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Erasmus students as consumers of tourism services in Poland

Abstract. Tourism is one of the main factors that encourage students to participate in the Erasmus programme, and many Erasmus students are eager to travel while studying abroad. The article highlights an important segment of the Polish tourism market, namely foreign students enrolled in the Erasmus programme. The article aims to identify opportunities for the tourism industry associated with Erasmus students in Poland, taking into account experiences of other countries. The study is based on empirical data obtained from the Polish Tourism Organization and from Erasmus Family in Cordoba, a Spanish travel agency for the period 2015-2018. In addition, the author conducted a literature review, analysed relevant documents, and relied on her own observations. The growing socio-economic benefits of the Erasmus programme for countries participating in the programme stimulate competition between them in an attempt to attract more international students, where success of particular host countries and their educational institutions depends on a number of factors, including those associated with tourism. Significant competitive advantages can be achieved in this respect by combining the efforts of educational institutions and those responsible for tourism policy.

Keywords: tourism, Erasmus, Poland

JEL Codes: Z32, I25

Suggested citation: Zubrytska, H. (2021). Erasmus students as consumers of tourism services in Poland. *Studia Periegetica*, 3(35), 9-22, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0015.4215>

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1. Introduction

The number of students participating in the Erasmus programme has significantly increased in recent years, which is not surprising given its status as the best known international education and exchange programme in the European Union (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016, p. 86). The programme has brought important results not only for participants themselves but also for host universities and countries where they are located. “International education has the potential for hybridization with other segments of tourism and non-tourism sectors” (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017, p. 319). Host countries benefit from international students paying for accommodation, food, entertainment and leisure services and, in some cases, tuition fees, which has an overall positive effect on the economy (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 95; Choudaha, 2019; OECD 2017, pp. 1-2; Riaño, Van Mol, & Raghuram, 2018, p. 283; Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1584; Tomasi, Paviotti, & Cavicchi, 2020, pp. 1-2). Students benefit not only from their studies but also from foreign experiences that contribute to their personal and professional growth. Many Erasmus students take the opportunity to visit local attractions or travel to other regions of the host country (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 95; Jamaludin et al., 2016, p. 1). In this way, the Erasmus programme promotes student mobility and is an important part of their travel experience (Huang, 2008, p. 1016).

In December 2020, the European Parliament reached an agreement to double the funding for the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021-2027. Its total budget amounts to € 24.57 billion at current prices plus € 1.7 billion at 2018 prices. The new programme is expected to be much more inclusive than the current one (2014-2020) and will triple the number of participants to 12 million (Council of the European Union, 2020). These figures represent a significant improvement in mobility opportunities for European students and their impact on the economies of the EU countries.

The article aims to identify opportunities for the tourism industry associated with Erasmus students in Poland, taking into account experiences of other countries. The article consists of two main parts. The first one presents a review of existing studies indicating that Erasmus students are strongly interested in travel and leisure while studying abroad. The second part examines the significant impact of Erasmus students on the tourism industry in host countries. The article ends with concluding remarks and recommendations for further research.

2. Tourism as one of the main reasons why students participate in the Erasmus programme

Apart from the unquestionable role of the Erasmus programme in the formation of common European values and culture, the following benefits are usually emphasised: academic development, better career prospects and higher competitiveness in the labour market (Di Pietro, 2019, p. 9; Müller, 2020). One of the key issues in the successful implementation of the Erasmus programme is how to achieve its goals, which largely depend on immediate motives and needs of its participants.

In 2008, Ewa Krzaklewska identified two main trends that she regarded as having the biggest impact on students' motivation to participate in the Erasmus programme (Krzaklewska, 2008). The first one was a response to the growing competition in the labour market and a decrease in the number of available jobs in the globalized economy. Faced with these conditions, young people set themselves the goal of obtaining unique individual skills and professional competencies that could give them an advantage in finding a job. The second trend was the delayed onset of adulthood (going to work, starting a family, having a child). The postponement of adult responsibilities has given young people the freedom to experiment and make more choices in all areas of life, including leisure and travel. In fact, the idea that young people "should have fun and rest" was successfully combined with the concept of "competition for the future" (Krzaklewska, 2008). For many reasons, this model of Erasmus students' motivation is relevant in the present and is consistent with findings from other studies on the subject. A number of researchers analyse the motivation of Erasmus students in terms of the theory of migration, which is based on two main factors – push and pull (Krzaklewska, 2008; Lesjak et al., 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Push factors are internal motives that encourage students to study abroad. Some of the most powerful driving forces include (Unurlu, 2021, pp. 29-30):

- escape, i.e. a person's need to get away from everyday ordinary life;
- rest, i.e. a need to recuperate;
- search for new knowledge and experience, such as the need to learn and discover new things;
- socialization, such as meeting and communicating with new people.

Pull factors are related to characteristics of the destination, that is the hosting educational institution. They refer to aspects that make the host country attractive for international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82). Six pull factors have been identified (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 83; Mazzarol, Kemp, & Savery, 1997):

- reputation of the host country, security, its general perception in the student's country of residence;
- personal recommendations from parents, relatives, friends and feedback from other students;
- cost of living, including travel costs;
- climate and living conditions in the destination country;
- geographical proximity of the country of potential destination to the student's home country;
- presence of the student's family or friends who live in the destination country.

Consequently, individual and socio-psychological needs of foreign students can be regarded as factors motivating students to study abroad, and the unique qualities of host countries and educational institutions determine the actual choice students make.

Given that foreign stays of Erasmus students are shorter than those of students seeking a full international degree, some researchers believe that initially their motives tend to be less professionally oriented (Findlay et al., 2010; Jamaludin et al., 2016, p. 2), arguing that students decide to participate in the Erasmus programme because of a new intercultural learning environment that enables travel, entertainment and adventure, recognising a special academic opportunity and, hoping for a unique social experience. In the study by Lesjak et al. (2015) the main reason for participation is professional and personal growth, while the choice of the destination is determined by its infrastructure and public image – the standard of life and lifestyle. The authors conclude that the decision to study abroad is driven by students' desire to grow personally and professionally, but the choice of a destination depends on general and tourism-related factors.

For example, a study by Christof Van Mol and Peter Ekamper shows that in the 2012-2013 academic year, of the 20 cities most frequently chosen by Erasmus students, only 5 had world-class universities (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016, p. 88). In a survey of Erasmus students from the Romanian-American University (Bucharest, Romania) 59.4% of respondents said that had travelled more than 7 times during the semester, 21.9% had done so from 4 to 6 times, while 18.8% – from 1 to 3 times (Gheorghe, Moraru, & Anton, 2017, p. 69). In a survey of Erasmus students at Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain), 95.8% of respondents had made tourist trips to other cities in Galicia during their studies, and 78.4% had travelled outside the Autonomous Community of Galicia (Pawlowska & Roget, 2009, p. 12).

According to data provided by the travel agency Erasmus Family in Córdoba (Spain), in the academic year 2017-2018, Erasmus students used their services 2,557 times by taking part in 23 different trips and festivals organised in the Cordoba region and to other destinations in Spain, Portugal and Marocco. Since the total number of international Erasmus students studying at the *University of*

Córdoba in the academic year 2017-2018 was 543 (Diario Cordoba SAU, 2017), it can be assumed that travelling was a very popular leisure activity for the majority of Erasmus students.

The above studies provide evidence showing that tourism is an important factor motivating students to participate in the Erasmus programme and that many Erasmus students are eager to travel while studying abroad, thus representing an important segment of the tourism market in host countries.

3. The impact of Erasmus students on the tourism industries of host countries

Because of credit mobility that Erasmus students benefit from and their interest in travelling during their study abroad many researchers treat them as participating in education or academic tourism.

Credit mobility is “a limited period of study or traineeship abroad (in the framework of on-going studies at a home institution) for the purpose of gaining credits. After the mobility phase, students return to their home institution, where the credits should be recognised and they complete their studies” (European Union, 2020a).

The term ‘education tourism’ “covers those types of tourism which have as a primary motivation the tourist’s engagement and experience in learning, self-improvement, intellectual growth and skills development. Education Tourism represents a broad range of products and services related to academic studies, skill enhancement holidays, school trips, sports training, career development courses and language courses, among others” (The World Tourism Organization, 2018, p. 52).

However, several authors (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 96; Bento, 2014, p. 614; Pawlowska & Roget, 2009, p. 1; Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1584; Unurlu, 2021, p. 23) note that international student mobility differs from educational tourism in that it involves:

- a longer period of stay at the destination;
- greater consumption of tourism products and services.

Because of these distinctive features of international student mobility, a more adequate term to describe it is ‘academic tourism’, which can be defined as “staying in institutions of higher education in places outside the usual visitor environment for a period of less than one year, the main purpose of which is to complete studies at the university level and / or attend language courses organized by these centers” (Martínez-Roget, Pawlowska, & Rodríguez, 2013, p. 1140).

However, considering Erasmus students exclusively in terms of educational or academic tourism is very problematic as it entails a motivational dichotomy between “tourism first” or “education first” (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017, p. 323). It is therefore necessary to take into account the considerable impact of Erasmus students on the host country’s tourism industry, as evidenced by the following studies:

- the economic impact of Erasmus students is comparable to that of traditional tourists (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 95; Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1585);

- longer stays of Erasmus students make tourism less dependent on seasonal fluctuations (Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1589);

- preferences of Erasmus students do not differ from those of other tourists (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 102; Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1589);

- recommendations made by Erasmus students on social networks, together with visits made by relatives and friends during their studies help to generate additional tourist traffic in the host country (Amaro et al., 2019, p. 102; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 88-89; Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, 2011; Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1584). According to Pawlowska & Roget (2009, p. 14), one Erasmus student on average attracts 2.9 new tourists (2009, p. 14).

According to the data of Publications Office of the EU, in 2015-2018 Poland was one of the seven EU countries, which accepted more than 60% of all Erasmus students in the K-103 programme (Table 1). The ranking of countries with the biggest number of Erasmus programme participants in Poland is led by Turkey (26%, 2018), followed by Spain (23%, 2018), Italy (11%, 2018), France and Portugal (8%, 2018) (Table 2). It is noteworthy that in the period 2015-2018, every

Table 1. 7 EU countries which accepted over 60 of Erasmus students in 2015-2018 (K-103 program)

Receiving country	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students
Spain	14.7	44596	15.1	47138	15.3	49692	15.2	51058
Germany	11.0	33346	10.5	32876	10.0	32693	9.8	32855
United Kingdom	10.2	31067	10.0	31243	9.6	31396	8.9	29797
France	9.6	29068	8.9	27742	8.7	28476	8.8	29511
Italy	7.5	22785	8.0	25108	8.2	26704	8.4	28188
Poland	4.8	14616	5.1	16081	5.1	16613	5.2	17348
Netherlands	4.2	12771	4.5	13931	4.5	14637	4.6	15376

Source: based on European Union 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020b.

Table 2. Countries of origin of Erasmus students studying in Poland in 2015-2018 (K-103 program)

No.	Sending country	2015		2016		2017		2018	
		Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total
1	Turkey	3 804	26.03	4 202	26.13	4 596	27.67	4 510	26.00
2	Spain	3 314	22.67	3 597	22.37	3 634	21.87	4 046	23.32
3	Italy	1 261	8.63	1 390	8.64	1 685	10.14	1 906	10.99
4	France	1 266	8.66	1 481	9.21	1 459	8.78	1 399	8.06
5	Portugal	1 084	7.42	1 171	7.28	1 113	6.70	1 393	8.03
6	Germany	1 086	7.43	1 148	7.14	1 108	6.67	1 122	6.47
7	Romania	456	3.12	541	3.36	533	3.21	496	2.86
8	Greece	270	1.85	274	1.70	277	1.67	359	2.07
9	Slovakia	261	1.79	222	1.38	265	1.60	232	1.34
10	Czech Republic	228	1.56	304	1.89	250	1.50	227	1.31
11	Hungary	155	1.06	193	1.20	174	1.05	181	1.04
12	Bulgaria	168	1.15	200	1.24	204	1.23	175	1.01
13	Netherlands	181	1.24	163	1.01	194	1.17	154	0.89
14	United Kingdom	103	0.70	125	0.78	121	0.73	149	0.86
15	Croatia	179	1.22	172	1.07	168	1.01	146	0.84
16	Lithuania	184	1.26	174	1.08	144	0.87	142	0.82
17	Belgium	134	0.92	138	0.86	119	0.72	124	0.71
18	Latvia	65	0.44	91	0.57	80	0.48	92	0.53
19	Austria	89	0.61	92	0.57	101	0.61	75	0.43
20	Denmark	54	0.37	63	0.39	67	0.40	74	0.43
21	Finland	65	0.44	101	0.63	83	0.50	71	0.41
22	Slovenia	59	0.40	73	0.45	64	0.39	67	0.39
23	Ireland	27	0.18	27	0.17	25	0.15	41	0.24
24	Sweden	39	0.27	43	0.27	35	0.21	38	0.22
25	Norway	24	0.16	22	0.14	23	0.14	33	0.19
26	Malta	19	0.13	11	0.07	19	0.11	29	0.17
27	Estonia	17	0.12	25	0.16	26	0.16	25	0.14
28	North Macedonia	12	0.08	14	0.09	33	0.20	24	0.14
29	Cyprus	5	0.03	19	0.12	6	0.04	10	0.06
30	Iceland	1	0.01	2	0.01	6	0.04	5	0.03
31	Liechtenstein	2	0.01	2	0.01	1	0.01	2	0.01
32	Luxembourg	4	0.03	1	0.01	-	0.01	1	0.01

Source: based on European Union 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020b.

Table 3. Percentage of students participating in the Erasmus program who choose to study in Poland (K-103 program)

No.	Sending country	Total number of students	Total number of students in Poland	Percentage of total
1	Turkey	68 148	17 112	25.1
2	Portugal	37 748	4 761	12.6
3	Spain	162 821	14 591	9.0
4	Croatia	7 619	665	8.7
5	Bulgaria	10 115	747	7.4
6	Greece	21 453	1 180	5.5
7	Slovakia	15 179	980	6.5
8	North Macedonia	1 338	83	6.2
9	Romania	30 327	2 026	6.7
10	Malta	1 799	78	4.3
11	Italy	148 895	6 242	4.2
12	Hungary	17 047	703	4.1
13	Latvia	8 784	328	3.7
14	Liechtenstein	182	7	3.8
15	Slovenia	8 326	263	3.2
16	Czech Republic	30 329	1 009	3.3
17	Lithuania	17 592	644	3.7
18	France	181 067	5 605	3.1
19	Germany	164 975	4 464	2.7
20	Estonia	4 719	93	2.0
21	Denmark	17 397	258	1.5
22	Iceland	1 378	14	1.0
23	Cyprus	2 832	40	1.4
24	Belgium	37 042	515	1.4
25	Finland	23 384	320	1.4
26	Norway	9 977	102	1.0
27	Austria	28 375	357	1.3
28	Netherlands	55 979	692	1.2
29	Ireland	14 241	120	0.8
30	United Kingdom	67 026	498	0.7
31	Sweden	17 248	155	0.9
32	Luxembourg	2 238	6	0.3

Source: based on European Union 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020b.

4th student from Turkey and every 10th student from Portugal and Spain chose Poland as the country of study during their Erasmus programme (Table 3).

In 2015-2018, Poland had the third largest number of Erasmus students from Erasmus partner countries (K-107), though it was overtaken by France and Italy in 2019 (shaded areas in Table 4).

At the same time, Erasmus students' willingness to choose Polish universities coincides with preferences of traditional tourists. In the academic year 2012-2013, the 3 main tourist destinations in Poland were included in the TOP 50 EU countries most frequently chosen by Erasmus students: Warsaw (14th place, 2108 people), Krakow (27th place, 1553 people) and Wrocław (34th place, 1143 people) (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016, p. 87).

Table 4. Countries hosting the largest number of Erasmus students from countries participating in the Erasmus program in 2015-2018 (K-107 program)

Receiving country	2015		2016		2017		2018	
	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total	Number of students	Percentage of total
Germany	2617	14.1	3163	13.9	3626	13.7	2907	13.1
Spain	1973	10.6	2828	12.4	3212	12.1	2667	12.0
Poland	1780	9.6	2239	9.8	2381	9.0	1952	8.8
Italy	1650	8.9	2120	9.3	2365	8.9	1966	8.9
France	1551	8.3	1460	6.4	2359	8.9	2228	10.0

Source: based on European Union 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020b.

Although the number of Erasmus students in Poland is quite small relative to the total number of foreign tourists (around 0.1%) (Table 5), they end up spending much during their study period than foreign tourists. Assuming that:

- the minimum stay of an Erasmus student in Poland lasts one semester or 5 months;
- monthly expenses of an Erasmus student are limited to the amount of their scholarship, which is 300 euros (PLN 1284) per month;
- average expenses per student in 2018 would add up to PLN 6420, which is 3.5 times more than in the case of an average traditional tourist.

Calculations carried out in 2007 for the Autonomous Community of Galicia (Spain) showed that the direct economic impact of just one Erasmus student on the tourism industry could be equivalent to that of 80 traditional tourists (Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012, p. 1585).

Unfortunately, despite the significant economic impact of Erasmus students on the tourism industry, these issues are still poorly studied in Poland and certainly require additional research and efforts on the part of tourism policy actors.

Table 5. Foreigner's visitors and their expenses in 2015-2018

Year	Number of people in thousand	Number of nights during the holiday months spent in hotels and spas in million	Spending in PLN million	Average spending per 1 person in PLN
2015	16 728.2	13.8	28 097.6	1680
2016	17 471.3	15.6	31 709.9	1815
2017	18 257.8	16.7	32 767.9	1795
2018	19 622.8	17.7	34 524.7	1759

Source: based on publications of Statistics Poland about tourism in GUS 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019.

In 2011, the Polish Tourism Organization (POT) accepted Poland's Marketing Strategy for the tourism sector for 2012-2020, which considered Erasmus students as one of the target groups, which are described as promoters (ambassadors). They were viewed as an intermediate link that can be used to indirectly reach the final consumer in a much more effective way (Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, 2011, p. 47-48). As part of this strategy, in 2018-2019, POT organized and held a competition entitled „#ErasmusPolandTravel”. Information about the competition was posted on POT's Facebook page (polska.travel) and in various open and closed social groups of Erasmus+ students in Poland. In the second year of the competition, the number of countries represented by participating students doubled. According to POT data, in 2019 1195 entries were received from students from 40 different countries in five categories #CitiesOfPoland, #NatureOfPoland, #FoodOfPoland, #ActivitiesInPoland and video. The entries were also posted on Instagram and reached 7.4 thousand Erasmus+ students, 10.6 thousand unique users of the POT website, 795 Facebook users and 1.6 thousand Instagram users.

However, in the absence of specific tourism products and services dedicated to the needs of Erasmus students, publicity for the tourism industry is ineffective and has only a short-term character (Panasiuk & Zubrytska, 2021, p. 18). The results of the #ErasmusPolandTravel competition indicate that there is a high demand from Erasmus students to study the culture and sights of Poland. Unfortunately, the Polish tourism industry does not offer any high-quality proposals to satisfy this demand. There are no travel agencies that specifically cater for this target group, like Erasmus Family Córdoba in Spain, in any of the major academic centres in Poland. Tourist trips undertaken by individual Erasmus students in Poland (even those organised by travel agencies) are relatively sporadic and do not contribute to generating new tourist traffic since they are not fully suited to the needs of Erasmus students.

4. Conclusions

Studies indicate that tourism is one of the main factors that encourages students to participate in the Erasmus programme, and this group can have a significant impact on the tourism industry of the host countries.

In 2015-2018, Poland ranked 6th in terms of the number of incoming Erasmus students. Unfortunately, this fact received little publicity, which may be one of the reasons the tourism industry did not adequately assess the potential of this target group and respond in a timely manner. The successful implementation of a marketing policy by the Polish Tourism Organization, which resulted in a larger number of participants in the second edition of the #ErasmusPolandTravel competition, is

insufficient, since there are still no special offers specifically tailored to the needs of Erasmus students.

The key ones are likely to be the reputation of the host country and its universities, as well as personal references from former students. It can be assumed that universities in Poland, as regional educational centres of the Erasmus programme, can significantly affect the potential of tourist destinations (Borgioli & Manuelli, 2013; Matahir & Tang, 2017; Olszewski, 2021). Conversely, tourist destinations themselves can increase the attractiveness of choosing a university for study.

However, it is necessary to conduct further research aimed at understanding the socio-cultural and individual needs of Erasmus students, their expectations regarding educational institutions and leisure in Poland. This will provide evidence and help to develop tourism products and services tailored to the needs of Erasmus students.

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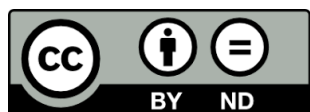
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Studenci Erasmus jako konsumenci usług turystycznych w Polsce

Streszczenie. Turystyka jest jednym z głównych atrakcyjnych czynników uczestnictwa studentów w programie Erasmus, a sami studenci są bardzo zainteresowani podróżowaniem podczas studiów za granicą. W artykule podjęto próbę zwrócenia uwagi na dość istotny dla polskiej branży turystycznej segment rynku – zagranicznych studentów uczestniczących w programie Erasmus. Artykuł ma na celu określenie znaczenia studentów Erasmus w Polsce dla branży turystycznej, przy uwzględnieniu doświadczeń innych krajów. Wykorzystano dane empiryczne dotyczące Polski z Polskiej Organizacji Turystycznej oraz z biura podróży Erasmus Family Cordoba w Hiszpanii. Na potrzeby badań zastosowano następujące metody badawcze: krytyczną analizę literatury przedmiotu, analizę dokumentów, metodę operacji logicznych i obserwację uczestniczącą. Przedstawione dane empiryczne dotyczą okresu 2015-2018. Rosnące korzyści społeczno-ekonomiczne programu Erasmus prowadzą do dalszej silnej konkurencji między krajami UE w przyjmowaniu większej liczby studentów zagranicznych. W tych okolicznościach zdolność kraju przyjmującego i jego instytucji edukacyjnych do przyciągania większej liczby studentów zagranicznych w dużym stopniu zależy zarówno od czynników ogólnych, jak i turystycznych. Połączenie wysiłków instytucji edukacyjnych i podmiotów polityki turystycznej może pozwolić na osiągnięcie znaczących przewag konkurencyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, Erasmus, Polska



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