

# Differentiation of Preferences Regarding the Places of Studying, Their Changes and Relationships with Mobility Decisions of the European Youth

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The article presents the results of the research on preferences regarding the places of study among young Europeans, the changes of the preferences and the relationships between the preferences and the decisions. The research was carried out among secondary school students in seven European cities in 2005–2007 and again in 2015–2018 (n=1577). The research showed a strong positive correlation between the preferences of the places of residence and the places of studying (r = 0.85). At the same time, stronger declared mobility among young inhabitants of Western Europe and the impact of economic barriers on decisions concerning studying among the youth from less developed European countries were proven. Minor changes in the preferences of the places of study over the past decade have been shown, along with the Cold War division of Europe, constantly influencing the imaginations.

**Keywords:** Perception, Erasmus, Europe, geography, youth, mobility

## Introduction

In the recent decades, the number of students moving abroad has been growing dynamically (Beine et al., 2014). The process is particularly visible in highly developed countries. It is a desirable phenomenon for both the host party and the students. On

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one hand, it enables internationalization of the universities, develops services related to students' accommodation in the academic cities and is a source of additional income for the universities; on the other, it develops the educational, social and linguistic competences of the students. It also enables career development, as international students often work in the host country (Rosenzweig, 2008). An important role in this process is played by governmental and international programs, such as Erasmus Plus, financially and organizationally supporting students' spatial mobility<sup>2</sup> within the European Union and the cooperating countries. As a result, Europe is nowadays one of the leading regions in this respect ([www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)). Only within the frames of the above-mentioned program, over 300,000 students move to study abroad each year ([www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)). The benefits of admitting students make the universities strive for as many of them as possible. In this context, it is important to answer the question about the preferences regarding the places of study for the future students.

The research on the preferences of the places of residence emerged among the geographers on the basis of the interest in imaginary maps, initiated in the 1960s by the paper of Kevin Lynch (1960). An important work in this period was the study on preferences of the places of residence of British school graduates (Gould and White, 1968), or the research undertaken by these authors in the subsequent years on larger spatial scales (Gould and White, 1974). The authors initiated the mapping of subjective variables in an innovative way. Although they used the later criticized isoline method to determine the preferences (Walmsley and Lewis, 1993; Montello and Gray, 2005), the geographers' shift towards a behavioral approach was appreciated. The research on student mobility, especially in recent years, has been undertaken more and more often. In the subject of student mobility, geographers have made a significant contribution by researching the demographic characteristics of the students (King et al., 2011), the human capital (Rosenzweig, 2006), the cultural capital resulting from these mobilities (Baláž and Williams, 2004), or by approaching the topic in a theoretical manner (Brooks and Waters, 2009; Findlay, 2011). Most of the works however, focus on the mobility of the students itself, while there is the lack of a broader cognitive perspective (Findlay, 2011), e.g. on the mobility of students not oriented on the West (Prazeres, 2013). When researching the general rationale of the decisions to move to study in OECD countries, it was noticed that high qualities of the university may have an attractive effect on the scale of mobility, while the high cost of living in the city or the distance between the university and the place of residence may discourage potential students (Beine et al., 2014). The differences of the level

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<sup>2</sup> Mobility can be understood as a short-term stay abroad, as opposed to long-term migration (Bell, Ward 2000) or as spatial activity within the EU (Rogoz, Perchinig 2019). At the same time, mobility is treated as a term referring to academic exchange under the Erasmus Plus Program, also between countries outside the EU. In the paper the term Mobility is used in the latter sense, meaning trips abroad for the purpose of studying.

of education between the student's country of origin and the host country may also affect the direction of mobility (Szelenyi, 2006). An important and often underestimated element in decisions regarding the destination of mobility is the presence of diasporas in the host country (Beine et al., 2014) and the social networks based thereon, creating chain migration processes (Haug, 2008; Beech, 2015). Based on the research conducted among students from Norway, Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen (2021) it was determined that there are 3 dimensions of motivation for choosing a place to study: Exploration, Pragmatism and Differentiation, which are in general based on career plans (Findlay et. al, 2017) or cultural features of the places (Findlay et al, 2012; Krzaklewska, 2008), especially that the choice of the place of study does not have to result from its prestige (Prazeres et al., 2017). Regardless of students' individual motivations, the families can also influence the mobility decisions of young people (Findlay et. Al, 2017). Börjesson, in turn, notes that international academic mobility is directed towards the countries of the global North, thus increasing the already existing inequalities on a global scale (Börjesson, 2017). More than half of all international students move to the United States, Great Britain, Australia, France and Germany. The same phenomena are present among PhD students (Van der Wende, 2015). At the same time, a clear increase in the popularity of East Asian countries has been visible in the migration preferences of students in recent years, resulting from the emerging new economic order in the world (Hof, 2019). There are different ways of organizing perceptions of academic centers by foreign students within particular countries. S. Beech notices, for example, the differences in imaginative geography between foreign students of Scottish and Northern Irish universities, who are more familiar with the places of study than their peers studying at English universities (Beech, 2014). However, it is undeniable that the links between the sociological and economic aspects of mobility are therefore quite strong. However, a question arises on how this generalizing approach to student mobility translates into specific preferences and to what extent the preferences translate into the destinations of mobility of the young, especially since it is the imagination, not the objective reality, that influences human decisions (Boulding, 1956). S. Beech notes that the choice of the place of study results from „diverse perceptions of place that they have constructed over long periods of time“ (Beech, 2014). This imagination is constructed through the perception of the environment by an individual, dependent on preferences, motivations and traditions that emerge from his/her cultural and social status. The same environment can therefore be perceived differently not only by individuals from different cultures, but even by members of the same culture who, due to personal differences, apply different value filters (Kirk, 1952, 1963). The imagination influencing the preferences should therefore be understood as the individual's organized subjective knowledge of the environment (Gold, 1980), or as a visual image produced in the mind (Tuan, 1975). The imagination of the space stored in the human mind also creates a mental or a cognitive map, understood as an individual's knowledge

of spatial and environmental relations, and as a cognitive process related to coding and reconstructing information that makes up this knowledge (Kitchin and Blades, 2002). Thus, preferences can be definitively placed on the preferences – attitudes – traits scale, where both the inclusiveness and the cognitive duration steadily increase (Downs, Stea, 1973).

The questions about the preferences of the places of studying lead to asking further ones, addressed in the hereby paper:

- are the preferences spatially differentiated?
- is it possible to observe changes in the preferences resulting from the European Union's expansion to the East?
- are the preferences of the places of study coinciding with the preferences of the places of residence?
- does a relationship between the preferences and the mobility decisions exist?

## Methods

The research was conducted using auditorium questionnaires in schools in seven European cities: Bălți (Moldova), Bern (Switzerland), Cork (Ireland), Krakow (Poland), Niš (Serbia), Porto (Portugal) and Uppsala (Sweden). The cities were selected on the basis of the principle of multifunctionality and their high position in the settlement hierarchy; however, the capital cities were eliminated in order to avoid the influence of metropolisation on the perception of space by respondents inhabiting them. The only exception is Bern, as Zurich has been assumed to be the metropolis in Switzerland. The research covered students from 38 classes in 19 selected public schools in 2005–2007 and 34 classes in 17 public schools in 2015–2018. In each of the cities, 2 or 3 schools were selected in order to mitigate the excessive influence of the institution's specificity on the results of the research. In each city, a school considered prestigious and one or two from the group of other schools located in poorer city districts were selected for research. Most of the research was repeated in the same schools. If that was not possible, the research was conducted in a school in the same part of the city with a similar level of prestige. The selection of respondents was deliberate (purposive sampling). Students of the penultimate classes of general secondary schools, following which they had the opportunities to continue education at the university level, were selected. Therefore, the research covered mainly students aged 16–18 (approx. 95% of the respondents were of this age). Age differences between respondents result mainly from different education systems and different ages of starting the education. Such detailed criteria of the selection of respondents allowed for the comparison of social groups with similar educational competences, thus limiting the differentiating influence of knowledge and age on the perception of space. Therefore, the most important explanatory variable was the place of residence in dif-

ferent parts of Europe, with a diverse cultural, historical and economic background. The respondents were requested to answer the following question:

„If you had the opportunity, which city in Europe would you like to study in? List not more than 3“. The analysis also included the questions about the preferences regarding the places of residence at the country level. The activity was part of a larger survey on the perception of Europe, for which the students had 25 minutes to complete. As a result of the research, 1,577 questionnaires were gained: 806 in the first and 771 in the second round of the research. For a better control of the process, the tests were carried out in the presence of the author. The surveys were translated into national languages. Due to an imprecise translation of the questionnaire into Romanian and German, in the cases of Bălți and Bern, the respondents were asked about the countries, not the cities, where they would like to study. Therefore, further analysis also included the answers to this question.

## Results

### Differentiation of preferences between respondents from different cities

The analysis of the results of the research carried out in 2015–2018 shows that mainly large, Western European capital cities are preferred as the places to study, regardless of the respondents' origin (Table 1). London and Paris are the undisputed leaders of preferences in each of the researched cities<sup>3</sup>. Berlin and Rome are also generally preferred. The clear primacy of Western European cities results from a Western-centrism, characteristic for the perception of Europe by its inhabitants (Padžo 2013, Padžo 2015) and fits in with the concept of academic imperialism, according to which Great Britain and the wider Western world offer more attractive cultural, social and emotional values compared to other regions (Madge et al, 2009). Also in Bălți and Bern, where respondents indicated their preferred country rather than the city in the surveys, Britain, France, Germany and Italy received the majority of responses. The preferences of the respondents from Niš, half of whom would choose Vienna, may seem surprising. This is partly due to the imitation of the general migration habits in the preferences of places of studying (Dreher and Poutvaara, 2005). The Serbian diaspora in Vienna is the most numerous one and counts more than 100,000 ([www.wien.gv.at](http://www.wien.gv.at)). Therefore, the students from Niš prefer the destination of mobility that their fathers and grandfathers would have chosen earlier, taking advantage of the already established social network. A similar principle shapes the preferences of the Moldovan students. Indicating Russia and Romania next to the traditionally selected

<sup>3</sup> In Bălți and Bern, due to surveys translators' errors, the respondents were asked about the country preferred as a place to study instead of the city.

large Western countries is quite untypical compared to the results from other cities, and it derives from the cultural division of the society into the pro-Russian (Russian-speaking) and the pro-Western (Romanian-speaking) parts, reflected in the mobility attitudes.

Table 1

Preferences of cities and (countries) as the places of study (%)

|                                  | Bălți    | Bern      | Cork          | Krakow        | Niš           | Porto         | Uppsala       |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| London (+UK)                     | /(39)    | /(75)     | <b>27(45)</b> | <b>36(72)</b> | <b>21(33)</b> | <b>44(68)</b> | <b>27(64)</b> |
| Paris (+France)                  | /(31)    | /(52)     | <b>25(46)</b> | <b>25(31)</b> | <b>17(22)</b> | <b>19(27)</b> | <b>28(39)</b> |
| Berlin (+ Germany)               | /(49)    | /(32)     | <b>16(35)</b> | <b>8(17)</b>  | <b>15(30)</b> | <b>11(16)</b> | <b>15(34)</b> |
| Vienna (+Austria)                | /(2)     | /(11)     | <b>4(5)</b>   | <b>6(8)</b>   | <b>49(58)</b> | <b>0(1)</b>   | <b>2(3)</b>   |
| Rome (+Italy)                    | /(19)    | /(11)     | <b>10(20)</b> | <b>10(19)</b> | <b>17(35)</b> | <b>19(33)</b> | <b>6(18)</b>  |
| Amsterdam (+Netherlands)         | /(3)     | /(6)      | <b>14(18)</b> | <b>9(10)</b>  | <b>6(6)</b>   | <b>4(10)</b>  | <b>3(4)</b>   |
| Madrid (+Spain)                  | /(7)     | /(11)     | <b>5(19)</b>  | <b>4(12)</b>  | <b>5(17)</b>  | <b>11(21)</b> | <b>8(23)</b>  |
| City in the country of residence | <b>1</b> | <b>58</b> | <b>37</b>     | <b>22</b>     | <b>6</b>      | <b>4</b>      | <b>35</b>     |

Only cities for which the share of responses to any of the questions in any of the cities exceeded 10% were included.  
 Source: Author's own research

In the case of respondents from Cork, Krakow, Uppsala and, especially, Bern, spatial egocentrism can also be noticed in the preferences of the places of studying (Padło, 2015). The strong Scandinavian regionalism (Katzenstein, 1996), the academic traditions of Krakow or the Swiss sense of the high economic position of their own country may enhance the preferences for studying in one's own country. Strong Western-centrism is reflected in a minor scale of indications of cities from Eastern Europe<sup>4</sup> as preferred places of studying (Table 1). Even students from countries located in this part of the region choose cities from Western Europe much more often. For respondents from Western Europe, the East is practically non-existent in their academic preferences. This may seem surprising in the context of the high tourist popularity of Eastern European cities but it results from the persistence of the Cold War division of Europe as perceived by its inhabitants (Padło, 2015). In 2019, 6 of them counted with the top 30 most often visited, including Prague, visited by 10 million tourists ([go.euromonitor.com](http://go.euromonitor.com)). This would suggest that it is not only the attractiveness of the city that determines the preferences. On the other hand, there is a lack of indications of well-known centers with dominant academic functions,

<sup>4</sup> Eastern Europe is hereinafter referred to as the former "peoples democracies", located East of the so called Iron Curtain, as well as the former Yugoslav republics and Albania.

such as Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg, Tübingen, Leuven, etc. Apart from Oxford, mentioned by 9.7% of the respondents from Krakow, Cambridge and Heidelberg received individual indications, others were not mentioned at all.

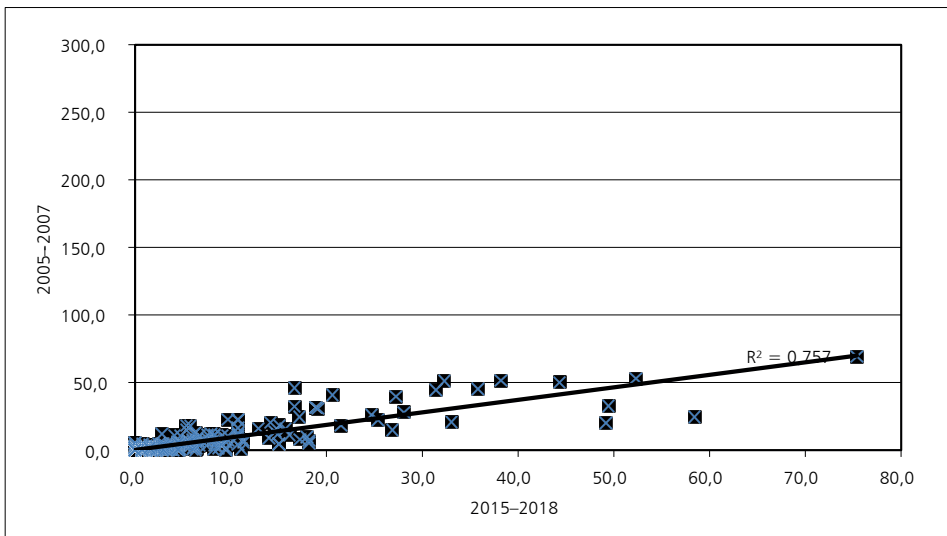
### Changes in preferences in the years 2005–2018

The research was conducted twice, in 2005–2007 and again in 2015–2018. The aim of re-conducting the research was to capture the impact of socio-economic changes in Europe on the change of preferences. The decade between the studies was characterized by deepening European integration after the EU expansion to the East, reduction of cognitive barriers or a distinct economic advance of the so-called Eastern Europe (Campos et al. 2014). On the other hand, it was also a decade of a deep economic crisis that impacted the countries of Southern Europe particularly hard, and of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Despite the aforementioned events that might have changed the perceptions, a strong correlation between the preferences of the places of study in these two periods is observed (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

The relationship between the preferences of the places of studying.



Source: Author’s own research

In this rather coherent picture of preferences over the decade, one can clearly see a decrease in the attractiveness of studying in Italian (a decrease of the total of shares by –97.8 points), Spanish (–62.8 points), French (–60.2 points) and British

(−20.7 points) cities. At the same time, the attractiveness of German (+34.4 points), Austrian (+49.2 points), Swiss (+60.0 points), as well as Swedish and Norwegian cities increased. The lower attractiveness of studying in the South is probably due to the repercussions of the economic crisis of 2007–2012 and the refugee crisis, which also impacted Southern Europe particularly hard. Economically, the countries of the North performed relatively the best among the whole of Western Europe, which might have contributed to the improvement of their attractiveness in the opinion of respondents.

The marginalization of Eastern Europe in potential choices for places of study is an ongoing process. The share of this region increased from only 6.5% to 7.2% of all indications. Fifteen years after the EU expansion and following a significant reduction in development differences, destinations from the East are still much less preferred than those from the West.

## Relationship between the preferences of the places of studying and the places of residence

Apart from questions regarding the preferences for the places of study, the respondents were also asked about the European countries in which they would like to settle. The question was:

„If you had such an opportunity, in which European country would you like to settle? List not more than 3.”

A strong correlation between the answers of the respondents was shown (Table 2)<sup>5</sup>. Regardless of whether the respondents intend to continue their education or not, the cities mentioned as places of studying are dominated by those located in countries most often mentioned as potential destinations of permanent emigration. The correlation was calculated only for the answers provided by the respondents in the first phase of the research, i.e. in the years 2005–2007. This is supported by the results of the previous studies (Dreher, Poutvaara, 2005).

Table 2  
Correlation between respondents' preferences of the places of residence and the places of studying

|                     | Bern | Bălți | Cork | Krakow | Niš  | Porto | Uppsala | overall |
|---------------------|------|-------|------|--------|------|-------|---------|---------|
| R correlation index | 0.87 | 0.87  | 0.91 | 0.74   | 0.84 | 0.96  | 0.93    | 0.86    |

Only countries for which the share of responses to any of the questions in any of the cities exceeded 10% were included. Correlations were calculated for the indications from the first phase of the study (2005–2007)  
Source: Author's own research

<sup>5</sup> Results for research from 2005–2007 were presented



Despite the strong relationship of both types of preferences, they do not inform about some interesting aspects observed in the obtained responses. In addition to the general relationship, one can distinguish groups of countries preferred to settle in and those in which the respondents would prefer to study. For example, the high position of Great Britain in the choices of places of study is distinctive. In each of the researched cities, respondents more often indicated it as a country of education, and less often as a country of residence. This is due to the reputation of British academic centers, reflected in the answers of the respondents who, apart from the largest urban centers, mentioned Oxford and (much less often) Cambridge. The biggest disproportion was observed among students from Krakow, of whom nearly 83% expressed the will to study in the UK, while only less than half of them indicated Great Britain as one of the three countries where they would like to settle. There is a clear predominance of indications of countries as places of study in the case of the Swiss who, apart from Great Britain, often mentioned Germany and France. Cultural proximity and the lack of a language barrier (and thus greater adaptation opportunities) were also driven by the Moldovans, who eagerly indicated Romania as a place to study, and the Portuguese, who would rather study in Spain than settle there for longer. It is also an exception among the groups of respondents who rather unanimously have perceived Spain as a place to live rather than to study. Greece and Italy are treated in a similar way, which may be surprising given the traditions of Italian universities and the significant role of the attractiveness of places in the motivations driving the choice of a place of studying (Lesjak et al, 2015).

Thus, respondents seem to be even more pragmatic in their decisions regarding studying than in the case of their residential preferences. The countries of the South, which in the opinion of the respondents are less suitable for studying than living, are clearly losing here. On the other hand, Great Britain is winning, being on one hand perceived as a country with strong academic centers, and, on the other one, offering education in English. A similar percentage of respondents treat Germany and France as a suitable place to live and to study. While the attractiveness of countries is perceived through the prism of general socio-economic conditions and spatial stereotypes, academic cities are characterized by more precise opinions or ideas and, in addition to the educational aspects, the respondents focus on the ways of spending free time, access to the culture, etc. (Lesjak et al. al, 2015). The indications of countries from Eastern Europe are within the limits of statistical error, except for the Moldovan version of pragmatism, directed towards Russia and Romania.

Similar results were observed in research conducted under the EuroBroadMap project (EuroBroadMap). They showed that students are rather inclined to study in countries from the North-West of Europe: Great Britain, Sweden, Belgium, France, and, to a lesser extent, in the EU countries of Southern Europe. Countries from Eastern Europe and from the vicinity of Europe (Turkey, Tunisia) were practically not mentioned. The research under the ACA on the perception of higher education in Europe

and in selected non-European countries (China, India, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Thailand) is worth mentioning here (Academic Cooperation Association, 2005). Respondents from these countries also chose countries from Western Europe, especially Great Britain, France and Germany. The new EU member states were ignored or rejected by the respondents, with a small exception of Czechia, which the authors of the report associated with the attractiveness of Prague. The authors note that the situation is more complex in the eastern outskirts of the European Union, where some countries (e.g. Romania) are on one hand strongly rejected in terms of residence preferences (Hungarian respondents), while on the other, the situation is quite opposite (Moldovan respondents). Similarly to the Russians, who on one hand reject the option to live in the countries of the former Soviet Union but on the other, they would like to live in Czechia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia or Hungary. It was found that, although in the economic dimension Europe is treated by students as unity, individual countries are distinguished in the cultural and higher education dimension (Academic Cooperation Association, 2005). However, knowledge about Europe is limited to a few countries only, mainly the preferred ones: Great Britain, France and Germany, while the amount of information about the new members of the Union (Padło, 2015), especially the knowledge about the opportunities of studying in these countries, is slight.

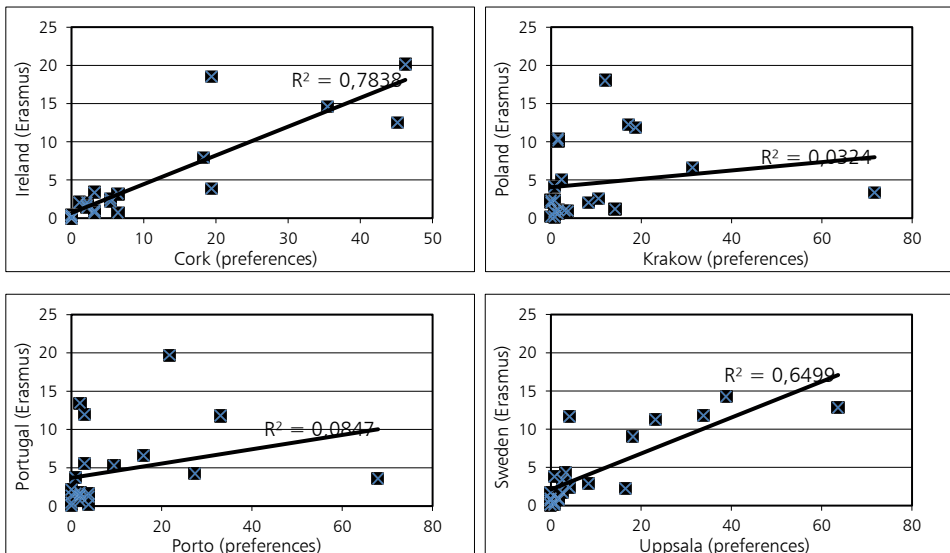
## Preferences and mobility decisions

Student mobility in Europe is related to short-term exchanges, only 3% of the students take a full degree abroad (OECD, 2019). Therefore, preferences regarding mobility have been correlated with the activity of students in the Erasmus Plus students mobility program (KA103). The program covered 33 countries in 2018 and involved over 330,000 students (Erasmus+ annual report, 2019) from Europe and Turkey. The broad scale of the program, its recognizability and egalitarianism resulting from the relatively low costs of participation make it the basic form of international student mobility in most EU countries (Van Mol, Ekamper, 2016; Mikuláš, Jitka, 2019; Eurostat EDUC\_UOE\_MOBC01, 2021). It seems therefore, that in the social perception of young people, in the countries covered by the program, it is identified as the basic form of international student mobility, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe, which predestines this program to be treated as a reference for comparing the preferences of the place of study with the actual activity. Among the cities covered by the research, students from Cork, Krakow, Porto and Uppsala had the opportunity to participate in it. At the time of the research, the program did not include Moldova, Serbia and Switzerland. Due to financial barriers limiting the possibility of widespread study abroad by students from Moldova and Serbia, which could distort the picture, it was decided to limit the analysis to 4 countries included in the exchange program. The most popular destinations for student mobility among these 4 countries are Spain, Germany, Italy and France, which more or less reflects the general

picture of the mobility directions of European students (Erasmus+ annual report, 2019; Van Mol, Ekamper, 2016). There are however, clear differences in the mobility habits of students from particular countries. While within the program 20% of Irish students choose France, and another 20% choose Spain, in case of Swedes it is 14% and 11% respectively. There is also less enthusiasm for studying in Italy among the Irish, in the Netherlands and in Great Britain among Poles or less willingness to choose German and French universities by the Portuguese. This does not follow the migration traditions from Portugal to France or the preferences to study in Great Britain among the youth, as previously argued. Students' activity under the Erasmus+ program depends, among others, on the number of contracts signed with individual universities or the differentiation of the fields of study; therefore, one cannot draw too far-reaching conclusions from comparing individual countries dispatching and hosting students. Such a risk is nullified by the generalized approach to overall students' activity. Unification of the preferences of the places of study and the decisions of students' mobility under Erasmus+ at the level of the states enabled calculating the relationship between preferences and mobility (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2

Correlation between the preferences of the place of study and mobility decisions under the Erasmus program (KA103)



Source: Author's own research, Erasmus+ annual report 2019

Methodological doubts may arise when the results obtained on the basis of research in selected cities are extrapolated to the preferences of students from all over the country. It was assumed that a strong correlation of the preferences of the places

of studying in different years would allow for an extrapolation of these preferences onto other students in the country as well especially that preferences do not seem to be based on local features (e.g. proximity to a place, migration traditions) but on more general perceptions. The way from preference to trait (Downs, Stea, 1973) shows a strong correlation in the case of the youth from Ireland and Sweden, and very weak in the case of Poland and Portugal. The preferred places of studying are a plan for students from Cork and Uppsala, while for students from Krakow and Porto they are a desire. Despite the fact that the motivations for choosing a place of studying by Erasmus+ program participants mainly include such traits as attractiveness of the place, safety, rich culture, nightlife (Lesjak et al, 2015), elements less frequently indicated by respondents, mainly financial barriers related to high costs of living and insufficient scholarships (Souto-Otero et al., 2013; Beine et al., 2014) differentiate these two groups of countries.

## Conclusions and Discussion

Regardless of the place of residence, there is a high degree of compatibility in the preferences regarding the cities where the respondents would like to study. These are most often large capital cities of Western Europe, characterized by excellent universities, but the decisions to choose them are rather related to the attractiveness and accessibility of the cities themselves, not the ranks of the universities. The research showed a strong, unchanging Western-centrism in the preferences of the places of studying, also among students from Eastern Europe. European integration has still not eliminated negative stereotypes about Eastern Europe, despite the large scale of tourist traffic, good transport accessibility and lower living costs in this part of Europe, while these features are also important factors in mobility decisions regarding studying (Beine i in., 2014). It is difficult to explain this reluctance by the lower level of education in Eastern Europe, as it has been shown that it is not the most important element in choosing a place to study, especially in the frame of short-term mobility. Perhaps the answer is the nature of the motivation of Erasmus students. Career motivations and cultural motivations (Krzaklewska, 2008, Bryntesson et al, 2018) distinguished by the authors' cultural predisposition to the choice of the countries of Western and Southern Europe.

Major socio-economic changes over the last 15 years have not significantly influenced the changes of the preferences. There is a noticeable decline in the proportion of those willing to study in the countries of Southern Europe, which were most impacted by the crises of the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps this is a symptom of an economic shift in Europe also in the sphere of social perception. On the level of imagination, the beneficiaries of the crisis of the South and the failure to notice the East are the countries of North-Western Europe.

There is a strong correlation between the preferences of the place of studying and of residence although motivations for the destination of mobility are different in both cases. But the stronger preference for the countries of the South as places of residence, despite all the negative economic features existing in these areas, seems to be even stranger. This suggests that the respondents look more idealistically than pragmatically and base their ideas on holiday experiences rather than on a rational assessment of the situation.

When the actual migration takes place, its destinations differ from those preferred in relatively less developed countries. This can be seen in the Erasmus Plus program, under which the regions of Europe most often chosen by students are those in the South of the continent, despite the fact that the declarations of preferences most often include large cities in Western Europe. This may be due to the stronger influence of cultural motivations with short-term mobility and a high cost of living in Western countries (Beine et al., 2014). Moreover, the specificity of mobility under the short-term program seems to focus on the Exploration dimension (Hovdhaugen & Wiers-Jenssen, 2021). In the case of students from wealthier countries, the compatibility between the preferences and the traits is high.

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