cultural competencies and future career ambitions. By comparing two groups of students – Erasmus and non-Erasmus – the article seeks to ascertain to what extent institutionalised student mobility can be perceived as a leveller of the social inequalities that have been found in other comparative studies.

### **Theoretical framework: Push factors for institutionalised student mobility**

According to Ballatore and Ferede, student mobility, as promoted in the Erasmus programme, is “institutionalized student mobility, which is managed and facilitated by higher education institutions and operates between organisations that are in contractual relations and includes a certain level of reciprocity” (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 526). This type of student mobility is primarily short term because it cannot exceed 12-month periods and, at the end of their stay, institutionally mobile students must go back home. Conceptually, such short-term student mobility can be approached by two

perspectives – either from the push–pull model or from the choice model (see Beerkens et al., 2016: 186–187). In the former, the push–pull framework, the decision on international mobility can be explained by a complex set of educational, political, cultural/social and economic factors that ‘push’ the student away from their home country and ‘pull’ to a specific host country (see de Wit, 2008). The second, the college choice framework, looks at educational choice in a broader sense: first, students develop an intention to study abroad, then they search for an appropriate location or programme for their period abroad, and finally they make their selection and depart (also see Salisbury et al., 2009).

Empirical research based on the first framework shows how safety and living standards in the host country, future career perspectives, and available information about the educational opportunities, and quality of education exert a positive effect on student choices to engage in student mobility. However, for short-term mobility, the “consumption benefits” (Souto-Otero, 2008) seem to have even stronger effects: for instance, a warm climate and an attractive city seem to be more important than the career perspectives or quality of the programme. On the other hand, studies following the second framework stress the importance of other, much more personal attitudes such as curiosity, serenity, and tolerance of ambiguity. Based on such differentiated findings, Beerkens et al. conclude that studying abroad is obviously “a result of multiple extrinsic and intrinsic factors” (Beerkens et al., 2016: 187).

In addition, gaining international credentials serves as a way to differentiate oneself from the masses. Munk (2009) in this sense argues that studying abroad is perceived as a form of transnational investment in acquiring informational and academic capital at prestigious foreign educational institutions (see Ballatore and Ferede, 2013: 527). Yet, educational systems can also be viewed as sites of social reproduction that maintain the status quo. Since studying abroad is strongly linked to the cost of living, which for some students may be just too high to afford, despite the scholarship that Erasmus students receive, the opportunities are different from the start. It is hence not surprising that, according to the findings of many studies (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006; Balatore and Ferede, 2013), students studying abroad come from a socially and economically better family environment, which shows that the choice of student mobility is in some ways not evenly spread among students. Costs are important factors when students are deciding whether to study abroad, and high study costs are one of the biggest obstacles (Vossensteyn, 2010).

In 2018, the average Erasmus grant was EUR 336 per month (European Commission, 2020), which in most European cities is not even enough to cover accommodation costs. As the Eurostudent survey (Hauschildt et al.,

2018) shows, 70% of respondents said that the Erasmus grant covered half or less of their total expenditure. Also for these reasons, the majority of students studying abroad come from privileged backgrounds, as confirmed by many studies (e.g. Balatore and Ferede, 2013; Beerkens et al., 2016). In addition, the Survey of the Socio-Economic Background of Erasmus Students (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006) reports that two-thirds of the respondents had at least one parent who was a manager, professional or technician. This proportion is higher than in the population in general, where less than 40% of the working population aged 45 and over are engaged in such a profession. Moreover, around 58% of the students in the survey had at least one parent with a higher education. A large majority of Erasmus students stated that their parents' income status was at or above the average income in their country (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006). Consequently, students with study mobility experience might have better opportunities for their future careers. Findings from the Erasmus + Impact Study (European Commission, 2019) confirm that Erasmus students are indeed employed abroad more often than non-mobile graduates. As reported, 15% had moved abroad for their current job. The share of those who receive their first job after graduation abroad is substantially higher for Erasmus graduates than for non-mobile graduates (23% vs. 15%). In addition, almost half of Erasmus graduates who obtained their first job abroad took up their first job in the country where they had stayed during their Erasmus mobility period (European Commission, 2019). As Beerkens (2016: 185) argue, those students later work in higher-status employment sectors, are more likely to have an international job or work abroad, and are also less likely to remain unemployed after their studies (also see Bracht et al., 2006; Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie, 2009; Parey and Waldinger, 2011).

### **Who are institutionally mobile students? Combining two empirical insights**

In order to at least partially reflect on to what extent the mentioned factors are relevant in the Slovenian context, an exploratory analysis was conducted. Here, the main aim is namely to show, first, the context of student mobility at the University of Ljubljana and how students from different faculties respond to the Erasmus programme. With such insight, the position of the Faculty of Social Sciences in comparison to other university members will be identified. Second, emphasis is given to the main characteristic of mobile students, namely their socio-economic background and their potential future plans. Here, the analysis is focused on the survey conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences. Accordingly, the main results are also presented on two levels.

### *Methods used, the sample, and data analysis*

The data for describing trends in student mobility come from the official databases of the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The data used at this level were selected according to three criteria. First, information about the share of incoming and outgoing students from 1999 on. Second, information about the numbers of both types of students within all faculty members of the University of Ljubljana. Third, information about the main countries to which students move from Slovenia or come from. The data collection considers a larger time-frame, that is, between 1999 and 2019, but the primary focus is on the data in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 when the survey was conducted. The presentation of the results is combined with descriptions and visual graphs.

In the academic years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 a quantitative study was conducted among UL-FSS students. The study included Slovenian and foreign students in the first and second cycles of Bologna study. The survey was carried out online, with the questionnaire for students available in both Slovenian and English. The study included all three types of students: those with an experience of studying abroad within the Erasmus programme, those who intended to study abroad and those who did not even going to participate in any international student mobility. For the purpose of this article, we concentrate on students with the mobility experience. However, to be able to present the specific distinctions between mobile and non-mobile students, those without a mobile experience are also included.

Our sample therefore consists of 173 students: 115 students (66% of the sample) are Slovenian and foreign students who had studied abroad (Erasmus), while 58 students (34% of the sample) had not studied abroad and had no plans to do so (non-Erasmus). Among the Erasmus students, 47.2% are Slovenian students and 53.8% are foreign students. Among the non-Erasmus students, there are only Slovenian students.

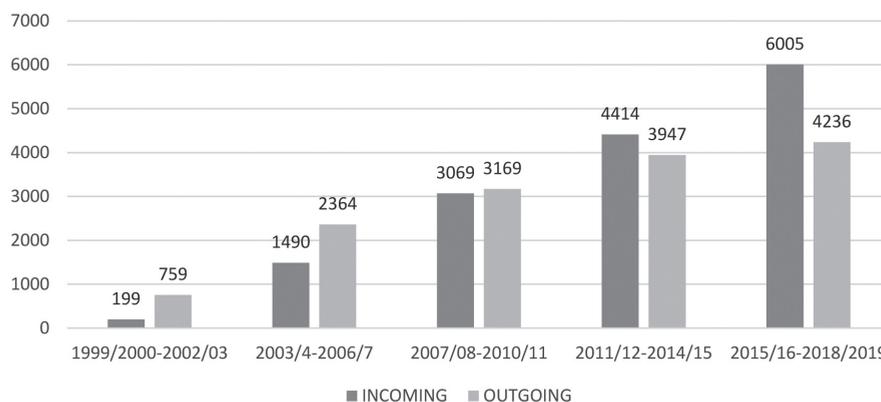
The data analyses of survey data are statistically driven. Here, chiefly bivariate analyses were used, comparing Erasmus and non-Erasmus students, and focusing on the two major sets of variables. The first set of *social and cultural background variables* included measures on parental education, perception of social class and attitudes to learning foreign languages. The second set of *decision-making and motivations variables* included measures on job preferences, attitudes to employment at home and abroad, and motivations for moving abroad. Elements of both sets of variables are partially comparable to the much more extensive research study conducted by Beerkens et al. (2016).

### *Trends in student mobility at the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Social Sciences*

The University of Ljubljana has 23 faculties and 3 academies and is actively engaged in the Erasmus programme, showing highest mobility figures on the national level, i.e. 16,205, compared to the second-largest Slovenian higher education institution the University of Maribor with 3,973 mobilities (see CMEPIUS Statistics).

However, in the last decade the University of Ljubljana has become a receiving rather than a sending institution. The figures for incoming and outgoing students from the start of the Erasmus programme in Slovenia (1999/2000) until the 2018/2019 academic year (see Graph 1) show a rising trend in incoming and outgoing students. Yet, since 2010/2011, the growth in the number of outgoing students has slowed down while the number of incoming students is still increasing strongly. The share of mobile students compared to all students enrolled at the university level is overall very small, representing less than 4%.

*Graph 1: NUMBER OF INCOMING AND OUTGOING STUDENTS AT THE UL FROM 1999/2000 TO 2018/2019*

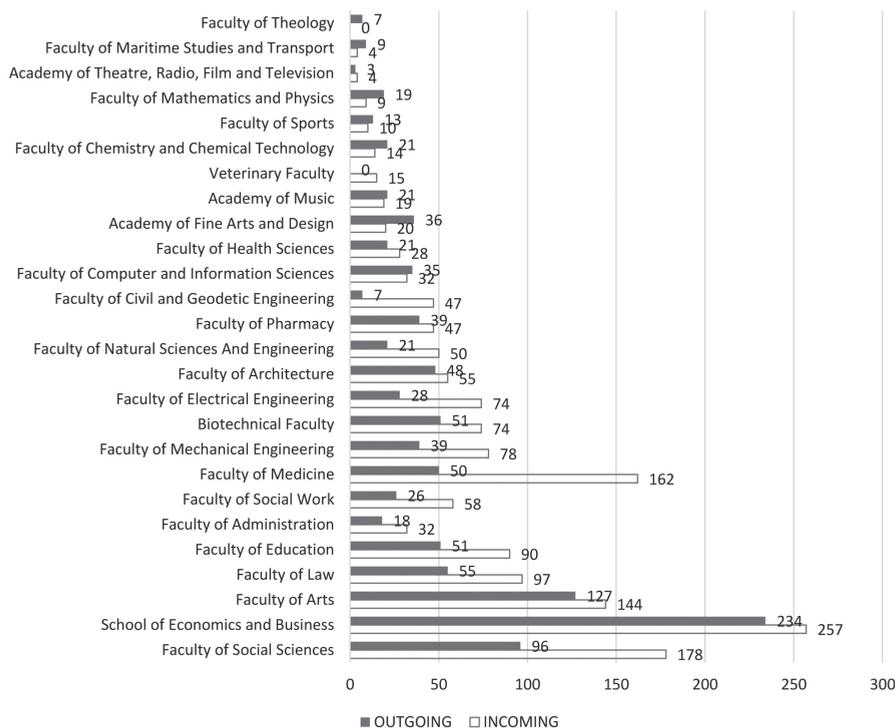


Source: Own analysis on the basis of the University of Ljubljana data on student mobility.

The lion's share of student mobility traditionally occurs at business, social sciences, law and humanities faculties, which are also the faculties with the highest number of enrolled students. As shown by Graph 2, indicating the number of incoming and outgoing students by faculties in the 2018/2019 academic year, social sciences, humanities, law, administration and business/economics faculties accept or send abroad more than two-thirds of all University of Ljubljana exchange students. Also with these faculties, the

trends are similar as on the university level, thereby increasing the number of incoming students and varying the number of outgoing students from year to year.

Graph 2: ERASMUS+ INCOMING AND OUTGOING STUDENT MOBILITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA BY FACULTIES



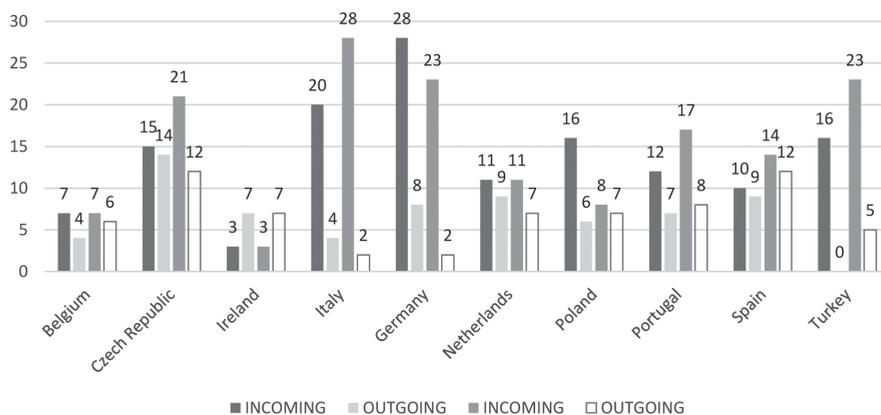
Source: Own analysis on the basis of the University of Ljubljana data on student mobility.

Something similar holds true with regard to the data on the national level. Statistics (see CMEPIUS Statistics) reveal that business and administration, social sciences, arts and humanities students make up the largest share (62%) of those on an Erasmus exchange. The same applies to the incoming students, accounting for 56% of all Erasmus students. In the student survey (European Commission, 2019), the Commission came to similar findings regarding participation in Erasmus mobility by subject.

In both absolute and relative terms, the Faculty of Social Sciences takes, as a rule, third place among all 26 members of the University of Ljubljana. The share of outgoing exchange students accounts for about 8% of all enrolled students, yet the gap between incoming (178) and outgoing (96) students is big and widening year after year. Graph 3 depicts where the outgoing

students undertook their studies abroad and where the incoming students who participated in the survey came from.<sup>1</sup>

Graph 3: TOP 10 HOST COUNTRIES OF OUTGOING STUDENTS AND HOME COUNTRIES OF INCOMING STUDENTS IN 2018/2019 AND 2019/2020



Source: Own analysis on the basis of the Faculty of Social Sciences data on student mobility.

Spain and Portugal have always been the most popular destinations among outgoing students, not just among FSS-UL students, but also on the university as well as national levels. In fact, as shown in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2018 (European Commission, 2018), Spain is overall the top receiving country. Those two countries, together with the Netherlands with its high costs of living, confirm the contention of consumption benefits. Still, the top host destination is the Czech Republic, with a favourable ratio between living costs and high education quality. The only country where the FSS-UL during the years in question sent more students than it received is Ireland. This decision by students arises from the possibility to learn the English language from mother-tongue speakers. The majority of incoming students come from Germany, Italy, Turkey, followed by the Czech Republic and Portugal.

According to the data obtained from the FSS-UL International Office, the highest number of places is available at the German partner universities (around 70 places upon 32 agreements), followed by Italy with 28 agreements, and Poland with 21. Interestingly, FSS-UL has only one partner university in Ireland with 7 study places available, but still more students

<sup>1</sup> While analysing the choice of the mobility university/country, the offer of available places has to be taken into account, which depends on the number of inter-institutional agreements signed between partner universities.

decided to study at the Irish university than at German universities, although those universities are high in quality<sup>2</sup> and located in cities with much lower costs of living.

In sum: student mobility still reaches only a minority of students at the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Social Sciences. In the last 20 years, the Erasmus programme has not gained in popularity among domestic students, as might have been expected. This raises questions about the barriers that students face in relation to studying abroad. Applications for an Erasmus grant nevertheless show that many students are interested in and do apply for the exchange, but eventually do not participate. The reasons most often cited by students are family-based, personal relationships, lack of financial resources or more precisely the level of Erasmus funding, work responsibilities, and unmet home study obligations. Those reasons also correspond to the findings of the Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2019).

### *Student mobility as a signal of privilege? Results of a quantitative online survey*

In the part below, we try to answer three narrower research questions: 1) *What are the main social and economic characteristics of mobile students at the Faculty of Social Sciences?* 2) *Are the students who decide to study abroad more open to learning foreign languages?* 3) *How open are the Erasmus students to moving abroad for work compared to non-Erasmus students?* As discussed in the previous chapter, students who study abroad come from an environment with a better economic situation. Their parents are in the management, professional or technical professions, and the education of at least one parent is a higher education for the majority of students (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006; Balatore and Ferede, 2013). Is this also the case with FSS-UL students?

1. *What are the main social and economic characteristics of mobile students at the Faculty of Social Sciences?* The study among FSS-UL students shows similar results as found by the aforementioned authors: among Erasmus students, there are 69.5% of those whose mothers have at least a post-secondary education and 51.6% of those whose fathers have at least a post-secondary education. Among non-Erasmus students, there are 44.7% of those with mothers and 37.5% of those with fathers with at least a post-secondary education. The difference between Erasmus and non-Erasmus

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the *Academic Ranking of World Universities (2020)*, 15 out of 27 German partner universities were ranked in the top 1000 universities in the world, whereas the Irish partner university has not yet been ranked by the ARWU.

parental education is significant (see Table 1 and Table 2) and consistent with the findings of other studies. Such findings suggest that the social environment differs between two groups of students.

Table 1: EDUCATION MOTHER (N = 142)

	Erasmus students		non-Erasmus students	
	n	%	n	%
No formal education or primary school	3	3.2%	1	2.1%
Lower secondary	12	12.6%	15	31.9%
Upper secondary	14	14.7%	10	21.3%
Post-secondary, non-tertiary	13	13.7%	6	12.8%
Lower level tertiary	29	30.5%	10	21.3%
Upper level tertiary	24	25.3%	5	10.6%
$\chi^2 = 11.356$ ; df = 5; sig = 0,04; V = 0.283				

Source: Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

Table 2: EDUCATION FATHER (N = 143)

	Erasmus students		non-Erasmus students	
	n	%	n	%
No formal education or primary school	4	4.2%	2	4.2%
Lower secondary	14	14.7%	17	35.4%
Upper secondary	28	29.5%	11	22.9%
Post-secondary, non-tertiary	8	8.4%	7	14.6%
Lower level tertiary	21	22.1%	6	12.5%
Upper level tertiary	20	21.1%	5	10.4%
$\chi^2 = 11.569$ ; df = 5; sig = 0,04; V = 0.284				

Source: Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

Given the results on parental education, it is not surprising that Erasmus students feel better off compared to non-Erasmus students (see Table 3) when asked about their perception of the social background of their family. Among non-Erasmus students, 22.6% of students are from the working class compared to just 8.3% of Erasmus students. Among Erasmus students, about one-quarter can be classified as upper-middle class or higher, while among non-Erasmus students only 11.3% of students belong to the upper-middle class ( $\chi^2 = 10.393$ ; df = 3; sig = 0.03).

Socio-economic background is not only linked to the question of whether a student can afford to study abroad, but also to the opportunities and experiences that they may be exposed to as a child or adolescent. If a (young) person has an experience or several experiences with foreign countries – for instance, travelling with parents to foreign countries, taking holidays abroad, going on language courses at home or abroad etc., the decision to

move and study abroad will come easier compared to those without such an experience. This thesis was confirmed by Ballatore and Ferede (2013) who conducted a study in three universities (one in the UK, one in Italy, and one in France), where they found that Erasmus participants had taken more foreign family trips than non-Erasmus students. Across all three universities, the frequency of foreign family trips was significantly related to participation in Erasmus. They came to similar findings while exploring language-study abroad. They found significant relationships between participating in Erasmus and having previously undertaken a language study in a foreign country – there were more Erasmus students who had previously taken at least one language study abroad (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013).

Table 3: PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL STATUS AMONG ERASMUS AND NON-ERASMUS STUDENTS (N = 160)

	Erasmus students		non-Erasmus students	
	n	%	n	%
working class	9	8.3%	12	22.6%
lower middle class	18	16.5%	7	13.2%
middle class	52	47.7%	28	52.8%
upper middle class	23	21.1%	6	11.3%
higher class	5	4.6%	0	0.0%
$\chi^2 = 10.393$ ; $df = 3$ ; $sig = 0,03$ ; $V = 0.266$				

Source: Fink-Hafner et al. (2019).

Apart from such a socio-economic background, mastery of a foreign language is a big barrier in the decision to study abroad (Beerkens et al., 2016; Costa, 2018). However, fluency in foreign languages is one of the key and basic requirements for participation in the EU. To be able to participate actively in European society, it is important to speak at least one foreign language in addition to one's mother tongue. Language learning plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and European integration, as stated in the Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 (Council of the European Union 2002):

*...the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning, which stresses that the knowledge of languages is one of the basic skills each citizen needs in order to take part effectively in the European knowledge society and therefore facilitates both integration into society and social cohesion.*

Students involved in our study were also asked what they think about learning European languages and, again, we can observe some differences

between Erasmus and non-Erasmus students. While among Erasmus students there is very high agreement about the importance of learning European languages, we observe that among non-Erasmus students agreement with some of the views on learning languages is somewhat lower (see Table 4).

Table 4: IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AMONG ERASMUS AND NON-ERASMUS STUDENTS (N = 169)

		Learning European languages makes it easier to find employment		Learning European languages is important for work and study in other EU member states		Learning European languages helps understand the cultures of other EU member states		All young Europeans should acquire knowledge of at least two European languages		Schools should enable young people to learn other European languages	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Erasmus	Strongly disagree or disagree	4	3.6%	8	7.1%	7	6.3%	11	9.7%	2	1.8%
	Agree or strongly agree	108	96.4%	105	92.9%	105	93.8%	102	90.3%	111	98.2%
non-Erasmus	Strongly disagree or disagree	4	7.2%	8	14.3%	10	17.8%	11	19.6%	5	9.0%
	Agree or strongly agree	52	92.9%	48	85.8%	46	82.2%	45	80.3%	51	91.0%

Question: What do you think about learning other EU member states' languages? To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

That is particularly true for the statement "Learning of European languages helps understand the cultures of other EU members" (82.2% vs. 93.8%;  $\chi^2 = 10.536$ ;  $df = 5$ ;  $sig = 0,02$ ). That "All young Europeans should acquire knowledge of at least two European languages" was agreed or strongly agreed to by 90.3% of Erasmus students, while among non-Erasmus students the figures is 80.3%. Among non-Erasmus students, we also find less agreement with the statement "Learning European languages is important for work and study in other EU member states" (85.8%).

#### *Motives for student mobility and visions of future career*

The literature agrees that students with a study abroad experience are also more employable. As the Valera study showed, international experience plays an important role while entering the labour market. In the study,

employed Erasmus graduates were surveyed and for 60% of them foreign language proficiency and for 53% their study period abroad was an important criterion in their recruitment process (Engel, 2010). This is supported by the feedback of employers who reported that foreign language proficiency was an important criterion for employment (70%). The study period abroad is stated by 30% of employers as being important for their recruitment decisions (Engel, 2010). Since studying abroad has a certain impact on employment, we also asked in our study some questions related to employment in order to understand the preferences and expectations of students with an experience from abroad.

When asked where would they like to be employed after completing the studies, the majority of students selected the non-governmental sector (80.7%) and education and training (60.6%). In third place are media and communications (see Table 5). All three major sectors represent the sample, which reflects some of the study programmes at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The smallest share of students reported that they would like to be employed in the economy, finance (34.3%) which is unsurprising when we note that the surveyed students came from the FSS-UL, where the emphasis is on the social sciences.

Table 5: FUTURE AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG ERASMUS STUDENTS AFTER COMPLETING THEIR STUDIES (N = 107)

Where would you like to be employed after completing your studies?	n	%
Non-governmental sector	88	80.7%
Education and training	66	60.6%
Communications (journalism, publishing, multimedia services)	60	54.1%
Government and public administration (on national or local level)	59	52.7%
Marketing and PR	48	44.0%
Economy, finance	37	34.3%

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

Besides the potential vision of the sectors in which the students would like to work in the future, it is relevant to analyse how open (or non-open) Erasmus students are to moving abroad and living there also in the future. As studies show, Erasmus students more often become employed abroad or in internationally-oriented organisations with more of an international focus in their work (Engel, 2010). In our case, the openness of future employment was measured with a set of items, which related to a set of items about where the students plan to seek employment after completing their studies (see Table 6). Students who had studied abroad (or were studying abroad) tend to be open towards working either at home or abroad. The share of students who would seek work only at home or only abroad is relatively

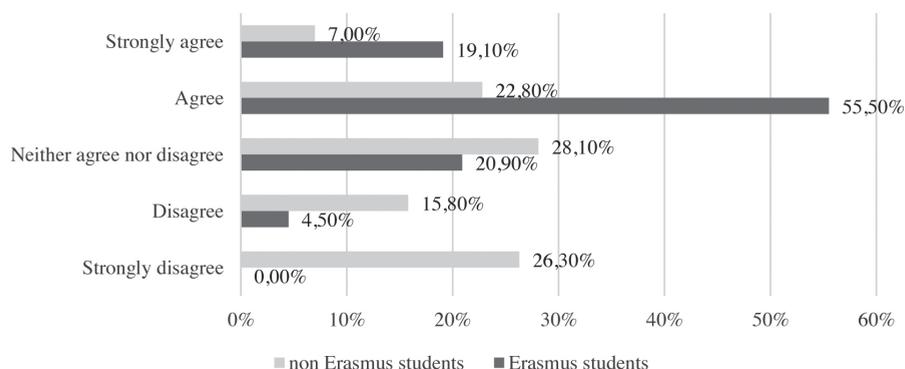
low, especially when compared to the share of students who would seek employment in their home country and in EU member states – 74.6% (agree or strongly agree with the statement). The Erasmus students are open to Europe and the border seems no obstacle while seeking employment.

Table 6: ERASMUS STUDENTS' VISIONS OF FUTURE EMPLOYMENT WITHIN OR OUTSIDE THEIR NATIONAL COMMUNITY (N = 110)

After completing my studies...	... I intend to seek employment only in my own country		... I intend to seek employment only abroad		... I intend to seek employment in my own country and in other EU member states		... I intend to seek employment in my own country and in non-EU countries	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly disagree	29	26.6%	15	13.6%	0	0.0%	16	14.5%
Disagree	37	33.9%	42	38.2%	5	4.5%	14	12.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	22	20.2%	34	30.9%	23	20.9%	32	29.1%
Agree	17	15.6%	11	10.0%	61	55.5%	37	33.6%
Strongly agree	4	3.7%	8	7.3%	21	19.1%	11	10.0%

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

Graph 4: READINESS FOR SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN THE HOME COUNTRY AND THE EU AMONG ERASMUS AND NON-ERASMUS STUDENTS (N = 167)



Question: I intend to seek employment only in my own country and in other EU member states

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

When compared to non-Erasmus students, we see a substantial difference – among non-Erasmus students there are only 29.8% who would seek

a job in their home country as well as in other EU member states (see Graph 4). Non-Erasmus students tend to primarily seek employment at home (48.3%).

The fact that Erasmus students are more open to moving and working abroad is confirmed and emphasised when students rated their level of agreement with the statement: "I would seek employment in other countries only if I had been unemployed for a longer period of time in my own country". The majority of Erasmus students do not agree with the statement (57.3%), while among non-Erasmus the majority does agree (53.5%) ( $\chi^2=37.418$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $sig=0.00$ ;  $V=0.473$ ). They would go abroad, but only if they had to.

Table 7: EMPLOYMENT IN OTHER COUNTRIES (N = 166)

	Erasmus students		non-Erasmus students	
	n	%	n	%
Strongly disagree	22	20.0%	7	12.5%
Disagree	41	37.3%	10	17.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	18	16.4%	9	16.1%
Agree	25	22.7%	25	44.6%
Strongly agree	4	3.6%	5	8.9%

$\chi^2=13.584$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $sig=0.01$ ;  $V=0.286$

Question: I would seek employment in other countries only if I had been unemployed for a longer period of time in my own country.

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

Table 8: IMPORTANT FACTORS IN FUTURE EMPLOYMENT (N = 172)

		Individual career development		Deepening of knowledge and acquiring professional skills		Financial satisfaction	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Erasmus	Not important at all	2	1.8%	2	1.8%	1	0.9%
	Not important	2	1.8%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
	Neither important, nor unimportant	6	5.3%	5	4.4%	14	12.4%
	Important	48	42.1%	35	30.7%	58	51.3%
	Very important	56	49.1%	71	62.3%	40	35.4%
non-Erasmus	Not important at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Not important	2	3.4%	3	5.2%	1	1.7%
	Neither important, nor unimportant	6	10.3%	2	3.4%	7	12.1%
	Important	23	39.7%	25	43.1%	27	46.6%
	Very important	27	46.6%	28	48.3%	23	39.7%

Question: For your future employment, how important are the following:

Source: Fink-Hafner et al., 2019.

Despite some differences in employment preferences and differences in attitudes to learning languages, when asked how important they are for students in their future employment individual career development, deepening knowledge and acquiring professional skills and financial satisfaction, we see that the differences between Erasmus and non-Erasmus students tend to become smaller. All – Erasmus and non-Erasmus – students find all three factors important. For both groups, the least important is the financial aspect: 86.7% of Erasmus vs. 86.3% of non-Erasmus students. Deepening of knowledge and acquiring professional skills seems to be a very important factor in both groups (93% Erasmus; 91% non-Erasmus). Individual career development is slightly less important for non-Erasmus students (86.3%) than for Erasmus students (91.2%).

## **Conclusion**

According to Engel (2010), mobility is for students a worthwhile experience regarding their international competencies, personal development and long-term career prospects. Mobility creates possibilities to enter the labour market since foreign experiences are highly valued. Studies also show that Erasmus students have an advantage in the employment market over non-Erasmus students. Nevertheless, not all students enjoy the same possibilities for studying abroad. As shown, when it comes to a decision on mobility the biggest obstacles are financial issues and language skills (Ballatore and Ferede, 2013; Beerkens et al., 2016; Costa, 2018). For that reason, the majority of Erasmus students come from privileged environments and the unequal uptake of student mobility has also been recognised by the European Commission (2017).

Similar was shown in our study of FSS-UL Erasmus students. First, we can see that the number of outgoing students is not changing significantly (compared to incoming students); on the contrary, the number has more or less been the same for the last 10 years. Yet, the number of incoming students is rising. Without additional data, it is difficult to say whether this shows a lack of interest among Slovenian students or whether some other pull factors are more relevant.

Urry (2002) argues that studying abroad fits with the notion of a “do-it-yourself” biography where mobility is one of its defining characteristics. Despite the relatively small sample of students studying abroad surveyed, we can clearly identify some common characteristics: Erasmus students tend to have parents with a higher education and perceive themselves as better situated than non-Erasmus students. These findings are in line with Ballatore and Ferede (2013), Hauschildt et al. (2015) and Souto-Otero (2008). These students also see learning European languages as much more important

compared to non-Erasmus students. The analyses also showed that Erasmus students are more open to moving and working abroad than non-Erasmus students, thereby accruing more possibilities to become employed elsewhere. Such more open attitudes are not surprising – by having experiences abroad, such students are better prepared and more experienced and less scared of moving away from their home country.

However, at least at the Faculty of Social Sciences, there is no continuous research on students with international exchange experience, as is common in certain other institutions and countries. In addition, the questionnaire we used only asks partial and generalised questions, which should be accompanied with more in-depth research into the Erasmus and non-Erasmus groups of students. While self-reported surveys are an important source of information for understanding mobility, as Beerkens argued (2016: 201), it seems necessary to couple these results more effectively with another type of research. Especially longitudinal studies could reduce certain biases and we could also learn more from systematic studies on students' perceptions, practices, and future plans.

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