

UNIVERSITIES' STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONALISATION: CONTEXTUAL DETERMINANTS**

Abstract. *Over the last few decades, the Erasmus programme has served as an impetus for internationalisation in higher education on the institutional and national levels. The aim of the article is to present the results of qualitative comparative analysis of three cases in order to explore three different universities' strategies for internationalisation (Vienna, Granada, Lausanne) in three different national contexts (Austria, Spain, Switzerland), and their various approaches to the Erasmus programme, and mobility in particular. Although sharing common goals, instruments and activities created at the EU level, different approaches to internationalisation, the Erasmus programme and the mobility concept are evidenced, which have consequently brought various effects and outcomes.*

Keywords: *internationalisation, Erasmus programme, mobility, university strategy, policy outcomes*

Introduction

During their long history, universities have seen tremendous changes that have impacted all aspects of their functioning. Considered an important part of higher education (HE), internationalisation has broadly been encouraged in many academic milieus ever since the Middle Ages, mostly through the mobility of students and scientists among European universities (Knight and De Wit, 1995). Over time, university policies on internationalisation were further broadened with various tools and activities.

The globalisation effects on HE, visible in the development of new technologies, introduction of new forms of teaching and learning, and scientific

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** The article is based on a draft paper prepared in the framework of work in the scholarship for the 2017–2018 academic year as part of the project "The University of Ljubljana – Centre of Excellence DebatEU" financed by the Jean Monnet Programme.

The analysis is based on empirical research conducted for the doctoral thesis of Tamara Dagen *The impact of globalisation on the internationalisation of European public universities (defended in 2018 at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb)* and additional research for the book *Impact of Globalisation on Internationalisation of Universities* by Tamara Dagen and Danica Fink-Hafner (2019), Ljubljana, Založba FDV.

work that have fostered cooperation and increased competition, put even greater emphasis on the development of new university internationalisation strategies in which the mobility concept plays an important role. Indeed, the need to follow the accelerated global trends of interconnectedness in HE and the need to adapt to the new circumstances in their surroundings have forced universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) to set new agendas so as to find answers to the present global changes. In this sense, many HEIs recognise internationalisation as a crucial strategic tool for development. Various universities have developed different strategic niches and goals within the framework of their internationalisation policies (e.g. Soliman et al., 2019.).

The aim of this article is to present insights into different university strategies of internationalisation, with a particular focus on the Erasmus programme's role in straightening out and broadening the concept of mobility at the institutional level of European public universities. While data on Erasmus mobility presented in the empirical part of the article refer to Erasmus+ programme outcomes gathered from official documents, the analysis also considers the Erasmus programme as a broad framework and examines its influence on national and university strategies for internationalisation.

The analysis is focused on three research questions: 1) which factors mainly influenced the selection of different approaches to institutional and national policies in the field of internationalisation, especially to the Erasmus programme; 2) what kind of outcomes are observed in three cases; and 3) how are the approaches connected to the concepts of *internationalisation at home* and *internationalisation abroad*.

The concept of internationalisation in HE is understood differently in different contexts and also by various actors, stakeholders and scholars. The literature shows a variety of approaches to its conceptualisation and definition (e.g. Knight, 1994, 2003; Teichler, 2004; Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007; de Wit and Hunter, 2015). Following the definition that internationalisation in HE is *a steerable process of greater cooperation and cross-border formal relations between states, institutions and organisations in HE, which includes an international and/or global dimension in the teaching, research, service functions, purpose and delivery of HE* (Dagen et al., 2019), in this analysis it is viewed as a process that affects all parts of HE and filters policies created at the global and supranational levels, which are then implemented on both the institutional and national levels. Mobility is seen as an instrument and a tool for fulfilling one of the main goals of the Bologna Process and as an impetus for the internationalisation of HEIs and HE systems.

Since globalisation in HE is defined as *a worldwide social (societal, economic, cultural and political) connecting in the area of HE* (ibid.), in this

article it is regarded as a broader process that impacts HE on all levels (supranational, national, institutional), increases and accelerates the communication and exchange of knowledge, experiences and ideas among students, academics and administrative staff, and fosters competition on the individual, institutional and regional (European Union, EU) levels.

Europeanisation in a broader sense forms *part of globalisation in HE* and, in a narrow sense, it consolidates *processes of internationalisation in the HE field based on policy-making and implementation within the EU framework* (ibid.). Accordingly, as a supranational project created by the European Commission (EC) and financed by the European Union, the Erasmus programme is analysed here as both a tool for fostering the mobility of students, academics and administrative staff and building up a European cultural identity, and as a framework that enables the higher global competitiveness of Europe as a world region and of its inhabitants on the European Continent (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2020).

In the first section of the article, the methodological framework is presented. The next section brings insights and data obtained in empirical research on the national and institutional (university) levels, especially from interviews. In the last section, insights and comments on different approaches to activities in the framework of the Erasmus programme, and mobility in particular, on the level of three countries and three public institutions are presented, followed by concluding thoughts. Considering the Covid-2019 pandemic and related financial and economic crisis, the final part of the article offers comments on the possible effects on mobility as a concept in general and the Erasmus mobility schemes in future years.

Methodological framework

The article is based on empirical research conducted during 2017 and 2018 in three European countries (Austria, Spain, Switzerland) at three European public universities (Vienna, Granada, Lausanne) which have created and implemented different strategies and approaches with respect to the concept of mobility.

The comparative case study includes a literature analysis, analysis of official documents and available data, and 26 semi-structured interviews in three countries. For two cases, eight interviews in each country were conducted (Austria and Switzerland), while considering the existence of two University of Granada campuses in North Africa (located in two autonomous Spanish cities Ceuta and Melilla), the analysis of the Spanish case included 10 interviews. Selection of interviewees included both university level representatives and national level officials. Additionally, due to the specific territorial organisation of the country, in Swiss and Spanish cases interviews with

representatives of the regional government and regional university associations were included into the analysis. All the interviews were conducted in person, from February to July 2017, in official headquarters of the institutions. The analysis considered both the Erasmus programme's general role in developing specific internationalisation policies and strategies at the national and institutional levels from its establishment until 2018, and official data on mobility in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020).

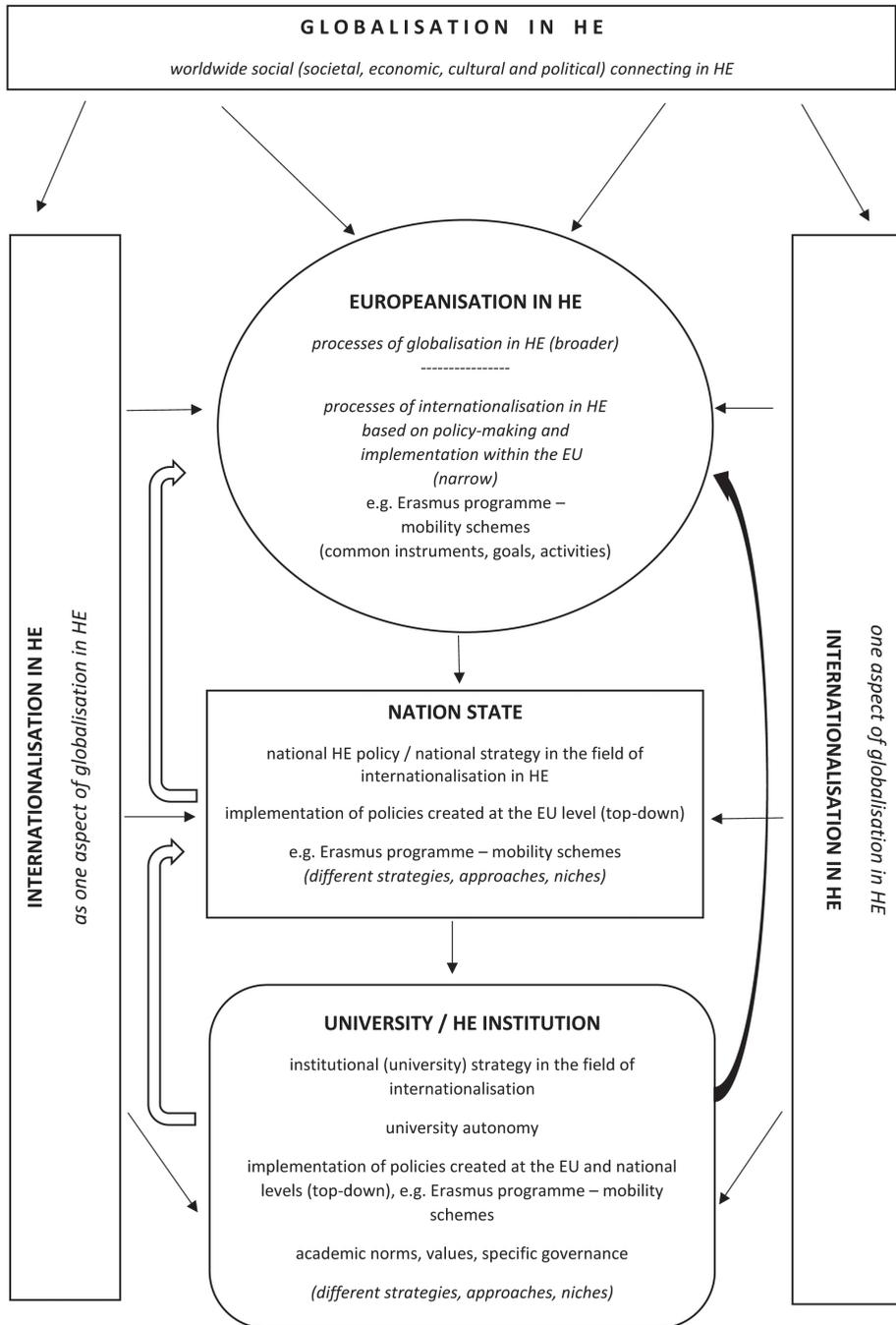
As presented in the introduction, insights into the concept of mobility in the framework of the Erasmus programme in three different national and institutional contexts rely on different strategies and approaches to internationalisation in HE.

The comparison of three typical cases – three countries (Austria, Spain and Switzerland) and three highly internationalised European public universities (Vienna, Granada and Lausanne) which shared a set of characteristics in the internationalisation field can help with general understanding of the analysed phenomenon, and serve to confirm a set hypothesis (Gerring, 2007: 92–92). In comparison, a Method of Difference was used (Ragin, 1987; Rohlfing, 2012).

The unit of analysis was a public university in one European country, with the selected universities having the following common characteristics (necessary conditions): (1) a public university; (2) an old university with a long tradition; (3) a university that is highly ranked; (4) a university strongly focused on the developing internationalisation initiatives and activities; and (5) a university firmly focused on implementation of the Bologna Process. The article focuses on a comparison conducted at the national and institutional (university) levels and takes into consideration data on mobility in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme and the impact of the Erasmus programme on general through to specific policies and strategies on the national and university levels.

As presented in Figure 1, in the analysis the Bologna Process and Erasmus are considered to be connected parts of HE policies created on the supranational (EU) level in the last few decades. Still, while the Bologna Process relies on intergovernmentalism, 'soft law' and can be implemented on the national levels in peculiar variants and models, the Erasmus programme is based on a large scheme made up of specially designed rules, procedures, guidelines and instructions created by the EC. Taking the financial aspect of Erasmus into account, non-compliance with scheme activities and procedures leads to financial penalties and obligatory refunds for countries and universities as well, while the Erasmus control mechanisms conducted on the EU level (first reviewed at the national level, typically by the national agency), might be considered to form part of the 'hard law' mechanisms

Figure 1: RESEARCH MODEL



Source: Based on Dagen and Fink-Hafner (2019).

of EU policies (Fink-Hafner and Dagen, 2017). Still, with a budget of EUR 14.7 billion¹, of which 2/3 is targeted to learning opportunities abroad for individuals and 1/3 to partnerships and reforms of the education and youth sectors, the Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020) is the main income source for many activities implemented by European public universities (Erasmus+ factsheet, 2020).

The Erasmus programme is broadly perceived on the national and institutional levels to be a part of the Bologna Process since one of its goals is to encourage the mobility of students, academics and non-academic staff.² Although originally created in 1987, more than a decade before the *Bologna Declaration* was signed (1999), and while the programme has been developed considering the number of member states, rules, budgeting, and new activities, the programme is still viewed as part of the large Bologna reform by students, scholars and staff.

The research showed that the factors, characteristics and indicators highlighted in Figure 2 largely influenced the selection of the different approaches taken in institutional- and national-level policies and strategies in the field of internationalisation, and mobility in particular, as one of the most important Erasmus activities.

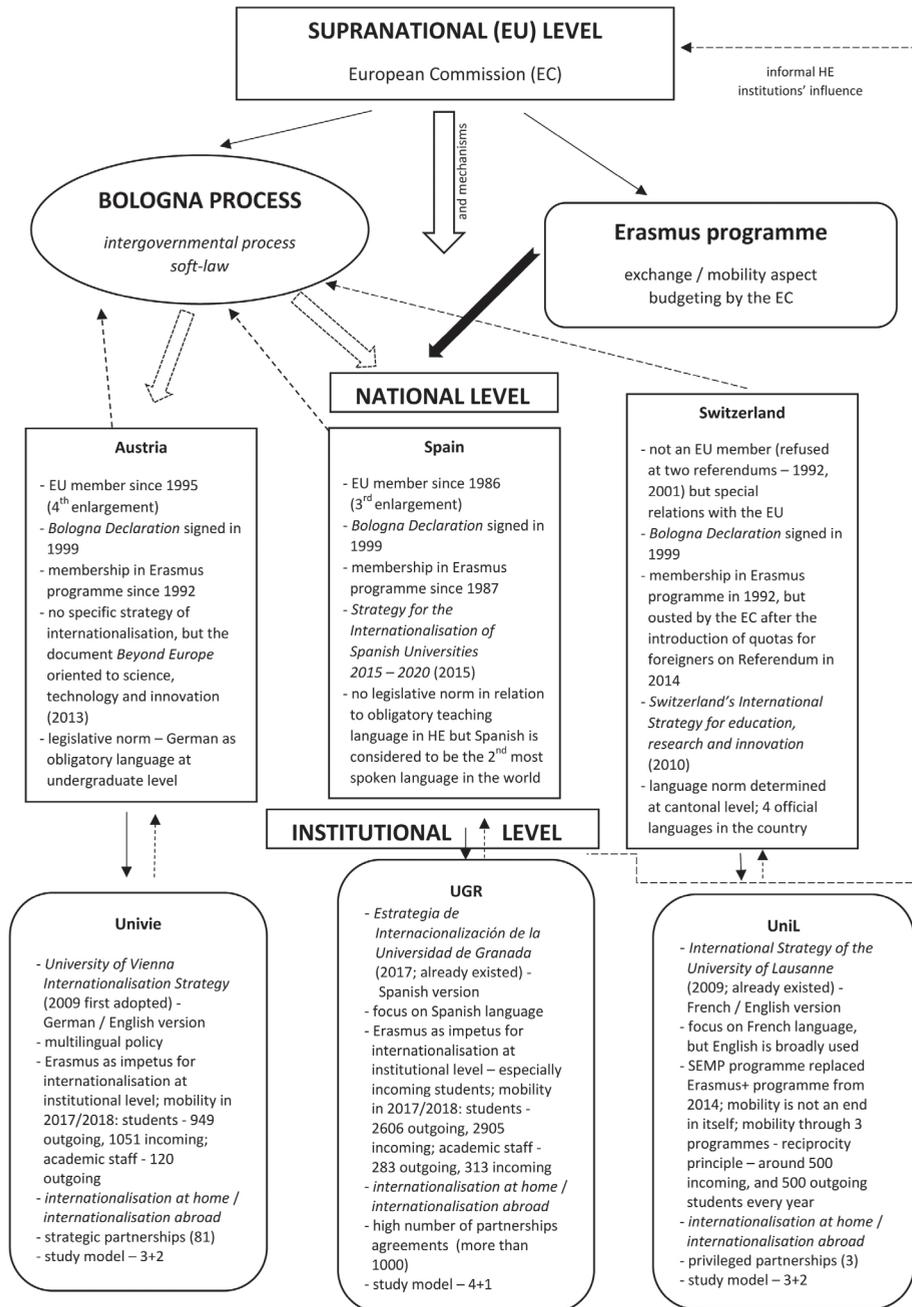
In order to answer the three main research questions raised in this article, analysis on the national level therefore included differences among three countries regarding membership in the EU and the Erasmus programme, association with the Bologna Process by signing the *Bologna Declaration*, analysis of strategies in the field of internationalisation the three countries have developed, and the language policy.

The comparison of the three public universities on the institutional level included analysis of institutional strategies for internationalisation, particularly language policy, data on students, academic and non-academic staff mobility (exchange) in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, the attitude to the concept *internationalisation abroad vs. internationalisation at home*, internationalisation policy related to partnerships among institutions, and the effects of different study cycles.

¹ More information is available from the official website of the European Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en, 21. 8. 2018.

² "Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to: for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services; for teachers, researchers and administrative staff; recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights", *Bologna Declaration*, accessible at https://www.eurashe.eu/library/modernising-phe/Bologna_1999_Bologna-Declaration.pdf, 1. 6. 2018.

Figure 2: MODEL FOR THE MOBILITY ANALYSIS



Source: Based on Dagen and Fink-Hafner (2019).

National-level findings

Analysis showed that the Erasmus programme and implementation of the Bologna Process moved the previous mobility activities from the individual to the institutional level, thereby enabling a top-down policy implementation approach. Further, having been earlier mostly limited to scholars and researchers, mobility became accessible to the broad student population under the Erasmus mobility schemes.

In Spain, in the region of Andalucía, and the University of Granada (UGR), mobility schemes as part of the Erasmus+ programme are seen as tools for straightening collaboration and a potential instrument for further interconnecting among scholars, especially due to the establishing of consortium-project proposals for competitive EU research funding. On the contrary, trends in students' mobility numbers show the considerable interest of incoming and outgoing young people, especially from and into neighbouring countries and Spanish-speaking regions. UGR leads among universities in the autonomous community of Andalucía in Erasmus mobility trends, ranking highly on the national level in mobility schemes in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

Two other cases further confirm the importance of the Erasmus programme, but still with certain variations. While implementing the Bologna Process, the Austrian HE system has experienced big changes including legislative adaptations and the introduction of 3-year performance agreements negotiated between the federal Ministry and the rector of each public university. Based on the development plan of a university, internationalisation might be selected as a key strategic area. Implementation of all activities defined in the development plan, which also includes the area of internationalisation, is under the rector's competence and relies on a top-down approach.

In Switzerland, at the University of Lausanne (UniL) in the Vaud canton in which this public HE institution operates, most of the Erasmus advantages are not seen in its mobility schemes as much as in activities related to the development of cooperation projects among HEIs, the exchange of good practices through various partnerships, establishment of new joint study programmes, introduction of new teaching and learning practices etc. Although Switzerland joined the Erasmus programme in 1992, it was ousted by the European Commission from all HE and research programmes in 2014 because of a referendum decision on the introduction of quotas for foreigners. Switzerland re-joined the European Research Council (ERC) programme in 2017, but replaced the Erasmus+ mobility scheme with the national Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) and, despite resentment of the academic community, has not returned to Erasmus+. The management of UniL did not see exclusion from the mobility scheme as such

a big loss, but emphasised the lack of activities covered by KA1 and KA2 actions³ as problematic. In addition, analysis showed that mobility in general in Switzerland and at UniL is not seen as an end in itself. According to interview insights, the primary strategic UniL interest is to attract the best individuals, not only students, but also researchers. UniL students are encouraged to attend foreign HE and research institutions to gain new knowledge and experiences, but with the parallel expectation that the best of them will return to Switzerland. Following this logic, UniL has developed a special policy oriented to young researchers.

As presented in Figure 2, the analysis showed that all three countries joined the Bologna Process at the time this large reform was starting on the European level (1999), which significantly influenced the further development of their internationalisation activities, especially in the segment of students, administrative and non-academic staff mobility and exchange. Still, among the three analysed countries, only Spain joined the Erasmus programme at the time it was initiated in 1987. As a result, the country that had already been an EU member (since 1986), and its public universities, had an opportunity to develop and establish processes and procedures in the framework of Erasmus mobility schemes in an early stage of the programme's early implementation. On the contrary, Switzerland has not been a member of the Erasmus+ programme since 2014.

While all three countries have developed strategic documents on the national level in the field of internationalisation, only Spain has a special strategy focused on universities. While Switzerland's internationalisation strategy brings together the areas of education, research and innovation, Austria has left internationalisation in HE and associated strategic decisions to universities (Austria's national strategic document combines science, technology and innovation policy fields).

A country's territorial structure exerts an important influence on the national internationalisation policies in HE. The Austrian case showed that the nation state through its federal Ministry has a role in the performance agreement negotiations, while the selection of internationalisation goals and activities is left to university-level decision-making. Due to their territorial organisation (autonomous regions and cantons), Spain and Switzerland have shared responsibilities for policies in HE (including mobility) on the federal and regional levels. Further, the interviews show that both countries and their regional governments mostly engage in decision-making on internationalisation issues through to university managements and institutional strategies.

³ *Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals; Key Action 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices.*

Data from the Erasmus+ country report for Spain in 2018⁴ show that the top three sending Spanish HEIs are the University of Granada, Complutense University of Madrid, and the University of Valencia. The majority of incoming students come from Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany. While the total number of outgoing students and trainees in the 2017/2018 academic year was a little lower (40,226 outgoing students) than in the year before (40,079 in 2016/2017), the population of incoming students and trainees has increased (from 48,595 in 2016/2017 to 51,321 in 2017/2018). The total financial amount invested in 2018 in mobility as part of the Erasmus+ programme in Spain was EUR 9,789,203. International Student Statistics in Spain 2020⁵ data show there are 1,548,369 students in Spain, of whom 185,145 are international students (around 12%), where 57,548 (around 3.7%) were international students in mobility programmes (2017/2018).

According to the Erasmus+ country report for Austria in 2018⁶, the top three sending Austrian HEIs are the University of Vienna (Univie), Vienna University of Economics and Business, and the University of Graz. The majority of incoming students come from Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. While the total number of outgoing students and trainees in the 2017/2018 academic year in Austrian HEIs shows a small decrease (7,427 outgoing students) compared to the year before (7,270 in 2016/2017), the same as in the Spanish case, the population of incoming students and trainees has increased (from 7,934 in 2016/2017 to 8,369 in 2017/2018). The total financial amount invested in 2018 in mobility in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme in Austria was EUR 20,179,445. According to Österreichs Agentur für Bildung und Internationalisierung (OEAD)⁷ official data, more than 102,000 of the 370,600 students in Austria in the 2016/2017 winter semester came from abroad (around 27%).

The language issue was shown to be a very important characteristic of national HE systems and a possible obstacle to meeting some goals in the field of internationalisation policy. Although the three countries are not English-speaking areas, the use of English as a modern *lingua franca* in education and science has tremendously influenced how the internationalisation strategies are implemented.

⁴ Erasmus+ 2018 in numbers report for Spain, accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/spain-erasmus-2018-numbers_en, 10. 8. 2020.

⁵ Accessible at <https://www.studying-in-spain.com/spain-international-student-statistics/>, 26. 10. 2020.

⁶ Erasmus+ 2018 in number report for Austria, accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/austria-erasmus-2018-numbers_en, 10. 8. 2020.

⁷ More information available at: <https://studyinaustria.at/en/news/article/2017/11/share-of-international-students-remains-steady-at-approximately-27-percent/>, 26. 10. 2020.

Although national legislation leaves the universities with the decision on the teaching language, given the broadly accepted opinion that Spanish is the second-most spoken language globally, some Spanish universities find it hard to create and implement study courses and programmes in English and other foreign languages. In addition, the interview respondents see two other reasons for challenging the use of English in HE – the legacy of Franco’s regime during which English was not taught in primary education for political reasons that then negatively impacted older generations, and the potentially insufficient competence of teachers teaching English on lower levels of the education process, namely, in primary and secondary schools. With regard to mobility in general, and especially the Erasmus+ schemes for students, language has proven to be the most important issue in students’ selection of Spanish universities for an exchange period. Especially in some autonomous regions, the lack of knowledge of the Spanish language at least on a basic level, or of some other Romanic group languages (especially Italian and Portuguese), could be an obstacle. Still, the high numbers of Erasmus+ students across Spain show that, notwithstanding the language issue, Spain and Spanish universities are very popular among the Erasmus+ student population.

Switzerland with four official languages (German, French, Italian, Romansh) is multilingual. Due to internationalisation policies being found in all areas of life, and noting that Swiss cities are the headquarters of many international organisations and companies (thus meaning that a large population of foreigners lives in Switzerland), English is a broadly spoken language across the country, including HE and science. According to Federal Statistical Office data⁸, around 25.3% of foreign students were enrolled in Swiss HEIs in 2019.

Among the analysed cases, Austria is the only state to legally establish German as an obligatory language on the undergraduate study level. Still, like in the case of Switzerland, the language issue has not proven to be an obstacle to the mobility and exchange of students. English is the main language of research and science in all three countries under analysis.

National context and related differences were shown to be crucial for internationalisation policies on both the level of the state and the institutional. Differences related to the tradition of HE, the historical paths taken by the countries and their universities, and the societal context influence internationalisation policies and the concept of mobility. Overall peculiarities of each society emerged as the main reason for Erasmus+ students’ decisions on the state involved and for HEIs to host.

⁸ Education Statistics 2019. Accessible at <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/education-science/pupils-students.assetdetail.12607178.html>, 26. 10. 2020.

Finally, although ranking positions cannot indicate the actual quality of an institution and national HE system, over the last 10 years good ranking results have been considered to be an important promotion tool, which also influences national and institutional popularity among Erasmus+ students. That is not the case for the mobility of academic and non-academic staff. According to the interviews, on the doctoral level, the research quality and results of a single department, as well as international achievements and the reputation of individual scholars and research groups are perceived to stimulate mobility.

University-level findings

All three analysed universities have developed strategies in the field of internationalisation. Although their strategic documents follow the main goals of many high-level internationalised HEIs, especially European ones, which to a certain extent share supranational policies and programmes created at the EU level, specific goals are identified among the three cases, in particular as regards the mobility concept.

While the Univie internationalisation strategy (2009) is a general strategic document with a smaller scope, based on three pillars of internationalisation (research, teaching, service support areas) and representing a base for the development of specific activities that rely on a top-down approach, UGR is continuously working on annual plans for the implementation of activities in this field. In this sense, the UGR strategy (2017) is an extensive document with detailed activities in four fields (institutional collaboration, internationalisation of research, internationalisation of curricula, internationalisation outside UGR's seven campuses) that are implemented by both a top-down and bottom-up approach. The international strategy of UniL (2009) is a document with a medium scope that relies on continual implementation. It is based on four groups of elements (general activities in human resources, financing, partnerships, marketing and promotion; internationalisation of teaching; internationalisation of research; other general activities). Further, the three documents take different approaches to partnerships with foreign HEIs. While Univie is oriented to establishing strategic partnerships (71), UGR is strongly focused on a huge number of Erasmus+ agreements (more than 1,000) and bilateral collaborations with many universities (over 800). On the contrary, UniL is oriented to the concept of privileged partnerships (3 universities).

Based on the analysis, on the national level language policy has turned out to be a very important factor for the implementation of internationalisation activities at all three universities, including mobility. While the strategies of Univie and UniL are publicly available in both the official language and English (Univie – German; UniL – French), the UGR strategy is only

available in Spanish. In addition, analysis showed that Univie is oriented to a multilingual language policy. Although as a cantonal university in the French region UniL is focused on the French language, English is broadly used due to the country's international context, especially on the master and doctoral level and in the research area. Unlike the other two cases, UGR has proven to be specific example regarding the language policy. A broad understanding detected on the national level that Spanish is the second-most spoken language in the world proved to be broadly present at the regional (autonomous community of Andalucía) and institutional (UGR) levels as well. Although insights from the interviews show a strong university management focus on developing study programmes and courses in English, the Spanish language still holds the position of almost the sole language at UGR. Accordingly, among Erasmus+ students UGR has proven to be a very popular and desirable Erasmus+ mobility destination, at least for those young people who have at least basic Spanish language knowledge, or wish to start learning it during the Erasmus+ semester.

Official reports and data show that Univie had 949 outgoing and 1,051 incoming Erasmus students in the 2017/2018 globally. While these numbers show that the majority of incoming Erasmus students come to Univie from Germany due to the language issue, there was still a large number of Italian, French and British students who picked the University of Vienna for their Erasmus-period destination.⁹ With around 30% of foreign students in its total student population,¹⁰ Univie has developed an approach to internationalisation whereby domestic students are encouraged to go to foreign partner institutions and gain new knowledge, learn other languages and become acquainted with the cultural heritage of other countries/societies in order to improve their competencies for the labour market. Parallel to this, incoming Erasmus+ students are seen as a potential tool for attracting the best young talents who might enrol in the master- and doctoral-level study programmes at Univie, especially based on their good experiences during the Erasmus+ semester.

In the 2017/2018 academic year, UGR had more than twice the number of Erasmus students than Univie – 2,606 outgoing and 2,905 incoming Erasmus students. Official UGR data¹¹ show there are 8.7% international students at the undergraduate level in the total student population, 16% in master- and 30% in doctoral-level programmes. Although Switzerland is no longer a member of the Erasmus+ programme (since 2014), in the framework of the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) UniL has stable annual mobility numbers – around 500 outgoing and 500 incoming students, based on

⁹ More detailed data are accessible at the official website of the University of Vienna: https://international.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/d_ie/International_Report/IR_2018_complete.pdf, 20. 12. 2018.

¹⁰ Univie official website: <https://www.univie.ac.at/en/about-us/at-a-glance/facts-folders/>, 26. 10. 2020.

¹¹ UGR official website: <https://www.ugr.es/en/about/facts-figures>, 26. 10. 2020.

the reciprocity principle with foreign HEIs (3.2%). In its total student population, UniL has more than 4,000 regular foreign students (around 26%)¹². The management at UniL is not so concerned with suspension from the Erasmus+ mobility schemes as much as the lost participation in international training courses and also in collaboration frameworks with organisations from different countries that enable the transfer of the best practices and innovative approaches in the fields of education, training and youth.

The numbers of academic staff mobility in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme show that UGR had 283 outgoing and 313 incoming academics in the 2017/2018 academic year. In the same year, Univie had 120 outgoing academic staff. Since Switzerland is no longer an Erasmus+ programme member, incoming and outgoing academic staff mobility at UniL is generally organised through various research schemes (mostly the Swiss National Science Foundation (FNS) or partnerships' privileged activities).

Besides mobility, one of the six initial main goals of the Bologna Process based on the *Bologna Declaration* is the adoption of a system that relies on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate. As already noted, the Bologna Process left to national-level decision-making the selection of the national HE study model. While some countries decided to adopt the 3+2 model, others selected a 4+1 model, with differences in some specific study areas such as regulated professions and educational studies. Insights from the analysis, especially the interviews, show that Spanish universities and UGR see the 4+1 study model as one of the biggest obstacles to having even more incoming and outgoing Erasmus+ students, and to the mobility concept in general. As one of the most popular Erasmus+ university destinations among Spanish HEIs, UGR does not feel negative effects of the 4+1 model on mobility outcomes, even though the majority of other European countries and universities work under the 3+2 model. In contrast, some other Spanish public universities see it as the main reason for their lower numbers in the mobility field (mostly Erasmus+).

Based on interviews in Austria and at Univie, the 2007 and 2008 global financial and economic crisis influenced students' decisions to participate in Erasmus programme mobility. Many students see Erasmus mobility scholarships as insufficient for spending one semester abroad at a foreign university and thus had to depend on their parents' additional financial help to join the Erasmus mobility schemes. Many of them have thus withdrawn from mobility programme opportunities in the last few years.

While the global financial and economic crisis did not influence European countries' HE systems and universities in the same way, and

¹² UniL official website: <https://www.unil.ch/international/en/home/menuinst/etudiants-international.html>, 26.10. 2020.

despite the existence of Erasmus+ programme funding schemes (which are filtered by the states), the economic standard of the inhabitants and the level of living expenses in each country also influence Erasmus+ mobility numbers. Moreover, insights from the analysis show a need to interweave the national- and university-level policies in further decision-making on the financial aspects of the mobility concept. Especially in countries with high living expenses (e.g. Switzerland), financial intervention from the national and institutional levels is needed.

The overall attractiveness of a certain Erasmus+ destination depends on a variety of factors, e.g. the cost and quality of living in a specific country and city, security, the geographical and historical connections of certain regions, countries and HEIs, the quality of the university and its departments and the internationalisation activities (Dagen and Fink-Hafner, 2019).

Finally, although in their internationalisation strategies all three universities have committed to both – *internationalisation at home* and *internationalisation abroad* – the interviews indicated that the former is more important. Since only a minority of students experience an Erasmus+ mobility semester, the introduction of new activities in the framework of *internationalisation at home* is perceived as a strategic priority.

Conclusions

The insights into national policies for internationalisation in the three countries and on mobility as part of the Erasmus+ programme show that the three universities follow the strategic framework of their countries while also autonomously creating their institutional strategies for internationalisation. The specific niches of internationalisation are strongly influenced by the broad social, traditional and historical context of each state and the particular characteristics of the national HE system. While sharing common goals, instruments and activities created on the supranational (EU) level, different strategies and approaches to internationalisation have been developed and implemented in the three cases on the national and institutional levels. Answers to the three research questions presented in the introduction can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, the most important factors for the national-level analysis are: the national context (including various social characteristics, the tradition and historical developmental path of national HE systems), language policy, length of membership in the Erasmus programme (especially in the Spanish case) and in the EU (notably Switzerland as a non-EU country and due to its exclusion from all European research and HE programmes), commitment to implementation of the Bologna Process, and the national strategy in the area of internationalisation.

Factors that emerged as being the most important for the university level are: institutional (university) strategies in the field of internationalisation, language policy, a strategic orientation to partnerships (strategic partnerships; privileged partnerships; a 'widespread' approach characterised by a huge number of agreements), the HE study model, and the implementation of the combined concepts *internationalisation abroad* and *internationalisation at home*.

Secondly, the analysis of outcomes that are observed in three cases showed that all three countries and their HE systems have felt some benefits of implementation of the Bologna Process and from membership in the Erasmus programme (and Erasmus+). Further, as part of their internationalisation strategy, Erasmus+ programme activities have proven to be a very important impetus for internationalisation policies on the institutional level in two cases (Spain and UGR; Austria and Univie). Broad analysis showed that different national contexts, the historical development of HE systems and public universities, as well as various developmental paths and traditions have influenced mobility policies on both the institutional and national levels in all three cases, especially in relation to outcomes of the Erasmus+ mobility schemes. Yet, since Erasmus+ mobility plays a very important role in acquiring new cultural, linguistic and social experiences for students as well, further analysis is required to examine whether and how a semester spent in a foreign HE and in a new social context influences young people, and whether it has added to the building of a common European identity, a positive attitude to the EU, the development of cosmopolitanism and a better understanding of differences among people in the European and global contexts. While students who had an opportunity to spend a semester or longer at a foreign European institution tend to become more competitive in the labour market (on the national, European and global level), this phenomenon needs to be further analysed. Moreover, since the analysis indicated a possible connection between the selection of an Erasmus destination with the economic standard of the inhabitants in a certain country and the level of living expenses there, this causal relationship calls for in-depth research.

Thirdly, following the third research question oriented towards the analysis of approaches connected to the concepts of *internationalisation at home* and *internationalisation abroad* in three cases, comparison showed that all three universities tend to attract the best students, particularly from abroad. Still, the Univie and UniL strategies focused more on recognising the best individuals among incoming students as potential candidates for master, and even more often, doctoral study programmes. All three universities are strongly committed to developing both – *internationalisation abroad* and *internationalisation at home*. Still, *internationalisation at home* is perceived to be a strategic priority since only a minority of students

have the possibility of experiencing an Erasmus+ mobility semester.

Research has shown that internationalisation is a very important strategic area for particularly those universities that see it as an opportunity for their further development. Still, national- and university-level strategic documents rely on various approaches to internationalisation which depend on the different national HE contexts, specific characteristics of HEIs and particular academic milieus that are shaped by a range of norms, values and institutional logic. Those varieties are also seen in national and institutional approaches to the Erasmus programme and the mobility concept.

The promotion of European citizens' mobility, which relies on the idea of the free flow of people and services among EU member states, is one of the most important tasks of the European higher education area (EHEA), as highlighted in both the *Sorbonne* and *Bologna declarations*. When looking at European HE landscapes, Erasmus mobility schemes have proven to be a broad framework that has critically influenced the development of university internationalisation strategies and also universities as institutions during the last three decades. However, as the year 2020 brought the global Covid-2019 pandemic and the growth of a new worldwide financial and economic crisis, the mobility of students, academics and administrative staff is currently in some kind of stand-by position. Although universities face many challenges at the present time due to the new global reality, and most of them are functioning in a virtual mode, internationalisation activities should continue. Yet, in order to comply with the temporary social (physical) distance rules, many HEIs have decided to move their Erasmus students' and academic staff activities to virtual surroundings and introduced a distance learning model, which has thus reduced physical Erasmus mobility in many countries. In this sense, the question which arises is whether distance learning, and mobility without a physical experience of the foreign academic milieu and national context as well, especially in terms of learning about other cultures and societal peculiarities, can replace the original mobility idea (and also the Erasmus mobility schemes) and permanently change the mobility concept in the upcoming years? And will the process of developing a common European cultural identity, as one of the goals of Erasmus, stop in future years?

In the EU's next long-term budget plan for the period 2021–2027, around EUR 24.6 billion is projected to be invested in Erasmus+ programme activities¹³. A key objective of the new programme is to reach more young people from diverse backgrounds and increase the participation of underrepresented groups in Erasmus+. This might change the present trends which

¹³ More information accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/1_en_act_part1_v9.pdf, 14. 12. 2020.

reveal that in the last few years only a minority of the student population has had the experience of spending a mobility semester in a foreign country. While this has to be analysed in more detail, one reason for such trends might be found in insufficient Erasmus+ funding, especially for an exchange in a country with high living expenses. As this article's analysis indicates, it seems that students who come from wealthier families find it easier to join the Erasmus+ mobility schemes due to the additional parental support and their better socio-economic status. The question that arises here is whether all of these preconditions make Erasmus students more competitive and cosmopolitan than their colleagues who only studied in their home country at national HEIs.

Still, in order to obtain more detailed data on mobility effects, further analysis is required that seeks to better explain whether a mobility experience influences students' additional tendency for further willingness to be mobile in their professional careers and education as well, and what really motivates them in the selection of a specific country and university for their Erasmus semester mobility. In addition, the fact that various universities, government authorities and statistical offices use different methodologies and indicators while processing data on international students makes it very challenging to compare different HEIs and national-level data. This means that it is extremely important to develop clear instruments and indicators for measuring internationalisation in HE.

Finally, although physical mobility should remain a priority of Erasmus, the question is will the present situation with the Covid-19 pandemic impact the fulfilment of the planned activities. In this sense, the new reality calls for new policies on all levels. New policy solutions should ensure an ongoing process of sharing knowledge and experience in the everyday contacts of students and academics from different countries and milieus in order to develop new skills and strengthen their intercultural awareness to become engaged citizens. However, this task is not easy and will depend on policymakers and university managements' individual positive orientation to the further development of 'new internationalisation activities' as well. Moreover, the need to invest more effort in the development of new tools and activities that will bring the internationalisation context in domestic university milieus within the *internationalisation at home* concept, from which the majority of students would benefit, will probably become even more important for university managements in the years to come.

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