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THE CULTURAL EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY: RUSSIAN MILLENNIALS

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КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ СТУДЕНЧЕСКОЙ МОБИЛЬНОСТИ: ПОКОЛЕНИЕ МИЛЛЕНИУМА В РОССИИ

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Abstract. This research study measures and presents the cultural effects of international mobility on Generation Y students in Russia. The analyzed sample is based on primary research data (n=302) supported by secondary data and literature review. Two major groups have been compared: (former) students with international mobility experience — the ones who participated in Tempus, Erasmus+ or other exchange programs, and students without foreign experience, graduates who took part only in the domestic education system. In order to reveal the measurable impacts of international mobility, Likert scale items were used to measure respondents' attitudes to particular statements such as self-confidence, tolerance, cultural acceptance, and active citizenship. Among the 15 variables adopted in this study, the importance of seeing the value of different cultures" was identified as the highest positive difference in favour of the internationally mobile group.

Аннотация. Эта статья представляет оценку культурных последствий международной мобильности студентов поколения Y в России. Анализируемая выборка основана на данных первичных исследований (n=302), поддерживаемых данными вторичного исследования, и обзором литературы по данной тематике. Были сопоставлены две основные группы: (бывшие) студенты с опытом международной мобильности: те, кто участвовали в программах Темпус, Эразмус+ или других программах международного обмена, и выпускники, не участвовавшие в подобных программах. Для оценки последствий международной мобильности использовалась шкала Лайкерта: было измерено отношение респондентов к конкретным понятиям, таким как уверенность в себе, толерантность, принятие культурных различий, активная гражданская позиция и т. д. Среди 15 переменных самая высокая положительная разница в пользу группы с опытом международной мобильности была определена для переменной «важность понимания ценности разных культур».

Keywords: international mobility, student mobility, Russia, Generation Y, Erasmus, impact study, culture, tolerance.

Ключевые слова: международная мобильность, студенческая мобильность, Россия, поколение Y, Эразмус, исследование воздействий, культура, толерантность.

Introduction to International Student Mobility

“Travelling is an act of humbleness. He who is convinced he knows everything prefers not to move. Travels bewilder our certainties, show how little we know, and how much we have to learn” [1].

Travelling for education is highly supported by the well-known Erasmus Programme (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), that is the most successful student exchange programme of the European Union. It has been established in 1987 in order to increase the intercultural competencies and the better understanding among various nations [2]. Students rebuild their social circles abroad, from perceived similarities and differences, which goes hand in hand with the (re-)definition of group boundaries” [3]. The program helps students to study outside their own country, where they can learn about other cultures and social integration, languages, develop new relations and friendships without borders that may help them in their future either on a professional or personal level. Mobility budgets tend to grow and fund more international opportunities in order to support peacemaking processes by developing skills and awareness to bridge cultural gap lines and contribute to more competitive labour market in the globalising business world [2]. Considering the European grants for international student mobility, opportunities are expanding, as the Erasmus+ Programme is not limited to the European Union Member States or the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). After the Tempus Program, the new Erasmus+ Credit Mobility Program became available for Russian universities, academic staff and students as well as the EEA Grants and Norway Grants, further state supported scholarships such as the Stipendium Hungaricum or the DAAD in Germany [4]. Unlike the international full-degree mobility, the availability of funded short-term (non-degree) mobility programs is quite recent and still limited compared to the EU Member States, therefore the popularity and participation is relatively low in Russia [5]. The further development and effective implementation of the programs require measuring early-stage effects, how participants react on particular cultural impulses, main differences in attitudes between them and their peers who are graduating from the Russian education system without international experience.

The Russian Culture by Different Measuring Metrics

Several theories have been formulated in order to explain what culture is. Culture shapes our way of thinking, behaviour and personality, which is related to the development of fundamental attitude, values and principles we live by [4]. Culture is important for numerous reasons; because it highly influences an individual’s life in many ways including views, desires, fears and worries; it creates an invisible bond which ties people together. Belonging to a culture can provide individuals with an easy way to connect with others who share the same mindset and values [6].

Cultural difference theories are developed to classify countries based on their cultural characteristics, hence they create a basis for identifying differences between various cultures. In order to define major cultural differences, Professor Geert Hofstede conducted one of the most comprehensive studies. He defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others” [7]. His 6-D Model is formed to measure national cultures through six dimensions, however the scores are generalisations based on the law of the big numbers and don’t describe reality. The most meaningful use of the received values is through comparison [8], therefore the Hungarian profile has been added to demonstrate and better understand it (Figure 1).

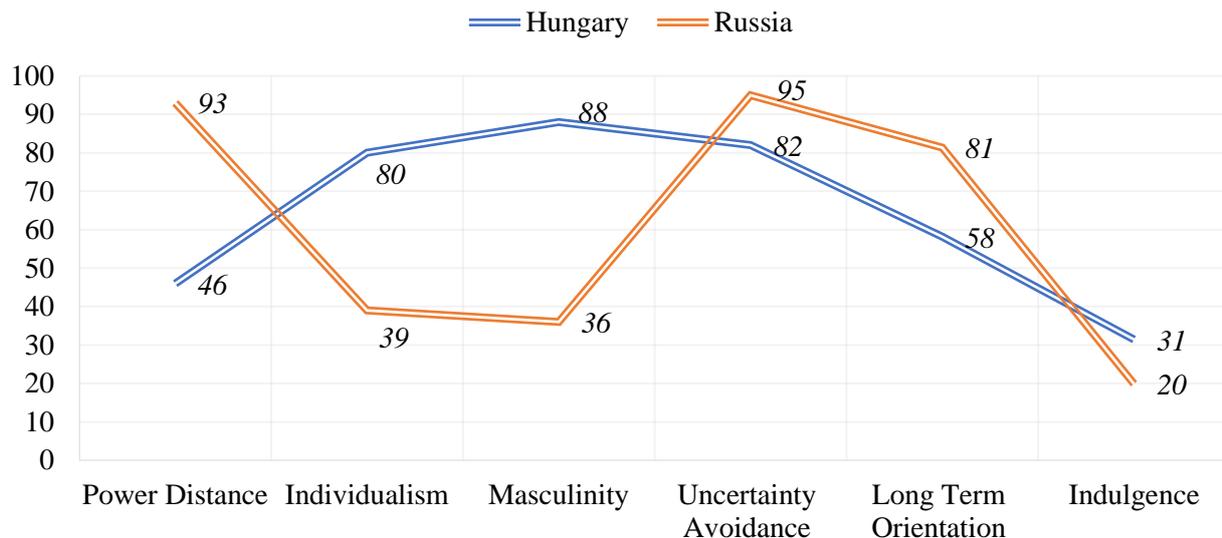


Figure 1. Cultural comparison based on Hofstede's 6-D Model (1).

The Russian and Hungarian cultures are significantly different based on their deep drivers according to the 6-D Model [9]. All dimensions are explained with country-specific features.

Power Distance: Russia is a high-power distance society. Based on the extreme centralized power society, huge discrepancies exist between the have and the have's not with regards to power, as well as the status roles in all areas of business interactions. The Hungarian style is more flexible, power is less centralized, hierarchy is for convenience only, control is disliked and attitude towards managers are informal.

Individualism versus Collectivism: Russia is a collectivist society, and Hungary is more of an individualistic one. Family and friendship are much more important in Russia, relationships need to be personal, authentic and trustful to make any business [10]. Hungary has a loosely-knit social framework, where people take care of themselves and their immediate families only, and the employer/employee relationship is a contract based on mutual advantage [11].

Masculinity versus Femininity: Russia is a feminist society while Hungary is masculine one. Russians talk modestly about themselves in the workplace as well as when meeting a stranger, and they understate their personal achievements or contributions. In Hungary people think and often even state that they "live in order to work", and they lay emphasis on achievements, competition and success [12].

Uncertainty Avoidance: Russians feel threatened by ambiguity. To prevent this, detailed planning and briefing is practiced including context and background information. Hungarians need rules as well, and they like being busy with work, as time is money for them. Precision and punctuality are important, innovation may be resisted, and security is an important element in individual motivation [13–14].

Long Term Orientation: Both cultures include a pragmatic mindset, where people consider the truth based on the situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt to changed conditions, and a strong propensity to save and invest in long-term achievements.

Indulgence: Russia and Hungary are both restrained cultures. They tend to be pessimistic, they do not put much emphasis on leisure time and control the gratification of their desires. Their actions are restrained by strict social norms, positive emotions are less freely expressed, freedom and leisure activities are not given the priority [4].

The GLOBE study clusters Russia in the Eastern European country cluster which means that the indicators would show very similar values for all countries in the same group such as high collectivism and power distance [15]. Edward Hall's background context approach shows more difference; it refers to Russia as a high-context culture, where the rules of communication are not standard, but primarily transmitted through the use of contextual elements (i. e., non-verbal communication, a person's status, and tone of voice). According to Fons Trompenaars, the Russian culture can be generally characterized by the following features: particularism, individualism–collectivism, affective orientation, diffuse orientation, intermediate position in achievement — aspiration parameter, outer–orientation, weak future orientation [16].

Characteristics of Russian Youth

Representatives of the Russian Millennials (Generation Y) are the first real consumers in their country. There were no brands back in the USSR, but after its collapse, foreign products began to flow from the international market in the same time (late 80s and 90s) with the birth of the first generation of consumer society. They have never experienced the shortages of the Soviet Union but were influenced by the sudden rising consumption of their parents. Russian youth prefer international products with higher quality than that available in domestic markets; this is linked to the fact that from post-communist times, possession of good quality and famous international brands has become a kind of status symbol.

Accustomed to economic uncertainty and volatility, Russian millennials value short-term enjoyment, achievement and products over potential gains down the line. However, not all of them are convinced about the value of renting or having something for a short period of time. Material values such as cars and apartments still matter as they represent stability and social status. Similarly, to the rest of the world, Russian Millennials live in big cities, overwhelmed by their daily routines. The work-life imbalance is a usual phenomenon, but they have embraced the trends of healthy lifestyle and community building to connect with like-minded people and engage in activities that don't require too much effort (2).

Data and Methods

The present study is based on primary quantitative research completed by secondary data and the related literature review. The online questionnaire was distributed among Russian students using snowball sampling method. Beside the demographic data collection, a matrix of 15 questions focused on the assessment of future plans and the cultural effects of domestic and foreign studies on 5-point Likert scale (where: 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= fully agree).

In terms of data quality, the Cronbach alpha test resulted high degree of reliability on matrix 1.: $\alpha = 0.812$.

The primary sample (n= 302), was divided into two major groups: the “non-mobile” group (n= 235) which represents the students without foreign experience; and the “mobile” group (n= 67), the ones who participated in international mobility/study abroad program (Erasmus+ Credit Mobility, Tempus Program, etc.).

According to the demographic data, the average age of the respondents was 22 years (standard deviation: 2.642), determined in the age group 18–30. The majority, 70.5% were female, 29.5% were male. The 79.8% of the sample represents undergraduate students, 9.9% the ratio of master students, 7.6% enrolled for vocational training and 2.6% for Ph.D. program.

Quantitative Research Results

Discussing the primary research results, it generally can be said that the 56.3% of Russian students plan to live at home, and the 43.7% want to move abroad. Considering the two different group divided by mobility experience, Figure 2 shows that non-mobile students are more interested in leaving the county, while the majority of experienced students plan to live at home.

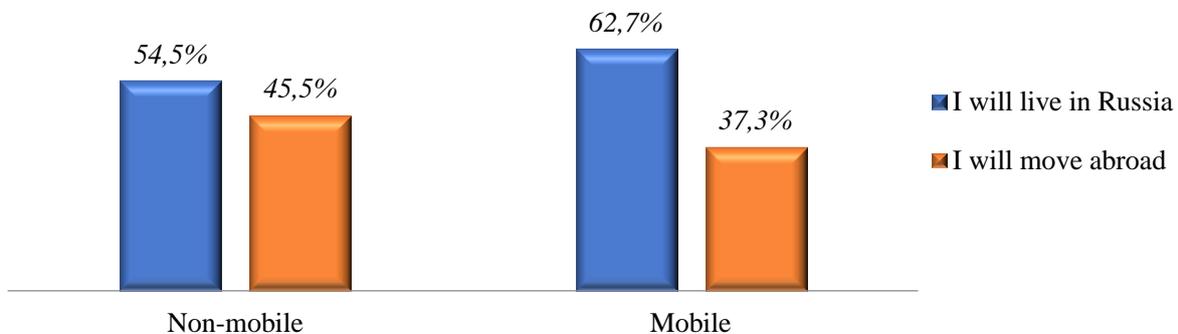


Figure 2. The future plans of Russian students.

The 25.37 percentage point difference is clearly visible between the future plans of the mobile group. It can be explained due to realistic foreign experiences the mobile group faced, such as the differences between home and host country, being out of the comfort zone and so-called “mama–hotel” [17], administrative difficulties, etc. Their unexperienced peers do not have basis for comparison, (practically) they are not aware of these issues and challenges, therefore it is easier to imagine themselves abroad, where everything seems to be more convenient, especially in the representation of (social) media. Based on this comparison, international mobility seems to have a decreasing effect on immigration plans of Generation Y Russian students by 12.2% in favour of living in their home country. Accordingly, short-term mobility does not contribute to “brain drain”. This confirms the findings of Feyen and Krzaklewska (2013) in the Russian case [18]. No significant Pearson correlation has been found between the future plans and participation in student mobility, but negative statistically significant correlation occurred between the values of future plans and self confidence ($r = -.203^{**}$, $p < .001$). It suggests that more confidence leads to less desire to live abroad. Students with higher self-confidence tend to be more engaged with their home country. This result was confirmed by multinomial logistic regression.

For the intention to participate in international mobility programs, 46.4% reacted uncertainly, 28.8% of the total were not interested, while 24.8% have plans to participate. The mobile group was much more positive about the future participation (again), but 34.5% of the non-mobile group is not interested at all, 46.4% responded “maybe” and 19.1% is open to the foreign experience. Age and interest in participation in international mobility were negatively correlated ($r = -.308^{**}$, $p < .001$), so with increase of age, interest is decreasing, confirmed by regression analyses. Mobility experience generates further interest and openness towards mobility ($r = .291^{**}$, $p < .001$), with the following regression results: ($\beta = .214$, $p < .001$).

Participation in international mobility had the following effects on participants. Table presents mean value differences on each (Likert scaled) variable divided into two groups: non-mobile and mobile students.

Higher values and positive difference mean more advanced skills and higher confidence, however, the last 3 variables (separated by a thicker line) have to be evaluated with different logic. The second section refers to skills requiring further improvement for future career success. Therefore, higher values mean that respondents consider themselves less advanced in the presented

skills and they need more improvement to perform successfully in their professional life. Smaller values and negative differences after mobility experience mean positive effects and less skill shortages.

Table.

COMPERATIVE ANALYSES ON MEAN VALUE DIFFERENCES —
 EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

<i>Variables (Mean values)</i>	<i>Non-mobile</i>	<i>Mobile</i>	<i>Difference (%)</i>
I am confident and convinced of my abilities	3.78	4.18	+7.9%
I know my strengths and weaknesses	4.21	4.24	+0.6%
I am able to adapt to and act in new situations	4.26	4.40	+2.9%
I am able to think and analyse information critically	4.32	4.13	-3.7%
I am tolerant towards other persons' values and behaviour	4.36	4.39	+0.5%
I am open-minded and curious about new challenges	4.44	4.40	-0.7%
I intend to participate actively in social and political life of my community	3.59	3.85	+5.2%
I am interested in knowing what happens in the world daily	4.03	4.25	+4.5%
I am able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures	4.40	4.55	+3.0%
I am interested in European topics	4.10	4.34	+4.8%
I feel European	3.39	3.60	+4.1%
I am aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, civil rights	4.48	4.33	-3.0%
In order to succeed in my future career, I need to improve my analytical skills	4.61	4.21	-8.1%
In order to succeed in my future career, I need to see the value of different cultures	3.88	4.34	+9.3%
In order to succeed in my future career, I need to be more co-operative (teamwork)	4.52	4.43	-1.8%

The lowest values and the highest values of each category are marked with are marked with blue and red respectively. The lowest value provided by non-mobile Russian students was first, the feeling European, secondly active citizenship and thirdly the importance of cultural awareness. These values all increased after mobility, with the necessity of cultural awareness showing the highest increase with 9.3%. This indicates that the international environment helped participants identify it as one of the key factors for their future career successes. As the cultural skills show increased value compared to the non-mobile group, there is a need for further improvement. The values of the other variables in the future oriented skill development section (more improvement needed in analytical and teamwork skills) have decreased — meaning that international mobility contributed to more confidence and less skill shortages on these fields.

The mobile group had the highest value for the intercultural cooperation variable, indicating that they seem to be the most confident in their skills. In the first row, self-confidence shows quite significant increase in favour of the mobile group, nearly 8% is the positive effect of mobility. The correlation analyses indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between the variables of confidence and participation in international mobility ($r = .157^{**}$, $p = .006$). This result was confirmed by linear regression test ($\beta = .387$, $p = .007$), therefore we can state that the mobility experience contributes to higher self-confidence. Confidence has strong positive correlation with knowing strength and weaknesses, ability to act in new situations, active citizenship and critical thinking as well.

Tolerance towards others' values and behaviours show nearly no change, but it is positively and significantly correlated with openness towards new challenges and intercultural cooperation, interest in European topics. Russian females generally have higher tolerance levels ($r = .187^{**}$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .398$, $p = .001$) than males, but increase in age have a negative effect on the whole sample. The highest values of cultural tolerance have been measured among the 20–21-year-old female respondents, this group seem to be the most flexible, as they had the highest level of openness towards the participation in mobility as well. Based on the correlation and regression tests, the participation in international mobility contributes to higher level of cultural tolerance ($\beta = .371$, $p = .003$), interest in global affairs ($\beta = .162$, $p = .006$) and active citizenship ($\beta = .214$, $p < .001$) among Russian youth. Mobile students show generally good, but slightly better level of integration (5.38% difference) with their international peers than the local ones during mobility in the host country.

Summary

Through the short-term international mobility programs, the feeling of freedom, travelling and new experiences — which are among basic characteristics of Generation Y — are a successful combination with higher education studies. The Russian participation in European mobility programmes such as the Tempus or the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility, provided the opportunity to measure the country-specific cultural impacts on participants by surveying non-mobile and mobile students.

Based on quantitative analyses, Russian youth have a strong desire to live abroad, which is negatively influenced by mobility experience. The mobile group tend to have future plans in Russia, while the unexperienced ones imagine their life and career abroad. The values of self-confidence show the same trend: more confident students would stay, while less confident ones are in favour of foreign life. The majority of respondents are uncertain about participation in international mobility programs, but females and mobile students are more open to (further) experiences. The increase of age is correlated with a decrease in openness towards mobility and cultural tolerance. This study therefore concludes that, international mobility significantly contributes to higher cultural awareness, self-confidence, interest in European and global affairs, analytical skills and active citizenship, without resulting “brain-drain” effect.

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