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Cross Border Student Mobility: The Campus Europae Experiences

1. The European University Foundation – Campus Europae (EUF-CE)

The European University Foundation - Campus Europae is a network of 18 universities in 15 European countries. Campus Europae is not a special “cross border project”, which promotes cooperation between universities in one region although some of our members are involved in projects such as the Universities of Luxemburg and Nancy or the University of Eastern Karelia and Russian Universities. It is against this background that I have the opportunity to compare and highlight the differences between cross-border cooperation in the traditional sense of a specific region and European-wide cooperation.

The main purpose of the Campus Europae- network is to improve sustainable student and teacher exchanges. Sustainable in the sense that the participants of the exchange programme will get a real understanding of the host country, the social and economic structure and its culture and mentality. Most importantly, that they learn the language of the host country because this is absolutely necessary firstly for cultural understanding and secondly for business.

To attain these goals, the EUF-CE developed a concept based on the existing Erasmus structure and added some additional features:

The first of these additions is the duration of the period abroad: We encourage students to go abroad for one full academic year, not for a shorter part of time. Ten months are necessary to have at least a basic understanding of the host country.

Secondly, we recommend to our students to go to another European country for a second year, because this will help the students learn, not only the differences between two countries, but to understand what is common among three – and if possible more – European countries.

The third feature is that our students receive very efficient intensive language courses before the start of the study year. (We are presently developing within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, an online language learning gateway covering the 12 languages of the universities of our network.) Students will be able to communicate in the local language from the beginning of their stay abroad and they will reach the B1 level at least by the end of the study year. This will happen in both countries in which they study.

The fourth feature is that we try to give students the opportunity to gain working experiences in study-related jobs. This is difficult because of the restrictive labour laws, still in force in the European Union, but I will explain these details later.

Last but not least, our successful students who studied in three different countries, reached their academic goals and are able to communicate in at least three languages –

besides English - will be awarded a “CE-Degree”, a diploma in which their academic degree and their international experiences including their language competencies will be documented.

The overriding goal of this programme is to give students an impression of what is “European unity in diversity” and to make them, so we hope, active European citizens.

2. Innovative and efficient forms of cooperation

The efficiency of cooperation is directly linked to the purpose of the cooperation. During the last years, in several European countries, the main purpose of cooperation between Higher Education Institutions has been: to save money. Especially in Germany but not only there, universities which are situated in the neighbourhood have been forced to concentrate their activities and to close others. For example one dental medicine faculty had to close if there was another in the neighbouring university 40 km away, or have a Romanistic Department only in Rostock and not also in Greifswald.

I am afraid that this type of cooperation may become fashionable also in cross border projects.

More future oriented is the development of common study programmes among two, three or more universities in a region such as it has been established during past years between Luxemburg, Nancy and Saarbrücken. The Physics departments developed a common study programme by which it is confirmed that reciprocal recognition is guaranteed. Students use the specific strength of the members of this network for their academic interests and, later on, for their professional career. This cooperation includes research cooperation among the participating universities and increases the quality of studies and research.

It is important that such cooperation will not touch the specificities of each of the member universities or even lead to the closure of departments at other network-members as has been shown with the German examples. Using the specific strengths of the partners and learning from each other is only possible if there are similar structures within each of the partner institutions.

There is a tendency in many of our universities to offer courses in English. This policy is supported by some European institutions too. There are arguments to enforce this development. But if we talk about cross-border cooperation in a region and we combine this cooperation with promoting small and medium sized companies, I am convinced that language learning, learning of the local languages, is also a very important goal of this type of cooperation in study programmes. During university, English may be a helpful bridge-language for understanding but university-studies are – hopefully – a passing phase in students’ lives and the real world requires more languages than English.

3. Mutual diplomas and qualification recognition

Study abroad has to be taken serious, not only by the student, but also by the teachers, the faculties and the universities. All festive speeches about the necessity and value of

international experiences and cross-border cooperation are hollow words if there is no recognition by the home universities of the qualifications obtained abroad.

The debate on the recognition of certificates or ECTS-points attained at host universities is some decades old. Do not be afraid, I will not tell you the whole story which started in Western Europe already in the Fifties. With regard to final qualifications and degrees, the discussion ended in April 1997 with the Lisbon-Convention on the recognition of degrees. By this Convention the signing states agreed to accept that someone who is accepted in one state as a teacher or lawyer or medical doctor will have the right to practice also in the other states, with some modifications.

The problem we face inside the universities is not the recognition of ECTS-points attained in foreign universities. The problem is that these ECTS-points should *replace* ECTS-points which normally have to be gained at the home university. The slogan for this is: a point is a point. Many faculties and teachers insist that such a replacement will take place only if the courses studied in the foreign universities have the same contents and the same length as those at the home university. But the idea of studying abroad is not to do and to learn the same - only at another place and probably in another language. The purpose of gaining cross-border experiences is to learn about the differences of how they teach in the other country and how they consider similar subjects. The aim is to understand the diversity, not to learn the exact same contents in the same way.

Campus Europae has developed a system of recognition between the member-universities. In matrices, which have been accepted by the different faculties, students will see before they go abroad which courses offered at a host universities may replace a course – or several courses – at the home university. At the beginning it was a bit of paper work. But now the update can be done in less than one day for each of the study programmes.

4. Academia-business cooperation

I will deal with this topic from the point of view of the student. To get study-related work experience already during the study is a great advantage for both students and future employers. Campus Europae furthermore tries to make it an advantage for the students and the present employer who gives students the actual chance to work.

The institution of an internship is well known all over the world. Now it is generously supported by the EU too. But an internship is different from work-experience. Internships have to be a part of the study-programme as it is based on a learning contract signed by the company and the faculty. The consequence is that companies have to invest a lot of time and do not like to pay for students especially if they know that the EU will generously award grants.

Therefore, Campus Europae went another way. CE-movers offer companies to work part-time (up to 16 hrs per week) for them without taking a salary. We call it, using a key word of the Bologna-Declaration: “learning employability”. The student will work for the company or administration or agency for at least 9 months. Because Campus Europae gave the student the possibility to take part in a 4 – 6 weeks intensive language course with at least 5, better 6 – 7 hrs per day, the student will be able to understand the

other employees and to cooperate with them mostly without an interpreter. After some weeks these students will be productive employees in each of the companies. For the students it will be an excellent opportunity to increase the language competency, to learn something about the country outside the academic society and to have a first work-experience in a cross-border company. As we know from the trainee-programmes in which big firms try to help their young employees also to work experiences abroad the CE-Programme is much cheaper for the employers than these trainee programmes.

The problem is that most of the CE-movers need to earn money when studying. About fifty percent of all European students have to earn part of their living by working during the study-year. A lot of restrictions exist even in the EU to carry out such working experience. That is why Campus Europae offered this path: Learning Employability without a salary. Instead of a salary paid by the employers, CE- movers have the possibility to get a Campus Europae bursary which Campus Europae finances with the help of sponsors. Most of the sponsors are those companies and organisations which are offering unpaid working-possibilities to CE-movers.

5. Conclusion

As I mentioned at the beginning, Campus Europae is not a typical cross-border project. But the elements I have presented seem to be also the key points for successful cross-border cooperation among universities in border regions.