EDUCATIONAL TOURISM AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Marta-Christina Suciu¹, Marco Savastano², Gheorghe-Alexandru Stativă³, Irina Gorelova⁴

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, christina.suciu@economie.ase.ro
² Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, marco.savastano@uniroma1.it
³ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, alexstativa95@gmail.com
⁴ Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, irina.gorelova@uniroma1.it

Abstract

Educational tourism is a new branch of tourism, which has experienced a significant increase in recent times, due to the important benefits it brings to the local communities. Universities and other educational specialized institutions may highly contribute, support and encourage local development through educational tourism. Students who benefit from studying abroad can be considered as symbolic educational tourists, and their stay is considered to have a high potential to generate benefits. The host university may facilitate the development of better relationships between tourists and local communities in order to contribute to the development of the local economy in a sustainable and resilient way. Education tourism has to be taken into account by all educational institutions due to the different learning opportunities that might be better exploited. This paper focuses on some indicators considered to be relevant for educational tourism.

Keywords: educational tourism, local development, student mobility

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a modern branch of activity that has developed rapidly in recent years. The amplified demand for tourism employment has highly contributed to the intensification of the tourism boom (Abu Al-Asal, 2009). Since 1930, many universities in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Milan, Italy have provided high-quality accommodation conditions.

In recent years, the number of students studying abroad has increased worldwide, bringing beneficial results for both the student and the universities in the host countries. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, international students are defined as students who have crossed the national border for education and are enrolled in a study program outside their home state (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021).

On the one hand, students benefit not only from the advantages of completing study programs, but also from their interactions with local residents and people from other states, as well as from the experiences they gain, experience that will help them develop professionally and personally. On the other hand, the host country spends financial resources in order to support international students’ mobility of (accommodation, entertainment, food, tuition), with a positive impact on the local development and indirectly on the whole economy.

International students may be considered tourists since during their studies they are also visiting various places of local interest in the country where they study, especially in the different regions where they study. Tourism gathers a complex set of experiences and experiential learning as part of skills and competences accumulated by studying abroad (Huang, 2008). This set of core competencies and skills contributes to the complex process of transforming learning based also on personal development that

* contact author
complements professional development, thus leading to create and develop social experiences (Richards, 2011; McGladdery, 2017).

One of the most important reasons taken into account by students when they decide to choose a university for international mobility concerns also the attractiveness of the destination and the quality of the education offered by that higher education institution (Lam, 2011; Rahman, 2017).

Due to the increase in the number of students studying abroad, lately, universities have to actively be engaged in their mission dedicated also to stimulate the local communities and the whole economy by promoting the high technologies and IT&C on a broader scale to the majority of the local companies (Carayannis, 2010). Universities pursue the civic spirit in a holistic way by actively involving students within educational activities with a local specific in line with local communities, providing more and better opportunities to practice civic citizenship and the acquisition of new knowledge and their subsequent development (Goddard, 2016). International student mobility has to better promote the development of future international networks and partnerships to support scientific cooperation between faculties, and in this way, more benefits are generated for the host university (Hénard, 2012).

The main objective of our paper is to provide a detailed analysis of the way in which educational tourism is manifesting in different ways in the various states of the world. At the same time we were looking to identify whether benefits are generated as a result of this process. These objectives have been translated in the form of the following research questions (RQ):

• RQ1: What trends are emerging in the mobility of international students?
• RQ2: Does COVID19 pandemic have an impact on the mobility of international students?

2. Brief literature review

Educational tourism is one of the tourism branches that has been studied mostly since 1990 (Ritchie, 2003; Gibson, 1998). Educational tourists are represented by students who have been actively involved within various educational activities in order to learn new skills, also during their holidays. Educational tourism refers to a lot of common topics, such as: formal education, tourism, travel and skills. The link between learning and travel, even if it may be considered as a passive one, has been analyzed in a specific way by some authors (Falk, 2012). It has been noticed that the acquisition of knowledge and skills with a focus on the development of practical competences and skills take place sometime spontaneously.

Modern society is evolving more from knowledge and innovation-based society to a wisdom-based society. Thus wisdom, which may be understood better as a long-life learning complex process, may also be achieved by becoming more aware of harsh and ethical behavior seen from a broader perspective by taking into account also the cultural perspective according to the cultural and creative economy approach. Educational tourism is a complex transformative process that brings together different learning perspective based also on the accumulation of an international experience and core competencies and skills that have to provide also some measurable results in the form of acquired behaviors and knowledge (McGladdery, 2017).

One important issue that is highly debated concerns motivation that stays behind when students decide to apply to study abroad, in their attempt to learn, and takes also into account the place they intend to choose in terms of primary or secondary motivation. Educational tourism is defined as an organized trip that lasts at least 24 hours and takes place in an informal setting (Sie, 2016). This type of tourism is related to non-formal learning and is also a form of directed learning.

Educational tourism has three dimensions (Nugroho, 2016): all tangible and intangible elements of the tourist experience, tourist package that meets the needs of tourism? Or tourists?; the consistent beneficiary of learning as a product and correspondingly the educational experience. Moreover, different forms of educational tourism, respectively seminar vacations, skills enhancement vacations, educational cruises and study outside experience had also been identified.

In all the identified definitions of educational tourism, travel is a fundamental issue, because it plays a key role for developing the whole experience in order to better satisfy the willingness and differentiated desires to learn the habits specific to the local culture (Universities UK, 2017).
In recent decades, universities have paid more attention to civic engagement and thus they collaborate in various partnerships to design and develop local projects with stakeholders in order to assure a long-run sustainable and competitive improvement of the local communities (Trencher, 2013). During this process, different specific needs and innovative solutions to these problems have been identified, in order to encourage and support these projects development in a sustainable way such as to bring different benefits for the local area (Charles, 2016).

Universities play an important role in teaching ethics beyond the academic educational formal curriculum by providing a special dedicated course for moral education that complements the traditional set of professional competences and abilities.

Teachers also play a key role within the Long Life Learning process, seen from a holistic vision by joining formal, non-formal and informal issues of the education process as they have more opportunities to get to know the students individually and to work with them on the travel module (Liang, 2015). Because they are engaged in educational tourism, academics pursue the civic mission for local development, as it integrates teaching, research and active civic involvement abroad (Goddard, 2016). They are supported to conduct place-based research and to expand the teaching process to address the challenges local society is facing in order to capitalize and bring added value to the place. Local communities have to play an active role in planning these kinds of activities and they have to inform other interested actors about the local culture. Thus, the university could meet both the needs of the public, but also to one of the tertiary sectors (Pitman, 2011).

The role of universities in educational tourism is closely linked to its key strategic regional role as one of the important poles of competitiveness on the local level and it does not have to be limited to foreign students’ education. While students study abroad, they may also stimulate the local communities through tourism by spending a part of their budget to get access to cultural attractions, transportation and various restaurants (Nugroho, 2016). Even so, most tourism theories do not consider international students to be tourists, except when they spend less than a year in mobility, because they spend most of their time under non-tourism conditions (Huang, 2008).

Most specialized research studies dedicated to educational tourism had focused previously on the international students who choose to pursue a study program abroad. Among the most important factors taken into account in order to choose the place of study is the destination itself, with all its specific concerning also non-educational issues such as: political stability of the destination, local events, weather, activities that might take place during loisir /free time, local lifestyle (Lesjak, 2015).

The prestige and reputation of the university is important (students consider the quality of staff, curricula, academic infrastructure and access to various services), but so it is the one of the destination places as an important motivational factor (Rahman, 2017). Other determining factors in choosing the university are represented by culture, social ties and geographical proximity (Lee, 2014).

Studying abroad may have immediate benefits, such as academic knowledge, improved language skills, social, personal and emotional development, and intercultural sensitivity competences that refer to the host culture, highlighting the importance of understanding the local culture and its traditions (Bolen, 2007). The experience of studying abroad allows students to practice critical thinking and to reflect on the learning experience, but it can also improve and enlarge their influence and attitude.

Students can develop new strategies or styles for learning information, knowledge and for developing core skills by learning effectively how to improve their academic performance. Special dedicated programs for studying abroad are also a benefit for the host country by developing the local economy. The benefits of educational tourism have a social and economic relevance for the host country. Programs for studying abroad offer many opportunities for local entrepreneurs, respectively more and better employment opportunities for locals and economic benefits for small businesses.

The interaction between residents and international students may positively influence the perception of residents about international student’s mobility.
3. Methodology

According to the main goal of our paper, as well as in line with the research questions mentioned previously, this paper has a multilevel approach. First of all, we consider it is necessary to identify the main representative works on educational tourism and student mobility. Moreover, different relevant indicators for this central theme were analyzed, namely educational tourism. The main indicators analyzed in this paper are:

- Number of foreign and international students enrolled in OECD and non-OECD countries
- Growth rate foreign/international enrollment in tertiary education worldwide
- Share of national students enrolled in tertiary study programs abroad
- Distribution of international students by state origin
- Student mobility depending on the level of education.

4. Main results

To study abroad and to follow a student mobility program is a great experience that differentiates students. Thus the students’ international mobility benefit of a special attention in recent years. Conducting various studies abroad is an opportunity to access quality education, where core competencies and skills can be better, more effective and efficient acquired, in order to facilitate a rapid integration of students into dynamic and more complex labor markets that are more globalized.

From the point of view of the host country, more international students are a source of income that may have a relatively unfair impact on innovative and local economic systems. These students pay higher tuition fees compared to domestic students, but they also deal with various living expenses, which contribute to the local economy. For home studies, mobile students represent a brain drain.

International students can contribute to the economic development of their country of origin if they return home after completing their studies and contribute to improving technology and economic development. These students acquire knowledge and core competences, high skills that are shared through direct personal interactions, which may help the country of origin to better integrate into the global network of knowledge. The country of origin has to offer them higher job opportunities such as to use their competences and skills by getting proper income to allow them to have a higher standard of living.

4.1 Trends in student mobility

In 2020, universities stopped holding face-to-face classes in order to stop the COVID19 pandemic, which affected more than 4 million foreign students studying in OECD countries (OECD, 2020). This blockage affected the continuity of the educational process and the students' perceptions regarding the value of graduation diplomas. This pandemic may have serious long-term consequences for the international mobility of students even for the near future.

In the last twenty years, international student mobility has developed rapidly. In 2018, 5.6 million students worldwide chose to study abroad, twice as many as in 2005. There are various factors that determine students to study abroad, including: personal ambitions, lack of good quality educational institutions; quality of education in the state of origin, good employment prospects (Bhandari, 2018). The need to implement on a broader scale economies based on innovation and knowledge has stimulated the demand for tertiary education worldwide. Among the factors that have contributed to facilitate the effects of programs specially dedicated to study are: technological factors (spread of the Internet and social networks that allow contact with people in the country of origin), economic factors (low costs of international transport) and cultural factors (use of foreign languages, mostly English as the common working language).

During the period 1998-2018, the number of students in tertiary education increased by about 5% per year. OECD countries experienced an increase of about 4.5% per year, while the growth rate in non-OECD countries was higher, over 6% per year. In 2018, students enrolled in a study program in non-OECD countries accounted for 30% of all mobile students internationally, 7 percentage points higher
compared to the year 1998. In the last two decades, an increase in the annual average growth rate has been observed for both groups of states, but a greater variation has been observed in the group of OECD countries compared to non-OECD states. Between 1998 and 2018, the annual average growth rate of students in non-OECD villages ranged from 0.3% in 2004 to 19% in 2008, compared to OECD countries, where they ranged from 0.7% to 8% during the same period. However, annual average growth rate in OECD countries students has slowed below 3%. Even if there was an important increase in the number of international students, their concentration remained relatively stable, increasing from 5% in 2014 to 6% in 2018 in OECD countries.

Fig. no. 1: Number of foreign and international students enrolled in OECD and non-OECD countries and growth in international or foreign enrolment in tertiary education worldwide

4.2 International student flows and mobility models
It is important to identify also the factors that determine international students to be mobile as different policies may be created in order to encourage this process. Differences in education are the main determinant of student migration, as they have a lack of educational resources in the home countries. Among the economic factors determining the increase of the mobility rate are the high economic performance of the host state and a higher education of the host state. Non-economic factors that stimulates mobility are represented by religious and cultural similarities with the country of origin, as well as economic stability (UNESCO, 2013; Weisser, 2016). The quality of the educational process abroad is one of the essential factors taken into account when students choose the place of study (Abbott and Silles, 2016). The most important international destinations for students include a large number of top higher education institutions, which are confirmed in various international rankings benchmarking methods. A criterion for evaluating the qualities and performances of educational institutions is represented by attracting foreign students to study programs. Many countries have implemented various measures to reduce barriers to the migration of highly skilled people.

While migration conditions differ, one of the target ingredients for these programs are early-stage researchers. Tuition fees are a quite debated topic, as they are high for international students and represent a significant stream of income for universities. Some countries charge a double tuition fee for international students compared to the fee for domestic students, while other countries that promote international mobility may eliminate or at least reduce these fees.
In 2018, 2% of OECD national standard students were enrolled in an educational program abroad, a value that is lower compared to the EU average. The highest value is observed in Luxembourg, which records a value of 76%, followed by Slovakia with a value of about 20% and Iceland, with a value of over 16%. Most students in Luxembourg study in Belgium or Germany, students in the Slovak Republic study in the Czech Republic, and students in Iceland study in Denmark. Factors such as geographical distance, language, bilateral relations, historical connections are also important in choosing the destination country.

4.3 Distribution of students by country of origin

English language is also one of the main tools of the globalized world because it is used by at least 25% of people (Sharifian, 2013). For this reason, English-speaking countries are the most attractive destinations for students. Thus, in four of the states there are over 40% of the total mobile students at the level of OECD countries. The most important OECD destination country is the United States of America, with a global market share of 18% globally, followed by the United Kingdom and Australia, both with a global market share of 8%.
The European Union is an important geographical area for mobility, with over 1.7 million mobile students in the 23 OECD countries. Besides the United Kingdom, France and Germany are destinations chosen by many international students. Asian students are one of the largest groups of international students enrolled in study programs, with 57% of all OECD mobile students in 2018. Stable where more than 30% of OECD mobile students come from are India and China, and this is why I choose Canada, Japan, United States of America, Australia and the United Kingdom as destination countries. Europe is the next home region for international students, with a value of 23% of all mobile students in OECD stars, who prefer to stay in Europe.

4.4 Profile of mobile students internationally

From an educational point of view, students are more likely to travel abroad for advanced educational programs. In most states, the share of international students enrolled in study programs increases simultaneously with the level of education. In OECD countries, international students represent 6% of all enrollments in tertiary programs. Enrollment in undergraduate programs or equivalent is relatively low, below 5%, except for countries such as Austria, New Zealand, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, which have levels of over 15% of international students in total undergraduate students.

![Fig. no. 4: Students’ mobility by level of education in 2018](source: OECD (2020))

Enrollment in study programs increases significantly starting with the master's degree or equivalent. In the OECD, 13% of students are international students. This share is double the level of the bachelor's degree. At doctoral level (PhD) or equivalent, the share is even higher, respectively 22%, the states with the highest shares are represented by the Netherlands, Belgium, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Switzerland, which have a higher percentage. Fields of study are important for students who choose a foreign study program. There are countries that allocate resources for research in certain fields and that benefit from international recognition. Among the fields that attract many foreign students are social sciences and journalism, which attract about 12%, followed by natural sciences, statistics and mathematics, which attract about 8% of all foreign students.

4.5 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student mobility

The global spread of COVID-19 has prevented educational institutions from taking *face-to-face* classes, and as a result, universities have been forced to close their offices in response to human resource health measures. This pandemic crisis has affected all students in general and mobile students in particular. International students were particularly affected because they had to find solutions to the closure of universities and campuses in the host country. They had to return to their country of origin with limited information about when they could return to school. To support these students, the United Kingdom and Canada have offered the opportunity to remain on university campuses and have clemency regarding visa rules (UKCISA, 2020). States and educational institutions have taken various measures for the
safety and well-being of international students. In view of ensuring the continuity of the educational system universities are using IT&C technologies by offering courses and all learning experiences in online format. Although there were universities before the pandemic that offered online courses, few students considered this an alternative to face-to-face learning. Decreasing the share of international students will have significant repercussions on university funding, as these students pay higher tuition fees compared to others. States such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States of America and Canada, which rely on international students, will suffer the greatest losses. Higher education was considered a refuge during periods when there were no jobs, as it allowed people to better develop their competencies and skills. Compared to previous crises, pandemic measures have caused an educational crisis because they have affected the delivery of learning and study experiences abroad. Moreover, this crisis has raised awareness of the vulnerabilities of international students. Thus, it is estimated that in the coming years, international student mobility will be affected and diminished.

Conclusions

This paper presents educational tourism and highlights the key role they play for the local development. This type of tourism is experiencing an important developing in progress and it involves different economic actors. Research has provided evidence of the high impact of international educational tourism as one relevant way to assure the prerequisite of growth for various businesses developed within the tourism sector. It is considered to be economically beneficial to the host country and it helps students to develop through new professional and personal experiences that they do not find within the country of origin.

We consider it is important that policy makers collaborate permanently with universities and other educational institutions to expand and to optimize educational programs and their attractiveness. International educational tourism programs must better collaborate with universities in order to promote more and better-quality educational offers. Moreover, the university could develop different marketing and communication strategies in order to highlight its prestige of this higher education institution, the destination country, and the various tourist attractions according also to the local communities’ objectives. Graduates of such higher education programs must be considered as brand ambassadors for the university and the destination country.

As a limitation of our paper, the authors are aware that we mention that the analyzed data series are until 2018, as no available data were found for 2019 and 2020. Further studies will also take into account more detailed analysis for the years 2020 and 2021, years in which worldwide we had experienced numerous restrictions on people and students’ free movement and, implicitly, restrictions that affected the educational system, even they had been taken in order to better adapt to the new requirements regarding the safety of teachers and students.

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