ACADEMIC MOBILITY FOR FUTURE PROFESSIONALS’ DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THEIR OWN EYES

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Abstract

Academic mobility is widely seen as an adequate response of higher education to the ongoing globalization processes, providing students, academics, researchers and administrators with multiple opportunities to develop beyond the institutional and even national limitations and use the opportunities provided by Higher Education 3.0 more effectively and efficiently. Academic mobility launched in Europe by the collective effort of the Bologna process ideologists, advocates and academics, has much surpassed their expectations involving the rest of the world in the process at an increasing speed. Yet, like it always happens with a major new project, the achieved results (in many cases really astonishing) need some improvement. The authors have made an attempt to research the problem of multimodality of academic mobility as a prominent social phenomenon, identifying its current challenges and opportunities and focusing their attention on PESTEL factors determining stakeholders’ attitudes and their role in developing the phenomenon in Europe and beyond.

The research methodology includes both quantitative and qualitative methods and is based upon systemic approach. Basing on the cases of three Finnish universities and three Russian Universities (with two of them situated in Moscow and the one – in a Russian province), the authors have analyzed the issues of academic mobility, which look most topical for three major stakeholders – students, their parents and University organizers of academic mobility projects. The authors are willing to share the results of their research and believe it can be used as a basis for wider surveys covering parts of Europe and then the whole of Europe and beyond.

Keywords: academic mobility development, students’ perception, obstacles and challenges, limitations to academic mobility, primary measures.

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education as a socio-economic phenomenon continues to change rapidly in Europe and around the world. The large-scale structural reform of higher education in the first decade of the 21st century (the Bologna process), caused by the need to develop adequate responses to the large-scale challenges of the modern external environment – the increase of global competition, the aging of the European population and the impact of the financial and economic crisis, – has been realized in Europe, involving new stakeholders and new resources.

The idea of academic mobility promotion had long been ripening in the academic and political discourse and was finally formulated in the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action (WDHE 1998). According to the World Declaration and the Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education (FPACDHE 1998) adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education on 9 October 1998, quality requires that higher education should be characterized by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects, with stakeholders being an integral part of the institutional evaluation process (WDHE 1998). Technological achievements in communication and transportation have increased both opportunities and challenges facing national education systems. We agree with Junor (2008) that institutions of higher education no longer have a local, jurisdictional or even domestic focus; their vision is global, with students and faculty becoming increasingly interested in spending time in different, including foreign, academic environments (Junor et al. 2008).

Academic mobility as part of the global process of higher education internationalization requires universities’ comprehensive conceptual and structural transformation. In the recent decades, academic mobility has been getting largely integrated in universities’ visions and missions as part of the new international and intercultural dimension, which incorporates and further develops them.
2 EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY IN FINLAND AND RUSSIA

Two neighbouring countries with similar achievements in education systems have been chosen for the research purposes – Finland and Russia. According to the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2015, both countries are included in the list of top 5 countries in postsecondary education, with Russia occupying the 2nd place and Finland – the 3rd. The comment to this achievement reads, “In the percentage of the labor force with a postsecondary degree Russia, second overall, has an illustrious tradition in science and math, but innovation is not a national strength” (Bloomberg 2015). This comment is however inconsistent with the “Timeline of Russian Innovation” – the list of breakthrough inventions made on the territory of Russia, mostly by Russian (including early Slavs) and consisting of several hundred innovations (Timeline of Russian Innovation 2017). To the best of our knowledge, Russia is the only country, to which Wikipedia (not a Russian encyclopedia at all) devoted such a page.

According to the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2016, the list of top 5 countries in tertiary education efficiency included South Korea, Singapore, Russia, Finland and Ukraine. According to the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2017, the list of top 5 countries in tertiary efficiency includes Singapore, South Korea, Russia, Ukraine and Finland. The level of tertiary efficiency reflecting to a certain extent the higher education quality level remains high both for Finnish and Russian tertiary education systems.

The most popular targets of academic mobility comprise opportunities to experience a different perspective on students' academic subjects in other countries, personal and broaden their experience by living and studying abroad for a period of time, enhance students' intellectual maturity through inculcating flexibility, resilience, cross-cultural communication skills, as well as ability to adapt to new circumstances, and deal constructively with differences.

2.1 Finnish and Russian Education Systems in Comparison

Finland and Russia differ very much in many aspects, with the territory and population coming straight to one’s mind. However, the countries have much more in common when we compare their strategic priorities, with national education systems being among the most important ones. Nevertheless, the national political and social conditions differ quite a lot, which makes comparison of the higher education systems an interesting research objective.

Finland is an EU member, which means that Finland's national higher education system is integrated into EHEA as a full-fledged competitive national system and part of a supranational strategic alliance capable of winning a fierce competition with the higher education system of the United States, China, India, Brazil and other ambitious and determined participants in the global market of higher education and research.

Finland is a relatively small Scandinavian country, especially in terms of population number and density. Nevertheless, the first university in Finland was founded in Turku (at that time Abo) as far back as 1640 and by the middle of the 20th century an extensive multi-level system of higher education was established in Finland.

The Finnish ‘educational miracle’ attracts researchers around the world, since until the 1960s only one in ten adult Finns had more than nine classes of basic education (Sahlberg 2007), but by 2014, 40% of adult Finns aged 25-64 had higher education, compared to the average OECD and EU21 values of 33% and 29% respectively (EG 2014), and recent international indexing also confirms the fact that Finland is one of the most advanced knowledge societies (Sahlberg 2010).

The system of higher education of the USSR allowed the country to achieve and retain the status of one of the world's leading economies and superpowers for at least 50 years and produce a long list of breakthrough innovations throughout the twentieth and first two decades of the 21st century. According to the data for 2015, 50% of Russian men and 65% of Russian women aged 25-34 have higher education compared to the OECD averages of 35% and 46% respectively (Educat. at a Glance 2015)

The fundamental difference between the Russian and Finnish national higher education systems is first, the lack of private universities in Finland and second, education is free for citizens of the country and international students from EU (the tuition fee for non-EU citizens was only introduced in 2017).

The reform of higher education, initiated in Finland in 2009, aims at simplifying the activities of universities in the international environment. The goal of the reform is to create conditions for Finnish universities to react flexibly to changes in the operational environment, diversify their funding base, cooperate with foreign universities and research institutes, allocate resources for first-class research and strategic development, and compete for research funding by international funds. The reform
intends to provide Finnish universities faster and more efficient development, ensuring the quality and effectiveness of scientific research and teaching, strengthening the role of universities in the system of the national and global innovative economy (University Reform 2010).

2.2 Academic Mobility in Finland and Russia

The Russian Federation as the successor of the Soviet Union has traditional had large numbers of inbound students, with outbound academic mobility starting to flourish since the 2000s. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics for July 2014, Russia occupies the 6th place in the list of top 20 countries for international students: US – 740482, UK – 427686, France – 271399, Australia – 249588, Germany – 206986, Russia – 173627, Japan – 150617, Canada – 120960, China – 88979, Italy – 77732 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014).

The largest number of inbound students in Finland comes from the Russian Federation (2,799), which is quite natural as Finland is a neighbouring country with a very high level of education. The 2nd largest number of students comes from China – 1,929, which is also natural taking into account the population of China and the Chinese government’s efforts to promote academic mobility and support ‘the national soft power’ and the 3rd largest gives Viet Nam – 1,600, which reflects the strive of Vietnamese to good quality higher education as part of the national and international policies. The list of other countries, where Finnish higher education is quite popular includes Nepal – 1,137, India – 756, Pakistan – 703, Nigeria – 621, Germany – 614, Estonia – 599, Iran, Islamic Rep. – 581, Bangladesh – 541, United States – 414, Sweden – 364, Ghana – 353, Ethiopia – 352, Kenya – 329, Spain – 299, Italy – 292, United Kingdom – 276, Poland – 228, France – 223, Turkey – 193, Ukraine – 193, Cameroon – 177, Hungary – 173, Canada – 162, Korea, Rep. – 135, Greece – 135, Netherlands – 132, Mexico – 131, Latvia – 129, Romania – 125, Japan – 123, Brazil – 118, Lithuania – 112, and other 180 countries (Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students 2016).

The largest number of inbound students in the Russian Federation comes from the 15 former soviet socialist republics, which is absolutely logical because the high quality of the soviet higher education and the younger generation seeks an opportunity to acquire their successful new experience with the optimal ratio ‘quality–cost.’ The largest number of international students comes to Russia from Kazakhstan – 59,295, 2nd largest is Ukraine – 21,817, Belarus – 18,804, Turkmenistan – 16,332, Uzbekistan – 16,162, Azerbaijan – 14,083, Tajikistan – 10,825, Republic of Moldova – 5,834, Armenia – 4,446, Kyrgyzstan – 4,430, Georgia – 1,076, Latvia – 622, Estonia – 412, Lithuania – 355. Other countries sending comparatively large number of students to Russia, include China – 9,785, India – 4,276, Malaysia – 2,459, Viet Nam – 1,557, Mongolia – 1,284, Nigeria – 1,167, Morocco – 1,047, Turkey – 698, Syrian Arab Republic – 574, Namibia – 515, Myanmar – 511, and other 180 countries (ibid.).


3 RESEARCH OUTLINE

For the research purposes two higher schools were chosen – Saimaa University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) – and Moscow (Senkevich) State Institute for Tourism Industry (MSITI). The universities are of similar size (both have fewer than 5,000 students, i.e. fall into the category of ‘small university’). Both universities have programmes in business management and tourism and train students in international projects management and hospitality and tourism development.

Bachelor’s degrees at Saimaa University of Applied Sciences vary from 210 to 240 ECTS, with Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management and Bachelor of business Administration covering 3.5 years (7 semesters) and equaling to 210 ECTS. Bachelor’s degrees at MSITI equal to 240 ECTS.

Both universities pay much attention to widening the scope of their international partners and developing their international programmes, with Saimaa University of Applied Sciences being famous as ‘the most internationalized university in South-Eastern Finland or, most probably in Finland at large. Moscow (Senkevich) State Institute for Tourism Industry is not so experienced in international relations – it has been building its international reputation for about seven years, with its first double degree and long-term mobility programmes launched just four years ago.

3.1 Research Goal and Hypothesis

As is indicated in Section 1, the efficiency of higher education in Finland and Russia is very close (1.1.1), which partly reveals both the quality of higher education programmes and high potential of the higher education systems. Despite the similarity of these achievements, the inbound mobility rate differs more than twice: in Finland is 7.7, while the inbound mobility rate in the Russian Federation is 3.4. The outbound mobility ratio (% of total mobile students) differs much, too: it is 3.1 in Finland, while in the Russian Federation it is 0.9 only. Gross outbound enrolment ratio keeps the same tendency: it is 2.7 in Finland and just 0.7 in the Russian Federation. Despite this statistics, the literature review reveals that relatively little data about student perceptions and attitudes to academic mobility. Consequently, this pilot research aims to narrow this research gap and reveal the attitudes of Finnish and Russian undergraduate students to academic mobility, as well as identify the causes of their appreciation or depreciation of the opportunities provided by academic mobility programmes.

The hypothesis of the research presumes that academic mobility in Europe (with Russia still standing apart) faces the following five challenges:

Challenge 1 – Economic: the overall cost of academic mobility programmes including DD programmes varies much, with the average being high enough or even too high for non-EU citizens.

Challenge 2 – Social: academic mobility is not always seen as an ‘a social lift’ and a necessary step for the future career.

Challenge 3 – Political: political limitations, sanctions and restrictions hinder the development of the academic mobility network even in Europe.

Challenge 4 – Legal: the diversity of legal basis for academic mobility within and particularly beyond the European Union erects serious obstacles for the development of academic mobility.

Challenge 5 – Organizational: academic mobility designed as a solid basis for partnerships often turns into donor–recipient relationships.

3.2 Research Methods and Process

This study employed a scope of research methods including quantitative and qualitative methods to assess Finnish and Russian students’ opinions and attitudes concerning academic mobility, its risks and opportunities. The scope of methods used for the study includes sampling, a survey of opinions and attitudes of the students from the two chosen universities, case study and cross-case analysis.

The designed questionnaire contained 10 questions intended to identify the general attitude of Finnish and Russian undergraduate students to academic mobility programmes, reveal reasons for students’ participation or non-participation in academic mobility programmes abroad, identify challenges that undergraduate students anticipate in studying abroad, reveal students’ experience in academic mobility and their appreciation / depreciation of the opportunities, students’ intention to welcome or avoid academic mobility, identify the potential of academic mobility in students’ perception, as well as rank the importance of academic mobility components and find out students’ regional preferences.
3.3 Respondents

Aimed at a pilot research, the sample was limited to 51 Finnish undergraduate students from one Finnish university – Saimaa University of Applied Sciences – and 53 Russian undergraduate students from one Russian university – Moscow (Senkevich) State Institute for Tourism Industry – regardless of their previous experience in participation in academic mobility programmes. The random sampling covered all second and third-year students (over 300 in total), with 51 Finnish and 53 Russian students providing valid responses in the questionnaires. The participation in the survey was voluntary, which was a delimitation of the research, corresponding to the goal and conditions of the pilot research.

The respondents were of the same age group – 18–21, their gender and previous experience in international academic mobility were not relevant for the research goal and objectives.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

The students’ responses were not unanimous, which reflects the respondents’ voluntary and free expression of their opinions. The responses have provided a variety and inconsistency of the Russian undergraduate students’ knowledge of academic mobility programmes and better awareness of the Finnish students of the opportunities provided by SAMK and beyond it.

4.1 Analysis of the Students’ Responses

The students’ responses though diversified within each country / university group have reflected more or less uniform clusters of attitudes, with very few bluntly negative general opinions of academic mobility found among Russian students, which can be partly explained by the comparatively early stage of MSITI's internationalization in comparison with SAMK’s vast experience and profound and comprehensive internationalization.

The survey was intended to reveal the primary attitudes, which could be generalized to serve as basis for further research and did not aim at identifying deep personal reasons of the students’ reactions. So, the questionnaire contained 10 questions, which yielded the following results considered below.

**Question 1** in the questionnaire intended to identify the general attitude of Finnish and Russian undergraduate students to academic mobility programmes. The responses were as follows:

1) 66% of the Finnish students see academic mobility programmes as opportunities and benefits and 46% of the Russian students think the same.

2) 22% or almost one fourth of the Finnish students see academic mobility programmes as projects facing challenges and risks. At the same time, 31% of the Russian students think the same way.

3) And 12% of the Finnish students see academic mobility programmes as problematic and thus do not welcome them, while 23% of the Russian students see academic mobility as problem generating and do not perceive them positively.

So, the general attitude of the Finnish respondents – Finnish undergraduate students – is more positive than that of the Russian respondents.

**Question 2** aimed at revealing reasons for undergraduate students’ participation in academic mobility programmes abroad. The respondents were offered 7 reasons and asked to choose up to 4 most important to their mind. The responses yielded the following results:
15% of the Russian students see participation in such programmes as an opportunity to learn/improve language skills, while 18% of the Finnish students think the same. 17% of the Russian students think it is an opportunity to live abroad, and 13% of Finnish answered the same way. 12% of the Russian respondents believe it is an opportunity to improve soft skills, while 20% of the Finnish respondents answered the same.

“Improve and widen my career prospects in the future” was the answer of 21% of Russian students and 19% of the Finnish students. 4% of the Russian students believe it is an opportunity to experience different language practices and teaching methods, at the same time 11% of the Finnish students answered the same.

“Enhance my future employability abroad” was a choice of 16% of the Russian respondents and of 6% of the Finnish ones. 15% of the Russian students chose “Personal enrichment”, when 13% of the Finnish students chose the same.

The similar responses show similar understanding of the respondents of both nations, which reflects similar level of information provision in both universities.

**Question 3** aimed at identifying undergraduate students’ reasons not to study abroad. The students were offered 6 variants of replies and could choose three most significant reasons deterring them from academic mobility programmes.

Responding to this question, 25% of the Russian undergraduate students and 20% of the Finnish students chose the reply “Higher or uncertain costs of the study abroad”. 13% of the Russian respondents and 26% of the Finnish respondents chose “Family or personal relationships”. 11% of the Russian students and 9% of the Finnish students answered “Work responsibilities in my home country of study”. 15% of the Russian and 19% of the Finnish students answered “Uncertainty about education quality abroad”. 17% of the Russian and 12% of the Finnish respondents chose “Insufficient knowledge of a foreign language” 19% of the Russian students and 14% of the Finnish students chose “Expected difficulties with the credits transfer and recognition in my home university”.

The responses to **Question 3** reflect the different economic situations in Finland and Russia and higher economic concerns of the Russian respondents, the higher percentage of the Russian undergraduate students working at their second year of full-time study and higher percentage of Russian undergraduate students (almost twice) estimating their knowledge of foreign languages as insufficient. The responses reflected closer and stronger ties of the Finnish undergraduate students to their relationships and higher concerns of Russian students of the possible academic problems they may face in foreign universities, which reflects a lack of their awareness in the academic mobility issues.
**Question 4** intended to find out challenges that undergraduate students anticipate in studying abroad. The respondents were offered 5 options and asked to choose up to three most significant challenges. 25% of the Finnish undergraduate students and 18% of the Russian students identified social integration as the biggest challenge. Culture shock was seen as a possible challenge by 13% of the Finnish students and 11% of the Russian ones. Financial difficulties were seen as a serious challenge by 15% of the Finnish students and 29% of the Russian students (almost thrice as many). Academic difficulties are a strong challenge in the opinion of 22% of the Finnish respondents and 24% of the Russian respondents. The fear of getting isolated and abandoned was seen as a challenge by 25% of the Finnish students and 18% of the Russian students, which may reflect certain national cultural attitudes, as well as academic practices and experiences.

**Question 5** “Have you participated in academic mobility programmes?” yielded the following responses. 39% of the Finnish students answered “No, but I’d like to”, and 70% of the Russian students answered the same. “I plan to do it in the near future” was the answer of 25% of the Finnish students and of 17% of the Russian students. 24% of the Finnish students answered “Yes, I have done it once” and 10% of the Russian students answered the same. 12% of the Finnish students answered “Yes, I have done it more than once” and just 3% of the Russian students answered the same.

The responses to **Question 6** “How do you estimate your previous academic mobility experience?” turned out to be the following – 44% of the Finnish students answered “Undoubtedly positive” and 28% of the Russian students answered the same. “More positive than negative” was the answer of 39% of the Finnish students and 45% of the Russian students. “Difficult to say” was the answer of 12% of the Finnish students and 17% of the Russian students. “More negative than positive” was the answer of 5% of the Finnish respondents from and 9% of the Russian students. 0% of the Finnish students answered “Absolutely negative” and 1% of the Russian students shared their opinion.
Question 7 “Do you plan to take part in academic mobility programmes in the future?”

“Undoubtedly yes” was the response of 24% of the Finnish students and 13% of the Russian students think the same. “Maybe yes, due to the circumstances” was the choice 28% of the Finnish students and 29% of the Russian students answered so. 25% of the Finnish students answered “Hard to say” and 37% of the Russian students chose the same answer. “More probably no than yes, due to the circumstances” was the choice of 12% of the Finnish students and 14% of the Russian students. And “No way” decided 11% of the Finnish students and 7% of Russian students.

Question 8 “In your opinion, is academic mobility connected to building innovative and/or creative economy?”

24% of the Finnish students chose the response “Directly connected”, while only 16% of the Russian students think the same. 36% of the Finnish students answered “Partly connected” and 29% of the Russian students answered the same. 17% of the Finnish students responded “Fairly connected” and 31% of the Russian students answered the same. 7% of the Finnish students chose the answer “Not connected at all” and 10% of the Russian students shared their opinion. 16% of the Finnish students replied “Hard to say” and 14% of the Russian students chose the same answer.

Question 9 “Make a preference list of the continents where you would prefer to choose academic mobility programme”:

Europe was the preferred destination for 35% of the Russian students and 51% of the Finnish ones. Asia was preferred by 23% of the Russian respondents and by 13% of the Finnish respondents. North America was chosen by 21% of the Russian respondents and by 25% of the Finnish students. South America was chosen by 9% of the Russian and 4% of the Finnish respondents. Australia was preferred by 10% of the Russian students and by 6% of the Finnish students. Africa is chosen by 2% of the Russian respondents and by 1% of the Finnish ones.
Question 10 “What components of academic mobility programmes do you find primarily important?” presumed multiple responses.

Quality of education seems to be a primarily important component to 10% of the Russian students and 24% of the Finnish ones. Transferable credits are most important for 11% of the Russian respondents and 21% of the Finnish students. Quality of accommodation is primarily important for 6% of the Russian respondents and 20% of the Finnish respondents. Cost of education is most important for 45% of the Russians students and 19% of the Finnish ones. Cost of accommodation – for 19% of the Russian respondents and 6% of the Finnish ones. Cost of living is primarily important for 13% of the Russian students and 4% of the Finnish respondents. Cultural and social components are chosen as most important by 4% of the Russian respondents and 7% of the Finnish ones. Personal safety is chosen as the most important by 20% of the Russian and 26% of the Finnish students. Language of teaching/instruction seemed highly important by 9% of the Russian students and 10% of the Finnish ones. Methods of teaching were chosen as most important by 2% of the Russian students and 5% of the Finnish students. 14% of the Russian students and 7% of Finnish students chose “Cultural enrichment”. “Practical orientation” was chosen by 11% of the Russian students and 27% of the Finnish ones. 3% of the Russian respondents and 12% of the Finnish respondents chose “Project-based approach”. “Curriculum flexibility” was chosen by 4% of the Russian students and 15% of the Finnish students. And finally, “Internship in a foreign company” was chosen by 17% of the Russian respondents and 14% of the Finnish ones.

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<tr>
<th>Primarily important components</th>
<th>Finnish students</th>
<th>Russian students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of education</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transferable credits (ECTS)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of accommodation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost of education</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<td>Cost of accommodation</td>
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<td>Cost of living</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>Cultural and social</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>Personal safety</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>Internship in a foreign company</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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4.2 Comparative Results

The obtained results indicated a straightforward relationship between the students’ attitudes to academic mobility and their awareness of academic mobility conditions, particular programmes, opportunities, achievements, challenges, and risks.
Finnish students have proved to be better informed about the possibilities of academic mobility. They are encouraged by their universities and other governmental and non-governmental organizations to participate in academic mobility programmes and projects. They are not be afraid to take the initiative in finding, selecting and participating in academic mobility programmes independently from their main Bachelor's programmes or even independently from their universities. So, on the one hand they have demonstrated a higher self-confidence and confidence in academic mobility programmes as part of EHEA system, while on the other they have shown higher requirements to secondary characteristics of academic mobility programmes – higher importance of the quality of living including accommodation quality and personal safety with lower importance of all the monetary issues.

The Russian students seem to be more preoccupied with economic aspects of academic mobility programmes, which reflects the economic situation in Russia and their families' lack of economic sustainability or even stability. Besides, their responses have revealed their hopes for academic mobility's opportunities and advantages – such as academic mobility participants' higher employability and better remuneration resulting in better social protection, along with their higher uncertainty about the quality of education abroad, the importance of transferrable credits, as well as possible curriculum flexibility and project-based approach. All these prove the absence of systemic approach in academic mobility development in the Russian Federation, though its importance is largely recognised by Russian authorities at the highest levels, with less understanding found downwards the hierarchy.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey have highlighted a scope of problems proving the correctness of the previously formulated hypothesis encompassing economic, social, political, legal and organisational challenges facing the academic mobility system in EHEA. One more challenge can be added to the list – organisational, as international academic mobility in Europe has not been developing as a system but rather as a myriad of programmes organised between universities or universities and commercial companies (international internships). And though such organisational tools as Erasmus have been introduced to make the situation with academic mobility in Europe more structural, EHEA still lacks some largely available databases, which could accumulate and offer large number of academic mobility programmes.

On identifying the most significant challenges and basing on a survey involving Finnish and Russian university students as primary stakeholders, the authors have selected and listed priority issues in the order of importance to highlight the primary steps to be taken to overcome the existing obstacles on the way to academic mobility in the primary sense of the term.

Priority issue 1: The need for a comprehensive review of the current basis of academic mobility in Europe and its local implementations (organizational and legislative issues).

Priority issue 2: The need for changes in legal basis for academic mobility in Russia and beyond.

Priority issue 3: The need for deeper integration in Europe, both political and geographical, providing every aspiring European with opportunities to participate in academic mobility programmes.

On summarizing the research results and ideas outlined above, the following recommendations can be offered:

1. The Russian authorities at every level – from the Ministry of Education and Science to the university administration should pay a particular attention to the development and support of international academic mobility programmes. The experience of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Finnish universities (SAMK included) should be taken into account as successful examples within benchmarking.

2. The top management of the Russian universities should not stick to the growing number of agreements of cooperation signed with foreign universities but contribute money and effort to their implementation for the benefit of the Russian and international students.

3. Most Russian universities and students lack an easily available system of information accumulating data of international academic mobility programmes even offered by their alma mater, not to mention opportunities provided by other Russian and foreign universities.

4. The Russian system of international academic mobility lacks systemic approach and systemic funding of both inbound international students and particularly outbound Russian students,
whose academic mobility is a burden fully carried by their families, which limits and hampers the development of international academic mobility in Russia.

5 The recently introduced by Finnish universities tuition fees for non-EU citizens (which is even for Double Degree programmes can be quite high – e.g. 7,000 Euros as in SAMK) is sure to become a discouraging factor for many international students, primarily including Russian students, whose number is sure to decrease in 2017 and afterwards, as this sum is unaffordable for most Russian households, even though it is fully reimbursed two years later after a successful graduation from both universities engaged in the DD Programme.

6 Finland and Russia – two neighbouring countries with the highest level of higher education efficiency – are sure to be mutually helpful, with their joint programmes being mutually beneficial for the benefit of both innovative economies. This opportunity should be recognised and promoted by both national and university authorities.

REFERENCES


