

# Studying in the European Union – chance and challenge for international students

*Edited by Katarzyna Hadaś*

*Report on studies on Mundus Programme  
carried out within the Erasmus Mundus project:  
“European Higher Education for the World – Studies and Promotion”  
(2004-3183/001-001 MUN MUN B41)  
in the frame of Action 4 – Enhancing the attractiveness  
of European higher education.*



## Erasmus Mundus



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*It was my dream to study in Europe. Thanks to Erasmus Mundus I got more than I dreamed of... (...) It is easy to get a sponsor, the environment is good and peaceful and the people in Europe are very kind (Morocco 33 M MSc EF – Masters of Science in European Forestry)*

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## **Introduction**

### ***European Higher Education for the World – research on non-European students’ mobility towards Europe (Mundus case)***

*Katarzyna Hadaś, Annette Lang*

*I considered myself a very fortunate person to be chosen to pursue this Masters programme with scholarships. It is a dream for everyone and my dream came true to join this course. I am sure I will learn a lot from this programme (23 F Malaysia – Masters of Science in European Forestry).*

The Mundus project *European Higher Education for the World – Studies and Promotion* realised by the consortium of Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), Leibniz University of Hanover (Germany) and University of Zaragoza (Spain) was devoted to investigating how students from third countries see the European higher education area as study abroad destination and what their experience of studying in European Union countries is. We carried out research on non-EU students’ mobility towards Europe which was funded by the European Commission within Action 4 of ERASMUS MUNDUS PROGRAMME. Our studies resulted in 2 publications:

1. “*European Higher Education for the World – Studies on students’ mobility*” presenting qualitative research on personal, intercultural and educational experience of students from the third countries who studied in Europe and the estimation of the attractiveness of European higher education offered to them (findings based on research on a sample of about 1200 students, conducted in Europe and on three other continents: in China, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, the USA and Argentina),

2. the book currently presented **“Studying in the European Union – chance and challenge for international students”**, containing a qualitative and quantitative study presenting profound analysis of Mundus students’ experience and their assessment of the quality of education offered at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses (findings based on the sample of 250 Mundus students).

In the research presented in this book 252 non-EU students took part enrolled at 27 Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses (later called: EMMCs). Analysis of essays and questionnaires allowed us an in-depth look into individual experience and (subjective) perception of the quality of Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses as well as respondents’ satisfaction with studying in Europe. To distinguish between students of European Union origin and non-EU nationality students we used in our publication’s title the term “international students” instead of “third countries’ students” (having connotations with the term “third world countries”, what is sometimes perceived as depreciating for nationals of non-EU countries).

The aim of the research on Mundus students – the one that was planned and foreseen – was not to evaluate particular EMMCs but to show problems, difficulties and students’ suggestions of improvements and changes concerning the overall Mundus programme implementation in it’s first phase, which we hope, will be useful for the Programme continuation in years 2009 – – 2013. We got at the same time – which was surely not envisaged – great promotional material, as it turned-out that the majority of students surveyed expressed their satisfaction and appreciation with studying and living in Europe in the frame of the Mundus Programme.

## **1. Project background and content of the book**

The Erasmus Mundus Programme was launched in 2004 as a new tool for increasing internationalisation of higher education designed “to respond to challenges of the process of globalisation, identify overall objectives for a third-country co-operation strategy in this field and suggest concrete measures for achieving these objectives”<sup>1</sup>. The programme is intended to strengthen European co-operation and international links in higher education by supporting high-quality European Masters Courses. The courses enabled students and visiting scholars from around the world to engage in

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<sup>1</sup> Decision No 2317/2003/EC of The European Parliament and of The Council of 5 December 2003 establishing a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries (Erasmus Mundus) (2004 to 2008), [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/mundus/decision\\_en.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/mundus/decision_en.pdf), Brussels, 2004

postgraduate study at European universities but also, on a smaller scale, encouraged the outgoing mobility of European students and scholars towards the third countries. The European Union wants to open to the world what in the practice of the Erasmus Mundus programme meant funding of attractive scholarships for highly qualified third-country graduate students (having already a Bachelor's or Masters' degree). Thanks to them students were able to enrol in the prestigious, selected in highly competitive calls for proposals, Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses. As these courses are provided by three or more highly recognised universities from the EU countries, the Programme creates a unique, European flagship educational offer open to the world.

In the increasing global competition for the best students, the quality and attractiveness of EMMCs, presenting excellent academic, teaching and research standards can serve as a magnet attracting students from third countries to the European Union. The Programme of Erasmus Mundus gives to international students not only a chance to obtain a Masters degree issued by prestigious EU higher education institutions and enhancing by this their career prospects but also offers a possibility to get to know the culture and people of two or more EU member countries.

The first phase of the programme is going to be completed in 2008. Through establishment of Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses – Action 1 and the corner-stone of the programme – the European Union managed to respond to the growing internationalisation of higher education and the need to prepare our education systems to educate citizens for the emerging global society. Moreover in this way Europe ensured worldwide recognition of European universities as centres of excellence and created the offer competitive to the one of the US, Australia, Canada and other world educational market players. The European Union developed as a competitive focus of attraction for the growing number of internationally mobile students. Generous Mundus scholarships under Action 2 and Action 3's structured co-operation with third countries' HEIs also helped to achieve the goal of remaining at the leading edge of educational development by sharing the best practices and experiences from around the world, what has also contributed to cross-cultural understanding. The programme both contributed to promotion of the quality of higher education of the European Union in general and its Member States in particular and to the growth of incoming mobility of third-country graduate students and scholars. Measures undertaken within joint projects selected under Action 4, targeted to improving visibility, accessibility and transparency of the European higher education in the world as well as those devoted to carrying on studies on these issues – like our project – contributed to the overall enhancement of the attractiveness of the European Union as a study destination.

The best European teams have already been working hard for three years in organisation of the Programme's four actions. Now this is the time for summing up these endeavours. Our research aimed to support this task in terms of providing the European Commission with the Programme's assessment from the point of view of its biggest beneficiaries – students from other parts of the world.

We present below an over 300-pages long report, richly documented by “Mundus students’ voice” – quotations extracted from answers to open questions of our questionnaire survey and from essays sent to us for the contest “*My Mundus Experience*”. To clarify the phenomenon of studying abroad in the European Union countries from the point of view of international students we will present students’ observations grouped in themes and accompanied by researchers’ commentaries. Students’ comments are presented in the original version – as they were found in the questionnaires and essays, only slightly corrected where grammar/ orthography mistakes were evident or could lead to misunderstanding of students’ messages.

This, introductory, text starts with a description of research methodology and the surveyed group, then we will present research problems and a summary of the results of our study.

In the subsequent two chapters, we will present Mundus students’ experience (ways of getting information about Erasmus Mundus, reasons for choosing studying in Europe, perception of social life, problems, expectations and fears as reported by Mundus students as well as their plans and images of the future after completing studies in Europe) and Mundus courses’ assessment as perceived by our respondents (in terms of curricula content, quality of teaching and services, access to resources, organisation of the learning process, local language training and integration activities, organisation and management of courses and accommodation issues). Chapter II also highlights Mundus students’ satisfaction and emerging from it the wish to recommend the Programme to their peers and countrymen. It concludes with the students’ invaluable suggestions for improving Masters courses and the whole Programme.

Chapter III is devoted to presentation of selected students’ essays, deepening and clarifying the issues raised through the survey and presented in the previous two chapters. Essays are preceded by the text analyzing the Mundus authors’ experience of studying and living in Europe on the basis of their stories.

As a conclusion we will present promotional material – selected students’ opinions expressing their satisfaction about life and studies in Europe, appreciation of the quality of EMMCs and their gratitude for the possibility obtained to develop academically, professionally and personally under the auspices of Mundus. The final text is completed with the presentation of the concept of promotion by using students’ and alumni’s feedback, elaborated

by the project team of Poznań, Hanover and Zaragoza universities. The idea foresees the continuation of research on Mundus students, targeted to obtain informational, evaluation and promotional material. It consists of two pillars: **1) promotion of EHEA in third countries using Mundus students' and alumni's feedback and 2) promotion of brain gain for third countries through Mundus programme – promoting return and transfer of knowledge and skills from the UE to alumni's (developing) countries.** We are convinced that these ideas can assist the *Global Promotion Project*, by providing with research material collected within studies and analyses continued by our team in the frame of the next Action 4 project.

We hope that the extensive research material presented in this book can be useful in a twofold way. First, as **assessment material** which, we hope, will be of use for the evaluation of the whole Programme by The Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency Executive Agency (EACEA) or evaluating bodies but also as a source of information to particular EMMCs' coordinators about their students' feedback. Second, as **promotional material** for students from all over the world, encouraging them to apply for Mundus scholarships. Within our research students from six continents, who came to the European Union countries to study at various disciplines offered by EMMCs expressed their opinions and assessed – in the majority positively – studying in Europe. This certainly will encourage their fellow countrymen looking for high quality education and perspectives in developed countries to ask themselves: *“Why not use this unique opportunity as they did?, Why not learn from their experience and face the same challenge and great opportunity?”* and finally: *“Why not study in Europe?!”*

Our book is accompanied by the leaflet addressed to non-EU nationals, presenting the authentic voice of students – selected comments of 20 students, representing various nations and Masters courses – which, when distributed outside Europe, will promote the whole programme and attract students from third countries to respective courses. The leaflet directs all interested groups – students, their parents, HEI's authorities and services, study advisors and employers – to find further information about “Mundus challenge and adventure” in this book.

## **2. Description of research procedures and methodology**

Here we will familiarise the readers with the research methods and tools applied within the second phase of our project, devoted to research on Mundus mobility.

Research tools were first tested on the pilot group and studies on perception of EU higher education among Mundus students started in October 2005 and lasted till January 2007.

Studies undertaken in this project were of a qualitative nature and were aimed at a thorough and focused description of attitudes, views, opinions, anxieties, expectations and experiences of Erasmus Mundus students in educational, scientific, social and psychological context. We applied 2 research tools associated with 2 methods:

- A survey carried out amongst non-EU Mundus students, according to the methodology described below, with the use of the questionnaire, consisting mostly of open questions and containing a qualitative element (closed, two-options questions and scales);
- An essay competition “*My Mundus Experience*”, announced in December 2005, targeted to Mundus students from non-European Union countries (third countries), studying at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses.

### ***Methods of recruitment of students for the survey***

In October 2005 personal contact with Spanish, Polish and German HEI's involved in EMMCs and e-mail contact with coordinators from other countries were undertaken by the project team. Our contacts and correspondence led to gaining opinions of our research tool and methodology as well as to agreeing the scope of research. We planned to collect 100 questionnaires by e-mail or mail and we estimated that in the web survey we would get a similar amount. In fact we got more – 238 questionnaires and 14 essays (details of the response are presented in section 4 of this text).

We asked coordinators of all 57 courses, operating at that time under Action 1, whether they would allow for participation of their non-EU students in the survey and help us to distribute information about the essay competition for the purpose of collecting data about Mundus students' experiences and assessments of living and studying in Europe. We informed coordinators about our project overall objective of carrying out studies and surveys on the attractiveness and perception of the European Higher Education in third countries and our specific aim of the second phase of the project in which we planned to get to know how non-EU Mundus students evaluate the attractiveness of this special offer of the European higher education. Coordinators were also informed that the project study is designed to examine **students' subjective perception** of their Mundus courses.

Those who answered positively to our appeal (we got consent from 28 coordinators, but from students of one Masters programme we did not receive any feedback) were asked to distribute questionnaires and information about the contest among their third country students.

### **Construction of research tools**

In the questionnaire we asked students about reasons and motives for choosing studying in the European Union, their assessment of various aspects of Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses, opinions and feelings about the process of their integration into the host university and wider local communities, their expectations and plans, as well as problems that they faced before and during studies. The form was completed with a request to put forward ideas and proposals for improvements and changes concerning the Mundus Programme.

Here we present our questionnaire's questions grouped in six blocks, following introductory, personal data table:

Age			What Masters course are you studying?	
Gender	F	M		
What country are you from?			In what institution?	

#### **I. Study Experiences**

1. What is / are your former degree(s)
2. In what course, institution did you obtain it/them?
3. Did you study abroad before? If yes: where, what subject, for how long?
4. Did you have any other experience in European Union countries before (like internship, high school year, work, stay connected with parents work, travelling etc)?

#### **II. Information about Erasmus Mundus**

1. How did you learn about the Erasmus Mundus programme, your Masters programme and about the Erasmus Mundus scholarship?
2. Why did you choose to study in Europe?; at this university?; at this Masters programme?
3. Did you have any other alternatives? If yes: Where else did you apply? Did you apply for other scholarships?
4. How important were the following aspects in choosing studying at Erasmus Mundus Masters Course? Mark your choice at each row of the table.

	Very important	Important	Not very important	Unimportant
Academic reasons like:				
– academic quality in the EU Country in which you are studying				
– academic quality of your Masters course				
– renown of the professors / of the institution				
– your Masters course study programme				
Culture of countries in consortium organising your Masters Course				
Scholarship				
Previous experience of living, studying or working in EU countries				
Weather / location				
Opportunity to learn local European language (s)				
International character of the programme				
Career opportunities after completing the course				
Recommendations from friends, relatives, teachers etc.				
Information on Internet				
Others – please specify .....				

### III. Assessment of the Erasmus Mundus Masters Course

1. How do you assess the following aspects of your Erasmus Mundus Masters Course? Please mark your choice and add your comments.

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Not sufficient	Bad	Please add comments about your choice
The academic / professional quality of lectures						
The pedagogic quality of lectures						
Composition and content of curriculum						
The balance between lectures, group work and other forms of studying						
The balance between lectures and self-initiated studying						
Help, access to and time devoted to you from the academic staff						
Service from the administrative staff						
Quality and access to the institution resources: library, laboratories etc.						
Local language training						
Integration activities (welcome programme, personal tutor, buddy programme etc.)						

### IV. Living circumstances

1. Where are you living? Are you satisfied with your accommodation, the conditions and the price? Why?
2. How much money do you spend for your monthly living costs?
3. Would you be able to study in the European Union without the offer of Mundus scholarship?
4. Please summarise the best and the worst features of your Masters Course and/ or your hosting institution
5. How do you assess the life at the university and your interactions with local and other international students? Do you have friends at univer-

- sity? Is it difficult or easy to get into contact / friendship with European students? Do you participate in any university group (sport, choir etc)?
6. Do you have contacts/ friends outside University, e.g. do you participate in any extra-university group (sport, choir, church etc)?
  7. Do you feel integrated / accepted? Why / why not?

### **V. Expectations, problems and prospects**

1. What were your main expectations when you decided to study in Europe? Have they been fulfilled so far?
2. What were your main fears before coming to study at your Mundus programme?
3. What were the main problems that occurred before your arrival to European Union country?
4. What problems have you faced during your Masters studies so far?
5. Do you cope with the demands, do you feel well prepared for the level of the course, is it too difficult/too easy?
6. What are you planning to do after obtaining European Masters degree?
7. How do you think the European Masters degree will help you in your further career?
8. Would you recommend to a fellow-student that he/she apply for a / this Erasmus Mundus Masters? Why?

### **VI. Suggestions**

1. What could be improved at your Masters Course and/ or your hosting institution?
2. Would you suggest any improvements or changes regarding the whole Erasmus Mundus programme operation, its procedures and its rules?

Our study was qualitative, the questionnaire consisted mainly of open questions as our intention was not to make large-scale statistics but we wanted to gather students individual comments, opinions, views, their original expressions within a lower-scaled qualitative investigation. This is why we were very particular about receiving completely filled questionnaires with comprehensive and sincere answers. The coordinators' active involvement in encouraging students' feedback helped us to reach this goal. The questionnaire was four pages long and here we would like to mention that some students treated filling the questionnaire – consisting of many open questions with big spaces left and supposed to be filled – as a duty that must be done to satisfy the coordinator. On the other hand the majority of respondents seemed to find it interesting (writing about themselves) or useful (writing about shortcomings of the Programme in order to contribute to improvements). In two cases we had the impression that completing of our questionnaire could have a therapeutic role, cleansing an unpleasant experience.

### **Methods of carrying out research**

#### *Conducting of survey – methods of recruitment and selection of students for survey and submission of questionnaires*

Offices of EMMCs sent emails to their non-EU students inviting and encouraging them to take part in the survey and essays competition, attaching the questionnaire file and/ or a link to on-line survey tool and a leaflet informing about the contest. Students participation was voluntary. Non-EU Mundus students who decided to participate in the survey, filled in our questionnaires and returned them via e-mail or filled them in on-line at our project website <http://www.mundus.amu.edu.pl/Studies.php>. To obtain a higher response we also encouraged EMMCs' coordinators to use the third way of submission – distributing the paper version of questionnaires, collecting them from their students and sending them back to us by mail. This method was connected with more fatigue and was used in the case of two Mundus courses. In other cases it was usually up to the students' preferences which way of submission was chosen: by e-mail or on-line.

#### *Collection of essays – methods of disseminating information about the contest, recruitment and selection of essay authors*

The project team announced The Essay Competition “*My Mundus Experience – Write an Essay and win a Journey!*” It was targeted to students who would like to present their experience concerning both studying at Erasmus Mundus Masters Course and living in the European Union more deeply and share it more widely than could be done by filling in a questionnaire only. As a reward to potential authors we proposed prizes as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: one journey outside Europe (participation in a conference and a presentation based on an essay, with sightseeing and cultural programme and full costs of stay and travel covered);
- 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> places: journeys within Europe – in Poland and Spain (participation in seminar and presentation based on an essay, with sightseeing and cultural programme and full costs of stay and travel covered);
- The best 10 essays published in the book “*Studying in the European Union – chance and challenge for international students*”.

Potential contest participants were asked to send essays, clearly marked with their name, Masters course, university, age, country, e-mail address and telephone as a single attachment by e-mail.

We received 14 essays and 9 of them are published in this book. An international panel of project experts assessed all works submitted for the call for essays. The winners were awarded in the following way:

- the first and second prize winners will participate as speakers in the conference “*Connecting Cultures ... Respecting Differences. A global*

*dialogue for development and sustainability*” – iEARN 14<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference, which will be held on 21 – 26.7. 2007 in Cairo, Egypt;

- the third-place winner took part in the international seminar „*Bright and dark sides of studying abroad – international students experience*”, taken place on 01.03.07 in Poznań, Poland;
- six next ranked works were awarded with publication in this book.

More details about the winners of the competition and essays content are presented in section 1 of Chapter III – *Non-European students studying in EU countries – analysis of Mundus students’ stories*.

### ***Methods of analysis of study findings***

Phenomenology was selected as the research method applied to analysis of students’ narrations from questionnaires and essays. The value of the phenomenological method used for our studies lies in giving the researchers the possibility to discover the experience as it was perceived and to describe the phenomenon of study abroad within Mundus from the perspective of the participants as well as arriving at the meaning of the Programme for the participants.

By choosing a phenomenological approach, the study was designed to better illuminate the Mundus study experience. Phenomenology is seen as a “method of understanding events around us”. This method, based on the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl was defined as a “process which allowed for the viewing of an object or event within the context of the perceptions of the observer”, devoted rather to “description of phenomena” than invention of complete theories. Phenomenology allows the use of pure description/ narration to “find the meaning and essence of an object or experience”. Our project team agrees with the opinion that a qualitative research approach would help the researchers “to avoid simplifying the social phenomena and instead explore the range of behaviour and expand their understanding of the resulting interactions”. The most important aspect for us, using this method of data analysis, as well as for future readers of this text is to remember that “reality is what the people imagined or perceived it to be”<sup>2</sup>.

Little research of study abroad subject had been conducted in this manner, while quite numerous quantitative methodologies had been used to

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<sup>2</sup> Earline Byrd Orndorff: *The Short-Term Study Travel Experience for Adult Professionals: A Phenomenological Study*, 1998, Virginia

study international education programmes, the organisation of studies and their impacts. Also in the case of the Mundus programme some quantitative research has been carried out and presented – like the online survey on Mundus students' satisfaction, whose results were elaborated by DG EAC Tempus-Erasmus Mundus Unit and presented at the second Erasmus Mundus Student Seminar in Brussels in June 2006 (students' feedback: *How well is Erasmus Mundus Performing?*).

In the parts of the report presenting Mundus international students' experience of living and studying in Europe (Chapters I and III) extended students' data were presented as essential variables, helping to get to the nature of the described phenomena. The identification of students (in terms of nationality, age, sex, sometimes educational background or previous experience) was important for describing all that the students went through and how it was perceived by them, but was considered as less significant in the case of students' assessment of EMMCs – though it was omitted in the presentation of the research results in Chapter II. The project team decided to resign from showing identification of students commenting on the quality of their courses, moreover some students who sent their questionnaires by mail requested keeping their identity confidential, especially when these respondents were critical about some aspects of their Mundus courses.

Students' comments from essays were elaborated using table-formed protocols and – similarly as answers to open questions in the questionnaires – were grouped into themes and sub-themes. These themes were in line with topics previously identified during to the review of literature as potential areas for studies on students who experienced studying abroad in Europe. The quantitative analysis was used only to elaborate scores given by students in two tables in the questionnaire (in its section II – *Importance of selected aspects in the process of choosing studying at Erasmus Mundus Masters Course* and in section III – *Assessment of the Erasmus Mundus Masters Course*). The free comments added by students to the marks given in the tables were subject to the qualitative analysis of study findings. During work on the gathered material, through analysis of essays and questionnaires, common themes emerging from narrations and comments have been identified. They constituted research topics and problems – which are listed and introduced in the next section.

Our qualitative study does not give quick and simple answers to research problems, presented in the next section. Neither was it the intent of the study to discover universal truths and make ultimate evaluations. But through studying students' narration – as selected, grouped and commented on by this book authors – all involved in Mundus and potentially interested parties can increase the understanding of how

participation in the Mundus actions and the Programme itself were perceived and what could be developed in order to make more international students opting for studies in the European Union.

### **3. Research problems**

Questions that framed the whole study were classified into two main topics: Mundus students' experience and Mundus courses assessment in students' perception:

#### **Mundus students' experience:**

1. How did students learn about Erasmus Mundus?
2. Why did Mundus students choose to study in Europe?
3. What problems were reported by Mundus students?
4. How was Mundus students' social life perceived?
5. What were Mundus candidates' expectations and how did students realise them?
6. What were their main fears before coming to study at Mundus programme?
7. How Mundus students see their future after completing studies in Europe?

#### **Assessment of Mundus courses in students' perception**

1. Will Mundus students recommend the Programme to their peers and countrymen?
2. For what reasons students decided to study at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses?
3. How students assessed their Mundus courses in terms of:
  - a. composition and content of curriculum,
  - b. quality of teaching,
  - c. academic, professional and pedagogical quality of academic staff,
  - d. service from administrative staff,
  - e. quality and access to resources of hosting universities,
  - f. balance of time and work-load versus leisure,
  - g. local language training and language of instruction,
  - h. integration activities,
  - i. organisation, management and operation of courses and
  - j. accommodation issues?
4. What suggestions students had for improving their Masters courses?
5. What were students' suggestions concerning the whole Programme?
6. What one can learn when reading Mundus students' testimonies in terms of concepts and recommendations useful for the next phase of the Mundus programme?

7. What are the values and benefits of the Mundus programme and how they can be promoted?

Our survey investigation was intended to find answers to the above questions by heeding the voice of students from other continents – commenting, reviewing, assessing and evaluating their mobility within the Erasmus Mundus Programme.

Research problems presented above were linked to the following questionnaire questions:

- Non-EU Mundus students' experience in Europe: reasons of undertaking the challenge, best and worst aspects of the experience, problems of studying and daily life arrangements, opinions, observations and experiences of contact with European culture and Europeans, expectations and fears, visions of future after obtaining Masters degrees (questions: I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4, II.2, IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4, IV.5, IV.6, IV.7, IV.8, V.1; V.2, V.3, V.4, V.5);
- EMMCs seen from the perspective of non-EU students: motives for choosing this EU higher education offer, previous contacts and information channels, level of satisfaction with the quality of the Masters courses and of the whole Programme as well as suggestions for its improving (questions: I.4, II.3, IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4, IV.5, IV.6, IV.7, V.3, V.4, V.5);
- Qualitative assessment of importance of selected EMMCs' features in terms of their attractiveness and competitiveness in the global educational market (question II. 4) and EMMCs' quality, management and operation according to non-EU students' scoring (question III.1);
- Value and impact of the Mundus Programme: Mundus students' future plans, perspectives and imagined careers, suggestions for future Programme developments (questions: V.6, V.7, V.8, VI.1., VI.2).

#### **4. Description of the surveyed group**

##### ***Representativeness of the surveyed group for the Mundus population***

We are presenting in this book the European experience and the assessment of quality of Mundus studies as perceived by more than 250 Mundus students, representing some 50 countries. They were registered at 27 EMMCs of the 57 existing Masters (operating at the time, when the research were carried out). At the time of our research the overall number of non-EU nationals selected for Mundus scholarship was 2678 (in 2004/5 Masters Courses were enrolling 140 students, in 2005 – 808 students plus 353 selected under “Asian Window”, in 2006/7 – 741 students plus 636

selected under “Asian Window”<sup>3</sup>. Our sample constitutes 9,41% of Mundus population. But, as it was asserted before, the value of this study lies in its qualitative character.

Table 1 presents the list of EMMCs included in our research, showing the number of respondents.

In addition to the questionnaire feedback from 238 students we received 14 essays (9 of them are published in this book in Chapter III). We are aware that in many cases the numbers of respondents do not justify “to assess” Mundus courses. But, as we stated in our letter inviting all EMMCs’ Coordinators to take part in our study, the aim of our research was not to evaluate a particular Erasmus Mundus Masters Course but to show problems, difficulties and students’ suggestions for improvement and changes that can help in future operation both at Programme’s and particular Masters’ level. What we got in students’ response is not only evaluation but also great promotional material, as the majority of students expressed their liking and admiration for studying at their Masters, about Mundus in general and about living in the EU. Our book – when it is distributed among institutions and students from third countries – will work as a tool of promotion of the above listed 27 Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses and the whole Programme.

### ***Geographical scope***

With regard to the investigated group’s qualities in terms of sex and origin, we got a response from 142 male students and 110 female students, who came from six continents, representing 52 countries:

- Asia: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Israel, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam,
- North and Central America: Mexico, the USA,
- South America: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru,
- Africa: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Malawi, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda,
- Europe: Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey (both geographically located at two continents),
- Australia.

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<sup>3</sup> *Nationality of selected scholarship grantees* at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/projects_en.html)

**Table 1. The list of EMMCs and response from them**

Masters title	Way of submission			Total number of respondents
	Online	e-mail	paper	
1. Aeronautics and Space Technology EuMAS	5			5
2. AGRIS MUNDUS – Sustainable Development in Agriculture Masters Course	18			18
3. ALGANT – Algebra, Geometry and Number Theory	3			3
4. AMASE: Joint European Masters Programme in Advanced Materials Science and biotechnologies		2		2
5. Master of Applied Ethics	7			7
6. European Masters Programme in Computational Logic	23			23
7. Crossways in European Humanities		5		5
8. EMMS – Joint European Masters Programme in Materials Science			8	8
9. EMIN – Economics and Management of Network Industries	3			3
10. EURO-AQUAE – Euro Hydro-Informatics and Water Management	12	4		16
11. Forestry MSc EF – Master of Science in European	20			20
12. FUSION-EP – European Master in Nuclear Fusion Science and Engineering Physics	7			7
13. European Master in Global Studies	7	3		10
14. International Health tropEd	2	2		4
15. European Legal Practice – LL.M. Eur			16	16
16. MA LLL – European Master's in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management		2		2
17. M.E.S.C.: Materials for Energy Storage and Conversion	1	8		9
18. MEEES – Master's in Earthquake Engineering and Engineering Seismology	3			3
19. MERIT – European Master of Research on Information and Communication Technologies		1		1
20. MONABIPHOT – Molecular nano- and bio-photonics for telecommunications and biotechnologies		6		6
21. EMM-Nano – Erasmus Mundus Master of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology	11			11
22. International Master's in Quaternary and Prehistory	9	22		31
23. IMRD – International Master of Science in Rural Development	5	4		9
24. Special Education Needs MA SEN	2	5		7
25. MSPME – Masters in Strategic Project Management	8			8
26. WOP-P – Master on Work, Organisational and Personnel Psychology	1	1		2
27. "Vintage", Vine, Wine and Terroir Management	0	2		2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>238</b>

The age of respondents ranged from twenty-one (in the case of an Indian male enrolled at Erasmus Mundus Masters of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology) to fifty-eight years old (in the case of a female student from India, studying at Special Education Needs Programme).

### ***Differentiation of the group in terms of educational and cross-cultural background***

The group of our respondents also varied considerably in terms of their professional and educational background, level of previous education completed, previous periods of study abroad in general and previous experience in Europe in particular.

Referring to the professional and educational background of students it was usually – as declared by them in section I of the questionnaire (“*Study Experiences*”) – adequate to Masters’ discipline, with exception to the case of two students who radically changed their line of professional and educational orientation.

As concerns previously completed education, students had Bachelor or Masters degrees, as required by Mundus admission rules, but also two doctorate candidates, who were studying simultaneously at Mundus, were among our respondents.

The fact whether students had any previous study periods abroad and previous experience in European Union Member States before Mundus used to be important for their performance, at least initially. Any kind of familiarity with European culture and / or encounter with the EU higher education influenced the “hard” or “easy beginning” and the whole experience. However, the majority of students admitted that this is their first experience of studying abroad, while some studied already in Europe, in countries of their region or in the USA.

Here are examples of previous tertiary education background in Europe: “initial teacher training in England”, “A training course in African archaeology at archaeological museum in Poland”, “Madrid, Spain... ten months...Spanish and political science”, “one semester in Technische Universitat Muenchen as an Exchange Student”, “Sustainable Forestry Around Baltic Countries, SLU, Alnarp, Sweden”.

Some students had undergone previous language training in Europe: “I did an English Course for 20-weeks in the United Kingdom”, “Sienna, Italy. I studied the Italian language for three months”. Several Asian students studied abroad in countries of Asia-Pacific region: in Thailand (“two years postgrade programme”), Malaysia (“Malaysia University Technology”), New Zealand (“2 years, high school”), Australia (“Diploma of Business management, one and half years”). The experience of international students in

the United States ranged from regular studies: "I did all of my bachelor's degree in the United States" to other forms of learning: "Semester at Sea through the University of Pittsburgh... we went to 11 different countries around the world in 100 days".

Some had quite a rich experience of previous visits in the EU countries, however the majority – especially students from remote regions and developing countries – had not been there before. The following examples illustrate previous experience of European, American and Japanese students in the EU: "Bachelor of Arts in Italian Language and Comparative Literature. Study Abroad University For Foreigners in Italy during the month July and August in 2002. Other experience in European Union countries: SUMMER vacation and travelling and a couple of days work in Italy: translator for the international organization for migration and for the Cards Regional Project for the Balkans" (Macedonia 27 F Crossways in European Humanities); "Travel in Italy and Austria" (Japan 24 F Euro Hydro-Informatics and Water Management); "Studies in Cordoba, Spain. Spanish – 6 months. Travel several times. Conferences in Lisbon, Portugal and Turku, Finland" (24 M USA Global Studies); "I had travelled extensively around Western Europe and lived a year in Spain" (24 M USA Agris Mundus).

Students from Africa and South-East Asia also had a previous opportunity to take part in joint programmes or visit the EU for educational purposes: "I studied in a Catholic Seminary Institution that is an affiliate of Pontifical Urban University Rome and Federal University of Uyo, Nigeria and bagged the above degrees from both affiliate institutes" (28 M Nigeria Applied Ethics); "Two AIESEC internships i.e ITEP in Skopje and YDEP in Poland for a total of 4 months and another 2 months travelling in Eastern Europe" (28 F Malaysia Masters in Strategic Project Management).

Many respondents mentioned participation in exchange schemes, obtained fellowships or studied within "internationalisation at home" programmes as exemplified in the following quotations: "I took part in a two month exchange programme to Germany before my last year of school", "research on fish bones remains from archaeological sites in Cambodia and Germany", "Commonwealths' professional fellowship award, tenable at the UK environment agency", "Trent-in-Ghana programme. A one year study abroad programme of Trent University Canada".

Students also reported participation in educational events: "I took part during high school year in a quiz on general knowledge – Brussels 1997 (Belgium)", "I've been to Poland for a week as a chaperone for high school students participating in an international Olympiad".

Stays in European Union countries connected with family plans and tourist visits were also occasions to familiarise with European culture and people: "My Mom is originally from Holland, so I had been to the Netherlands as a young child to visit family. In my grade twelve year, I travelled with a school

group through England and Scotland. In my final year of high school I travelled with two friends through France and Spain”; “I travelled through the EU extensively and worked in Paris at UNESCO HQ for almost one year”, “Travelling to Bulgaria for holidays”, “Travelled to England one time”.

## **5. Summary of the research results**

### **I. Mundus students’ experience**

We present here the summary of findings concerning Mundus students’ experience, presented in details in Chapter II. It can be of use for EMMCs’ Coordinators who will get information derived from the survey of their Mundus international students and their essays. This can be used to provide information on what works to enhance Mundus operation and impact and what acts as barriers to it. Feedback from students may also lead to the need to implement systemic and maybe personal changes locally. International students will get authentic evidence useful for setting realistic expectations and third countries’ study abroad services and agencies will be able to give their students and clients a taste of what living and studying in Europe is like.

Also through reading students’ testimonies in essays presented in Chapter III one can imagine the background of the operations of the Programme – through students’ feelings, motivations, problems, fears, expectation and plans.

#### **1. How did students learn about Erasmus Mundus?**

Mundus students were asked how they had learned about the Erasmus Mundus programme, their Masters programme and about the Erasmus Mundus scholarship. The most frequently stated sources were internet sites and information obtained through personal contacts, then – media news, embassies announcements, international organizations and programme activities. Not many got information from their home institutions.

#### **2. Why did Mundus students choose to study in Europe?**

One of the project goals was to discover why Mundus students chose to study in Europe in general, at a particular university and at their selected Masters programme. Answers to these three questions and complementary opinions, attitudes and beliefs found in other parts of the questionnaire showed a variety of reasons. In the analysis presented in Chapter I very diversified students’ motives to study at Mundus were showed, ranging from searching for the very joy of studying and general personal growth to looking for specialised know-how for future studies and professional practice purposes. From the motivation to transfer knowledge and skills to home countries to the dreams of a professional career in Europe. From coming to Europe because of quality or scientific renown of country, field of research

or particular university to consider Europe as attractive for its cultural richness or just a good place to live. All of these motives were of a diversified nature and dimensions as they were investigated and explained in Chapter I. We also explored other alternatives that almost one sixth of the respondents had. It is important to mention that a significant number of students reported choosing Mundus before other educational possibilities in their home country or being offered other alternatives abroad but considering Mundus as a priority.

### **3. What problems were reported by Mundus students?**

Problems reported by Mundus students can be categorized in an academic and social context. In the first group we noted difficulties like: not responding to academic demands of EMMCs, lack of appropriate background from previous education and/ or professional practice due to outmoded scientific and pedagogical practice in their home countries, the challenges of learning in foreign languages, gaps between assumed knowledge and actual curriculum, problems arising from different methods of studying and impossibility to assimilate required content in a limited time (complaints of too much work, too little time and inappropriate time schedule). In the social context students reported problems concerning acceptance/integration of international students in local societies, religious/cultural differences, loneliness, adapting to climate and food, travelling between universities of the consortia and financial matters. The special and different, third category of problems were caused by obtaining visas and residence permissions. Detailed analysis of such problems is presented in the first chapter, some other problems described in details can be also found in essays "*My Mundus experience*" in Chapter III.

It is worth going through the immense material concerning students problems as our research aimed at investigating **the nature** of non-EU Mundus Masters students' experiences regarding academic and social problems. Moreover it surveyed not only problems but also students' attitudes towards difficulties of studying and living.

### **4. How was Mundus students' social life perceived?**

Another research objective was to display the picture of Mundus students' social life. In the response to respectively constructed questions, the importance of a fulfilling social life during studies abroad – apart from satisfying academic achievements – was expressed by the prevailing majority of respondents. The necessity for cultural preparation and integration also emerged as a major concern for international Mundus students. Our research has highlighted the limited interaction between international and European students in the campus context and also between international students and the wider communities of host countries. Chapter I considers barriers and bridges to developing effective intercultural interactions involving international students in the environments of EU universities and communities.

Students' testimonies enlighten what succeeds in the establishment of intercultural friendships and interactions and what blocks it. Barriers blocking successful interactions, integration and social inclusion in a foreign country or even immersion into local culture, sometimes desired by students, were as follows: lack of language skills, lack of time to devote to social contacts, too short a time of stay in one country and rotation of institutions every semester. Participation in extracurricular events organized by host institutions was of special interest to this study. The results show diverse students' perception of the situation at institutions engaged in EMMCs, from a full range of integration activities and very rich sport and cultural offer to very modest one or the lack of information about proposals available for students.

Detailed recommendations on how to enhance the development of intercultural interaction and the assurance of satisfying social life of international students (which can be applied also to EMMCs) has been presented in our previous publication<sup>4</sup>.

### **5. What were Mundus candidates' expectations and how students realized them?**

During the analysis of Mundus students' answers to the question: *What were your main expectations when you decided to study in Europe? Have they been fulfilled so far?* many kinds of expectations were identified and will be presented in Chapter I. They ranged from non-educational gains to professionally oriented development, from plans for getting Masters degree and hopes for continuing the training at Ph.D. level to targeting rather for finding work in the territory of the EU. We present both expectations and hopes totally fulfilled and those that brought disappointments. We also examined factors determining fulfilment of expectations, both these of an objective nature as well as those determined by students' individual features and characters.

Some gaps were noted between students' expectations of studies and life in Europe within Mundus and their perceived reality. Some citations show that sometimes students' expectations and fears prior to moving to Europe to study at EMMCs were shaped by incomplete or inadequate, heard opinions or fragmented information on Internet. There is a need to provide Mundus candidates with in-depth and many-sided testimonies of their peers who have already studied at Mundus courses. It is important to identify where the provision of accurate and meaningful information to students can work to reduce expectation versus reality gaps, and provide a solid and credible view of Mundus Programme.

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<sup>4</sup> Jose Luis Bernal, Katarzyna Hadaś, Annette Lang *Towards more efficient recruitment and better preparation for hosting of non-EU students at European universities. Recommendations from the project team in: European Higher Education for the World – Studies on students' mobility*, ed. Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik and Katarzyna Hadaś

## **6. What were students' main fears before coming to study at the Mundus programme?**

Answers to the question formulated as follows: *What were your main fears before coming to study at Mundus programme?* revealed a wide spectrum of anxieties and fears about a future career, academic accomplishment, everyday matters, as well as concerns of a social and psychological nature.

Students worried about their previously assimilated knowledge or the appropriateness of their practical skills – would it be enough or not sufficient to cope with the demands. Among concerns of everyday matters we noted fear of stressful circumstances like daily life fatigue and tiredness, dietary problems/ eating habits, striking or unusual situations to confront with and challenges of a new and independent life, problematic travel when changing country of studies, finally – exclusion or loneliness. All that combined or distinct was foreseen by Mundus students and shaped the set of adjustment worries. In the social and psychological context students expressed fears of social exclusion as being an international student among European people, impossibility of adapting to the way of life in a destination country and anxiety of isolation.

There is a necessity to inform widely, properly and suitably about conditions of living and studying in European Union countries awaiting prospective Mundus Masters Courses' students. This will make students' fears less stressful and more related to what they really can expect or to be truly afraid of.

## **7. How Mundus students see their future after completing studies in Europe?**

While exploring answers to two questions: *What are you planning to do after obtaining European Masters degree?* and *How do you think the European Masters degree will help you in your further career?* symptoms of massive optimism were noted as well as a strong belief in the positive effect of having education and diploma of the EU-provenience. Some students, mostly of younger age, expressed nearly euphoric, or at least a very bright outlook into their future in terms of professional development and general capacity to face life challenges. The three most frequent options were transmission of knowledge to developing countries, work in the EU and continuing training at Ph.D. level both at home country or in the EU Member States.

When elaborating research material the researchers were positively surprised to find out how many students declared to “take various methods and strategies back to your home country”; establish “research centres”; influence home policy and undertake other knowledge based actions in order to “overcome poverty and inequality” and “contribute somehow to society” of their homelands or “work as a pioneer for the future of the world”. One group that can be extracted proclaimed coming back to their home country, the other, represented also by students from the developed regions

– was ready to go anywhere to an underdeveloped country to transfer their knowledge and skills there. In our opinion these attitudes and plans based on expertise obtained in the EU are the most valuable and the most desired outcomes of the Mundus programme. That is why we plan to make the issue of transfer of knowledge gained in Europe to developing countries and “reversed brain gain” issue the central subject and concern in the research planned within our next project.

## II. Mundus courses assessment in students’ perception

The summary of findings presented below can be of use in terms of concepts and recommendations practicable for the next phase of the Mundus programme. All aspects of courses operation commented on by students (outlined here only but analysed profoundly in Chapter II) are really worth taking into consideration. Through reading students’ testimonies in essays presented in Chapter III, one can also draw valuable lessons for future operations of the Programme.

### 1. Will Mundus students recommend the Programme to their peers and countrymen?

Students share their study experiences abroad with potential students, and “word of mouth marketing” is extremely powerful. That is why one of the research objectives was to investigate if Mundus students were satisfied enough to be eager to recommend Mundus Programme and their Masters courses to other non-EU students and for what reasons. To the question: *Would you recommend to a fellow-student that he/she apply for a/this Erasmus Mundus Masters? Why?* students gave various answers. A significant number of them expressed general satisfaction making them willing to recommend the Programme. Another group was not so convinced and was ready to recommend it but under specific conditions. The reasons making students ready to recommend Mundus Courses and the whole Programme to others were: advanced technology and knowledge, an internationally recognizable degree gained during studies, their short duration, the scholarship offered as well as non-professional/ academic advantages influencing the students’ whole life. Some of them referred to the programme concept of responding to current global needs, considering it a great asset of Mundus.

### 2. For what reasons students decided to study at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses?

To investigate this research problem we applied the quantitative method. Students were asked to rank the importance of the following aspects in choosing studying at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses: academic quality in the EU country in which they were studying, academic quality of their Masters course, renown of the professors / of the institution, study programme,

attractiveness of culture of the countries in the consortium organizing their courses, scholarship, previous experience of living, studying or working in the EU countries, weather and location, opportunity to learn local European languages, international character of the programme and envisaged career opportunities after completing the course. With regard to information channels, students could rank the importance of recommendations from friends, relatives, teachers and information obtained through the Internet. Students were asked to rank the above listed aspects in a 4-grade scale – as very important, important, not very important or unimportant.

The most important reason to undertake study at Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses was the academic quality of the chosen Masters course (69,49%) and its study programme (66,39%). The course's location in the European Union and academic quality renown of the EU country of studying was also “very important” or “important”. Two financially oriented motivations – the scholarship offered and career opportunities after completing the course – were both ranked as “very important” by more than 62% of respondents. Climate and location of studies as well as previous experience of living, studying or working in EU countries were of very little significance; the latter factor probably because not many students surveyed had such a possibility before.

The results of the quantitative investigation presented in Chapter II are complementary to the qualitative analysis presented in Chapter I; in its section 2 – *Reasons to choose studying in Europe*.

### **3. How students assess their Mundus courses?**

Students were asked to rank in a 5-grade scale (very good, good, sufficient, not sufficient and bad) selected features of their EMMCs. The following table shows the total results of 27 courses assessment. In the Chapter II additional tables and charts show the results of assessment of 6 courses of the highest number of students taking part in our survey (1. AGRIS MUNDUS – Sustainable Development in Agriculture Masters Course, 2. European Masters Programme in Computational Logic, 3. EURO-AQUAE – Euro Hydro-Informatics and Water Management, 4. MSc EF – Masters of Science in European Forestry, 5. European Legal Practice – LL.M. Eur and 6. International Masters in Quaternary and Prehistory).

The overall assessment turned out to be high and – what was not envisaged – from this rankings and added comments emerged a kind of promotional material, promoting the whole Programme and those 27 EMMCs which took part in the research. We present below more detailed and precise study findings, based on quantified and qualitative data.

#### *a. Composition and content of curriculum*

International Mundus students expressed their opinions about and satisfaction with curricula content according to the following aspects: comprehensiveness, their individual expectations and global needs, students' back-

**Table 2. Students' assessment of Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses (percentage)**

	Very good	Good	Sufficient	Not sufficient	Bad
	%				
The academic / professional quality of lectures	45,80	44,96	5,46	2,52	0,84
The pedagogic quality of lectures	29,41	50,00	17,65	2,10	0,84
Composition and content of curriculum	36,29	38,82	18,99	5,49	0,00
The balance between lectures, group work and other forms of studying	26,47	38,24	23,95	9,24	1,68
The balance between lectures and self-initiated studying	25,85	43,64	22,88	7,20	0,85
Help, access to and time devoted to you from the academic staff	37,45	42,98	17,87	1,70	0,00
Service from the administrative staff	41,53	34,32	16,10	8,05	0,00
Quality and access to the institution's resources: library, laboratories etc.	41,60	31,93	14,71	10,08	1,68
Local language training	15,68	30,08	22,03	28,39	3,81
Integration activities (welcome programme personal tutor, buddy programme etc.)	32,91	36,29	18,57	9,70	2,53

grounds, planned content and its realization and balance between theory and practice. They also referred to different levels in consortium partners – very basic content, too easy or oppositely – a too demanding one. Other comments concerned flexibility, a possibility of choosing subjects/paths (not possible at every Masters course), harmonization of contents taught at institutions of the consortium (sometimes problematic) and duration of the programme (usually its shortage and overload).

The overall assessment of curricula offered within Mundus Course is expressed in quantitative measurement in table 2. The general opinion expressed was positive according to three-quarters of respondents (assessment: „very good” – 36,29% of received answers, „good” – 38,82%, „sufficient” – 18,99%, „not sufficient” – 5,49%, with no „bad” marks).

### b. Quality of teaching

Many students underlined the fact that the quality of teaching at EMMCs varies from country to country. Nevertheless the general perception of the quality of training received was positive according to outcomes presented in table 2. The overall assessment of professional/ academic quality of lectures was assessed as „very good” – by 45,80% of respondents, „good” – 44,96%, „sufficient” – 5,46%, „not sufficient” – 2,52%, „bad” – 0,84%) and proves high academic quality of Mundus Masters Courses. The pedagogic quality of lectures was weighed up as follows: „very good” – 29,41%, „good” – 50,00%, „sufficient” – 17,65%, „not sufficient” – 2,10%, „bad” – 0,84% (2 respondents). Those results prove that Mundus offers first-rate education at Masters Courses jointly run by the consortia of Europe’s best universities, having highly qualified academic staff. Looking at table 2 it is evident that it was the quality of teaching that received the highest number of “very good” and “good” marks.

### c. Academic, professional and pedagogical quality of academic staff

In this matter students expressed both a positive and negative assessment. Some put into questionnaires general remarks, while others wrote more specific opinions – even ones concerning particular teachers. Again – the pedagogic quality of lectures and conditions of teaching as well as availability and help obtained from professors varied from university to university. Additional comments were found while analysing the answers given to the question placed in another section of the questionnaire: *How do you assess help, access to and time devoted to you from the academic staff?*

When asked about the academic/professional/ pedagogical quality of *lectures* some students referred to *lecturers* instead of lectures features, which we deduced from added comments in the last column of the table III.1 in the questionnaire. The general opinion about help, access to and time devoted to students from the academic staff expressed by respondents was satisfactory, as indicated in the results presented in table 2: „very good” – 37,45%, „good” – 42,98%, „sufficient” – 17,87%, „not sufficient” – 1,70% with no „bad” marks.

### d. Service from administrative staff

There were both positive and negative comments concerning the quality of service from administrative staff. The general opinion – as expressed by respondents and presented in table 2 – was positive: this variable was assessed as „very good” by 41,53% of students surveyed, „good” – 34,32%, „sufficient” – 16,10%, „not sufficient” – 8,05% with no „bad” assessment. Additional comments put more light on the scores given by students.

### e. Quality and access to resources of host universities

Another category of EM Masters’ assessment referring to the quality and access to the resources of hosting institutions. Students expressed their satisfaction in terms of access to libraries, laboratories, computer facilities, sports, health and social services. Negative opinions related mainly to lack of

books in English in libraries, limited access to the library and lack of on-line resources. The qualitative outcomes of research in this area are represented by opinions and views added by students in the table of section III in the questionnaire or found in their answers concerning problems or the best and the worst features of the Masters Course and / or hosting institution (in section IV).

The overall assessment expressed by respondents, according to results presented in table 2 proved rather good quality and access to the institutional resources: „very good” – 41,60%, „good” – 31,93%, „sufficient” – 14,71%, „not sufficient” – 10,08%, „bad” – 1,68%.

*f. Balance of time and work-load versus leisure*

Students also assessed the balance between lectures, group work and other forms of studying as well as the balance between lectures and self-initiated studying. Some of those who gave additional comments mentioned an unsatisfactory equilibrium, while some were quite satisfied with the organisation of students' time.

The general opinion expressed by respondents about students' time management is good, although many respondents mentioned a great deal of time devoted to studies, commenting it both with understanding or with dissatisfaction. The results present as follows:

- the balance between lectures, group work and other forms of studying: „very good” – 26,47%, „good” – 38,24%, „sufficient” – 23,95%, „not sufficient” – 9,24%, „bad” – 1,68%
- the balance between lectures and self-initiated studying: „very good” – 25,85%, „good” – 43,64%, „sufficient” – 22,88%, „not sufficient” – 7,20%, „bad” – 0,85%

*g. Local language training and language of instruction*

Questions concerning local language training and language of instruction caused a meaningful response in frank expression, representing greatly diversified opinions. Dissatisfaction with the local language course offered, or non existence of such training, was a matter of complain in a significant number of cases. Some complaints were found about lack of courses taught in English along with exactly the opposite opinions – appreciating teaching in the local language.

The language aspect of EMMCs was assessed with the lowest number of “very good” marks (15,68%) and was estimated as “not sufficient” (28,39%) or “bad” (3,81% – 9 students) by the higher percentage of respondents. Local language training was assessed respectively by 30,08% and 22,03% of students in our survey as „good” and „sufficient”. This aspect of the Mundus programme definitely needs improvement, which was stated also in many free comments.

It was well understood by international students that a high level of proficiency in English language is fundamental to successful studies at tertiary level but many had not expected studying in the local language in non-English

speaking countries. The main difficulties that emerged from such circumstances concerned adapting to the use of the local language (other than English) in general and particularly for academic purposes.

#### *h. Integration activities*

The provision of integration activities like social events and gatherings, trips and sightseeing tours, personal tutor or buddy programme was assessed as follows: „very good” – 32,91%, „good” – 36,29%, „sufficient” – 18,57%, „not sufficient” – 9,70%, „bad” – 2,53%. More than 12% of respondents were not satisfied with the host university or the whole course offer in this area. Some students complained of a lack of welcome programme or unsatisfactory, not detailed enough welcome information received prior to or on arrival to the host university.

#### *i. Organisation, management and operation of courses*

Students' comments cited in the respective section of Chapter II, concerning organisation, management and operation of courses were found in their answers to the following questions in the questionnaire: *What were the main problems that have arisen before your arrival to the European Union country?; What problems have you faced during your Masters studies so far?; Could you, please summarise the best and the worst features of your Masters Course and/ or your hosting institution.* In response students commented on: selection procedures and the composition of participants, location of campus and accommodation and other organizational issues concerning training process. Moreover the following problems were identified: lack of possibility of contacts with local students and societies, complaints that EMMCs were separated from other courses or that they enrolled only international students. Students demanded provision of sufficient pre-departure information, proper schedule of the course and plan of classes with availability of the whole programme curriculum and plan in advance – in order to guarantee them awareness of structure, planning, linking and structuring contents etc. Some comments related to delayed scholarship payments and high study fees and other charges.

#### *j. Accommodation*

Housing is always a major concern for students when they go abroad, and not only for them but also, for instance, for their parents. Two questions in section IV of the questionnaire (*“Living circumstances”*) provided for qualitative assessment of accommodation conditions offered to Mundus students: *Where are you living? Are you satisfied with your accommodation, the conditions and the price? Why?* and *How much money do you spend for your monthly living costs?*

Answering the first question students gave various reasons for satisfying or disappointing accommodation (quality of premises and their facilities, social life at the place of living, its location and price). They also mentioned difficulties in finding a proper place to live and the lack of help in organising accommodation from some Masters organizers.

For the second question we got answers stating students' monthly expenses ranging from approximately 300 Euro to even 1600 Euro monthly. Many students gave comments about the high accommodation expense.

#### **4. What suggestions students had for improving their Masters courses?**

The final, IV section, of the questionnaire was devoted to getting students' suggestions for improving Masters courses and ideas concerning development of the whole programme. Here we present the outline of results, described in the fourth and fifth section of Chapter II. The majority of the Mundus fellows included a considerable quantity of suggestions in this place of the questionnaire, but some were also found among answers and comments referring to other questions.

During our analysis the following areas requiring improvements, according to students' opinions, were identified:

##### **Pre-departure preparation:**

- clear information about visa and help to make the process of obtaining visa easier, Shengen visa for non-EU nationals with Mundus grant,
- giving details concerning logistical and administrative issues before arrival to Europe, "more detailed information for the application and the programme"; "brochure of the Programme I expected to be much more practical",
- syllabus in advance to enable students to get to know the level of teaching, identify gaps and prepare before arrival to cope with demands of EMMCs,
- better mechanisms of accommodation and arrival arrangements,
- "orientation programme to show resources, courses and social life of the university as a whole and not just the Programme and the department"; "orientation classes in the institute before going to formal classes",
- "the exact schedule for a year", "schedule of courses and exams before the beginning of the year".

##### **Welcome programme and integration activities:**

- being „more international student friendly”,
- "manual for new students handed out on the first day with all the details of subjects offered, education system, examination systems etc, preferably in English",
- organization of trips to see a host country, region and city, tours or presentations about local sites,
- providing international students with student advisor service,
- creating more occasions and activities for non-EU students to integrate them more with the local students.

##### **Accommodation:**

- proper accommodation conditions – "some of us are older than other students so we need our privacy",
- housing offer for married students – "possibility to stay in a student dorm for a spouse".

**Selection procedures and composition of students:**

- notification of the acceptance in advance and early enough before students arrival to give them time for travel and visa arrangements,
- election of students “who deserve” Mundus grant; “some students were chosen just to not return scholarship”,
- election of students with appropriate background,
- election of students with appropriate language skills – “make sure that all students admitted to the Programme have passed TOEFL or IELTS”,
- encouraging European students to join EMMCs “otherwise they are just spending money on giving jobs in Europe for the third countries’ students without the interaction between EU and non-EU nationals”,
- encouraging non-EU students coming from different parts of the world to join the programme, some EMMCs were too homogenous in terms of origin of students.

**Promotion and availability of information:**

- better promotion in third countries, more intensive “advertisement campaign”, which is “a bit modest for this programme”,
- using alumni feedback for promotion – “campaign for integration of alumni in their respective countries and a good accessible website of alumni”.

**Scholarship issues:**

- scholarship “provisional”, functioning rather as “stimulation of excellence not a guarantee”,
- scholarship paid on time – “ensure scholarship arrives timely even it is delayed by the European Commission”,
- “making the grant payment available in the place [country] where students study to avoid loses from currency exchange”,
- providing students with establishment allowance,
- covering travel expenses.

**Curriculum content:**

- more practice-oriented education than offered in students’ home countries, “more practical exercises in the laboratories”,
- well-organised study programmes of proper content and duration,
- better use of time through planning and coordination of teaching modules’ content,
- “lesser study burden at the beginning and increased gradually”,
- programme ensuring compatibility, consistency and relations in all institutions of consortium – “more consistent and related”, “real joint programme, not collection of sub-programmes”,
- giving a chance to start carrying research, involvement of students in scientific work of hosting institutions,
- more courses for students’ choice, flexible programme composition,
- offer of “projects to carry out during the semester gap”,

- taking into consideration “what the students coming into Masters have studied and base content of courses and lectures on this fact”,
- additional courses of generic skills – e.g. “course of right and wrong in academic writing”.

**Local language learning and language of instruction:**

- language training programme before starting the course,
- courses taught in English not in local language (in non-English-speaking countries) or oppositely:
- “English language should be dropped out fully and replaced by course in local language”.

**Administrative staff service:**

- higher level of support and advice offered to international students.

**Academic staff qualifications and availability:**

- Higher level of teaching,
- Better communication and language skills of teaching staff,
- Awareness of the entire programme idea and content – “all staff should understand the nature of the programme”,
- Fixed office hours when academic staff is available for students.

**Pedagogical quality of teaching:**

- more exams or quizzes during the semester,
- providing students with text books, reference books, web pages with basics and background of subjects, “the courses (schedule, slides, contents of the course, etc) should be available online (in English)”.

**Access to resources:**

- improvement of accessibility to facilities supporting international students (e.g. language training, accommodation, sport facilities, integration programmes),
- more resources in English in libraries, longer opening hours.

**Management of the course:**

- less bureaucracy,
- “extra person to answer emails and questions from the students”,
- “decision on where [in which university within the consortium] students will complete their dissertations taken earlier”.

**Organisation of teaching process:**

- exact schedule of courses and exams obtainable before the beginning of academic year,
- extension of the duration of 1-year (or 1,5) courses into 2 years programmes and even of longer period,
- asking students about problems emerging in teaching-learning process in order to “learn from students’ feedback how to improve organization”,
- taking into consideration opinions that “there is a lot of leisure time” or opposite ones, complaining about:
- “no free time because of overloaded programme”.

**Consortium quality and homogeneity:**

- equal level of universities within the consortium – “the gaps of the educational level and quality of research and offered services between the coordinating universities should be decreased”, “all the participating universities should have more or less the same level”,
- “tighter relationship between institutions in terms of writing thesis”,
- gathering occasionally all students studying at Masters course – organization of “consortium seminar that can be attended by all Erasmus Mundus students from all three universities”.

**Help in finding a job and supporting future career:**

- providing students with a job-opportunities programme – “placement cell”, “career office”, “source of information about possible employment from programme organizers”, “help us to get job during the semester gap”,
- arranging of contacts outside a host country with companies, NGOs, foundations by seminars, conferences and workshops “where students can participate along with experts from different companies and institutes”,
- modification of the name of the course – change that refers better to its content and assures recognition of its degree,
- academic qualifications / degrees from the countries involved in the consortia should be recognised worldwide,
- universities in the consortia should be selected in such a way to “represent better the culture of a country, the reputation and the academic qualities”,
- providing students with “Ph.D. programme with funding after this Masters”,
- offering more specialized education and qualifications – “course can be made more specialized so that a student can get more practical skills and knowledge on a particular subject”.

It must be stressed that the above list of areas needing changes and improvements, created on the basis of students citations, does not refer to every course. What is worth underlining – students’ ideas listed here are based on comments that concerned particular courses, but frequently similar suggestions were expressed by students of various EMMCs.

**5. What were students’ suggestions concerning the whole programme?**

In response to the question: *Would you suggest any improvements or changes regarding the whole Erasmus Mundus programme operation, its procedures and its rules?* the following kinds of suggestions concerning the whole Mundus programme were proposed by Mundus students:

- more advertising and promotion, including proposals of events to be organised by the European Commission,
- information about the Programme provided to embassies, facilitating the process of visa issuing, making it easier for international students to get work permissions,

- more careful and transparent selection, shortening and improving selection procedures
- enhanced local and English language training,
- scholarship payment on time,
- using feedback from students for Programme development and change for the better,
- special attention to the future of students – jobs offers and Ph.D. studies opportunities,
- suggestions of other and/or general nature.

Students suggestions closing Chapter II can be of use in preparation of the concept, rules and structure of the second edition of the Erasmus Mundus Programme. We hope, and some of our respondents share this expectation also, that the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency Executive Agency (EACEA) and advisory bodies invited to drafting a new Programme as well as prospective EMMCs coordinators will take advantage of the students' feedback presented here in order to improve the Programme operation.

## **6. What are the values and benefits of the Mundus programme and how they can be promoted?**

The value of the Mundus Programme and benefits of studying at EMMCs as seen by students were described and commented on very eagerly and comprehensively. "Along the way", we gathered a huge quantity of promotional material describing characteristics and qualities of Mundus Programme and its – foreseen by students – impact on their life and work, in many cases resulting in benefits also for their home countries and communities. We are totally aware of existing shortcomings and weaknesses of the Programme and EMMCs operation, which can be mapped-out when reading students comments. Therefore quite different and complementary opinions obtained from questionnaires can be found in sections of Chapter II devoted to opinions, criticisms and suggestions concerning particular courses, as well as in Chapter I describing students' experience.

For the purposes of promotion of the Programme and EMMC's values and benefits we gathered in the text concluding the book, numerous students' opinions underlining very differentiated aspects. They vary from high quality of education to renown of the consortium, from availability and help of academic staff to no age limit for candidates, from international scientific exposure to the promise of future career perspectives, from self-development to the opportunity to contribute to the development of their home country after return, from the value and modernity of knowledge gained to improvement of language skills, from benefits of cross-cultural experience to those of being granted with a generous Mundus scholarship. The best way to outline such a richly documented area is to sketch it in the format of the following table:

Mundus Programme attributes and qualities as seen by students	Commentary
1. High quality	High-quality education at Masters Courses jointly run by consortia of Europe's best universities. High-class training and service received, positive impact of study for (future) life and work.
2. Modern knowledge	Updated expertise in various academic disciplines including innovative and cross-disciplinary studies and access to modern infrastructure and resources.
3. Cross-cultural experience	Fascinating Europe's culture and cross-cultural experience of studying in at least two different European countries with fellow students from all over the world.
4. International scientific exposure	International scientific exposure at various European universities and worldwide professional and personal relationships with scientists and students.
5. Helpful staff	First-rate welcoming and hosting services and helpful staff, properly functioning organisation and administration of EMMCs, good hosting facilities including language training, health and advisory services.
6. Unique opportunity	Unique opportunity to obtain an officially recognised double or joint degree, opening perspectives for doctoral studies or interesting career thanks to up-to-date knowledge and diploma. Value of prestigious scholarship enabling living well, focusing only on studies and enjoying social activities.
7. "Action against brain drain and for brain gain"	Useful knowledge, technology and skills to transfer after completing studies to alumni's home countries or elsewhere where needed in the world.
8. Improving language skills	Practical use of European languages and living in a multilingual environment, way of improvement of foreign languages proficiency.
9. Future carrier perspectives	Ensured degree recognition and expected vocational profits of the studies in Europe. Career development and further mobility possibilities.
10. Self-development	Valuable lesson of adaptability and self management skills, personal development through international environment, cross-cultural relations and cultural benefits. Source of "globalmindedness" and international awareness. Positive change of personal characteristics prior to experience and after the experience. Life changing opportunity or wonderful experience.
11. EU better than its competitors on global market	Wonderful place to study and experience – Europe!

The above listed Mundus Programme attributes and qualities constituted “10 + 1 benefits that Erasmus Mundus Programme offers to international students”, listed according to their peers’ opinions – Mundus students. They are displayed in our leaflet, promoting the Programme and accompanying this book. In our opinion, this is one of the best ways to promote the Programme – by using authentic Mundus students’ and alumni’s feedback in order to attract other international students looking for educational opportunities abroad.

## **6. Acknowledgments**

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