# The **Higher Education Students' Tourism Market**: The Role of Portugal in **International Mobility Flows**

MARIA JOÃO CARNEIRO * [ jmaria@egi.ua.pt ]
PAULA ALEXANDRA MALTA ** [ pmalta@egi.ua.pt ]

**Abstract** | Despite the number of persons travelling for education, research and reliable data on educational tourism are scarce. This is particularly true regarding international higher education students' market which is a distinct and expanding segment of the tourism sector. This paper describes the separate nature of higher education tourism market, its current global size, international education mobility patterns – identifying worldwide leading destinations and generating countries – and trends. Special attention is given to international organized student mobility occurring in the framework of the ERASMUS and to the Portuguese participation in this Programme. Data show that Portugal is one of the few countries that have generated a growing number of students, and that nowadays plays a very important role as both generator and host country. Details are provided about the evolution of the Portuguese students and about the current flows of Erasmus students between Portugal and other countries alongside with comparisons between the participation of Portugal and other countries in the ERASMUS.

**Keywords** | Educational Tourism, Higher Education Students´ Segment, ERASMUS Programme, Europe, Portugal.

**Resumo** | Apesar do elevado número de pessoas que viaja por motivos de educação, a investigação na área do turismo educacional tem sido escassa. Isto é particularmente verdade no que concerne ao mercado internacional relacionado com as mobilidades dos estudantes do ensino superior, mercado este com características muito específicas e que se encontra em expansão. Este artigo descreve a natureza específica do mercado de estudantes do ensino superior que viaja por motivos educacionais, a sua dimensão actual, os padrões geográficos de mobilidade à escala internacional – identificando os principais destinos e países geradores – e tendências que se desenham na formação destes fluxos.
É dada especial atenção às mobilidades estudantis de carácter organizado que ocorrem no âmbito do ERASMUS e à participação portuguesa neste Programa. Os dados mostram que Portugal é um dos poucos países que tem gerado um crescente número de estudantes, desempenhando um importante papel quer como país gerador quer como receptor destas mobilidades. Procede-se a uma caracterização pormenorizada da evolução dos fluxos de estudantes portugueses e dos actuais fluxos de estudantes ERASMUS existentes entre Portugal e outros países, bem como a uma análise comparativa da participação portuguesa e da participação de outros países no âmbito do programa ERASMUS.

**Palavras-chave** | Turismo Educacional, Segmento de Estudantes do Ensino Superior, Programa ERASMUS, Europa, Portugal.

* **PhD in Tourism** at the University of Aveiro and **Professor** at the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering of the University of Aveiro.
** **MA in Geography** at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra and **Lecturer** at the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering of the University of Aveiro.

## 1. Demand for international education

### 1.1. Going mobile

Although travelling for education and travelling to learn is not a new form of tourism, recent times gave new impetus to this market, fuelled by both the expansion of higher education worldwide and the desire of learning contents in tourist experiences. In fact, tourism and education are acknowledged to be in the front line of the changes produced under late modernity. Roppolo (1996: 91) observes that "as countries become more interdependent, their success, growth and economic prosperity will largely depend on the ability of two industries – education and tourism – to create the avenues necessary to support international exchange and learning". Furthermore, changes in both education and tourism generated a convergence process with education stimulating tourism development and formal and informal learning becoming an increasingly central component of the tourist experience (Roppolo, 1996). Educational tourism in general, and international student mobility flows in particular, are one of the most visible faces of the globalization processes.

Ritchie (2003: 18) conceptualizes educational tourism as "tourist activity undertaken by those who are undertaking an overnight vacation and those who are undertaking an excursion for whom education and learning is a primary or secondary part of their trip. This can include general educational tourism and adult study tours, international and domestic university and school students' travel, including language schools, school excursions and exchange programs. Educational tourism can be independently or formally organized and can be undertaken in a variety of natural and human-made settings". The author develops a classification outlining a major distinction based upon a combination of two criteria – the relevance of the specific motivational foundations, in particular the formality level of the learning component within the tourist experience, coupled with the demographic factor linked with

the role of age – that splits down the market in two segments: (i) General travel for education and adult and seniors' educational tourism; (ii) University/ college students' and school tourism.

Within the student education market, and particularly the international segment, Australian Education International (2004) recognizes 5 categories: (i) students in higher education institutions; (ii) students undertaking language courses; (iii) students enrolled in vocational courses; (iv) students enrolled in primary and high schools; (v) miscellaneous group of students doing preparation courses and non-accredited programs.

Set against the above framework, this paper sets apart student tourist experiences associated with leisure motivations, to focus exclusively on higher education students' tourism segment linked to the demand for formal international education. In other words, the opportunity to study abroad, and taking part in international travel as part of an academic degree.

### 1.2. Expansion and intensification of a global market

Since the second half of the XX century, as nations became wealthier and sought to educate their population, the world witnessed an expansion of the overall student population, together with steadily rising numbers of students accessing higher education. Higher education has been one of the fastest growing sectors in the world over the last twenty-five years. In fact, one main trend common to higher education systems and institutions worldwide is the quantitative expansion[1], which is, nevertheless,

---

[1] Higher education was defined for this study as "all post-secondary education for which at least an upper secondary school-leaving certificate or equivalent is required and which leads to a higher-level qualification" (Eurydice, 2000: 17). Higher education has long been recognized as an instrument of cultural, social and economic advancement for societies and for their individual members (Eurydice, 2000). Its global expansion is explained by the convergence of several factors: demographic growth; significant advances in the provision of primary and secondary education make more young people eligible to higher education; economic growth experienced by many countries, and awareness that it

accompanied by continuing inter-country and inter-regional inequalities in access (UNESCO, 1995). If enrolments in education at all levels have been growing very rapidly, the number of students in higher education grew even faster from 13 million students in 1960 to 28 million in 1970, 46 million in 1980 and 65 million in 1991. The figures for the developing countries show a particularly rapid growth rate – from 3 million students in 1960 to 7 million in 1970, 16 million in 1980 and 30 million in 1991. As a consequence, the proportion of student enrolments from the developing countries increased from 23,1% in 1960 to 46,2% in 1991 (UNESCO, 1995). Updated UNESCO statistical data demonstrates that through the 1990s the number of students worldwide grew by around 3,9% a

year, on average, and the rate of increase stays markedly greater in the developing world than in the developed world. Today, higher education students are estimated to be 79 million and are expected to reach 100 million by 2025, most of them will be in developing countries (projected enrolments in the developing countries will reach 54 million students in 2025 (UNESCO, 2004))[2].

IDP Education Australia (quoted by Davies, 2003: 78) forecasts even more promising figures, estimating global demand for higher education to increase from 97 million in 2000 to 262 million in 2025. Even in a mature market like the UK, whose full-time student numbers increased by almost 70% between 1989 and 1995, and one in three young people now enter higher education, compared with one in six in 1989 (Eurydice, 1999), it seems that the sector will continue to grow as the government has set a target of 50% of all 18-30 years-old having received higher education by 2010 (Mintel, 2002). This broad evolution pattern, distanced from elite higher education, has been mirrored by the EU countries, including Portugal. In 2002, the EU had 16.3 million tertiary students, representing an increase of 16% or an average of 3,1% per year in the period from 1997 to 2002. The number of students enrolled in higher education increased especially in the new Member States (79% in 1997-2002) (CEC, 2005). In Portugal, the higher education system in the last twenty-five years went through a process of very deep change, maybe unique in Europe – the number of institutions grew at a surprising rate[3], the number of students increased enormously. OCDE (1999) stresses that Portugal has achieved faster growth in its tertiary education sector over the past 10 years than has any other OECD country. The strong increase in student numbers should be seen in connection with the fact that until 1974 Portuguese higher education system was an elitist one with very low enrolment rates[4]. On the other hand, this impressive development derives partly from Portugal's entry into the EU, leading to additional support for governmental policies directed at the reform and development of

correlates well with investment in higher education; emergence of independent and democratic countries which see in higher education a key instrument for economic development and for social, cultural and political change (UNESCO, 1995).

[2] There is little doubt that, for instance, in both India and China the numbers will continue to expand at a very healthy rate. In India, higher education has expanded at a phenomenal rate in the last century; by 1997, India's system of higher education was the second largest in the world with 229 universities, more than 8 000 colleges, and 6.4 million students, but despite its expansion, enrollment in higher education in India today accounts for barely 6% of the relevant age group (Chitnis, 1999: 26). In China, gross enrollment rates in higher education increased from 3,4% in 1990, to 7,2% in 1995, and to 11% in 2000; this growth rate puts China well ahead of the goal set in the Action Plan to Vitalize Education in the 21st Century, issued by the Ministry of Education in 1999, to achieve a 15% enrollment rate by 2010. The national government has recently readjusted its planning goal to 15% as soon as 2005, with a total of 16 million students in higher education (Yang, 2002).

[3] The network of public universities expanded in number and size, the polytechnic sub-system was implemented, the private sector grew rapidly. Despite the first university studies in Portugal date back to 1290 – the University of Coimbra is one of the world's oldest universities –, in 1973 there were still only 4 public universities (plus the Catholic University). The current higher education system comprises in its public sector 14 universities plus the Catholic University; 36 public polytechnic institutes; 3 non-integrated nursing schools; and 7 public Higher Education Schools (Military Schools, The Police Academy, the Navy School, the Air Force School and Health Schools). The private sector is represented by 14 universities (some of them with various campuses, in different geographical areas) and 105 university institutes and polytechnic schools (Dima, 2005).

[4] There were only 9 321 students in 1940/41, 24 149 in 1960/61 and 49 461 in 1970/71 (CCGSE, 2004).

**Table 1** | Evolution of students enrolled by type of education

|  | **1960/61** | **1970/71** | **1980/81** | **1990/91** | **2000/01** | **2003/04** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public higher education | 21 927 | 46 172 | 74 599 | 135 350 | 270 312 | 282 215 |
| Private higher education | 2 222 | 3 289 | 7 829 | 51 430 | 114 010 | 106 509 |
| Total | 24 149 | 49 461 | 82 428 | 186 780 | 384 322 | 388 724 |

Source: CCGSE (2004).

higher education and stimulating rapid economic change (OCDE, 1999, Dima, 2005). The number of students rose by 72% between 1985/86 and 1990/91. In 2000, the gross enrolment ratio of Portuguese higher education reached 50,3% (Table 1) (CCGSE, 2004).

These enormous changes brought about the expansion and intensification of a global market concerning international higher education demand. Internationalization, the inherent characteristic of higher education, has been considerably enhanced throughout the latter 50 years (UNESCO, 1995) and the reinforcement of student and staff international mobility flows gain additional significance in the light of current globalization processes. Although completely reliable data are hard to find constrained by definitional problems[5], according to UNESCO statistics, the estimated number of people pursuing higher education studies outside their country of origin increased by almost 30% over the 1980s: from about 920 000 per year in 1980 to approximately 1.2 million in 1990 (UNESCO, 1995); in 2000, higher education enrolments of foreign students rose up to 1.7 million (UNESCO, 2004). OCDE (2004) reports that the number of higher education students engaged in international mobility goes on consistently increasing to reach, in 2002, the figure of 1.9 million students enrolled outside their country of origin (1 898 250 foreign tertiary students). Multiple other sources corroborate this trend of global growth concerning higher education students' demand. New Zealand's Ministry of Education (quoted by Ryan and Xie, 2003) estimates that international students might reach a 5 million figure within the next 20 years. Following this same idea, the *Global Student Mobility 2025 Study* carried by IDP Education Australia (quoted by Davis, 2003: 4) foresees that, as developing countries become wealthier, the number of students eager to study abroad may double before 2015, and double again by the 2025, predicting that there will be 8 million students getting international education.

### 1.3. Leading destinations and generating countries

#### 1.3.1. The traditional pattern

As Davis (2003: 5) underlines, international education mobility trends and patterns, as a component of the world-system of exchanges and, therefore, in which they are shaped, must be read in conjunction with other global flows and networks, as well as national developments, namely in terms of home country potential and population growth, investment in qualified human capital, level of technological capacity, growth in civil liberty, and international nets' connectivity.

---

[5] The statistical measures available cannot fully reflect the dimension and size of the higher education students' tourism market. UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT methodological statistical procedures base its definition of foreign students on citizenship which does not correspond to the concept of international mobile student and therefore some major problems arise. First, many higher education students with foreign citizenship are not really physically mobile students, once they may have lived all their life in the country where they are studying. A second problem compounds the fact that many families live outside their citizenship country which means that some students with home citizenship should be considered mobile students. A third one relates to the fact that these indicators include long-term international mobility. In this sense the figures presented must be treated with appropriate caution.

As figures of international higher education students' flows grow, so will the complexity of its mobility patterns. Quantitative expansion of worldwide international students' demand has been marked by factors of permanency and continuance, alongside with qualitative changes in mobility geographical patterns and in the field of study choices. Talk about permanencies and continuances means referring to the traditional pattern of movements originated in and hosted by developing countries. From a global perspective, international student flows are largely a creation of the wealthier and most developed countries, and student mobility takes place between relatively similar countries in terms of economic and human development, with the exceptions of China and India and a few other emerging economies (Davies, 2003). The major destinations are the higher education institutions of the developed world (Table 2).

By the school-year of 2000/01, the global movement of higher education students across national frontiers was polarized by the two leading destinations: USA and UK[6]; these two host countries account for over half (51,2 %) of the total mobility – including both spontaneous and organized mobility –, and this figure shoots up to more than 3/4 (77,1%) if we consider the leading five host countries (Table 2). As shown in Table 2, 12 of the 20 leading destinations are EU Member-states, which account for a combined EU figure of 48,6%. The meaning of these patterns of permanency goes way beyond being just higher education students crossing political-administrative borders;

it's another dimension pulling through, revealing long standing geopolitical, economic, linguistic and historical bounds between origin and host countries (Davis, 2003: 11). UNESCO (1995) reports that 97% of students from developed nations who undertake studies abroad go to another developed country, making international student mobility more a North-North than a South-North interchange, and meaning that the costs involved make it a privilege for those countries and students who can afford it (UNESCO, 1995). According to the described model, Europe emerges as the core of international student mobility, revealing outstanding contrasts amongst Western Europe's most developed nations and those of the Central and East Europe, summed into a single figure: in 2002, 37% of foreign students in the EU came from other EU member-sates (OCDE, 2004). Located on the margins and periphery of these interchanges we found Central and South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Islamic world.

Table 2 | Leading destination countries for international mobile students (2000/01)

| Host countries | N.º of international student enrolments | % |
|---|---|---|
| USA | 547 092 | 36,4 |
| United Kingdom | 222 576 | 14,8 |
| Germany | 185 179 | 12,3 |
| France | 134 783 | 9,0 |
| Australia | 69 668 | 4,6 |
| Japan | 59 656 | 4,0 |
| Spain | 40 506 | 2,7 |
| Belgium | 37 789 | 2,5 |
| Canada | 34 536 | 2,3 |
| Austria | 30 064 | 2,0 |
| Switzerland | 24 729 | 1,6 |
| Italy | 21 229 | 1,4 |
| Sweden | 20 631 | 1,4 |
| Turkey | 17 635 | 1,2 |
| Netherlands | 13 949 | 0,9 |
| Jordan | 12 154 | 0,8 |
| Portugal | 10 998 | 0,7 |
| New Zealand | 7 603 | 0,5 |
| Denmark | 7 124 | 0,5 |
| Ireland | 5 564 | 0,4 |
| 20 leading destinations | 1 503 465 | 100,0 |

Source: Davis (2003).

_____

[6] UK, Australia and France have been launching aggressive student recruitment efforts in the global international higher education market, namely in Asia. In 1999, the British government launched a sponsored initiative to attract more international students to the UK. This initiative identified two objectives: (i) achieve a higher education market share of 25% by 2005 (50 000 additional students); (ii) to be the world's leading nation for international students in further education with an increase of 100% by 2005 (25 000 additional students) (British Council, 1999).

In a more detailed analysis it also becomes evident that stronger and intensified exchange flows occur between countries sharing common linguistic and cultural affinities. Over half of Austria's mobile students are in Germany and 80% of Irish international students chose UK (Davis, 2003). If one scans the case of Portugal, ranked in the 17th position among the top leading destinations (Table 2), the relevance of these bounds also show up clearly: it is linguistic and cultural affinities that explain why 2/3 of Portugal's 10 998 foreign students are citizens from former colonies, especially from Angola (2 393), Cape-Verde (1 728) and Brazil (1 338) (Table 3). As a result of these bounds, Portugal receives an atypical huge flow of international students (39%) coming from low-income countries. The second most important generating source of international student flows for Portugal are the EU Member-states, namely France, Spain and Germany (Table 3) (Davis, 2003: 38). This pattern reproduces itself in other countries, which had a relatively high level of internationalisation in what concerns the reception of international mobile students before the 1980s due to their links with former colonies.

A similar picture of strong polarization also emerges from the emission perspective: in 2000, the 10 leading sending countries stand for 40% of the global mobility (Table 4). When trying to explain the geographical patterns detected in terms of international students mobility by countries of origin, the *Atlas of Student Mobility* (Davis, 2003) underlines not only that countries with larger populations tend to emit the most intense flows but, in order to explain some anomalies, takes in account explanatory factors related to development, freedom and international connectedness. The relationship between these variables explains why Singapore, a well-developed city-state of 4 million residents, emits a flow of 18 392 students and Brazil with a population of 170 million has no more than 6 756 mobile students; or the case of Nordic countries and other countries associated with high human development index scores and high rankings in other measures development and internationalisation, end up emitting stronger flows of international mobile students than it could be expected based exclusively

**Table 3** | 10 Leading countries of origin for international students studying in Portugal (2000/01)

| Number of international student enrolments | |
|---|---|
| Angola | 2 393 |
| Cape Verde | 1 728 |
| Brazil | 1 338 |
| France | 984 |
| Mozambique | 834 |
| Venezuela | 467 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 422 |
| Spain | 390 |
| Germany | 358 |
| S.Tomé and Príncipe | 358 |

Source: Davis (2003: 38).

**Table 4** | 20 Leading countries of origin for international mobile students (2000/01)

| Country of origin | N.º of International Student enrolments | % | Income category |
|---|---|---|---|
| China | 120 486 | 13,7 | Lower mid income |
| Korea | 76 790 | 8,7 | High income |
| India | 66 587 | 7,6 | Low income |
| Japan | 61 637 | 7,0 | High income |
| Greece | 52 845 | 6,0 | High income |
| Germany | 52 472 | 6,0 | High income |
| France | 50 896 | 5,8 | High income |
| Turkey | 42 690 | 4,8 | Lower mid income |
| Morocco | 41 296 | 4,7 | Lower mid income |
| Italy | 40 728 | 4,6 | High income |
| Taiwan | 37 371 | 4,2 | High income |
| Malaysia | 32 958 | 3,7 | Upper mid income |
| Canada | 31 965 | 3,6 | High income |
| United States | 31 542 | 3,6 | High income |
| Indonesia | 26 833 | 3,0 | Low income |
| Spain | 26 182 | 3,0 | High income |
| Hong Kong | 25 073 | 2,8 | High income |
| United Kingdom | 21 966 | 2,5 | High income |
| Kazakhstan | 20 938 | 2,4 | Lower mid income |
| Russian Federation | 20 160 | 2,3 | Lower mid income |
| 20 leading generating countries | 881 415 | 100,0 | |

Source: modified from Davis (2003).

on their respective demographic potential; or also Cuba's case, a country which on the basis of its population size sends fewer international mobile students than expected, but whose measures of international connectedness and press freedom scores are low (Davis, 2003).

### 1.3.2. Dimensions of change: reshaping the traditional pattern

Some lines of discontinuance and change have been reshaping the traditional global international higher education mobility patterns, through two major processes. A first consideration is the continuous reinforcement of the generating capacity of China and India, as well as other emerging countries, particularly the Asian South-East tiger-economies, which due to their high long-term growth rates, are emitting more and more powerful flows towards the developed world (Table 4). In fact, in 1990, 750 000 of the 1.2 million higher education students who had experienced formal education abroad came from the developing countries (UNESCO, 1995). The IDP Education Australia (quoted by Davis, 2003) foresees that by 2025, China and India will correspond to a portion of 50% of the total global demand for international higher education.

However, the most relevant dimension of change is the establishment and strengthening of powerful intra-regional movements. According to UNESCO (quoted by Davis, 2003: 4), by 1995, the intra-Asian movements reached more than 18% of the 678 000 Asian international mobile students. A similar pattern can be found in South America: 17% of the South-American students experience international education in other higher education institutions of this sub-continent. The explanation of the emerging location patterns produced by the intensification of the intra-regional mobility forces us to monitor the process of higher education internationalization at a global scale. Following a first wave characterized by students mobility to a host country – which was the

dominant trend along the past century, although it keeps quite up to date nowadays –, a second wave follows, featuring export-channels as traditional private and public higher education institutions decided to export their programs to other countries, through partnerships and twinning programs between higher education institutions (Smart, 1988, quoted by Mazzarol *et al.*, 2003). This rather popular strategy in Asia throughout the 90's has allowed students to achieve an international degree in their home country (Prystay, 1996) or in neighbouring ones. A third wave involves innovative forms of trans-national education including the creation of branch campuses, new types of partnership and administrative arrangements (twinning and educational franchising) and new delivery methods (internet-based distance learning) (Mazzarol, 1998). Taken together, these new opportunities make student options for higher education no longer constrained by national boundaries. A remarkable example is the Malaysia's case, analysed by Mazzarol *et al.* (2003). Facing huge problems related with the reduced dimension of its higher education provision sector and consequently having to deal with flowing effects and human and financial capital losses caused by Malaysian students eager to study abroad, Malaysia started to encourage, since the end of the 80's, the implementation of partnership and twinning programs. More than stopping the hemorrhagic flows, this strategy repositioned Malaysia from an international mobile students sending country to a destination one: despite the 90's crisis, the number of international students' enrolments in Malaysian higher education institutions rose from 5 635, in 1996, to 26 649, in 2000, drained out from a basin of 134 countries (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2003).

Reflecting on the eminently selective nature of international higher education market, marked by strong imbalances either in terms of destination countries and generating ones, it is worth questioning whether international education truly ends up being a global fact.

## 2. Higher education organized students' mobility – The ERASMUS programme

### 2.1. From ERASMUS spirit to SOCRATES era

The recognition that international mobility has the potential to increase the professional and personal competence of the labour force and has a positive impact on learning, including language skills, and that it contributes to understanding other cultures, an asset in an increasingly global economy, lead to the increasing involvement, by higher education institutions and/or by governments themselves, in establishing bilateral and multilateral agreements, cooperation programs within a frame of formal organization headed to promote mobility. In this sense, student mobility is a high EU policy priority. A considerable part of the overall student mobility within Europe occurs in the framework of an organized collective arrangement, particularly supported through EU programmes such as ERASMUS[7], launched in 1987. Inspired by a mobility tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages, nowadays the ERASMUS action and its different activities, henceforth, fit into the mobility policy promoted by the Bologna Process, which aims at the creation of a European Higher Education Area by 2010. Despite the fact that ERASMUS encompasses a number of different activities, its main feature was, indeed, students physical mobility, firmed not only as the most prominent characteristic of ERASMUS programme, but also as one of the pillars of the so-called *Citizens' Europe*. ERASMUS impact was immediately and unanimously recognized, given the fact that it took-off from a starting figure of 2 500 students/year before its implementation, towards a number of 4 000 students in 1987/88, its first year of implementation (GAERI, 2000: 9).

ERASMUS programme has been structured in two phases: ERASMUS I – from July 1987 to June 1990; ERASMUS II – from July 1990 to June 1995. Since 1995, ERASMUS became incorporated into SOCRATES – European Community Action Programme in the Field of Education, as the Higher Education Action. ERASMUS aims to enhance the quality and reinforce the European dimension of higher education by encouraging trans-national cooperation between universities, boosting European mobility and improving the transparency and full academic recognition of studies and qualifications throughout the EU. SOCRATES Programme also encompasses two phases: SOCRATES I (1995-1999); SOCRATES II (2000-2006).

Regardless the course of time and its inevitable changes together with the Programme's inner evolution, namely its geographical expansion[8] and its integration into the SOCRATES Programme, ERASMUS has not changed in its substantial sketch with regards to students' mobility. ERASMUS mobility is open to 2 199 higher education institutions from 31 participating countries: the 25 EU Member States; the 3 European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway); and, the 3 candidate countries (Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey). ERASMUS mobility encompasses all academic disciplines and all levels of higher education study up to and including the doctorate. To support a 3-12 month period of studies abroad which receives full formal academic recognition through the European credit transfer system (ECTS), students may be entitled to an ERASMUS grant intended to help cover the cost of travelling and the difference in cost of living. A final feature worth noting is that for the current phase, ERASMUS Action established the ambitious target of achieving a mobility rate of 10% of all European students before its close in 2006, further increasing mobility levels; its target is 3 million ERASMUS students by 2011, implying that 375 000 students will be participating in the final year of the programme.

---

[7] An acronym designating EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

[8] Geographically, ERASMUS has been an up-and-down shaped programme whose changes bring about unequivocal effects concerning its geographical evolution; in fact, there are considerable differences in terms of territorial area, considering the enlargement from 12 participating countries, in 1986, to 31 in present time.

### 2.2. Key findings about the Portuguese participation

The growing importance of the ERASMUS may be observed through the evolution of the number of ERASMUS students. Between 1987/88 and 2003/04, the number of ERASMUS students rose 4,080% (EC, 2005). Portugal has had a very important role in the expansion of this European Programme, being one of the countries with highest growth in terms of students' participation rates in the four stages of the ERASMUS Programme (Figure 1). Only in the last stages Portugal was surpassed by other countries that presented highest growth rates, such as countries that had recently adhered to the ERASMUS (e.g. Bulgaria, Lithuania, Czech Republic) or countries with a low contribution to this Programme (e.g. Liechtenstein) (EC, 2005). It is clearly seen that the growth rate of the Portuguese ERASMUS students has been much higher in the first stages of the ERASMUS than in the latest ones. This reality reflects the situation of the majority of the countries that adhered to the ERASMUS in the first stages of this Programme. However, considering this group of countries, Portugal still is the one that presents the second highest rate of growth during the SOCRATES II, being only surpassed by Luxembourg (Figure 1).

In 2003/04, the Portuguese students travelling in the scope of the ERASMUS represented about 3% of the total number of ERASMUS students (Figure 2). This quota was similar to those of Czech Republic (3%), Austria (3%), Finland (3%) and Netherlands (3%). In that year only seven countries generated a much higher number of ERASMUS students – France (15%), Germany (15%), Spain (15%), Italy (12%), UK (6%), Poland (5%) and Belgium (4%). Whereas the first four countries seem to be reinforcing their role as generating countries, UK has been loosing some weight in this context (Figure 1). The decreasing rate of the number of ERASMUS students coming from the UK was attributed to the decrease of the financial amount of the scholarships (Carr, 2003: 204).
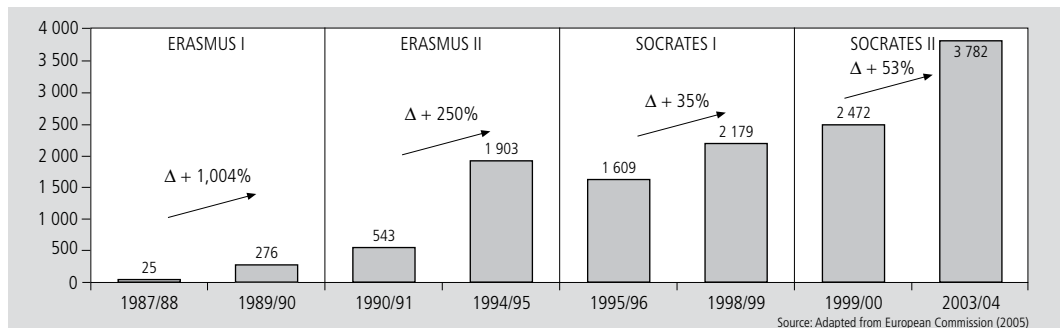


**Figure 1** │ Evolution of the number of ERASMUS students generated by Portugal.
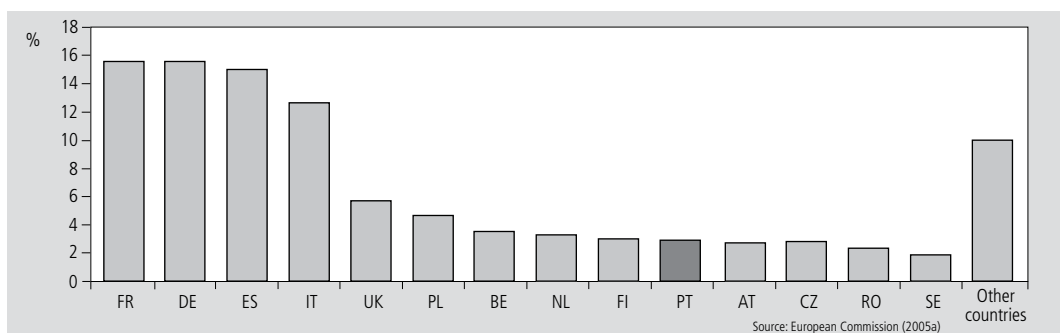


**Figure 2** │ ERASMUS students by home country in 2003/04.

Portugal not only plays an important role as a generator of ERASMUS students, but also hosts a high number of ERASMUS students every year. In 2003/04, Portugal received 3 782 ERASMUS students, who corresponded to 3% of the total number of ERASMUS students. It is worth noticing that there is a high balance between the number of ERASMUS students that Portugal receives and generates (Figure 3). In contrast, other countries stand out as predominantly generators of students – generating a higher number of ERASMUS students than the number of students they host – or predominantly receptors – receiving a number of foreign ERASMUS students higher than the number of students they generate. UK is the country that is more outstanding as a predominantly receptor country, being followed by Spain, Netherlands, Ireland and a group of Nordic countries (e.g. Sweden, Denmark and Finland) (Figure 3).

Germany and Italy, besides receiving a high number of ERASMUS students, are the main predominant generators of students among the countries that adhered to the SOCRATES programme at the stages of ERASMUS I or II (Figure 3). The majority of the countries that adhered in the stages of SOCRATES I or II are also primarily generators of students (EC, 2005a). The unequal distribution of the flows of the ERASMUS students worldwide, as well as the imbalance between the generation and reception of students in several countries, may be partially attributable to linguistic issues (as suggested by Jallade and Gordon, 1996) and

political factors. Some specific features that may have contributed to this imbalance are: the inexistence, in certain countries, of subjects lectured in languages dominated by a lot of students (e.g. English and French); and the fact that several countries have only recently adhered to the EU.

Although Portugal presents a strong balance between the generation and reception of ERASMUS students, Portugal seems to have privileged relationships with some countries (considering the number of exchange students between Portugal and these countries). In 2003/04, a high concentration flow of students between Portugal and/or Italy and Spain was visible (Figure 4). More than 45% of the foreign ERASMUS students hosted by Portugal came from these two countries and these countries received more than 40% of the Portuguese ERASMUS students. There is also a substantial exchange of students between Portugal and other countries such as France, Germany and Belgium. Besides these countries, those that still present a strong relationship with Portugal, although at a lower level, are the Netherlands, UK and some of the more recent adherents to ERASMUS – Poland, Czech Republic and Romania. It is worth noticing that the importance of each of these countries as receptors and generators of students differ. Whereas UK and Netherlands stand out by receiving much more Portuguese students than the number of students they send to Portugal, the opposite happens with Spain, Italy and the recent adherent countries identified (Figure 4).
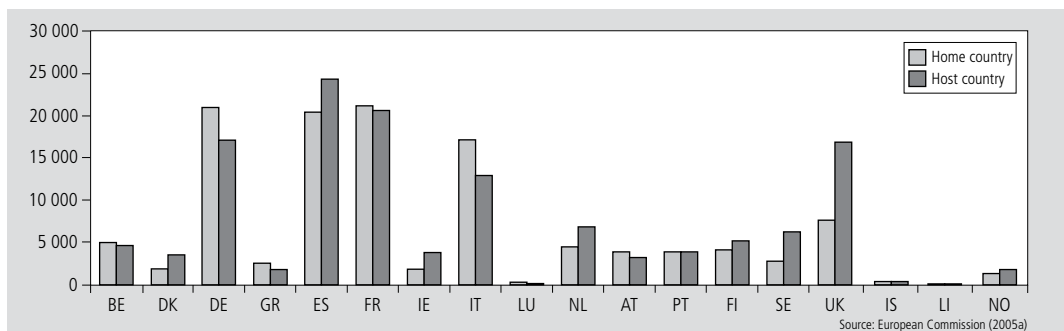


Source: European Commission (2005a)

**Figure 3** | ERASMUS students in 2003/04, by home country and host country – Countries adherent in the stages of ERASMUS I and II.

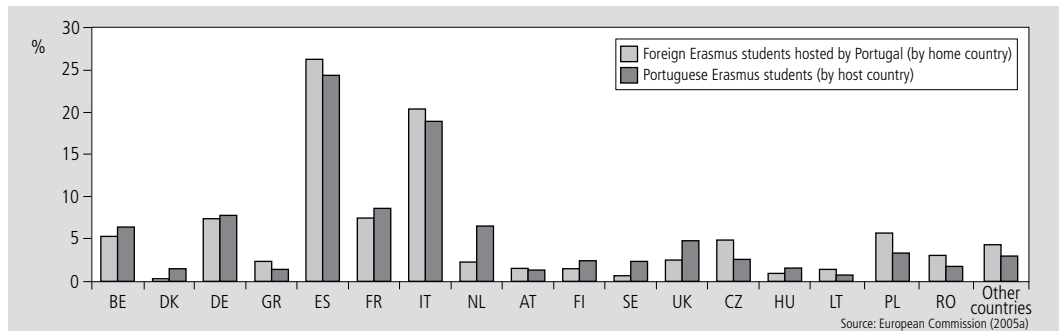Source: European Commission (2005a)

**Figure 4** │ Foreign ERASMUS students hosted by Portugal in 2003/04 (by home country) and Portuguese ERASMUS students (by host country)

Some research has already been undertaken in order to identify the potential causes of the geographical concentration of the ERASMUS flows and the superior power of attraction of some countries when comparing to others. The concentration of the Portuguese ERASMUS students in some foreign countries seems to be a consequence of some of the characteristics of these countries (ANAB, in Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação, 2003; AN, w/d):

– their wide participation in programs of student mobility, which contributed for a high experience in hosting students;

– low language barriers because subjects are lectured in the languages in which the Portuguese have higher competencies;

– the prestige of certain universities, that contributes to attract a lot of students;

– the strong cooperation established between Portugal and these countries, that sometimes lasts since the beginning of the ERASMUS;

– those countries are preferential destinations in specific areas of study.

As far as Spain and Italy are concerned, long and strong geopolitical, linguistic and historical relationships between Portugal and those countries have possibly facilitated the flow of students to these countries. The proximity of Spain and its similarity to Portugal in terms of cost of living has possibly been a crucial factor to the attraction exerted by this country.

In 2003/04, at the world context there was a predominance of ERASMUS students from some areas of study, by growing order, business (22%), language (16%), engineering (11%) and social sciences (10%) (Figure 5). The predominance of ERASMUS students of some areas of study seems to indicate that the periods of study in a foreign country are particularly valued in some areas of study, where the enlargement of knowledge by studying abroad seems to be particularly significant. As far as the Portuguese ERASMUS students are concerned, students from the areas of study above mentioned also play a significant role, with students from each of these areas representing between 13% and 8% of the Portuguese ERASMUS students (Figure 5). However, in the group of the Portuguese students there is almost an inverse order of importance of these areas of study, with social sciences and engineering being the two most important ones, followed by medical sciences and business (medical sciences not being so important worldwide) and, after that, languages. Students from these five areas of study represented more than 55% of all the Portuguese ERASMUS students. In Portugal, the National Agency has already made some efforts in
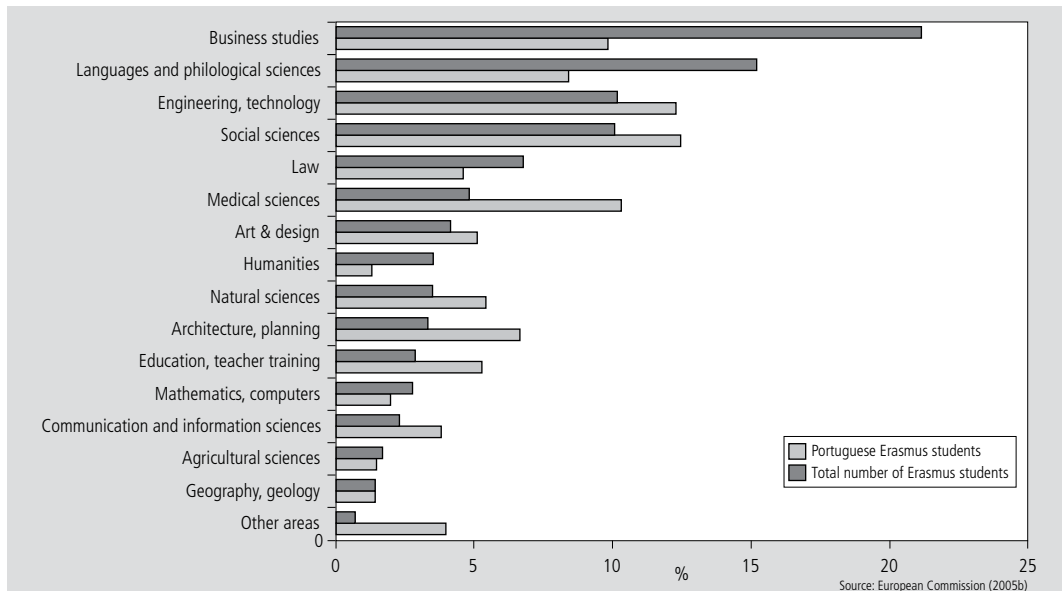
**Figure 5** | ERASMUS students in 2003/04, by area of study.

order to promote a higher balance among the students from the different areas of study, namely, to increase the number of ERASMUS students in the following areas of study: education/teacher training, law, communication and information sciences (AN, w/d).

## 3. Conclusions

Portugal has been playing a very important role in the context of the ERASMUS. Portugal is one of the few countries that have been generating a growing number of ERASMUS students across all the stages of this Programme. In 2003/04, Portugal was already assuming a significant role as a generator and host of Erasmus students. Although at the level of several countries participating in the ERASMUS there is an imbalance between the numbers of Erasmus students generated and hosted, Portugal presents a relative balance in this context by both generating and hosting about 3% of all the ERASMUS students. This situation contrasts with that of other countries that are predominantly generators of Erasmus

students – e.g. Germany and Italy –, or receptors – e.g. Spain and UK. Portugal develops more exchanges of students with some specific countries. Portugal has developed especially high flows of Erasmus students with Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Italy, and also considerable high flows with Belgium, Germany and France. The privileged relationship between Portugal and these countries and, especially, the preference of the Portuguese students for these countries, seem to be related to: language features; previous cooperation undertaken under the ERASMUS; the prestige of some Universities from these countries; the countries experience in hosting students; and the countries' attractiveness in some areas of study. Considering the areas of study, it is possible to see that, either at the international level as at the level of Portugal, the adherence to ERASMUS is higher in some areas such as languages, social sciences, engineering, management and languages, than in many other areas. This may happen because the experience of studying abroad is not equally valued in all the areas of study. It is worth noticing that medical sciences is the third area of study that accounts

for a higher percentage of Portuguese ERASMUS students, situation not found at the global set of the participating countries.

Further research should be undertaken in order to analyse the evolution of the participation of Portugal in the ERASMUS in the following years. Specific attention should be paid to a possible change in the ERASMUS flows caused by the relatively recent adherence of some countries to the ERASMUS and to policies concerning the Higher Education such as the Bologna Process. Given the high value of an experience of study abroad, specific actions should be undertaken in order to: ensure that Portugal will still play an important role as a generator and host of Erasmus students; increase student mobility in some areas of study; and promote a higher balance between the number of ERASMUS students received and generated by each country.

It is also worth noticing that further research is now opening with the implementation of the Erasmus Mundus programme which, in response to the expansion and intensification of a global market concerning international higher education demand, aims at stimulating and supporting European and international cooperation in higher education and, therefore, strengthening Europe's position.

### References

AN, Agência Nacional para os Programas Comunitários Sócrates e Leonardo da Vinci, w/d, *Portugal. Plano Nacional de Acção. Mobilidade de estudantes e mobilidade de docentes*, Agência Nacional para os Programas Comunitários Sócrates e Leonardo da Vinci, 17 p., (policop.).

Australian Education International, 2004, *Overseas students statistics 2004*, Australian Education International.

British Council, 1999, *Branding British Education*, British Council/ Education Counselling Service.

Brito, S., 2003, *Notas sobre a evolução do viajar e a formação do turismo*, Medialivros, Lisboa.

Carr, N., 2003, University and college students' tourism, in Ritchie, B., (eds) *Managing educational tourism,* Channel View Publications, Clevedon, pp.181-225.

CCE – Comissão das Comunidades Europeias, 2001, *Relatório final da Comissão sobre a execução do Programa SÓCRATES 1995-1999*, Comissão das Comunidades Europeias, Bruxelas.

CCGSE, 2004, *Portugal - Database Student-Parent Cost By Country*,

The Center for Comparative & Global Studies in Education, [http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance/] (Site accessed in 2005).

CEC, 2005, *Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy European Higher Education in a Worldwide Perspective*, Commission of European Communities, Brussels.

Chitnis, S., 1999, The Transformation of an Imperial Colony into an Advanced Nation: India in Comparative Perspective, in Philip, G., and Peterson, Patti McGill, (eds) *Higher Education in the 21ˢᵗ Century: Global Challenge and National Response*, Altbach, IIE Research Report Number Twenty-nine.

Cooper, C., 1999, The European school travel market, *Travel & Tourism Analyst*, Vol. 5, pp. 89-105.

Dima, A.M., 2005, *Higher education in Portugal. Country Report*, CHEPS – Center for Higher Education Policy Studies.

EC, 2005, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/ socrates/ERASMUS/statatisti/stat1.pdf], (Site accessed in 2005).

EC, 2005a, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/ socrates/ERASMUS/statatisti/stat14.pdf], (Site accessed in 2005).

EC, 2005b, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ ERASMUS/statatisti/stat3.pdf], (Site accessed in 2005)

Eurydice, 2000, *Two decades of reform in higher education in Europe: 1980 onwards*, Eurydice.

GAERI, 2000, *A participação portuguesa do ERASMUS 1987--1999*, Ministério da Educação, Lisboa.

Jallade, J.P., Gordon, J., 1996, *Student mobility within the EU: a statistical analysis,* Vol. I: Synthesis report, European Commission, Bruxelles.

Maiworm, F., 2001, ERASMUS: continuity and change in the 1990s, *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 36(4), pp. 459-472.

Mintel, 2002, *Student lifestyles – UK. Country Report*, Mintel International Group Limited.

Rego, C., Caleiro, A., 2004, A atracção das universidades em regiões economicamente deprimidas: o caso da Universidade de Évora, *Estudos Regionais*, Vol. 7, pp. 19-40.

Richards, G., Wilson, J., 2003, *Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's Global Nomads. New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel*, A Report for the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association of Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC), Amsterdam.

Ritchie, B., 2003, An introduction to educational tourism, in Ritchie, B., (eds) *Managing educational tourism*, Channel View Publications, Clevedon, pp. 1-24.

Roppolo, C., 1996, International education: what does this mean for universities and tourism?, in Robinson, M. *et al.*, (eds) *Tourism and cultural change*, Centre for Travel and Tourism, Sunderland, pp. 191-201.

Smith, C., Jenner, P., 1997, Educational tourism, *Travel & Tourism Analyst*, Vol. 5, pp. 60-75.

Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação, 2003, *Avaliação intercalar da 2ª fase do programa SÓCRATES – Relatório final*, Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação.

UNESCO, 2004, [http://portal.UNESCO.org/education/en/ ev.phpURL_SECTION=201.html], (Site accessed in 2005).

Yang, R., 2002, Lost Opportunities in the Massification of Higher Education in China, *International Higher Education,* Summer 2002, [http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soa/cihe/newsletter/ News28/text009.html] (Site accessed in 2004).