



ALISIOS
ACADEMIC LINKS
AND STRATEGIES
FOR THE
INTERNATIONALISATION
OF THE
HE SECTOR

QUALITY OF MOBILITY IN EUROPE AND BRAZIL: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

SEPTEMBER 2015

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Introduction



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This paper is the third contribution of the ALISIOS project: it complements, with a more practical approach, the other two previous papers (the first focusing on the EU and Brazilian higher education and research policies, frameworks and structures¹; and the second focusing on the internationalisation strategies in Europe and Brazil and the impact of the Science without Borders programme²). The paper reviews policy documents, tools and good practices for quality mobility, including the identification of obstacles and suggestions for overcoming them. It capitalises on the European and Brazilian experiences and it identifies concepts, practices, tools and procedures used in both contexts, where one can find specific features but also similarities and the possibility of building a common ground for joint collaboration.

Given that the ALISIOS project aims at fostering a better understanding of the European Higher Education and Research Areas, as well as of the Brazilian Higher Education System and Research practice and organisation, the paper will start with a review of the past and current experiences focusing on mobility programmes, both in Europe and Brazil, looking especially for ways of enhancing the quality and the structure of mobility programmes and the definition of associated learning outcomes.

A specific focus is devoted to the topic of recognition of study periods and degrees as central both to the quality of mobility and to the design, development and implementation of joint education programmes between Europe and Brazil. This part benefits from the presentations, insights and discussions developed within the 3rd ALISIOS Workshop that took place in Cuiabá during the FAUBAI International Conference in April 2015³.

The last part of the paper will focus on the role of different actors in the overcoming of obstacles to academic mobility. Finally, it will review mobility tools which may help in improving quality and also in measuring and monitoring improvements in student, researcher and staff exchanges, which are the basis for the internationalisation and the development of science and innovation partnerships. Thanks to this, partners can benefit from complementary expertise, resources and innovative approaches.

¹ http://alios-project.eu/files/pdf/ALISIOS-Short-Paper1_web.pdf

² <http://alios-project.eu/files/pdf/ALISIOS-Short-Paper2.pdf>

³ <http://alios-project.eu/outputs/ws3>



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Quality of mobility – preliminary considerations

When we talk about quality of mobility we need first to contextualise our reflections on the conditions in which mobility takes place and on the role it plays according to the different perspectives and regional needs (HEIs, the educational system, the national, the regional, the international context). Quality can be defined as “fitness for purpose” and “fitness of purpose”⁴. This means that we always have to take into account that mobility can be an aim *per se*, and thus we need to guarantee that mobile participants, both young and adult, have a positive experience, but that it can also be a tool for reaching further goals: better learning, fostering intercultural competences, enabling international learning environments, enhancing educational and research cooperation, linking universities and companies, improving competitiveness, fostering social and regional integration, and to this aim we need to ensure a wider perspective in establishing suitable framework conditions.

For this reason, in the next section we will try to better explain some features of mobility programmes that can serve as models in different contexts and therefore contribute to define some quality standards. One cannot simply transfer models and standards from Europe to Brazil and vice-versa, especially because some of the objectives and starting conditions of the mobility programmes are different, as are institutional international strategies. We will highlight and compare some of the main features of European and Brazilian intra-regional and inter-regional mobility programmes and see to what extent these programmes have developed into ‘models’ of mobility and how this affects the appreciation of quality of mobility in the different contexts.

European mobility programmes

In this section we will look at the main features and evolution of the Erasmus mobility programme and underline the background reasons for the strong emphasis on mobility as a tool for curricular integration and recognition. We will also look at the ways in which academics and institutions have been involved in the managing of the programme throughout its different phases. This analysis will show us the way in which quality of mobility has evolved in Europe.

Erasmus as a “model”?

In Europe the Erasmus programme can be looked at in its evolution from a specific regional mobility programme to a programme tackling global mobility. Its main characteristics have been extensively studied, as well as its impact on the whole process of European integration, including the process leading to the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Based on the analysis of Teichler⁵ we can underline some of the main elements, which may facilitate comparison with other programmes.

The regional dimension at the origin of Erasmus mobility is probably the programme’s most important feature, and it has influenced most of its other specificities. The Erasmus mobility programme was born in 1987 (two years before the Maastricht treaty and the creation of the

⁴ You can find an explanation of these concepts in the document: “Quality Assurance: Role, Responsibilities, and Means of Public Authorities, with a view towards Implications for Governance of Institutions and Systems” available at http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Seminars/KOHLER_Jurgen_EN.pdf

⁵ Teichler, U., Maiworm, F. (1997). *The ERASMUS Experience: Major Findings of the ERASMUS Evaluation Research Project*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. See also Teichler, U. (2009) Internationalisation of Higher Education: European Experiences, *Asia Pacific Education Review* 10 (1), pp. 93-106.



European Union) within an area with shared cultural and political goals. It had a strong emphasis on supporting European regional integration, which became even stronger with the enlargement process after 1990. This explains the choice of an inclusive approach to the mobility periods, with recognition, upon return, of the integrated study abroad. In other words, the period of studies carried out at a host institution should be fully recognised by the home institution as an integral part of the programme leading to the degree rather than as supplementary or optional further studies.

As a matter of fact, Erasmus encouraged “curricular integration” since its beginning, by promoting mobility through networks of departments sending and receiving students while working intensively in comparing and linking programmes and contents of teaching and learning. The aim was to induce development of joint or coordinated academic activities between partner departments, from the incorporation of the study abroad period into the home country curriculum to the design of joint curricula, to joint selection of students, mandatory periods abroad, recognition procedures, and joint certification of study achievement abroad. This was a way to promote structural forms of academic cooperation leading to the improvement of reciprocal knowledge, trust and convergence of curricular diversities, thus facilitating circulation of students and graduates within the European Union and inducing a transformation of educational activities, so as to offer to all the students, regardless of their chances of moving, programmes with a ‘European’ intercultural and international dimension.

Erasmus mobility had other peculiar features that are worth mentioning:

- 1) Since its inception the programme was based on strong institutional multilateral or bilateral commitment: through departmental and institutional agreements, with very few ‘free mover’ students, it expected systematic support for ‘organised study abroad’ (preparatory programmes, language training, help in accommodation, administrative and academic advice and streamlined administrative processes both in home and host universities) and a balanced circulation of students.
- 2) Since the beginning it has also been an incentive, a partial funding scheme. Students are awarded a grant designed to cover only the additional costs of study abroad, while networks and institutions receive a moderate grant for institutional support, which has to be complemented by institutional resources.
- 3) Erasmus supported a broad range of activities beyond mobility: teaching staff mobility, curricular innovation, and thematic networks are among the most relevant. Support for specific activities was granted to institutions for short periods but with some degree of continuity – possibly for just an initial phase over a few years. These features were obviously designed to stimulate those with academic and administrative responsibilities *vis-à-vis* students to co-operate closely with their partners in other European countries.

In order to fully understand the concept and discussion about quality of mobility within the European context it is worthwhile looking at the main evolution of the Erasmus ‘model’, especially in the phase of transformation from its original, regional approach to the global approach of the Erasmus Mundus programme.

The transformation of Erasmus: the managerial shift

During its first ten years, from 1987 to 1997, the Erasmus programme was based on the so called ‘International Cooperation Programmes = ICP’, networks of departments or research



groups which received funding for the management of mobility flows and for regular meetings of the academic staff to discuss and monitor quality of mobility, namely academic progress of students and recognition matters. The programme's emphasis was on building trust and enhancing reciprocal knowledge of teaching and learning programmes, comparison of academic content and development of curricula with an enhanced European dimension.

As from 1995, with the new Socrates programme, the Erasmus programme saw a big shift:

- responsibility to manage mobility flows was transferred from the small multilateral networks of academics to the central institutional level: mobility had to be arranged through bilateral institutional agreements and
- each institution had to develop its own 'European Policy Statement', i.e. a strategic document where the organisation of services and the ways of articulating academic and institutional responsibilities were described and explained.

This shift was intended to bring more efficiency and effectiveness to the managing of funding and had an important impact on improving the organisation of mobility, helping institutions to develop more strategic thinking and professionalisation of support services, allocating complementary funding and guaranteeing coherence of policy and services. In most institutions the strong academic focus of the first ten years continued to be the basis for the choice of the most suitable partners in each subject area and as a guarantee for academic support, counselling and recognition. But this evolution had uneven results and sometimes led to a decrease in academic contact and integration, with lower priority being given, for instance, to 'internationalisation at home', which happens to be another desired development.

The challenge of shifting responsibilities from multilateral small networks to bilateral institutional arrangements was met by institutions in very different ways, but in any case the academic involvement had to be readapted to a completely new context. Universities had to decide how to articulate academic and administrative responsibilities at the different levels of university governance, depending also on the role assigned to the central and decentralised academic bodies, taking into account the new funding mechanism. Funding was given to institutions to provide for scholarships for outgoing students and staff, for monitoring visits and for organising student mobility.

Between the two extremes, total centralisation and total decentralisation of the management of the programme in schools, faculties or departments, there has been a full range of different solutions, according to the size and the centralised or decentralised culture of each institution:

- Some universities for instance remained particularly strong only with regard to administrating scholarships and managing general bilateral agreements, decentralising to the faculties/departments those decisions having to do with the choice of partners, students' flows and the management of learning agreements and recognition. They also allocated funding to the academic structures for the organisation of student mobility, including language preparation, academic integration and monitoring of visits;
- Others left responsibility in the hands of the teaching staff in all matters related to the students' experience but centralised the main support services related to the organisation of mobility, language preparation, accommodation and funding.
- The constant presence of different governance and organisational structures as well as of very different levels of interaction between centralised and decentralised responsibilities is still one of the main challenges that European institutions, administrative staff and academics have to address in their interaction and dialogue, when managing mobility flows, and this tends to generate some confusion among mobile students.

We should also keep in mind that the managerial approach to the organisation of mobility

needs to include ways for a growing involvement of the academic staff and governance of academic programmes; this is necessary in order to rethink ways to induce positive change of the curriculum and a general improvement of the intercultural and international competences of all students, both mobile and non-mobile, e.g. through the organisation of more flexible curricula, an international approach to contents, better involvement of the international and mobile students and the sharing of experiences in the learning and teaching processes.



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The transformation of Erasmus: the global shift

When the new Erasmus Mundus programme was launched in 2004, it was aimed at complementing the EU regional programmes for international cooperation between the EU and third countries in higher education (Tempus for the European partner countries, Alfa for Latin America and Asia-Link for Asia). However, the programme did not envisage direct cooperation with partner countries, since its main purpose was to develop the Union's universities and their attractiveness by awarding scholarships for third country nationals to enrol in joint programmes offered by consortia of European universities and by funding the development of such joint programmes (Erasmus Mundus Joint Master and Joint Doctoral Programmes).

As of 2006, Erasmus Mundus developed a second action (called Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Windows – EMECW until 2009, later renamed Erasmus Mundus Action 2), focusing on mobility for exchange students and degree-seeking candidates on all levels, from undergraduate to PhD to post-doc/staff, between consortia of European universities and country or multi-country regional consortia of institutions in different geographical areas around the world. This mobility programme was developed on the basis of many of the features we described above and was innovative in many respects:

- Combining regional and global mobility: the Erasmus Mundus joint programmes took advantage of near 20 years of Erasmus exchange experience and especially of curricular integration, by fostering joint programmes among European universities with a strong, embedded mobility component. Moreover, the programmes granted scholarships to students from non-European countries in order to increase the 'attractiveness' of the European dimension outside Europe, and had a strong impact on the global expansion and development of the international (not only European) dimension of the programmes' profiles and learning environments. Thus they combined the old component of institutional collective mobility and strong academic integration that characterised the original Erasmus programme with a new pattern of degree-seeking mobility provided by consortia of universities. Recognition of studies among European universities was embedded in the design of the joint programme, while degree recognition in non-EU countries of origin of the students still remains a challenge.
- The experience provided by EMECW/Action 2 brought other elements of innovation in the traditional distinctive 'Erasmus model'. First of all, it relied on the selection of projects presented by networks of institutions from both geographical areas: Europe and the interested country or region, depending on the calls. This model allowed going back to the basis of the first Erasmus generation of mobility, where patterns, flows, tools and objectives were decided within networks of departments. The EMECW thus allowed for a multilateral design and implementation of a mobility project, including shared decision regarding quality tools and quality enhancement, with a strong focus by the European Commission on the requirement to use the European transparency and recognition tools. Due to the multidisciplinary approach of most of the projects and to the strong managerial and administrative component required (especially the management of scholarships), there has been an uneven and rather low involvement of teaching staff in the different consortia and within them.



Another important development within the Erasmus Mundus programme has been the change in the approach, from partial incentive funding to full support grants not only for the mobility of students and staff to and from Europe but also for the management and organisation of specific services, monitoring and quality control.

Brazilian mobility programmes

In this section we will look at the main quality issues arising in some mobility programmes under international partnerships and regional programmes in which Brazilian institutions have been involved with different kinds of funding and management. It should be noted that, compared to the European experience, Brazilian mobility programmes (also taking inspiration from American programmes) are more focused on personal, civic and professional development of the students and on the international connection of institutions than on curricular integration (which has been an European concern rooted in the European convergence of educational systems).

Science without Borders (SwB) is one of the most recent and original experiences regarding Brazilian mobility programmes. It should be analysed in the light of Brazilian policies related to mobility scholarships, understood as a public investment for improving the international dimension of the scientific and educational landscape. This perspective explains the inclusive approach (full scholarships, involvement of a wide range of institutions, including those with less experience and with lower international exposure), broadly aimed at promoting the Brazilian Educational System worldwide as well as new links for future cooperation.

Mobility is one of the core activities in the internationalisation projects of Brazilian universities and its institutional implementation and inherent regulations have improved year after year. For approximately fifteen years, Brazilian universities have been carrying out institutional actions aimed at centralising international mobility and regulating it. In such a diverse and sometimes inequitable higher education system, quality of mobility should be evaluated taking into account the different contexts and in accordance with the goals of each institution or region. Is quality perceived only in terms of successful credit transfer? Is it the number of students involved in international mobility? How much is the intercultural experience valued in terms of quality in the Brazilian context? How much has mobility influenced the transformation of local curricula towards achieving international profiles and competences?

Institutional mobility programmes and areas of study

The international students' mobility formats most widely developed in Brazil – predating, and aside from, the SwB Programme – are the ones directly developed between Brazilian HEIs and partner institutions abroad, usually covering all areas of study. They create the opportunity for mobility in areas not covered by the 18 priority areas of SwB which are limited to the fields of science, technology, engineering, health sciences and creative industries. This is extremely relevant considering the high concentration of students in two of the major areas of study classified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In fact, the Social Sciences/Business/Law and Education comprise 59.4% of undergraduate enrolments, 21.48% of which in Business and Law alone.

Although currently computed as grants awarded by the SwB programme, the BRAFITEC and the BRAFRAGI mobility programmes started long before the SwB programme and were



developed under international cooperation agreements funded by CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, linked to the Ministry of Education). Under these programmes, undergraduate students of engineering (BRAFIPEC) and agronomy, agri-food and veterinary science (BRAFIAGRI) do part of their degree in a French institution. Started in 2002 and officially launched in 2003, the BRAFIPEC programme (*BRASil France Ingénieur TECnologia*) allows French engineering schools (around 75 in all) and Brazilian universities (around 40) to establish scientific collaboration agreements and exchange undergraduate students and teachers in the field of engineering. Recognised as a pioneering programme for scientific and technological cooperation, it served as a model for implementing similar mobility programmes between France and other Latin American countries. The UNIBRAL programme – started in 2006 and developed through a partnership between CAPES and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) – also involves projects of university institutional partnerships, exclusively at the undergraduate level, with the aim of fostering the exchange of Brazilian and German undergraduate students and encouraging the comprehension of curriculum structures, providing mutual recognition of credits. These programmes were built around strategic disciplinary areas of the partner countries, thus clearly relying on a model which combines mobility with the firm purpose of fostering scientific cooperation between the institutions involved. They were also based on the direct involvement of academics and to a certain extent on the promotion of curricular integration and mutual trust in the educational paths and degree profiles of each institution.

Several networks and consortia of universities also promote the mobility of students. This is the case of the Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group (AUGM), a network of public universities in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, first established in 1991 and which, among other things, offers credit transfer mobility programmes for undergraduate and graduate students. If we compare these mobility programmes promoted through networks to BRAFIPEC, we can see that the focus has shifted from a strong academic disciplinary involvement to a wider commitment of the institutions, with the central role being played by the university as a whole, which in turn results in the reinforcing of central services and the professionalisation of international relations offices called upon to participate in the stimulation of the academic component.

At the graduate level, especially PhD, besides individual grants for sandwich and full doctorate mobility offered by Brazilian federal agencies CAPES and CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation) and state-level foundations such as FAPESP and FAPERJ, mobility takes place through bilateral agreements that follow the models of the CAPES-COFECUB Programme (French Committee for the Evaluation of University Cooperation with Brazil). COFECUB is the oldest and largest initiative of its kind in Brazil, having reached 35 years of existence in 2014. It has supported more than 820 projects and trained over 3,000 doctors in all areas of knowledge, involving 37 Brazilian universities and 64 French institutions. These types of bilateral joint research projects and academic activities between Brazil and other countries fund scientific exchange between higher education institutions and intensify the training of high level human resources. This 'model' promoted by governmental agencies relies mainly on the direct contacts established by the researcher (or his/her group) and individual project leaders and/or on interdepartmental or inter-institutional agreements, but in either case the starting point and management structure is strongly based on direct individual academic engagement rather than on the institutional availability of specific central services to support and promote mobility, although the latter may help.

These pioneering experiences were very useful to implement student mobility programmes in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions, as they provided the necessary formal institutional framework, which mainly characterised – and largely still characterises – Brazilian mobility programmes, before the advent of the Science without Borders programme and the bilateral agreements with foreign institutions.



For several years now, many Brazilian HEIs have been developing and promoting mobility of undergraduate students through institutional mobility agreements with partner institutions abroad, creating and consolidating, through these experiences, good practices of recognition of credits obtained abroad. In most of these programmes, students do not pay school fees at the foreign host HEIs but have to support the costs of accommodation food, transportation, health insurance and other personal expenses during their stay abroad. In some cases, the students, depending on the analysis of their socioeconomic situation, can count on financial support from the Brazilian HEIs to carry out international mobility.

Due to these mobility experiences with partner institutions, many Brazilian HEIs already have resolutions and norms in place for studies carried out abroad, which provide for the establishment of formal agreements for the transfer of credits obtained in subjects successfully completed during mobility. The credit transfer arrangements vary widely, depending on the similarity of the technical profile of the course curriculum in Brazilian and foreign HEIs. Credits can be considered as mandatory, elective or complementary. In most cases, the transfer of credits of compulsory subjects of the curriculum depends on the contents of the subjects taken abroad and on the number of class hours, which are expected to be somewhat similar to the contents and class hours of the subjects in the Brazilian HEIs.

These previous experiences facilitated the credit transfer processes of undergraduate students within the Science without Borders programme, although this continues to be one of the biggest challenges for the quality of student mobility in Brazil. One of the reasons for this challenge is the fact that regulations and norms for credit transfer in Brazilian HEIs often demand a deeper analysis and understanding of the curricula of the institutions abroad, which cannot always be guaranteed in SwB.

Science without Borders

The Science without Borders (SwB) programme, created in December 2011, introduced a completely new perspective by starting a massive national mobility programme: "a program that seeks to promote the consolidation, expansion, internationalisation of science, technology, innovation and improve Brazilian competitiveness through exchange and international mobility". The initiative was based on the long experience, on the part of Brazilian agencies in charge of internationalisation and improvement of the educational, scientific and research systems, of funding individual mobility through dedicated scholarships. Intended to increase technological and scientific co-operation through the funding of Brazilian students and researchers abroad, as well as to increase mobility opportunities for undergraduate students, the SwB programme has granted 101,446 scholarships, 77.8% of which awarded to undergraduate students.

SwB has thus made a great impact on Brazilian society, in line with the traditional forward-looking policies of granting individual scholarships to talented students and researchers as a public investment for the improvement of the international dimension of the scientific and educational landscape. Scholarships granted to students or researchers to carry out complementary academic activities abroad have always been a way of achieving personal growth and creating links for future institutional cooperation.

SwB was designed to offer opportunities directly to talented students in a fast and massive way. Mobility flows were centrally negotiated by the Brazilian government with the host countries' representatives, using a 'top-down' approach with low participation of Brazilian HEIs. Mobility occurred without HEI involvement or commitment in terms of selecting the students and identifying the host countries and institutions. In this sense, it is frequently considered a 'free-mover' programme, in which the students move on their own initiative outside the institutional framework.



Nonetheless, SwB turned out to be an important instrument for social inclusion of economically and socially disadvantaged students and gave more opportunities to students in institutions with little or no experience in student exchange and international partnerships. It particularly provided unique mobility opportunities for the undergraduate students of these institutions.

With the creation of the programme, outgoing mobility nearly doubled in several universities and some institutions were faced with international mobility for the first time. The programme certainly put Brazil on the map of international education and forced institutions to start discussing more flexible mobility regulations, the specific requirements of the programme and the lack of formal relations between home and host institutions. The fact that the mobility of SwB students was not linked with the international partnerships of home institutions made the follow-up phase and assessment a big challenge for many institutions.

On the other hand, it is widely recognised among Brazilian academics that: *«the gains go much beyond the numbers and improved qualifications of young students and researchers. The greatest achievement has perhaps been the opening of dialogue between Brazilian higher education institutions and peer institutions in many different parts of the world. The academic mobility has opened channels of communication for ongoing future partnerships with institutions that were perhaps not within the reach of many Brazilian universities previously. The result has been the design of joint programmes, the promotion of courses with double degrees, joint diploma programmes, student and staff mobility as well as increased opportunities for collaborative research and international publications»*⁶.

It is difficult to speak about Brazilian models for international mobility, nevertheless we can point out a number of specific approaches which have an important impact on quality, especially if we take quality issues to include equal and wide access to mobility, foreign language policies, and internationalisation strategies both at an institutional and at a national, systematic level.

Did the Brazilian government have a plan to globalise higher education through SwB? Can the programme be considered the “Brazilian way” of doing undergraduate mobility? Is it a “model” or just a government programme to fully finance individual mobility? The programme is extremely ambitious and certainly benefits students from different backgrounds and regions in Brazil. The bilateral partnerships that supported undergraduate mobility before SwB were widely restricted to institutions located in the country’s urban areas and more developed regions; it has also given precedence to students who could afford the costs of mobility and had foreign language skills. SwB is definitely a programme designed to scale up the numbers of international mobility in Brazil but also to include students coming from different backgrounds and regions. Central (government) management was very much criticised by Brazilian HEIs, especially the research-driven, comprehensive institutions that already had a strong network of partnerships and well structured internationalisation strategies. Even they had to face challenges when SwB was launched, due to the number of applications and distribution of placements. Therefore, if there is a milestone for student mobility in Brazil, it is certainly the one of Science without Borders.

⁶ Luciane Stallivieri, Brazil’s Science Without Borders Program, Inside Higher Education blog, the world view, 31.May 2015 at <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/world-view/brazils-science-without-borders-program#>



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Inclusion in the Science without Borders programme

One of the main impacts of the SwB programme was the inclusion of new regions and Brazilian institutions in international student mobility: 1240 Brazilian HEIs, representing more than half of the country's institutions, participated in SwB. There was a strong participation of private HEIs (80%), many of them with no internationalisation experience. But the highest concentration of scholarship holders was to be found in the largest Brazilian public universities, such as USP (6.5%), UFMG (4.9%), UFRJ (3.6%) and UnB (3.2%).

To address the problem of foreign language proficiency, the Ministry of Education, through the combined efforts of the Secretary of Higher Education and CAPES, developed the Languages without Borders Programme (LwB). In order to encourage the learning of foreign languages in Brazilian universities, the programme provides opportunities for access to student mobility programmes in foreign HEIs and seeks to attract foreign students to Brazil by offering distance learning courses in 8 foreign languages – including Portuguese as a Foreign Language. In addition, students can also take language proficiency tests. The programme also invests in onsite courses in federal universities, thus allowing students to take German, English, Japanese, Italian, Spanish, French and Mandarin at their own institutions.

The importance attached to language competences is also contributing to a broad transformation in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Brazilian federal universities, through the creation or improvement of language centres, aiming at providing opportunities for language learning and developing intercultural awareness across all faculties and departments. LwB can thus be seen as an extremely interesting effect of SwB on the transformation of institutional international learning policies as well as on the development of staff and structures on a large scale.

Science without Borders 2.0

Announced in June 2015, the second phase of the SwB programme is still waiting for further specifications by the Brazilian government.

The information disclosed so far alludes to the intention of:

- a) ensuring a better balance between undergraduate and graduate scholarships (in the first phase, 78% of the grants were awarded to undergraduate students);
- b) improving the participation of universities in the monitoring of the scholarship holders, both in the selection process and during the mobility period abroad, similarly to what is done at the graduate level;
- c) promoting the follow-up and support of the scholarship holders after their return, especially in terms of their reintegration into academic and professional life;
- d) defining strategic themes for scholarships (and not areas or courses, as in the first phase);
- e) increasing private sector participation;
- f) ensuring better transfer of credits earned abroad.

In the first four years SwB consumed R\$ 6.4 billions, which funded 101,000 scholarships. The new target was to fund another 100,000 between 2015 and 2018 but Brazil's economic slowdown, the strain of the strong US dollar and the decrease in the participation of the private companies in the funding of the programme brought uncertainty to the attainment of the new goals.

Quality of mobility frameworks



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Main issues related to the quality of mobility

Given the analysis of the mobility programmes outlined above, we can identify some of the main issues to be considered when we look at the quality of mobility from different perspectives. This clustering will help us to better review the discussion currently held in Europe and Brazil and identify obstacles and tools to overcome them.

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Starting from the financial and management aspect of mobility programmes, we may identify the following areas for quality assessment and improvement:

- ✓ quality of support for mobility: services, professionalisation of staff, relation of administrative and academic staff in the organisation and implementation of mobility;
- ✓ quality as efficiency in the management of fellowship schemes: financial and organisational issues in centralised and decentralised management;
- ✓ quality and the different roles of home and host institutions in the different mobility schemes;
- ✓ quality as the opening of mobility to disadvantaged groups or to students in institutions with lower international experience;
- ✓ quality as the integration of mobile and local students in the classroom in order to achieve a true intercultural learning experience both for mobile and local students.

Moving further into the strategic role of mobility in the internationalisation strategies of institutions and of higher education systems, the following issues may be relevant in assessing the quality of mobility:

- ✓ achievement and relevance of desired impacts of mobility (according to identified purposes and goals): curricular integration, innovation capacity, academic collaboration, integration of research groups, etc.;
- ✓ mobility as a way to support the international dimension of teaching, research and organisation, namely as a tool to enhance international learning environments, definition of learning outcomes relevant to the international context, building of international research groups, promotion of research projects and outputs addressing internationally relevant research issues, participation of higher education institutions in the international debate on education and research and their impact on the international agenda on education and research.

Quality of mobility in the European context

The quality of mobility has been at the core of many recent European documents, the ones produced within the so-called Bologna Process (Inter-ministerial Conference, related seminars and Working Groups of the 48 countries participating in the European Higher Education Area), the policy directives of the European Union and the stocktaking of the European University Association (EUA) and the European Students' Union (ESU).

The following documents and sources have been selected as a background for this section:

- ✓ EHEA Ministerial Conference, Bucharest 2012: Mobility for Better Learning, Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area⁷
- ✓ Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the

⁷ <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/2012%20EHEA%20Mobility%20Strategy.pdf>



- Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European higher education in the world, 2013⁸
- ✓ EHEA Ministerial Conference, Yerevan 2015: Bologna Implementation Report, chapter 7: Internationalisation and mobility⁹
 - ✓ EHEA Ministerial Conference, Yerevan 2015: Report of the Working Group on Mobility and Internationalisation¹⁰
 - ✓ European University Association: Trends 2015¹¹
 - ✓ European Students Union: Bologna with students' eyes 2015¹²

Since the beginning of the Bologna Process, mobility and recognition have been at the core of the building of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), both as a goal *per se* (fostering mobility of students and graduates among different countries) and as a tool to promote innovation and convergence of the educational systems together with intercultural competences as a specific feature of the European dimension of education and its global attractiveness.

According to the European Students' Union document "*Bologna with Students' eyes 2015*":

«Mobility and internationalisation serve multiple purposes. However, the methods of following these action lines has been interpreted differently by stakeholders and policy-makers. The analysis of existing documents and reports has shown that there is an agreement that mobility and internationalisation should pave the way to the creation of a society where everyone can live peacefully, and that mobility and internationalisation assist in promoting democratic values and meeting the challenges of the globalised labour market. However, what we still lack is a clear and feasible way to measure progress within those action lines. As a consequence, countries often strive for quantity at the expense of quality, which does not and will not pave the way for balanced and accessible mobility across and beyond Europe.»

The issue of quality has been especially addressed in the last two inter-ministerial conferences in Bucharest (2012) and Yerevan (2015). In 2012, a European mobility strategy was set with ten recommendations aimed at higher quality exchanges and in 2015 the concept of mobility evolved to the concept of internationalisation. In order to understand the approach, it is worthwhile to quote from the two documents produced within the scope of these conferences.

In the document related to the Bucharest conference, *Mobility for Better Learning, Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area*, we can find a clear statement of the aims of the European approach to mobility as a way to enhance the quality of the learning experience of students, with further aims at the political level, such as the strengthening of the EHEA and of the cultural identity of Europe:

«High quality mobility pursues educational goals such as enhancing the competences, knowledge and skills of those involved. It contributes to expanding and improving academic collaboration and dissemination of innovations and knowledge within the EHEA, further internationalising higher education systems and institutions and improving them through comparison with one another, promoting the employability and personal development of the mobile people and strengthening the cultural identity of Europe. Mobility is essential to ensure high quality higher education and it is also an important pillar for exchange and collaboration with other parts of the world.»

⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/NOT/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0499>

⁹ http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/2015%20Implementation%20report_20.05.2015.pdf

¹⁰ <http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/MI%20WG%20Report.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/EUA_Trends_2015_web.sflb.ashx

¹² <http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/ESU%20Bologna%20With%20Student%20Eyes%202015-Executive%20Summary.pdf>



A similar approach and definition of mobility is contained in the document related to the Yerevan conference regarding the implementation of the EHEA (*Bologna Implementation Report, chapter 7: Internationalisation and mobility*), with an added focus on the importance of staff mobility and on the internationalisation of the organisation:

«International mobility is a core component of internationalisation and involves several key actors in higher education systems. It allows students to acquire valuable competences and skills needed to live and work in the global job market, while helping staff to gain new ideas, methods and skills and develop institutional relationships. Mobility also forces higher education institutions (both home and host institutions) to learn and adapt their management, services and administration procedures. It thus contributes to the internationalisation of HE systems in ways that are interconnected and relatively complex.»

Even if the link between mobility and the internationalisation of institutions is clearly expressed, it should be noted that all the documents focus mostly on the importance of quality of the experience of the individual student moving abroad and not so much on the quality of the design of the curricula or of the delivery of the courses adapted to the needs of the mobile students, who come from diverse education systems and learning environments that can enrich and improve local practices as well as foster mutually beneficial institutional links.

Overall, in the 2015 documents, the concept of quality is strongly linked with the improvement of the information services, the monitoring of students' experience and the professionalisation and efficiency of student services:

«For both student and staff mobility, it will be essential to focus not only on numbers, but also on the quality of mobility. This implies investing in information services, monitoring experience, ensuring that recognition and evaluation processes operate fairly, and making changes in light of experience. Improved monitoring of the impact of measures taken to remove obstacles to mobility will also be crucial if optimal mobility flows are to be achieved.» (Yerevan 2015, "Bologna implementation report" §7).

In other parts of the same document other important issues related to the quality of mobility are considered, such as:

- ✓ quality as balanced student flows (rebalancing the East/West flows);
- ✓ quality as inclusion: mobility support services for disadvantaged students and mobility of underrepresented groups;
- ✓ quality and improvement of staff mobility (with the awareness that this is not a homogeneous group);
- ✓ removing obstacles to mobility in order to improve quality (funding and improvement in the portability of grants and loans, language skills and language of instruction, study organisation and the implementation of flexible curricula, simplification of legal requirements for migration visas and stay permits, improvement of information, motivation and customised student support, advice and capacity building on recognition issues for institutions);
- ✓ quality as transparency and harmonisation of information in order to foster accurate planning and make recognition easier.

More detailed recommendations, *«meant to raise further political and institutional awareness of what quality of mobility means»*, have been worked out based on the "European Quality Charter for Mobility"¹³, the Council Recommendation 2011 on "Youth on the move", and the "Mobility

¹³ European Quality Charter for Mobility, Recommendation of the EU Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:c11085&from=EN>



*Strategy 2020 for the EHEA*¹⁴. These recommendations are published in the Annex 5 of the Report produced by the Working Group on Mobility and Internationalisation for the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan 2015¹⁴. In this Annex, the quality of mobility is understood as: «*personal improvement of the overall competence level, tolerance, refined intercultural competences, enhanced foreign language and awareness of democracy skills*». It also lists the issues that need to be tackled within the scope of the quality of mobility:

- ✓ Quality as part of an institution's strategy and predefined policies: targeted countries, selection of partners, design of 'mobility windows' in the curricula;
- ✓ Information and motivation: communicating goals and means of mobility, importance of the preparation phase;
- ✓ Reflection on the mobility experience and recognition of the value of the knowledge acquired abroad by students and staff;
- ✓ The importance of the expertise as well as international experience and contacts of the staff;
- ✓ The needs of students with disabilities;
- ✓ Adequate financial support.

Several quality-enhancing measures are therefore suggested for:

- ✓ The choice of cooperation partners (self assessment, search for complementarities, diversification of mobility types, support, training of own staff in relation to target countries);
- ✓ Recognition of study periods (training of staff, recognition based on outputs, use of Learning Agreements, curricular changes, use of transcripts of records and Diploma Supplement);
- ✓ Information and guidance (shared internal communication on the importance of mobility, information on access to mobility, cutting down procedures, simple communication channels, academic guidance, matching outgoing and incoming students to foster direct exchange of information);
- ✓ Adoption of accurate learning plans;
- ✓ Preparation: cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, financial, legal, etc.;
- ✓ Logistic support;
- ✓ Monitoring incoming students (mentoring, integration, access to services);
- ✓ Reintegration and evaluation (collecting feedback and engage former mobile students as promoters);
- ✓ Adoption of quantitative indicators to check the quality and commitment expressed in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).

Improving accessibility to mobility and widening participation are the main priorities for the European Students Union (ESU). In their recommendations mobility must become an opportunity for all and not a privilege for the few, and this means interpreting quality of mobility in connection with the social dimension, public responsibility and quality of higher education as a real opportunity for the entire academic community. Funding, socio-economic background, family situation and problems with recognition are still substantial obstacles that students need to overcome in order to become mobile.

For this reason countries should not only focus on numeric targets to be achieved but strive for equal access to mobility and a more balanced participation of all students, with specific measures to support underrepresented groups, so as «*to ensure that the mobile student population reflects the diversity of student population and avoid brain drain*».

ESU especially calls for the need to improve full portability of grants and loans and measures to ensure equal rights and support services (including financial support) for international and

¹⁴ http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/2015%20Implementation%20report_20.05.2015.pdf

domestic students, both exchange and degree-seeking, while also emphasising that «the hosting institution should cover the costs of education without imposing tuition fees or any other additional fees for international students».



ALSIOS SHORT PAPER 3
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Quality of mobility in the Brazilian context

National policies

Student mobility is still very recent in Brazil. It has mainly an institutional nature characterised by bilateral relations and successful credit transfer is still a challenge. There are as yet no regulations or official government recommendations on the quality of mobility.

University autonomy is a strong characteristic of Brazil's higher education system. Each HEI defines and establishes (if at all) its own policy, strategy, mechanisms, tools and rules for student mobility.

Moreover, the Brazilian higher education system is very diverse. There are about 2,400 HEIs, of which only 190 are universities. Most Brazilian HEIs are small institutions located in the countryside, offering degree courses with virtually no (or very low) level of internationalisation and few international mobility opportunities for students.

This diversity is also due to the public or private nature of the institutions. Currently more than 70% of undergraduate students are enrolled in private institutions, a fact that has consequences for the level of internationalisation of those institutions.

To sum up, we can say that Brazil has not yet accumulated enough student mobility experiences to allow the production of a national mobility policy. To a large extent, existing measures are still defined or established in the framework of the institutional policies of the HEIs. Sometimes the strategies and actions set out in the Institutional Development Plan of the HEI simply comply with the requirements of the Brazilian Ministry of Education for the elaboration of those plans, without ever being actually translated into effective and concrete actions. But this is changing, as seen in the recent inclusion of internationalisation as a quality indicator in the national system for the evaluation of Brazilian higher education.

Established by Law 10.861 of 14 April 2004, Brazil's National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES) has the purpose of assessing and improving the quality of Brazilian higher education, thus setting a basic frame of reference for the regulation of the processes and supervision of HEIs.

Implemented by the Higher Education Evaluation Board (DESA) of the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP), under the Ministry of Education (MEC) and with the guidance of the National Committee for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CONAES), higher education evaluation is performed with the aid of specific instruments that allow the recording of quantitative and qualitative data regarding the quality standards established by SINAES.

The assessment is divided into two types (internal and external evaluation). The Institutional Self-Evaluation (Internal Evaluation) is coordinated by each institution's assessment committee (CPA) based on the guidelines defined by CONAES, its goals being to ensure that HEIs implement the actions proposed in their own Institutional Development Plan (IDP). It serves also as a resource for decision-making at the institutional management level. The External Evaluation, conducted by committees appointed by the INEP/ MEC, is centred on the quality standards for higher education stipulated in assessment tools and self-assessment reports, and takes into account the diversity of Brazil's higher education system and the identity of each institution (currently SINAES monitors the operation of 2,391 HEIs, 32,049 undergraduate



courses and 7,305,977 students).

The INEP/MEC External Institutional Evaluation Instrument, which regulates the accreditation, re-accreditation and the transformation of the academic organisation (face-to-face courses) of the Brazilian HEIs is organised into five areas, containing the ten dimensions referenced in the legal framework of SINAES: Axis 1: Planning and Institutional Evaluation; Axis 2: Institutional Development; Axis 3: Academic Policies; Axis 4: Management Policies; Axis 5: Infrastructure.

Recently, INEP/MEC initiated a working definition of evaluation indicators with the inclusion of six new quality indicators as quality inductors. In the area of internationalisation and its impact on the evaluation process, Axis 2 (Institutional Development) has incorporated, in its dimension 2.9, the indicator "Internationalisation: coherence between the IDP and the institutional actions". To date, this only applies when foreseen in the HEIs' Strategic Plans, but there are indications that it will be mandatory for all HEIs, in recognition of the importance of internationalisation.

In the glossary of the external evaluators guide, internationalisation activities, for purposes of the evaluation instrument, "include institutional programmes of academic mobility/ exchange, participation in academic mobility calls, foreign students in HEIs, offers of foreign language studies, offers of courses in a foreign language, among others". In this context, the evaluators ask the HEIs for information on the welcoming policies for foreign students, number of students and foreign teachers and subjects offered in a foreign language. The evaluators seek to analyse the planning – in terms of coherence between the institutional strategic plans and the actions implemented, results from the implementation of agreements and conventions, developed mobility actions, grants and institutional incentives, and results in terms of scientific production.

Students' level of internationalisation has also been reflected in the National Exam of Student Performance (ENADE) – the mandatory census exam that all first-year and last year students of each programme under evaluation are required to take. In 2013, students answered three questions related to the process of internationalisation of higher education: a) During the degree course, did you participate in programmes, or curricular activities abroad? b) Did you have foreign language learning opportunities in your institution? c) Were opportunities offered for students to take part in exchanges and / or internships abroad? Those very questions signal a better understanding of the importance of internationalisation as an indicator of the evaluation of Brazilian higher education.

Internationalisation is also mentioned in the National Education Plan (NEP) approved in June 2014, albeit as a quite modest goal of higher education. The NEP sets out 20 goals and 253 strategies for Brazilian education, to be met in the next decade (2014-2025). Internationalisation is briefly mentioned in three goals and five strategies related to higher education. As an example, we cite here the strategy 12.12 of the goal 12, which aims to «consolidate and expand programmes and actions to encourage student mobility and teaching in undergraduate and graduate programmes at the national and international levels».

Quality of communication

To improve quality in student mobility from a Brazilian perspective and especially the mobility under SwB, it is also crucial to establish and/or enhance relationships between all actors involved, to develop better communication tools at regional, national and international levels, to develop a closer dialogue with agencies such as CAPES and CNPq and to discuss calendars, preparation and structure for the SwB calls.

Brazilian Higher Education Institutions also need to invest in student services and in the professionalisation of the staff members, so as to prepare them to provide adequate support for



outgoing and incoming mobility students. Many Brazilian institutions sent students abroad for the first time under the SwB programme, therefore it is very important that host institutions provide tutors and mentors to those students and that this network of professionals – from both Brazilian and international HEIs – get to interact more frequently.

The SwB centralises the communication with Brazilian Higher Education Institutions and foreign institutions, at governmental level, leaving out the inter-institutional communication, a fact that causes many management problems within the institutions involved. These problems could be mitigated if the following actions were implemented:

- ✓ To reorganise the SwB programme with a stronger involvement of the Brazilian HEIs and an enhanced networking among home and host institutions;
- ✓ To provide more information about European and other international Higher Education Institutions and their areas of study;
- ✓ To involve the Brazilian HEIs in the choice of the mobility partners that will host their students;
- ✓ To stimulate the mobility of academics to the host institutions abroad (including deans and course coordinators);
- ✓ To promote the mobility of staff for training on mobility management (sharing of good practices);
- ✓ To increase resources in order to improve the management capacity of the Brazilian agencies CAPES and CNPq, in closer contact with HEIs;
- ✓ To promote Brazilian Research Centres and Enterprises as attractive mobility opportunities for international researchers and employers.

Language preparation

In order to guarantee high quality mobility for Brazilian students there is definitely a need to break down language barriers. The federal government launched the Language without Borders programme (“Idiomas sem Fronteiras – IsF”)¹⁵ to support SwB grantees on a long-term basis. At first the programme provided online courses for all students enrolled in the Brazilian HEI system; as a second step a massive TOEFL application was provided that targeted about 30% of university students. The last step was to invest in physical language centres that are currently providing classes for students of the federal universities. The idea is to spread the language centres to public state universities as well. We believe that this process will assure higher quality in mobility, since students lack sufficient knowledge of foreign languages to fully complete their studies abroad.

Mobility and recognition of studies

The European perspective

As we have explained above, recognition has been emphasised as a core element in the discussion about the quality of mobility, especially in the European context, due to the high importance that curricular integration and the convergence of educational systems has assumed since the beginning in the European mobility programmes.

Several tools, aimed at supporting the recognition of horizontal mobility (short-term credit mobility) and vertical mobility (long-term degree seeking mobility), have been developed over

¹⁵ <http://isf.mec.gov.br>



time. In the first case, the incorporation of study periods abroad into the student's learning path at home institution have been made possible through the establishment of formal learning agreements agreed by all the parties involved.

It should be remembered that in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) the recognition of degrees and study periods abroad has a legal basis in the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997¹⁶. Currently the Convention has been ratified by most of the Council of Europe member countries and by some non-member states such as Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Moreover, several other mechanisms have been developed in the context of the EHEA, such as the ECTS credit system with its tools, the European Qualifications Framework and the ENIC-NARIC networks (information centres focused on the recognition of studies and qualifications)¹⁷.

Among the basic principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, mention should be made here of the principle of 'substantial difference'. This important principle is present in three of the four main areas covered by the Convention, namely the recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education, recognition of periods of study abroad and recognition of higher education qualifications.

In the first case, the Convention states that *«each Party shall recognise the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought»*.

In the second case, the Convention stipulates that *«each Party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought»*.

Similarly, and in the light of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, within the ECTS system, the recognition of studies should be made unless a "substantial difference" can be shown between the study programmes of the home and host universities. The ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, which in turn are preferably specified in terms of learning outcomes and acquired competences. The student workload therefore includes all aspects of the study programmes: time spent attending lectures, independent study, dissertations, placements, the preparing for and taking of examinations, etc. As we can see the contact hours are only a part of the student workload, therefore the recognition of studies cannot be made taking only into account the number of hours that a student spends on classroom. This means that student workload is a very different concept from contact hours or course units and it should allow an easier design, comparison and transfer of learning activities, in which the proportion of contact hours and individual study can vary a lot.

Another feature of the ECTS system is the use of tools and procedures to allow previous agreement between institutions and students on the planning of the study period, so as to facilitate recognition. The ECTS system has developed standardised documents that have been tested and used widely in European institutions both for intra-European exchanges and for exchanges with non-European institutions, especially in the context of projects like Erasmus Mundus.

¹⁶ http://www.uc.pt/ge3s/pasta_docs/Convencao_Lisboa.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.enic-naric.net>



The process designed and tested in the ECTS system stipulates that, prior to departure, institutions and students develop and approve a **learning agreement** with the course units and the credits to be taken at the host institution and about the same number of credits to be gained at home for the same period of study, *i.e.*, 30 or 60 credits, as well as the way in which the recognition of studies will be made after the student return. The information about the objectives of the study programmes, the contents, the credits and the learning outcomes of the course units are available in a **course catalogue** published by each partner institution in the Internet, according to the requirements defined at the EU level for this kind of study guides.

After the mobility period, the students receive a **transcript of records** where all the course units taken by the students are detailed, including the number of credits and the grades obtained at the host institution. Taking into account this document, which has to be consistent with the learning agreement formalised in the beginning of the mobility period, the HEIs proceed with the formal recognition of the studies followed by the students abroad. In this way, the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved are made explicit and transparent to everyone.

Moreover the ECTS system is clearly aimed at a progressive transformation of the whole organisation towards a student-centred approach. The teaching staff and the mobility coordinators are responsible for ensuring the quality and the consistency of the academic path of the students; therefore they are expected to help students in the choice of the host institutions and of the adequate course units. It is also expected that the mobility support services are able to interact efficiently at different levels, including academic and administrative, with partner universities hosting exchange students, so that the recognition of studies is fair and swift.

The mobility regulations are also a very important tool to ensure the fair treatment of all students according to the principles and the best practices adopted by the institutions. For example, all Institutions participating in mobility projects under the Erasmus (now Erasmus+) programme have to integrate into their own regulations some of the principles outlined in the 'Erasmus Charter': recognition and transfer procedures should ensure that the student's mobile activities at the partner institution are recorded in a transparent way (indicating the original course/ subject titles at the host institution in the national language and in English) and **that the credits gained abroad have been recognised as an integral part of the student's degree programmes**. This means that all the credits earned by the student during the mobility period and which were originally agreed upon in the learning agreement should be recognised by the home institution without the need for the student to take any further courses or exams.

However we know from experience that when it comes to applying regulations into practice, this cannot be done without changing the mentality of both faculty and students so that they fully understand the ECTS principles. Then, those principles have to be transposed into university regulations and enforced in daily academic practice:

- Study periods abroad in particular should be planned on the basis of **full consistency** between the **learning outcomes** of the study programmes of the home and host institutions, rather than on the basis of a correspondence of contents. Recognition should consider the whole sum of learning activities rather than a one-to-one recognition of course units;
- The study plan abroad should not be the same as the study plan at home, but complementary to it, in order to take advantage of the different offer (in compliance with the final learning outcomes of the study programme. Therefore, we should talk about **substitution** not **equivalence of course units**);
- Recognition should be understood as a shared **responsibility** of the programme board rather than of each individual faculty member.



In most European countries the ECTS system of recognition has evolved alongside the design and implementation of new programmes, based on ECTS credits, as a consequence of the construction of the European Higher Education Area. But since new programme planning or revision of previous programme planning are needed, a student-centred system requires **empowering students' representatives so as to promote their active participation in the revision of programmes.**

The students' representatives in the Academic Councils and the Academic Senate, as well as students active in associations relating to mobility and exchange, need to be able to work together with academic staff in order to:

- Increase knowledge about international student mobility and recognition;
- Collect regulations from different universities, identify problems and best practices, and compare them with the regulations of their own universities;
- Disseminate findings and best practices among fellow-students;
- Identify common problems and suggest solutions;
- Facilitate cooperation on mobility and recognition issues among students' representatives, academic authorities and the administrative services, such as the international relations offices;

Suggest new proposals to the academic authorities and boards (e.g. the Academic Senate) to change programmes and regulations, with a view to greater flexibility and the incorporation of mobility.

The Brazilian perspective

Since the beginning Brazilian models of mobility have focused on complementarity rather than on full compatibility and integration. As a result, mobility has been conceived of as a way to expand the educational experience of the student by allowing him or her to add an educational component to the mainstream study path. Similarly, more often than not the main criteria for funding international research projects have rested on a demonstration of the complementarity of research expertise and infrastructures. Moreover, the personal, civic and professional development of students and researchers and the strengthening of international links between institutions have often been a priority when compared to curricular integration, which – as we have mentioned above – has been a major European concern, for it is at the very root of the European notion of convergence of educational systems.

This specific framework can explain the lack of pressure on Brazilian institutions to establish regulations for academic recognition and credit transfer.

The first systematic negotiations about academic recognition within Brazilian Higher Education Institutions were initiated in the 1990s. They aimed at establishing a single procedure for all fields of study and administrative regulations, offering students the possibility of validating their international studies. In fact, credit transfer was not guaranteed at the time of the elaboration of the study plan to be followed abroad. Proposals were submitted beforehand, and upon return the student had to start the procedure all over again. There have been many instances of international mobility that failed to be validated by the Brazilian HEIs for lack of appropriate regulations, of knowledge of the technical areas of undergraduate studies, experience, interest, as well as for sheer resistance to internationalisation.

The first regulations addressed the formalisation of mobility essentially in terms of the minimum number of credits and the maximum number of semesters that could be taken abroad. The transfer of credits was at the discretion of the outgoing mobility advisor or undergraduate



council, based on the exact match of disciplines – the idea being not to transfer credits based on the relevance of curriculum content or workload, but to arrive at exact equivalence. The result of this process was somewhat disastrous for the first mobile students under these conditions, as course councils often denied such equivalence and forced the students to repeat the semester/ year of studies at their home university. Academic agreements did not always predict the flow of undergraduate mobility, but as demand grew exponentially, institutions started to address the credit transfer issue (especially the ECTS credits).

The significant expansion of international mobility in Brazilian universities has triggered discussions on the need for greater curricular flexibility, a model that has been applied in Brazil since 1995, where the minimum curriculum gave way to national curriculum guidelines (DCN) for each stage of the Brazilian education system (Federal Law no. 9131/95). The DCN's recommend that HEIs avoid setting specific content with a predetermined hourly workload, which does not exceed 50% of the total hourly workload; and that programmes stimulate practices of independent and interdisciplinary studies, among other recommendations. Given Brazil's diversity and the degree of autonomy of its universities, the implementation of these national guidelines were very different from institution to institution. Some areas of study have not even started to move towards curriculum flexibility yet.

The quality of mobility for Brazilian students can certainly benefit from greater curricular flexibility and a re-discussion of the curriculum design. The return of students and the processes for recognition of academic activities carried out abroad gave a major boost to the discussion by programme councils and advisors of international relations. Some institutions thus began to redesign their credit recognition regulations, accepting a greater commitment to the quality of mobility through the involvement of teachers and tutors in the preparation of students for mobility; the new regulations of some institutions recognised the study plan and secured recognition of credits upon the students' return and the credits were automatically inserted into the transcript of records at home university. This gave more legitimacy to mobility support tools and ensured higher quality in the preparation of the period of studies abroad. However, this process was implemented within the framework of bilateral partnerships between the home and the host universities. In the case of the SwB programme, there is still a long way to go, as there are no bilateral agreements between the involved HEIs.

The increasing mobility of students in Brazil has put into question the ways for improving the quality of education. While many world regions have adopted the credit system as a means of shifting the approach to education towards student-centred learning, the use of credits in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions still needs to be better understood and more standardised, the main obstacle to that aim being the Brazilian concept of "workload".

The National Curriculum Guidelines have not yet digested the concept of workload, and learning opportunities are reduced to the time the student spends in the classroom. In fact, they do not take into account the time of independent study and the credit transfer system centred on student learning (the amount of work required to achieve certain competences), neither a well-balanced, realistic distribution of learning activities in the curriculum nor a common form of recognising the learning outcomes achieved, based on estimates – in order to encourage and stimulate the mobility of students between programmes of national and international institutions.

This scenario demonstrates the urgent need for deep curricular re-discussion and for the creation, by the National Board of Education, of standards for addressing the realities of Brazilian higher education, which is marked by the wide diversity of its institutions in terms of nature, type, size and student profile.

The launching of the Science without Borders programme originated the mobility of Brazilian students to exchange experiences abroad on a scale never seen before in the country. As a result of that mobility there is the expectation, on the part of the students upon returning, that



their credits will be transferred to their home institutions. The lack of clear rules for the recognition of activities carried out while abroad creates problems and frustrates expectations.

In their decisions on credit transfers of subjects taken abroad, Brazilian HEIs still operate predominantly on the old traditional logic that consists of making sure that the courses taken are in accordance with the syllabi of their own courses, and only then will they include them in their curricula.

In many cases the issues related to equivalence and credit transfer are evaluated by the boards of each study programme. Students are often themselves responsible for solving this issue directly with their programme coordinators, but they may need to deal also with other entities inside HEIs, such as the Dean's office, the Faculty Council or the office of the Vice President of Undergraduate Studies. These processes are highly bureaucratic.

In the study plan, the document that lists the course units and/or the activities that the students are going to follow abroad, there is already an indication of those subjects that are likely to be validated, in accordance with the pedagogical project of the study programme. The subjects to be taken abroad are usually defined by the student and the coordinator of the study programme, with detailed information about the contents, contact hours and credits, so that the relevant information can be properly inserted into the student academic record, with reference to the number of credits/ hours per semester of the study programme at home university.

In the case of partnerships with European countries, many Brazilian HEIs created their own scales/conversion tables of ECTS credits. The conversion is typically based on the workload of each subject (1 credit of Brazilian HEIs corresponding to 15 class hours). But in almost every case, the final granting of credits depends on the Departments of Undergraduate Studies, taking into account the nature of each subject. Often the subjects taken abroad are validated as free elective subjects at the student home university. In many Brazilian HEIs, international mobility has often meant increased time to graduation, with academic and budgetary consequences.

While acknowledging the prerogative of university autonomy, ensured by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 (article 207), the country's HEIs should strive, along with the National Council of Education, for a better understanding regarding the importance of mobility and forms of credit recognition, setting limits for the definition of credits and working hours, with registration forms and the monitoring of students' efforts in learning – content and skills – without linking them almost exclusively to the "workload" as measured by the duration of the physical presence of students in the classroom.

Recognition of diplomas and degrees in Brazil

In Brazil the recognition of undergraduate degrees and diplomas obtained abroad and/or issued by foreign HEIs is the exclusive prerogative of Brazilian public HEIs. In the case of Master's and Doctoral degrees, diplomas may also be recognised by private HEIs. In both cases, Brazilian HEIs have to have a recognised course in the same area of knowledge or in a field related to the course completed abroad. Recognition procedures and conditions are determined by each HEI.

Given the prospects for the expansion of higher education internationalisation and the need to streamline procedures, the National Board of Education has recently approved a new set of rules whereby Brazilian HEIs are required to analyse requests for diploma recognition regardless of whether there are curricular discrepancies in the course in question as taught in the host country and in Brazil.



The Brazilian Ministry of Education, through CAPES and the Secretary of Higher Education, is going to create a database with information on foreign courses already recognised in Brazil so that a diploma obtained abroad can be recognised without further evaluation. Analysis and evaluation cannot be refused based on discrepancies in curricular organisation and a six-month deadline is set for the Brazilian HEIs to make its analysis. While respecting university autonomy, this new tool calls for a whole new normative framework on the part of HEIs regarding the recognition process, within the Brazilian higher education system¹⁸.

These measures aim to speed up recognition, for which there has been growing demand but which is still highly bureaucratic, slow and costly. This is also the case of the recognition of degrees of former grantees that studied abroad with Brazilian scholarships, with the screening process leading to the awarding of the scholarship often failing to be considered as regards the institution and research programme where the degree was earned.

The new procedure seeks to provide greater flexibility while maintaining the assurances of the recognition system, acknowledging the limits of the laws in place and adding new provisions and parameters. The risk of losing professionals with quality training was also given proper consideration, as was the role of recognition as a tool for curricular exchange and for the exchange of international models, parameters and practices, for international scientific cooperation and the improvement of institutional policies favourable to the development of Brazil.

Actors and tools

In this section we will briefly analyse a number of experiences regarding the development of mobility quality tools, organisational models for supporting and monitoring the quality of mobility and for measuring its impact, both at the level of the individual student experience and at the level of the institutions' internationalisation.

Quality tools and monitoring: the European experience

As we have seen above, quality is always very much dependent on the context and on the specific aims pursued by each institution. Nonetheless, while organisational models and tools to improve the quality of mobility should fit different contexts; there are some general elements (especially those pertaining to the quality of a student's experience) for which a benchmarking should be possible.

For this reason, there has been in Europe an intense debate and an exchange of experiences, both within networks and project consortia, to develop quality tools and effective monitoring. We can quote here two experiences: the EMQT project and the Erasmus Impact Study.

The EMQT (Erasmus Mobility Quality Tools)¹⁹ is a project focused on the mapping of institutional organisational models and on the development of a set of quality tools (a Mobility Quality Toolbox), monitoring instruments and indicators to be offered in a flexible way to institutions. Institutions may choose the most suitable tools according to their organisational models and aims and find support in the redesign of processes, based on a common framework of principles related with the quality of the mobility under the Erasmus programme.

¹⁸ <http://educacao.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,mec-mudara-sistema-de-revalidacao-de-diplomas-estrangeiros-no-brasil,1650500>

¹⁹ <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/handle/123456789/403903>



The EMQT project (2009-2011) was developed taking into account the results of several projects and studies related with the quality of mobility and the international experience of students and institutions, such as: ENPMOB – a comparative study on European and national-level policies and practices on academic mobility conducted by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA); PRIME: a project about the problem of the non-recognition of the studies carried out under Erasmus mobility programmes coordinated by the Erasmus Student Network; IMPI: a project aiming at mapping and profiling internationalisation indicators coordinated by the German consultant CHE; and MAUNIMO: a project about the management of the mobility programmes at HEIs, coordinated by the European University Association (EUA)²⁰.

Based on the EMQT project, we see that the most important areas in which institutions invest for improving the quality of mobility, beside the general organisational structure, are:

- Language preparation;
- Information and orientation;
- Students' performance and recognition of studies;
- Reception of international students;
- e-coaching and ICT mobility tools.

The final report of the EMQT project offers institutions an articulated questionnaire for mapping the mobility processes and organisation and a list of indicators to measure the quality of mobility within the six areas/ dimensions mentioned above. These tools can be used for internal assessment but also for benchmarking. The institutions have also access to best practices and a position paper on academic quality in exchange mobility built on 85 interviews with academics.

The Erasmus Impact Study (2014)²¹, much broader than the previous ones and more recent, attempts to measure the qualitative and quantitative impact of the Erasmus programme on both individuals and institutions. It was produced by CHE Consult, CHE Centrum for Hochschulentwicklung, Brussels Education Services, Grupo Compostela and ESN - International Exchange Erasmus Student Network.

As stated in its executive summary:

«The Erasmus Impact Study analyses the effects of mobility on the employability and competences of students and the internationalisation of HEIs. The Erasmus Impact Study (EIS) aims to answer two major questions. Firstly, it analyses the effects of Erasmus student mobility in relation to studies and placements on individual skills enhancement, employability and institutional development. Secondly, it examines the effects of Erasmus teaching assignments/staff training on individual competences, personality traits and attitudes, as well as the programme's impact on the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). EIS uses an innovative methodology by introducing a psychometric-related tool and relating facts, perceptions, personality traits and attitudes.»

Among its key findings, the report highlights the development of transversal skills and opportunities to enhance employability abroad as well as career development for mobile students as an important impact of Erasmus. It shows that, on average, Erasmus students have better employability skills after a stay abroad than 70% of all students and that employers look for transversal skills such as openness to and curiosity about new challenges, problem-solving and decision-making skills, confidence, tolerance towards other personal values and behaviours.

²⁰ ENPMOB: <http://www.aca-secretariat.be/?id=602>; PRIME: <https://esn.org/prime>; IMPI: <http://www.impi-project.eu/>; MAUNIMO: <http://www.maunimo.eu/>

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf



Moreover, it shows also the entrepreneurial skills acquired or enhanced through mobility, since almost 1 in 10 former mobile students who did a job placement abroad started their own company and 3 out of 4 plan to or can envisage doing so in the future.

It also assesses the inclusiveness of the Erasmus mobility programmes: 46% of Erasmus students have a non-academic family background (the same proportion as in other mobility programmes) and 62% of those that are non-mobile come also from a non-academic background. The main barriers to an experience abroad are a lack of financial resources to compensate for the additional costs and personal relationships.

Quality of the mobility support services: the Brazilian experience

Internationalisation at home is a very strategic topic for Brazilian HEIs as it can benefit a larger number of students from a variety of backgrounds. Nowadays the average number of outgoing mobility at the largest Brazilian universities is around 3% of the total higher education student population, including SwB grantees in undergraduate studies. To provide quality international experiences to their students, without sending them abroad, Brazilian institutions have been investing in infrastructures and activities to attract international students and to internationalise teaching methods. The number of incoming mobility students is still very low in Brazilian HEIs, but this scenario can be changed if the following measures are taken:

- ✓ To provide Portuguese language courses;
- ✓ To offer better conditions to receive international students (including housing, food, etc.);
- ✓ To facilitate student integration into the campus life;
- ✓ To facilitate visa procedures both in Europe and Brazil;
- ✓ To work closer with enterprises (in the areas of product development, transfer of technology, innovation, training).

In Brazil further progress has to be made in terms of transparency and recognition tools related to the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. It is also necessary to promote a better understanding of the importance of the very concept of quality of mobility.

In fact, the country still lacks sufficient awareness of the importance of mobility and its strategic role in the policies and strategies of internationalisation of the Brazilian higher education. This can be seen in the absence of goals, tools and clearer rules on the roles of the Higher Education Institutions, as home and host institutions. Furthermore, there is lack of adequate support services and a still relatively low professionalisation of programme management regarding institutional student mobility.

Brazilian HEIs should work further to raise the awareness of the staff to the political and institutional relevance of the quality of mobility. This would involve approaching issues such as the choice of partners, recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas, the production of information about mobility opportunities, student guidance, namely in the choice of course units, practical arrangements and foreign language preparation (including Portuguese, in the case of foreign students). The exemption or reduction of school fees in private HEIs and the existence of quantitative and qualitative indicators of evaluation and monitoring are also crucial aspects to be discussed within Brazilian HEIs.

Quality of mobility also faces management problems within HEIs caused by tensions and difficulties related to the centralisation and the decentralisation of academic and administrative bodies involved in the management of student mobility.



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Studies and impact assessment

A programme of such magnitude and impact as SwB requires a comprehensive assessment of results, including suggestions for adjustments and improvements. In addition to quantitative evaluations – in terms of allocation of scholarships by type, country of destination, home university –, more qualitative studies of the first implementation phase should be made in the light of the objectives and outcomes of the programme.

Evaluation should also be able to measure the effects of SwB in Brazilian HEIs in terms of its impact on the processes of internationalisation with respect to credit transfer, integration and curricular flexibility, greater concern with a student's overall training (and not only with class hours), facilitation of contacts and cooperation with international HEIs, improvement of the quality of education, establishment/strengthening of international offices in Brazilian HEIs, etc.

For this purpose, a number of seminars and meetings have been organised in Brazil to provide support to the evaluation of the SwB programme. Such was the case of the 67th Annual Meeting of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science held in Sao Carlos in July 2015, where CAPES and CNPq made a short and preliminary evaluation of the Science without Borders programme²²; and the seminar on "European Experiences and Planning for Evaluation of the Science without Borders", sponsored by CAPES, in August 2015, with the presence of German consultant Uwe Brandenburg, director of CHE Consulting, who is responsible for the 2014 impact and assessment study of the Erasmus mobility programme²³.

Additionally, the ALISIOS project has launched a survey²⁴ in September 2015 about the implementation of the SwB programme in the Brazilian HEIs in order to collect the institutions' point of view regarding the impact of the programme on both the students' academic performance and on the institutions' internationalisation development. The survey also attempts to gather a number of suggestions for the improvement of the programme that will be sent to the relevant Brazilian government authorities. This is the first external survey made at the institutional level in Brazil. The results will be available in November 2015.

Removing obstacles

Identifying and removing obstacles to mobility have often been seen as a major challenge both for national and international education systems and institutions. In this section we will focus specifically on the Brazilian perspective and on the importance of developing a mobility culture, sustainable infrastructures and specific competences for academic and administrative staff. Bridging policy dialogue and actual institutional practice to improve the quality of mobility between Brazil and Europe will require a deeper knowledge and understanding of their education systems, cultures and recent developments in the relevant fields occurred in both contexts. It will also require forums, training and exchange to allow a dynamic common understanding and sharing of goals, tools, policies and practices.

Efforts to internationalise universities often conflict with the institutional systems in place, and this is currently observable both in Europe and Brazil.

Obstacles are seen mainly as institutional, in the sense that they were caused by the policies, practices, and culture of the individuals of the institution, namely faculty and administrative staff resistant to internationalisation, especially on the undergraduate level. The bureaucratic system in the public sector in Brazil is also a general institutional barrier that should be discussed and made more flexible.

²² http://www.cienciasemfronteiras.gov.br/web/csf/views/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_VF2v/214072/5100172

²³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

²⁴ <https://surveys.uc.pt/index.php/survey/index>



The main obstacles to quality of mobility in Brazil stem from the lack of regulations to set standardised procedures at the national level. Let us keep in mind that Brazil still lacks a nationwide internationalisation policy. Science without Borders was the point of departure for mass mobility at the undergraduate level. At the same time, thanks to such associations as FAUBAI – Brazilian Association for International Education –, Brazil's HEIs now engage in an ongoing dialogue with federal agencies and the Ministry of Education to develop plans for a sustainable, long term, national strategy regarding internationalisation. We do not ignore Brazil's shortcomings in terms of technical knowledge, experience and motivation, which can act as barriers to the development of an internationalisation strategy. Professionalisation both of faculty and of the staff involved in international activities is essential throughout the whole process. Although recent, non-academic or staff mobility in Brazilian HEIs is currently viewed as strategic in the sense that it broadens the horizons of the international offices.

Mention should also be made of the issue of inefficient management on the part of international offices, due to high turn-over and to administrative changes (especially in the public sector) that hinder the accumulation of talent and experience as well as sustainable strategies and the international visibility of institutions. Lack of experienced human resources as a sound basis for hierarchical leadership in international relations offices and for ensuring good student mobility management pose challenges that urgently need to be addressed. There are also obstacles resulting from poor English language skills, financial issues and lack of knowledge regarding the international diversity of higher education systems.

The complexity of internationalisation is still largely underestimated in the Brazilian context and institutional strategies have been adopted to counter that; it is imperative to improve the assessment of the specific learning outcomes of Brazilian students who study abroad, through an accurate system capable of measuring impact and outcomes at the individual, institutional, regional and national level.

Brazilian institutions are permanently at work to improve and set up offices specially designed for internationalisation, with specialised staff and academic members fully involved in services that will help to prepare students for the mobility period abroad. Other recommendations regarding the quality of incoming mobility include promoting cross-cultural understanding, creating more opportunities to join local communities, through international weeks and other initiatives aimed at better integrating international students and preparing Brazilian students for a successful exchange experience.

Improving the language skills of both outgoing and incoming students is a challenge, highly recommended in terms of quality; besides achieving successful outcomes both in class and in their research, students should be encouraged to socialise and take part in groups, clubs and community activities in general.

The involvement of faculty in study abroad programmes as advisors is also recommended to promote internationalisation; faculty should also be encouraged to be more open to the process, not least because they stand to benefit by receiving financial and administrative support or other incentives to get engaged in international activities and cross-cultural academic collaboration with students.

The role of FAUBAI

FAUBAI, the Brazilian Association for International Education, established in 1988, is a non-profit association that brings together 240 members of the international offices of Brazil's most important public and private HEIs. It seeks to promote the development of the internationalisation process of the Brazilian HEIs, the dissemination of the diversity and potential of Brazilian HEIs abroad, the development and professional training of its members and the dissemination of good internationalisation practices, particularly the ones related to



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student mobility. It is a privileged forum for dialogue with the Brazilian government and the main players and protagonists of international education in the world. The association has played a crucial role in implementing the Science without Borders programme, discussing problems and solutions with Brazilian agencies, such as CAPES and CNPq, as well as with representatives of the host countries of the scholarship holders and of the Brazilian HEIs.

FAUBAI recently decided to develop Working Groups focused on mobility, legislation and evaluation indicators. The Mobility Working Group will cover different dimensions of academic issues, with an emphasis on academic achievement/credit transfer, double degrees, incoming international students and opportunities for internships and research in Brazil.

In spite of the many barriers to the implementation of these measures, the future looks bright and there is certainly optimism and no lack of will to create partnerships as well as the infrastructure and the tools for promoting high quality internationalisation. But first and foremost, there is an absolute need to assess the current situation and strategically plan the future direction of the internationalisation of the Brazilian higher education in order to ensure quality in all aspects of the process.

About ALISIOS

ALISIOS stands for Academic Links and Strategies for the Internationalisation of the HE Sector. It is a European Erasmus Mundus Action 3 project promoted by eight EU and Brazilian organisations deeply involved in academic internationalisation, with a wide range of expertise in mobility programmes, institutional strategy and HE policy development.

ALISIOS publications are freely available at www.alisios-project.eu.



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