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Academic mobility of Russian students on the international education market

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe the dynamics of changes in the position of Russian students in the context of international mobility. Data have been obtained by the method of the questionnaire survey and by focus groups. As a result, the percentage of Russian students involved in international educational processes, the countries which attract the largest number of Russian students as well as programmes they want to study, the obstacles to international mobility and other data have been obtained. In conclusion, interest in studying abroad among Russian students is still high.

Keywords: Social, Dimension, Student, Community, Nationwide.

Movilidad académica de estudiantes rusos en el mercado educativo internacional

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es describir la dinámica de los cambios en la posición de los estudiantes rusos en el contexto de la movilidad internacional. Los datos han sido obtenidos por el método de la encuesta por cuestionario y por grupos focales. Como resultado, se obtuvo el porcentaje de estudiantes rusos involucrados en procesos educativos internacionales, los países que atraen a la mayor cantidad de estudiantes rusos, así como los programas que desean estudiar, los obstáculos a la movilidad internacional y otros datos. En conclusión, el interés en estudiar en el extranjero entre los estudiantes rusos sigue siendo alto.

Palabras clave: Social, Dimensión, Estudiante, Comunidad, A nivel nacional.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities. Globalization is positioned as a multifaceted phenomenon and an important environmental factor that has multiple effects on education. International, intercultural, and global dimensions are three terms that are intentionally used as a triad (KNIGHT, 2003). In certain national and cultural contexts inter-culturalism is represented as a totality of theoretical and managerial approaches based on the principles of openness, intercultural dialogue and positive interaction. One of the biggest challenges for inter-culturalism is reconfiguring the models of

integration and the character of social relations in societies involved in the contexts of globalization, international migration, diaspora constellations, cultural and social diversity (KUROPJATNIK & KUROPJATNIK, 2018).

At present internationalization processes have covered all the spheres of social life, including the education market which in turn presents a number of challenges to higher education because of the disparities of resources in the world social space. Internationalization of the education market depends to a large degree on the situation in each particular country (LATYPOV, 2004).

2. METHODOLOGY

In 2015 the all-Russia sample of all the Federal Districts in Russia included the largest universities in each district. Quotas were observed for all types of higher education institutions 1) the level of education quota as well as an additional quota for classical higher education institutions; 2) quota by departments. A total of 2576 respondents were interviewed (KING, TERRIE, PECK, ALISTAIR, ALAN & DEBBIE, 2016).

In the survey, the Social Dimension of the Life of the Student Community in 2017 students of major classical universities in each Federal District filled questionnaires. The sample unit was a student group as a body, which corresponds to the European requirement of

cluster sampling. At each university two, randomly chosen study groups out of 6-8 university departments were surveyed.

An adapted version of the Round V in 2017 comprised the following thematic blocks:

Block 1 was devoted to the current educational status of the respondent at the time of the survey and contained the following questions: At what level of acquiring a higher education are you at present?; What is your form of study at university (in your major discipline)?; How is your tuition at university funded in the current semester?; Where is your university located and what is it called?; What is your specialization of study? (ZAJDA, 2005).

Block 2 was aimed at extracting information on previous education. The aim was to get information on the education trajectories of the students: school-university, school-college-university, school-job-university, etc. as well as possible horizontal mobility and its intensity (PETERSON, DAVIES, CHONG, EPSTEIN, PECK, ROSS, SEARS, SCHMIDT & SONU, 2016).

Block 3 is devoted to the living conditions of the students with fairly specific and detailed questions: With whom do you share your accommodation this semester? Do you live in a student dormitory? How pleased are you with the quality of your dwelling and living conditions during your studies? etc. (MACLEANS & GEO-JAJA, 2016).

Block 4 is the key to our survey. It is devoted to international mobility: Have you ever been a student abroad? According to what programme do you study abroad?; In what country have you studied

and over what period of time? Does your home institution recognize the credits you have obtained while studying overseas? Under what programme was your temporary study at a foreign higher education institution organized? Who funded your temporary study abroad and in what amounts and what was the main source of funding?...

Block 5, Personal data contained the usual passport data. Finally, Block 6 contained questions about the respondent's parents, for example: What is the education level of your parents? Their current or former job?; How do you assess the social status of your family?...

We present data for Russia for 2017 and compare them with the results of the 2015 survey, adding the more interesting elements from the results of the project's European base. On top of that, in May 2018 six focus groups were conducted with Friendship of the Peoples University students on the problem of student academic mobility. The criteria for forming focus groups were: citizenship, place of residence, year of study. Respondents were selected by sending an electronic form containing questions on the above criteria. A criterion common to all the questionnaires was the level of income.

3. RESULTS

On the whole, only 3% of Russian students at this period of time had experience studying abroad, however, about a third did not have such experience but were planning to study abroad soon, 66% have never studied and are not planning to study abroad (see Chart 1). It has

to be noted that the largest number of students among the 3% who have studied abroad were postgraduates and social sciences and humanities students. The previous sample in 2015 showed a slightly larger number of students who studied abroad, 5%.

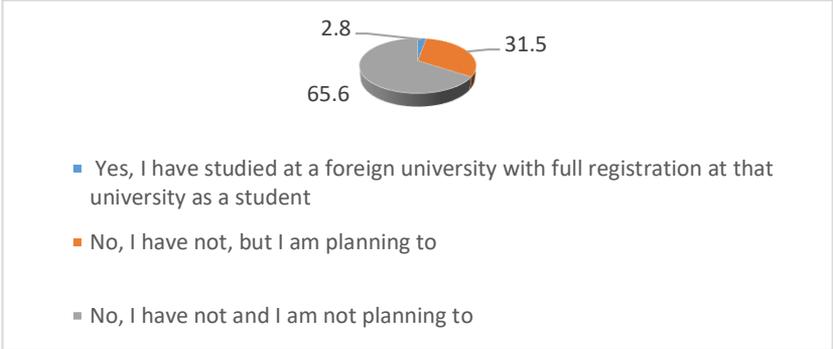


Chart 1: Experience of study abroad (in %)

Speaking about European countries one has to note Finland, Norway and Slovenia whose students in 2015 studied abroad more frequently than those from other countries whereas students from Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine studied abroad less frequently than those from other countries. Students from Georgia, Armenia and Montenegro declared plans to study abroad more frequently than those of other countries whereas students from Latvia, Austria and Italy are less motivated to study in other countries (BEVERLY, 2017).

Half of the countries where Russian students had studied before are not EU countries, one third are EU countries and 6.3% are the countries of the European Education Spaceless EU countries (See Chart 2). In 2015 outbound education mobility by foreign students

who had studied abroad was directed as follows: 55% to the European Union, 24% to the European education area and 18%, other.

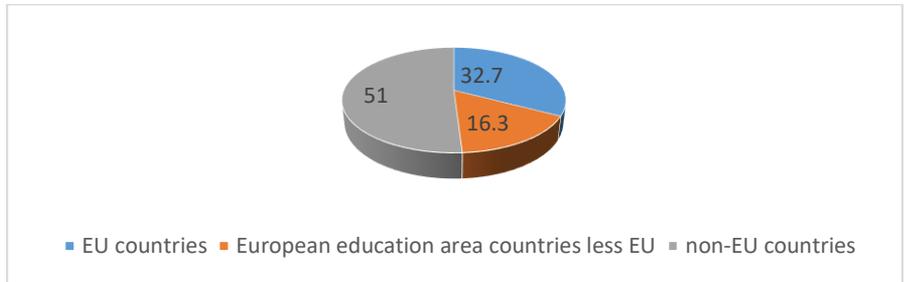


Chart 2: Countries where the students studied

The largest number of students go to China with Germany in second place (8.2%), the UK and the USA in third place (See Chart 3). In 2015 the leading destinations were the UK, China and Germany. That is, the three top leaders remained the same but the rankings within the three changed.

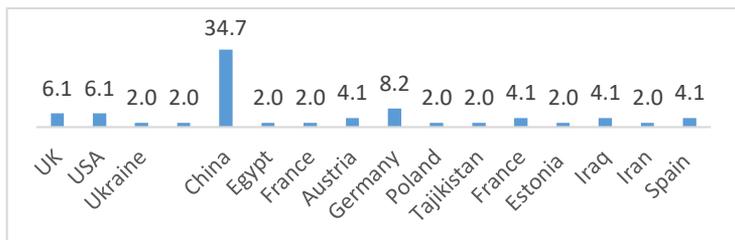


Chart 3: Countries where students studied

The globalization of the education space lends added importance to the recognition of credits. One-third of the students who studied

abroad say that all the credits were recognized, 15% say that part of the credits was recognized, 12.5% say no credits were given during their study abroad, 1.5% say that not a single credit has been recognized by their home university and there were 40% don' knows (see Chart 4).

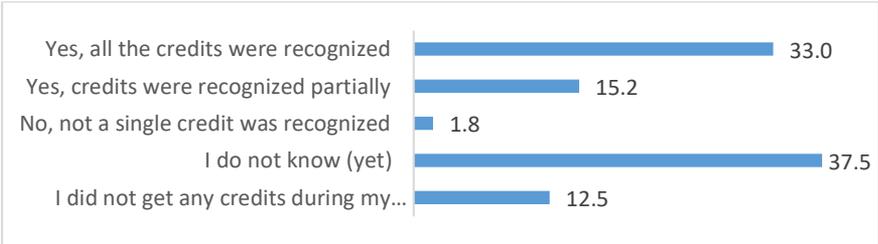


Chart 4: Recognition of foreign credits (ECTS, certificates)

60% of the students studied abroad without any definite programme, 12.7% were involved in a programme of inter-university exchanges, state or interstate programmes and EU programmes, 2.5% of students were financed by domestic or foreign foundations. In 2015 along with Russian students, students from Serbia (74%) and Sweden (57%) studied without a definite programme (ALTMANN & EBERSBERGER, 2013).

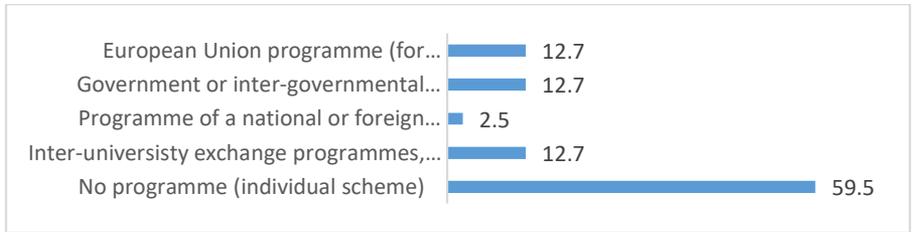


Chart 5: Programme of overseas study

Speaking about the main source of funding, the majority named family support (53.3%), followed by other sources (10%), my own paid job while studying abroad (8.3%), with equal numbers of answers my earnings from my previous job, scholarships/ jobs in my native country, stipends/loans offered by a foreign state, 5% said that an EU scholarship was the main source of funding and about 2% named special stipends/ loans from native country (see Chart 6).

Interestingly, stipends and study loans from a foreign state were named mainly by social and humanities students. In 2015 students from Russia were leaders in terms of frequency of their studies being funded by parents/ family/ partners. Along with Russia students from Switzerland, Italy and Armenia (62%, 62% and 61% respectively) also were heavily supported by relatives, whereas students from Latvia, Lithuania and Romania (78%, 76% and 62% respectively) more frequently mentioned their own incomes as a source of funding their education abroad (KORNEVA & PLOTNIKOVA, 2015).



Chart 6: Sources of funding the foreign study. Main source

Students who have not yet studied but are planning to study abroad choose EU countries (67%). In 2015 the most popular destinations chosen by students were European Union countries, 42%, European education area countries (non-EU countries), 4.9% and other countries, 22.4%, with 30% of respondents still undecided as to which country they would like to go to (see Chart 7).

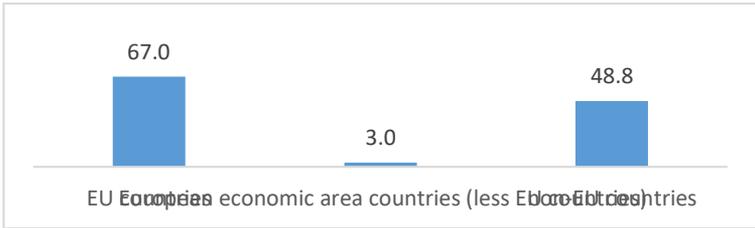


Chart 7: Countries of planned study abroad (in %)

The percentage is more than 100% because several variants of answers were offered the top 10 countries where Russian students would like to go to study: Germany, USA, China, UK, Czech

Republic, France, Spain, Canada, South Korea and Norway (see Chart 8). The most desirable countries for study in 2015 were; 1. Germany 2. UK 3. USA 4. China 5. France. We see that in this case, too preferences have not changed (SHANTI, 2014).

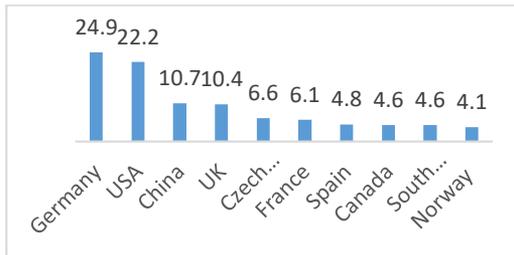


Chart 8: Countries of planned study abroad (in %)

56% of the students who have not studied but are planning to study abroad do not know what programme to choose, 19% believe it would be inter-university exchange programmes, 11% that it would be EU programmes, 10%, government or inter-government programmes and 4% programmes of foreign or national private foundations (see Chart 9). EU programmes were more frequently named by social and humanities students and inter-university programmes by technical students.

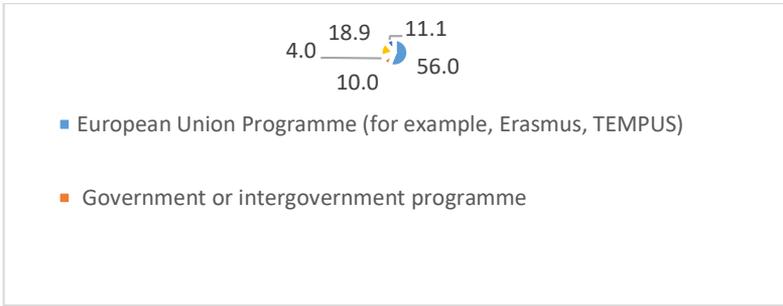


Chart 9: Programme of future study abroad (in %)

Almost half of the students are interested in Bachelor degrees, 42% other kinds of programmes and only 6.2% in Masters and 4.1% in PhD programmes (see Chart 10).

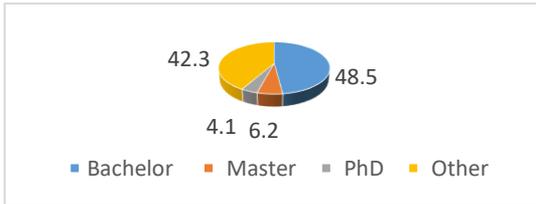


Chart 10: Level of study (in %)

The most serious obstacle is that education in the opinion of students who have not studied abroad, can be an extra financial burden (42%), in second place is the small education allowances in Russia (24.6%), in third place separation from close ones and family (22%) (see Chart 11). In 2015 the obstacles named most frequently were low education allowances in Russia (29%), followed by an extra financial burden for 23% and separation from partner, friend, family for 16%. It

is notable that in 2015 the financial burden was the decisive obstacle in the way of study abroad for students from Ireland, Montenegro and Croatia (80%, 80% and 79% respectively) and separation from family for students from Estonia, Norway and Poland (62%, 61%, 60% respectively).

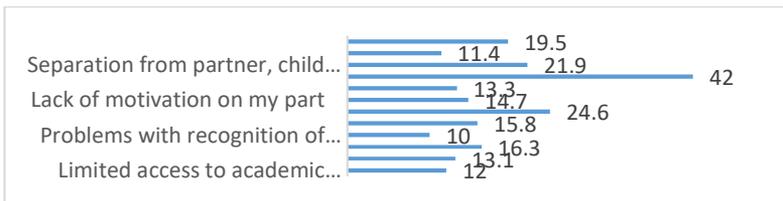


Chart 11: Obstacles to study abroad (in %)

The percentage for variants Serious insuperable obstacle and Serious obstacle that cannot be overcome any time soon in the context of this theme questions were asked about whether University students in various years had international study experience. The smallest number of students who had studied abroad temporarily was among junior year students and, naturally, the number was larger among senior year students. For all the foreign students, of whatever year, a study in Russia was the first international experience. Command of a foreign language is an important issue. Absolutely all the members of focus groups gave an affirmative answer to the question: Is a high level of proficiency in some foreign language necessary? The languages named to be most needed were as follows:

1. English = 71.7% (English should already be like your second native language, I consider English to be the world language,

you have to know English right from childhood, Historically English is everywhere).

2. Chinese = 10.2% (All the most important trade agreements are written in Chinese).

3. Spanish = 10.2% (It is fairly widespread, Statistically Spanish is used most frequently...).

4. French = 5.1% (French is more beautiful and is becoming a world language, like English).

5. Russian = 2.6% (Because I expect to work with it in future).

The focus group research (FG) revealed the fears that are most likely to manifest themselves when moving to another country to study or work. The results may be viewed in terms of the students' national affiliation (See Table 1).

Table 1: The fears of students that deter them from studying abroad

Russian students taking part in FG		Foreign students taking part in FG	
Object of fear	% of the total number of fears mentioned	Object of fear	% of the total number of fears mentioned
Loneliness	27.3	Loneliness	25
Mentality	18.2	Lack of communication skills	25

Lack of communication skills	9.1	Prospects	16.7
Social integration	9.1	Mentality	16.7
Uncertainty	9.1	Finances	8.3
Lack of self-confidence	9.1	No fears	8.3
Material aspects (financial, legal, accommodation)	13.6 (4.5% per each aspect)		
No fears	4.5		

Russian students have more fears compared with foreign ones. This is because the latter has experience of moving to another country as they have already arrived in Russia and this is a significant mobility experience for them. At the same time, fear of loneliness is prevalent among all respondents, even those who already have mobility experience. The students were then asked to rank the countries to which they would like to go for a temporary study.

The ranking mentions 47 countries with which the university has cooperative education programmes. Junior students named 30 desirable destinations. Some countries were not named at all: Bulgaria, Egypt, India, Peru, Romania, South Africa and others (see Cart 12). In choosing the countries where they would like to study students were guided mainly by their personal feelings (for example, I like the

Foreign students differ from Russian ones in that some of them have chosen India, Egypt, Panama, South Africa and other countries which Russian students did not even contemplate (see Chart 14).

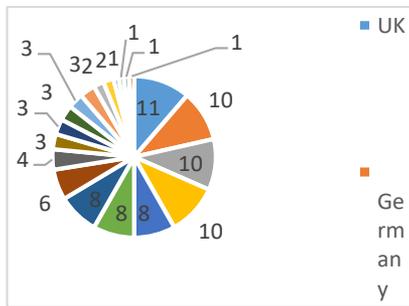


Chart 14: Ranking of countries by junior-year foreign students (in %)

Senior-year foreign students chose 14 countries. The most popular destination for foreign students is Germany. Unlike junior-year foreign students' respondents in this category revealed more similarities with Russian students (see Chart 15).

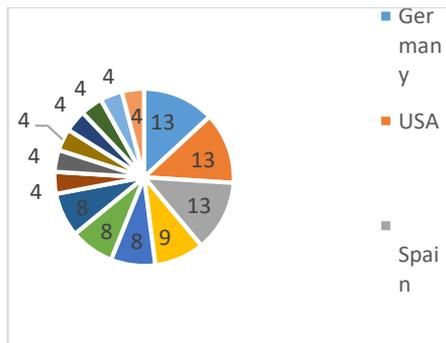


Chart 15: Ranking of countries by senior-year foreign students

4. CONCLUSION

The main factors that influence a Russian student's decision to go to study abroad can be divided into two groups: organizational-managerial and emotional. The results of surveys concerning the social dimension in other countries set forth in this article as well as the focus group data suggest that these considerations are relevant not only to Russia but to European countries as well. Thus, the organizational-managerial factors may include the student's lack of knowledge about possible study options in another country; non-recognition of credits received abroad by the home university; the university's problems with financing the student's trip as well as the student's language skills.

The emotional factors include fear of being alone and abandoned in a strange country, fear of separation from close ones, lack of self-assurance, not enough motivation. In the opinion of some Russian authors, any activity requires a conscious motivation based on three factors: interest, benefit and psychological comfort (KORNEVA & PLOTNIKOVA, 2015). On the strength of the data obtained as a result of the study, it can be said that interest in studying abroad among Russian students is still high, but the low percentage of realized enrolments indicates poor motivation in terms of psychological comfort connected with the mobility situation.

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