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## **Mednarodna mobilnost študentov in zaposljivost.**

### **Pogled delodajalcev**

### **Mobilidade internacional de estudantes e empregabilidade.**

### **A visão dos empregadores**

### ***International Student Mobility and Employability.***

### ***The Employer's Vision***

**Valeska V. Geldres-Weiss, Martinho I. Ribeiro de Almeida in Alenka Flander\***

Namen raziskave je analiza povezave mednarodne mobilnosti študentov (MMŠ) za namene študija ali delovnih praks in zaposljivostjo, in sicer z vidika delodajalcev v kraju São Paulo v Braziliji. Metodologija raziskave je raziskovalne narave in temelji na uporabi metode *survey*. V vzorcu je bilo vključenih 87 podjetij, predvsem velikih in mednarodno aktivnih. Ključna kompetenca, za katero podjetja menijo, da jo študenti razvijejo v okviru mednarodne izkušnje, je izboljšanje znanja tujih jezikov. Po mnenju delodajalcev MMŠ pripomore k izboljšanju samoiniciativnosti, ki je pri brazilskih delodajalcih ena najbolj cenjenih spretnosti, in sicer na drugem mestu, za odgovornostjo. Vendar pa, tako kot je navedeno tudi v mednarodni strokovni literaturi, delodajalci pri zaposlovanju in izbiri novih diplomantov ne upoštevajo MMŠ ter najbolj cenijo mednarodne delovne prakse. Z vidika visokošolskega izobraževanja je treba opredeliti spretnosti, ki jih študentje pridobijo v okviru mednarodnih izkušenj, zato da se jih lahko učinkovito predstavi delodajalcem.

**Ključne besede:** mednarodna mobilnost študentov, visokošolsko izobraževanje, zaposljivost, delodajalci

A pesquisa visa analisar a relação entre mobilidade internacional de estudantes (MIE) para estudos ou práticas de trabalho e empregabilidade, da perspectiva dos empregadores em São

Paulo, Brasil. A metodologia de pesquisa é exploratória e baseada na aplicação do método *survey*. A amostra reuniu 87 empresas, a maioria de las grandes e com relações internacionais.

Segundo as empresas acreditam, a principal competência desenvolvida pelos estudantes que têm uma experiência internacional durante seus estudos é o aperfeiçoamento no conhecimento de línguas estrangeiras. Segundo os empregadores, a MIE traz para a capacidade de iniciativa uma das competências mais valorizadas pelos empregadores brasileiros, depois da responsabilidade. No entanto, e tal como foi observado na literatura internacional, os empregadores não levam em conta a MIE no recrutamento e seleção de recém-formados, e o mais valorizado é uma experiência internacional de prática de trabalho. Da perspectiva da educação superior, é necessário definir as capacidades que uma experiência internacional gera para os alunos, com a finalidade de que estas possam ser efetivamente comunicadas aos empregadores.

**Palavras-chave:** mobilidade internacional de estudantes, educação superior, empregabilidade, empregadores

*The purpose of this research is to analyse the relationship between international student mobility (ISM), related to study programmes or internships, and employability, from the viewpoint of employers in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The research methodology is exploratory, based on surveys. The sample comprised 87 companies, most of which are big firms with international links. The main competence that organizations believe students develop when they have an international experience during their course of studies is a better command of foreign languages.*

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*According to employers, ISM contributes to boosting students' initiative –one of the top competences, most valued by Brazilian employers, second to responsibility. However, and along the lines of international literature about the issue, employers do not take into account ISM when it comes to graduate selection and recruiting, where the most valued experience is an international internship. From the perspective of higher education, it is necessary to define the skills that students should develop thanks to an international experience, so that they can be effectively communicated to future employers.*

**Key words:** *international student mobility, higher education, employability, employers*

La investigación tiene como objetivo analizar la relación entre movilidad internacional de estudiantes (MIE) para estudios o prácticas laborales y empleabilidad, desde la perspectiva de los empleadores en San Pablo, Brasil. La metodología de la investigación es de carácter exploratoria y se basa en la aplicación del método survey. La muestra reunió a 87 empresas, la mayoría grandes y con relaciones internacionales. La principal competencia que las organizaciones creen que los estudiantes desarrollan al tener una experiencia internacional durante sus estudios es la mejora del conocimiento de idiomas extranjeros. Según los empleadores, la MIE aporta a la capacidad de iniciativa una de las competencias más valoradas por los empleadores brasileños, después de la responsabilidad. Sin embargo, y al igual que lo observado en la literatura internacional, los empleadores no toman en cuenta la MIE en el reclutamiento y la selección de recién graduados, y lo más valorado es una experiencia internacional de práctica laboral. Desde la perspectiva de la educación superior, es necesario definir las capacidades que una experiencia internacional genera para los alumnos, con el fin de que éstas puedan ser comunicadas efectivamente a los empleadores.

Palabras clave: movilidad internacional de estudiantes, educación superior, empleabilidad, empleadores

## Introduction

International Student Mobility (ISM) has become one of the objectives of higher education institutions (HEIs) all around the globe. HEIs have integrated this objective in its strategic guidelines within various strategies for the internationalisation of their students, with the aim to prepare the latter for the labour market in the globalised world. HEIs promote ISM activities since they believe that such activities improve the employability of students. However, in today's globalised world there is not much research on whether participation in ISM activities is a factor which impacts employability.

In the first decade of the 21st century the global number of foreign students has doubled, i.e. from two million in 2000 to 4.2 million in 2011. Regions, which recorded the highest increase during the 2000-2011 period are listed in descending order: Oceania (289%), Latin America and the Caribbean (254%) and Asia (233%). Despite the high growth in Latin America, this region remains to attract the least students, which constituted a mere 1.85% of all global foreign students (OECD, 2013).

The University of São Paulo (USP) became the leading Latin American university, which recognised internationalisation as one of the pillars of the institutional mission. In 2010 it founded the International Cooperation Office with the strategic objective to put USP on the international map. Therefore all its strategies focus on the strengthening of the exchange of people, strengthening of agreements on academic cooperation, modernisation of organisational structure, optimisation of internationalisation process management and improvements of the infrastructure. In the field of strengthening the exchange of people the USP established a student mobility programme which targets especially undergraduate students and provides university funding for mobility scholarships; a unique project among Brazilian universities.

University internationalisation strategies are the result of the fact that stakeholders in higher education in general consider a period of study abroad as advantage on its own, and therefore encourage it (Rodríguez, 2012). The same author also found that IMS constitutes a tool for personal development, which benefits to the economy and the society; it contributes to individual's development as well as development of foreign language skills and intercultural understanding which, in turn, improves employability in the labour market that is becoming increasingly international. These are the foundations for the creation of substantial programmes to support student mobility.

Crossman and Clarke (2010) state that despite the awareness of the urgency and significance of the international perspective there are surprisingly little information on the link between students' international experience and graduates' employability. Teichler (2007: 12) confirms this claim and states that the "information on the link between higher education and the world of labour are far from adequate" despite the public discussion on the issue. On the other hand, during the review of existing literature on ISM King et al ("2010: 33) concluded that the relationship between mobility and employability is the "missing link in the story"; at least in the UK the evidence on the actual added value of studies abroad remain far from sufficient. In Sweden, Jonsson et al (2010) stress that it is clear that study abroad has a specific function, however, there is very little evidence, how this is relevant during the employment processes.

The question which arises in connection therewith is how the organisations, which employ young graduates, value their international mobility experience, and whether such an experience constitutes an advantage when applying for a job, compared to other candidates. The aim of this research was to analyse the link between international mobility of students and young graduates and their employability from the perspective of employers in São Paulo. The research is a part of a study, carried out in various EU member states. The special objectives of the research were: to find out what employers demand from young graduates; to discover the skills favoured by companies when recruiting young graduates; to find out which skills the employers believe graduates can acquire from international experience; and to examine the employers' attitude towards the study and traineeships abroad.

## 1. Theoretical analysis

### 1.1. International student mobility (ISM)

Mobile students are those students who leave their country of origin to study in another country (OECD, 2013). International student mobility is one of the most apparent features of higher education internationalisation (Luchilo, 2010). In general mobile student is a person who crossed a state border to study or within their studies. However, a definition of such student depends on the type of mobility or criteria applied for the definition of a mobile student (Rodríguez, 2012). Mobility can be either credit-based, i.e. when a student completes a part of the study programme abroad, or full, when a student completes the entire study programme abroad.

This research is focused on credit mobility which can include academic activities, placement and university activities within the scope of social responsibility or volunteering (King et al, 2010). The latter is subject to its inclusion in the components of the student's study programme. Mobility can last from four weeks up to a year. It applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate study (master's, doctoral, post-doctoral); it can be funded either by external funding (university or other scholarship) or it can be funded by the participants themselves.

## 1.2 Employability

Teichler (2004) finds that the term “employability” marks the entire process of transition from higher education to employment. If the transition of graduates is “smooth” (from the aspect of seeking employment), fast and nearly without any interim time between graduation and the beginning of regular employment, and if the employment suits the level and field of study we can claim that the graduates are employable. Harvey (2001) finds that the main meaning of employability refers to the ability of students to find employment. The same author states that employability can be interpreted as a set of basic skills or general characteristics, required by a specific type of employer. Less (2002) approached the term “employability” from the aspect of education and finds that the employability of graduates means that they are qualified for work and that they can enter employment.

Despite the discussions on how employability of graduates should be defined and measured, in the field of higher education employability of graduates became a core performance indicator at both individual and institutional level (Crossman and Clarke, 2010). With respect to employability of graduates universities have identified the need for the promotion of the development of a number of personal and intellectual skills, which exceed specific knowledge of a certain academic discipline (Shan et al, 2004).

However, Crossman and Clarke (2010) rely on the current employability research which shows that the main responsibility for employability lies in the hands of an individual who must be capable of acquiring knowledge and skills appreciated by current and potential employers. The authors find that the above-specified claim in relation to young graduates means that employers seek candidates who are able of demonstrating relevant knowledge and skills which will facilitate their performance in a complex work environment. For the candidates one of the ways to prove such skills is to have experience related to work or experience-based learning. From this aspect it would seem that graduates with an international experience have an advantage compared to those with no such experience.

From the governmental and employers' perspective employability mainly refers to ensuring that the graduates can contribute to the “economic competitiveness within a global context” (Cranmer, 2006:170).

The present research follows the approach applied by Flander (2011), analyses the graduates' employability primarily from the aspect of employment-related requirements and knowledge which employers expect from young graduates and skills which they believe are acquired by students due to international mobility, as well as employers' perception of the significance of international mobility.

### 1.3. International student mobility and employability. Employers' perspective

International student mobility and its relevance for employability is usually studied from the students' perspective (Marcotte et al, 2006; Teichler and Janson, 2007; Gajderowicz et al, 2013), while there was far less attention devoted to employers' perspective. In the opinion of students the main benefits of international mobility are improvement of language skills, improved awareness and knowledge of new cultures, and personal growth and development (Garam, 2005).

The research listed under references, which analyses the employers' perspective of international student mobility primarily originates from the EU, USA or Scandinavian countries. In a research related to the ERASMUS programme Bracht *et al.* (2006) analysed the employers' positions regarding the recruitment of new graduates which have been gathered in a research (entitled *VALERA Project*) from a sample of 312 employers with a 6% response rate. Trooboff *et al.* (2008) from the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) analysed US employers' opinion on study abroad on a sample of 352 companies and organisations from various sectors; 65% of all companies' HR departments completed the online survey. Two Scandinavian studies analysed the significance of the ISM for employers when recruiting new graduates. In Finland Garam (2005) analysed whether ISM meets employers' expectations, and in Sweden Jonsson *et al.* (2010) researched the employers' opinion on study abroad on a sample of 973 companies with a 21% response rate. Another European research, which is not linked to the ERASMUS programme is the research of Flander (2011) from the Slovenian Centre for Mobility and European Education and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS). The author analysed the companies opinion on ISM based on the Finnish model applied by Garam (2005), whereby she focused on the question whether international experience (study or traineeship) during studies affect Slovenian employer' decision on the recruitment of young graduates. We will analyse each of these studies below from the aspect of our research objectives.

#### 1.3.1. Requirements set by employers for young graduates

Studies of requirements set by employers for young graduates show that employers' main requirements include academic knowledge, study programme in the relevant field and an adequate level of education (Bracht *et al.*, 2006; Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011). Besides the above-specified knowledge other candidates' skills are also relevant (Flander, 2011); the ERASMUS research showed that the skills which the employers find especially important include computer and foreign language skills (Bracht *et al.*, 2006).

The third variable, specified in the expert literature, is the candidate's experience, acquired either through work in

their own respective field or through work in general (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011), and international work experience acquired through traineeships abroad (Flander, 2011). Other requirements are personal (Bracht *et al.*, 2006) and good references (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010).

The analysed research shows that requirements for young graduates include academic knowledge and a degree from a specific field and from a specific level; these are common factors with respect to employers' requirements regarding young graduates during the selection for their first (initial) employment.

#### *1.3.2. Competencies, which are given priority by employers when recruiting young graduates*

Research in the field of competencies, which are given priority by employers when recruiting young graduates show that the main competencies sought by employers include responsibility (Garam 2005; Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011) reliability and the ability to cooperate (Garam, 2005; Flander, 2011) as well as self-initiative (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011). Other competencies include problem solving (Garam, 2005), communication skills, adaptability and motivation (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010), ability to search for and process data, and the application of knowledge in new situations (Flander, 2011). Trooboff *et al.* (2008) found that employers seek young graduates who can prove that they are good at listening and observing, and know how to adapt to change, work well under pressure, analyse, assess and interpret, as well as successfully work outside of their comfort zone.

There is some overlapping of skills sought by European employers, in particular with respect to responsibility, reliability and self-initiative. However, there are major differences with American employers, which, as it is possible to observe, look for different skills. This might also be the result of the application of different research tools.

#### *1.3.3. Competencies, which the employers believe graduates acquire from international experience*

Garam (2005) finds that employers are more inclined to linking mobility benefits to acquisition of general competencies than to linking them with acquisition of competencies in the relevant professional field. Moreover, at least in Europe, employers' awareness and knowledge of ISM is rather questionable. When assessing the EU SOCRATES/ERASMUS mobility programme Bracht *et al.* (2006) found that only few employers are familiar with the programme – a mere 17%.

Study results show that in general employers believe that students' participation in ISM activities improves their foreign language skills (Garam, 2005; Bracht *et al.*, 2006; Trooboff *et al.*, 2008; Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011); they also believe ISM improves students' inter-cultural competencies, e.g. ability to collaborate with people from different cultures, knowledge of other cultures and other forms of work (Garam, 2005; Jonsson *et al.*, 2010; Flander, 2011).

Other competencies identified within these studies include the ability to apply knowledge in new situations (Garam, 2005); adaptability, self-initiative and motivation (Bracht *et al.*, 2006); communication skills, self-confidence and flexibility (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010), and establishing of contacts with foreign students and companies (Flander, 2011).

#### *1.3.4. Employers' attitude towards the study and traineeships abroad*

Research results regarding employers' attitude towards the study and traineeships abroad do not provide a clear image on the employers' opinion on ISM. Expert literature contains contradictory results. On one hand studies find that employers have a positive attitude towards ISM and give priority to candidates with an international experience, and believe that ISM plays an important role in the development of personal skills which are key for entering the labour market (Jonsson *et al.*, 2010), while other authors state that international experience is more appreciated if it lasts longer (Trooboff *et al.*, 2008) and in companies with international relations (Garam, 2005). Nevertheless, other studies show that employers do not think ISM is very important (Flander, 2011).

Research results confirm the findings of Garam (2005), who found that ISM is not important during the recruitment process for the majority of employers (nor do employers require it), and the findings of Flander (2011) who found that ISM is not a decisive element in the selection of candidates.

With respect to the relationship between the mobility programmes for study or traineeship, employer prioritise those which include experience-based learning (Trooboff *et al.*, 2008; Flander, 2011), however Garam (2005) finds that in the case of Finland employers prefer work experience within the country, rather than abroad.

In general employers value ISM, however, they do not consider it during the recruitment of selection of young graduates. Nevertheless it is possible to establish that employers prefer international experience which includes experience-based learning, i.e. traineeship or work in foreign companies. Work experience should enrich the person working in another country since it provides a direct contact with the culture of the respective country. Working abroad provides a possibility for a different kind of learning, not only in the professional field, but also in other fields, since it includes learning about habits and customs in a specific state which enables student to get a comprehensive insight into the host country. Such valuation is also linked to the culture of each state.

## 2. Methodology

Considering the existing international research in this field of research, we decided to analyse the relationship between international student mobility and employability of young graduates in São Paulo, Brazil, by applying the approach from the research conducted by Flander (2011), whose study follows the approach applied by Garam (2005).

Research methodology is based on the survey method, and uses the data collection instrument used in the EU. According to Gil (2009) the objective of research is to develop, explain and change the definitions and/or ideas, and to specify in more detail the problem and hypotheses for further studies. This approach is adopted when the selected research topic is not well-researched and it is consequently difficult to define a hypothesis. From all research types this is the type which required the least rigid planning. Thus, the survey method seemed the most appropriate since it places the current developments regarding employability of higher education graduates with international experience in the centre of the research (Freitas *et al.*, 2000). The research is also based on an in-depth interview with a former vice-chancellor for international relations at the University of São Paulo (USP), which was carried out after the acquisition of research results. He was in charge of the internationalisation process at the university between 2010 and 2013, which in turn led to the fact, that today the university is ranked top among Latin American universities, while also being ranked among the top 200 universities in the world.

This survey was structured in accordance with the objectives, specified in the research. The selection of questions was based on previous research conducted in Finland (Garam, 2005) and Slovenia (Flander, 2011). Flander, who was in charge of the above-specified research in Slovenia, submitted the questionnaire which was translated and adapted for use in Brazil in a way to preserve its main features in order to allow for the comparison of its results. The confirmation of questions in the questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 10 companies who participated at the career fair at the USP Faculty of the Economy, Administration and Accounting (FEA-USP). The companies received the questionnaire and had an opportunity to express their doubts regarding questions and terms used. We used this feedback to design the final version of the questionnaire (**Appendix I**). For the grading of answers we applied a 5-level Likert scale, where 5 was used to mark the highest significance and 1 was used to mark the lowest significance. Structural survey topics were:

- a) Voluntary consent
- b) Organisational characteristics: field, legal form, number of employees, international relations/networks
- c) Respondent's personal characteristics: position, international experience
- d) Requirements for young graduates
- e) Competencies considered when selecting young graduates
- f) Competencies, which the companies believe new graduates acquire due to international mobility
- g) Valuation of young graduates' international experience by employers

To collect data we first submitted an email presenting the research with an enclosed questionnaire for companies, to email addresses acquired from databases. This strategy failed; one of the reasons was that the databases were out-of-date and obsolete. We therefore changed the strategy and made a call to each company from the sample in order to identify responsible HR management person within the organisation. We then explained the context and objectives of the study to this person and tried to acquire their consent for participation – completion of the survey. In case of a positive response we requested this person to give us their email address, and we sent them the questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared in a Google Doc format, therefore employers could complete it online. In case of employers, who were not able to access the e-form (mostly companies with blocked access to specific types of files) we submitted the survey to the contact person's e-mail address.

The selection of companies was based on random sampling. We set up a database of 461 companies which recruit young graduates and maintain contact with FEA-USP due to traineeships and selection of young graduates (interns). A total of 87 companies were included in the final research sample, constituting an 18.9% response rate.

## 3. Results

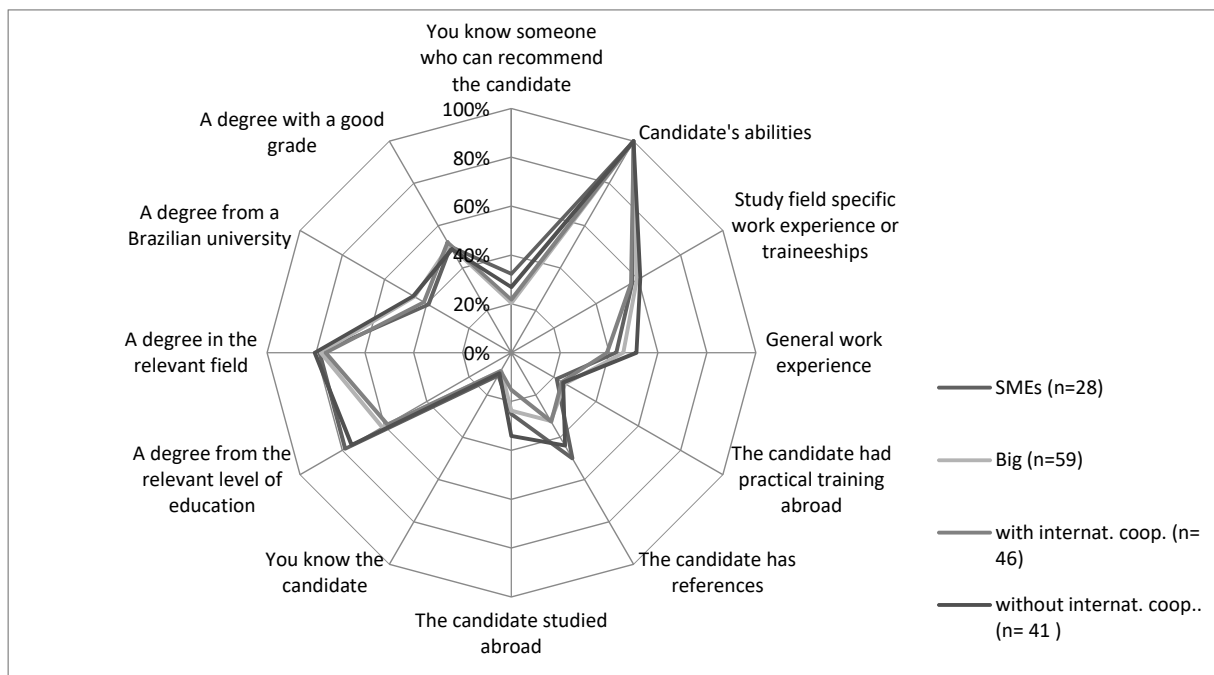
### 3.1. Structure of Brazilian employers

The Brazilian employers participating in the research come both from the private as well as public sector, and include small, medium and large companies from all sectors. 95.4% of all responses come from the private sector, with the main sectors being trade and services (39.1%) and manufacturing (18.4%). Most of them were large organisations (67.8%), followed by medium companies (23%). Of all employers 54% engage in international operations which comprise collaboration in international projects, representation of foreign companies and cooperation with foreign partners. Of all answers 86.4% were submitted by staff responsible for deciding on HR affairs.

### 3.2. Employers' requirements for young graduates

In Brazil the main criteria for selection of young graduates, which are considered by employers when recruiting young graduates and which they consider either very important or important, include: candidate's ability (100%), a degree from the relevant field (78.2%) and from the relevant level (66.7%), practical work experience in the relevant professional field (58.6%), degree with a good grade (50.6%) and general work experience (44.8%).

When comparing the scores by company size or their international cooperation, we did not observe any major differences in the companies' positions. The existing differences however show that small and medium companies believe it is important or very important that candidates have good references (50%), while large companies think it is most important that the candidate has a degree from a Brazilian university. If we compare companies with or without international relations we cannot observe any differences in their scores with respect to what is important or very important. However, difference were observed regarding the appreciation of whether the candidates studied abroad; the share of companies without international cooperation which appreciate this element (34.1%) is more than twice as high as the share of companies with international experience (15.2%) (**Figure 1**).



With respect to requirements linked to international mobility, these are the least sought when recruiting young graduates. Within the specified context the companies which value study abroad the most, comprise companies without international cooperation (34.1%). The value of foreign traineeship is the highest among large companies (25.4%) and companies without international cooperation (24.4%).

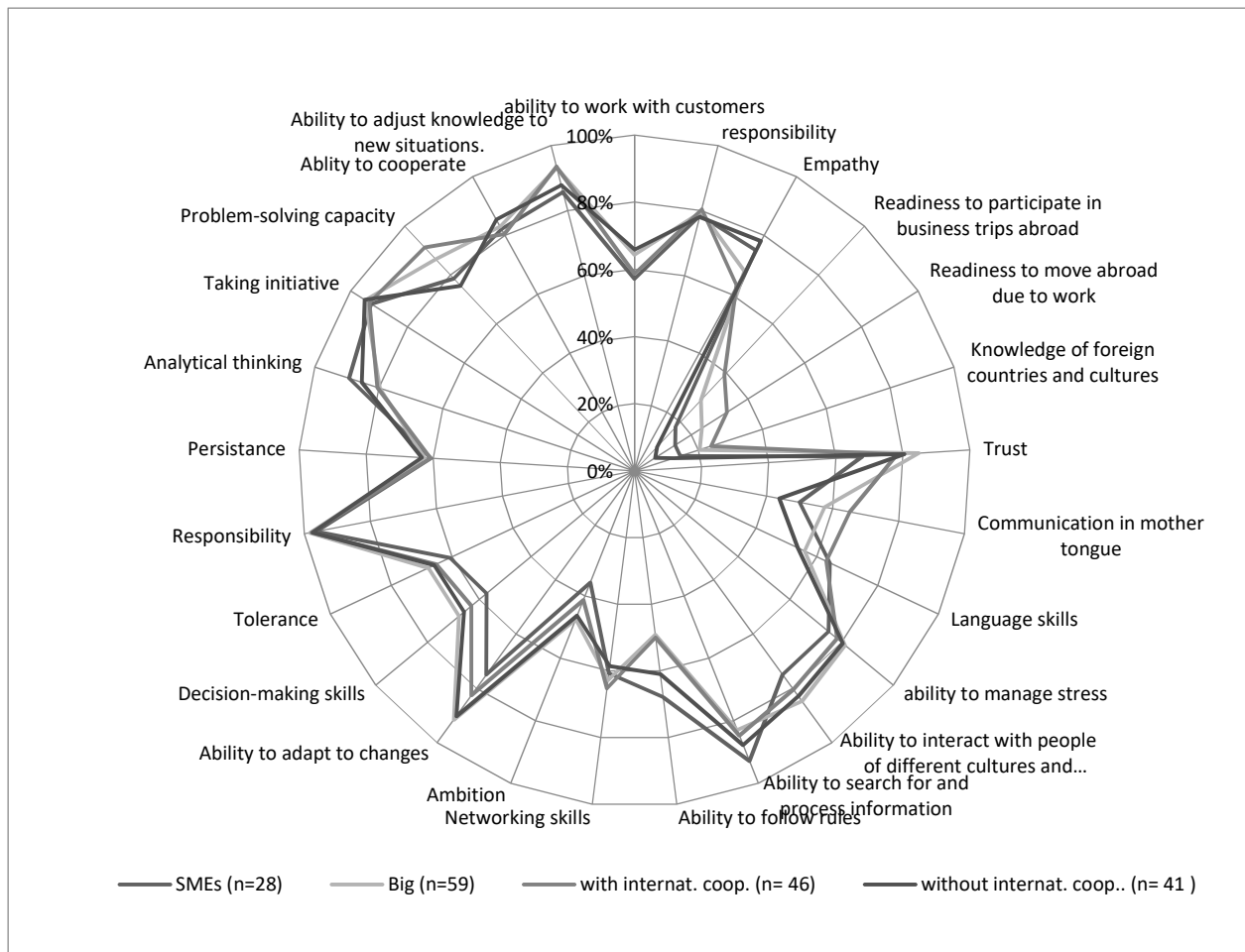
### 3.3. Skills, which the employers find the most important when recruiting young graduates

The main competencies which Brazilian organisations find the most important when recruiting young graduates include: responsibility (70.1%), self-initiative (70.1%), ability to search for and process information (58.6%), ability to apply knowledge in new situations (52.9%), confidence (52.9%), a sense of duty and responsibility (50.6%), as well as problem-solving capacity (47.1%).

When comparing priority competencies by the size of the company, we can find that – immediately after responsibility (96.4%) and self-initiative (92.9%) – small and medium companies seek mostly young graduates who demonstrate the ability to search for and process information (92.9%) and candidates with critical thinking capacity (89.3%). The most sought competencies after responsibility (98.3%) and self-initiative (94.9%) sought by large companies in graduates include the ability to adapt to different circumstances and change (91.5%) and the ability to adapt their knowledge to new situations (93.2%) (**Figure 2**).

With respect to desired competencies depending on the international relations of the company, the most desired competencies of companies with international request after responsibility (97.8%) and self-initiative (93.5%) give priority to the ability to adapt knowledge to new situation (93.5%) and problem-solving capacity (91.3%). With companies without international relations the most sought competencies after responsibility (97.6%) and self-initiative (95.1%) include the ability to adapt to new circumstances and change (90.2%).

**Figure 2. Knowledge and skills sought by employers by company size and international relations**



In the analysis of competencies sought by employees when recruiting young graduates of all 25 analysed competencies the following three international competencies received the lowest percentage of “important” or “very important” answers: knowledge of foreign countries and cultures; readiness to move abroad due to work, if required; and readiness to participate in business trips abroad. These skills were graded as important or very important only by a small group of companies regardless of their size or international cooperation (Table 1).

**Table 1. The least important competencies for Brazilian employers by size and international cooperation**

	SME (n = 28)	Large (n = 59)	With int. coop. (n = 46)	Without int. coop. (n = 41)
Knowledge of foreign countries and cultures	14.3%	20.3%	23.9%	12.20%
Availability to move abroad due to work, if required	14.3%	23.7%	32.6%	7.3%
Availability to participate in a business trip abroad	17.9%	28.8%	39.1%	9.8%

There is not a high demand for language skills among Brazilian companies, only 56% or 64% of employers (i.e. large companies or SMEs) find them important or very important; the results are similar for both companies with as well as companies without international cooperation.

### 3.4. Competencies which employers believe graduates acquire through international experience

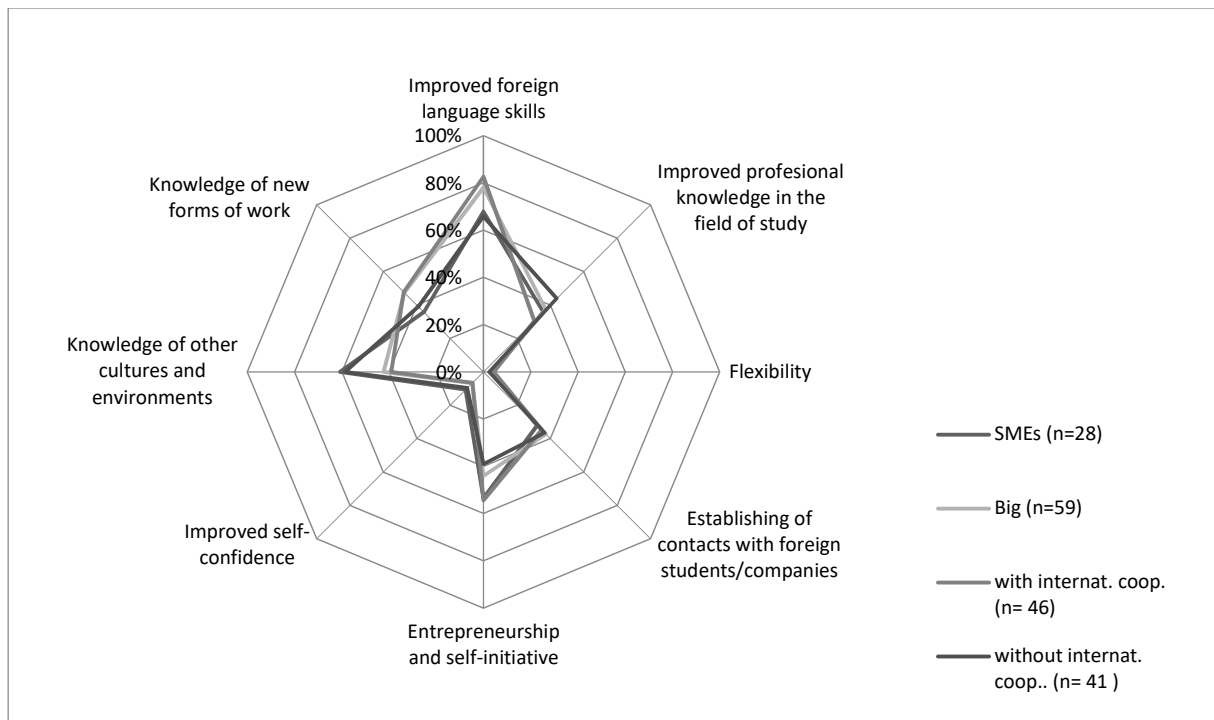
The key competencies which Brazilian employers believe are acquired by students due to international mobility



include language skills (74.7%), knowledge of other cultures and environments (48.3%) and entrepreneurship and self-initiative (47.1%).

The results of the analysis of large companies differ; after foreign language skills (78%) the second highest answer is the awareness of other forms of work (47.5%). According to responses of companies with international cooperation the second place was given to entrepreneurship and self-initiative (54.3%), after improved foreign language skills (82.6%), while awareness of new forms of work ranked third (47.8%). Companies without international cooperation believe the acquired skills include professional knowledge in the field of study (43.9%), after improved language skills (65.9%) and knowledge of other cultures and environments (58.5%) (**Figure 3**).

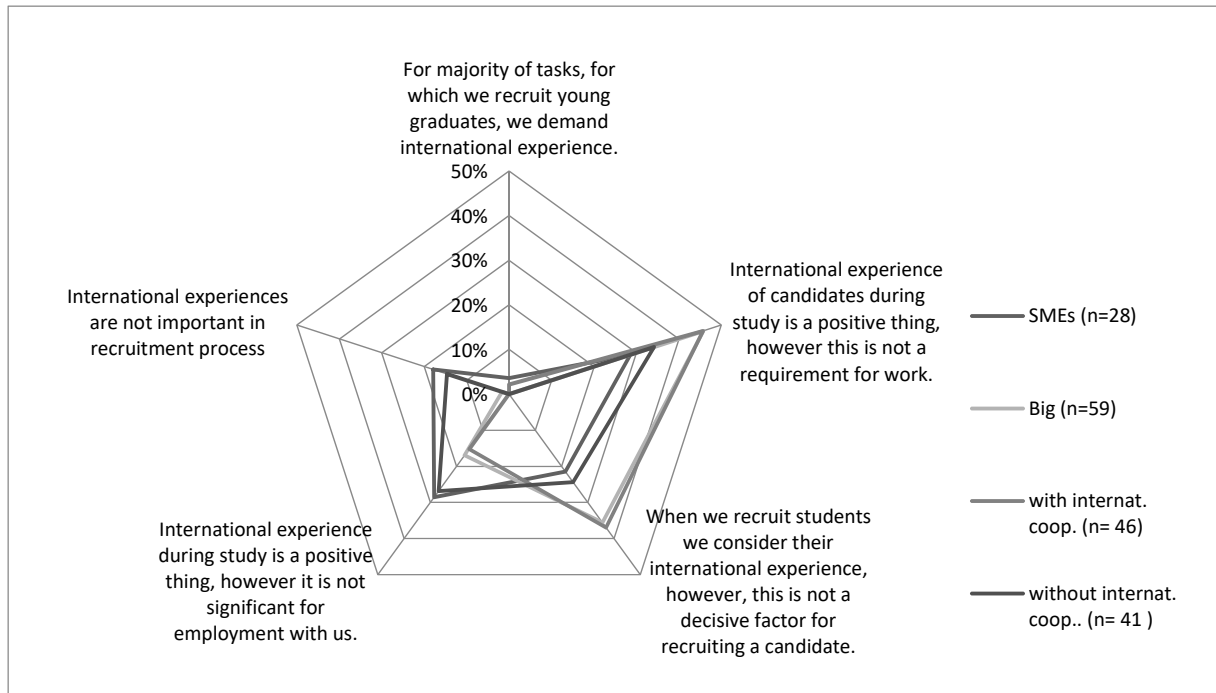
**Figure 3. Competencies which the employers believe graduates acquire through international experience (in Brazil and Slovenia)**



### 3.5. Attitude of employers towards study and traineeship abroad

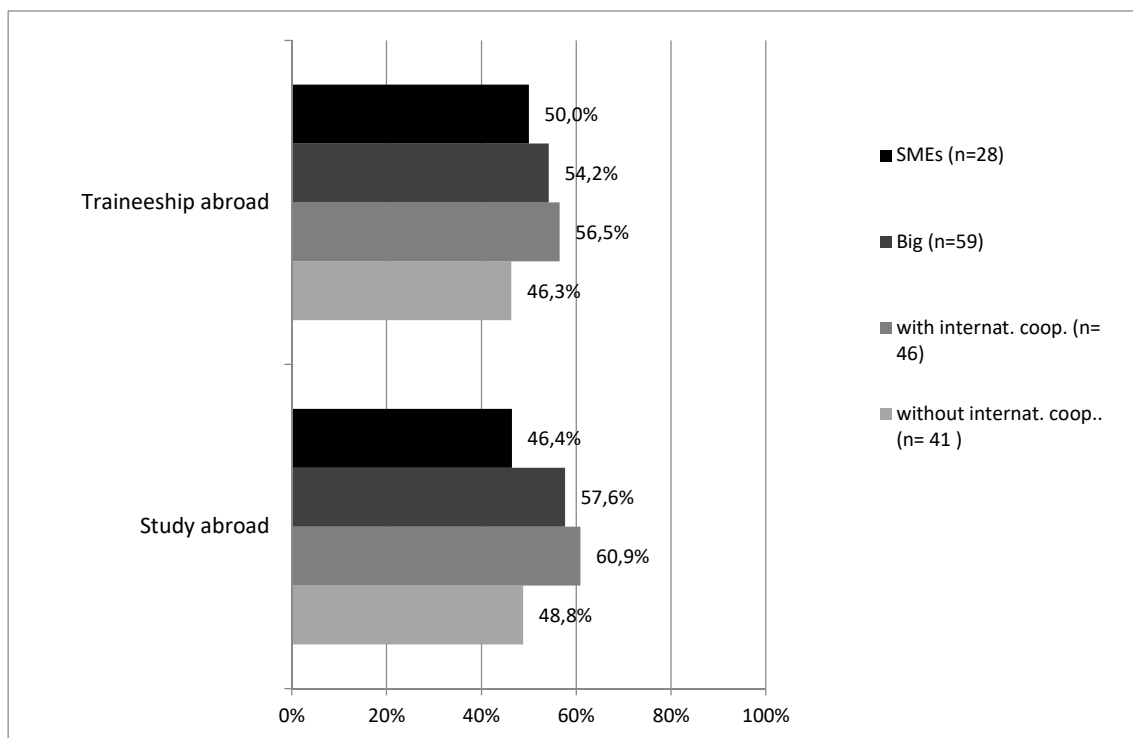
We analysed the attitude of employers towards graduates' international experience during their education by examining what employers think of ISM; if they find it important, required, if it constitutes a decisive factor during selection, or if it is required for the job. The majority of Brazilian employers believe international experience is a positive thing for the student. 61% believe this is a positive thing; however it is not a significant element during recruitment nor a requirement for employment. 31% of employers say that they consider students' international experience during recruitment, although it is not a decisive factor for recruitment of candidates (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 4. The employers' perception of international experience when recruiting young graduates by company size and international cooperation**



When we asked Brazilian employers what they think of study or traineeships abroad, which are a part of higher education study programmes, results showed that they value traineeships abroad higher (55.2%) than study abroad (51.7%). The results by the company size and international relations revealed that companies with international relations and large companies rank higher the international experience included in the study programme (Figure 5).

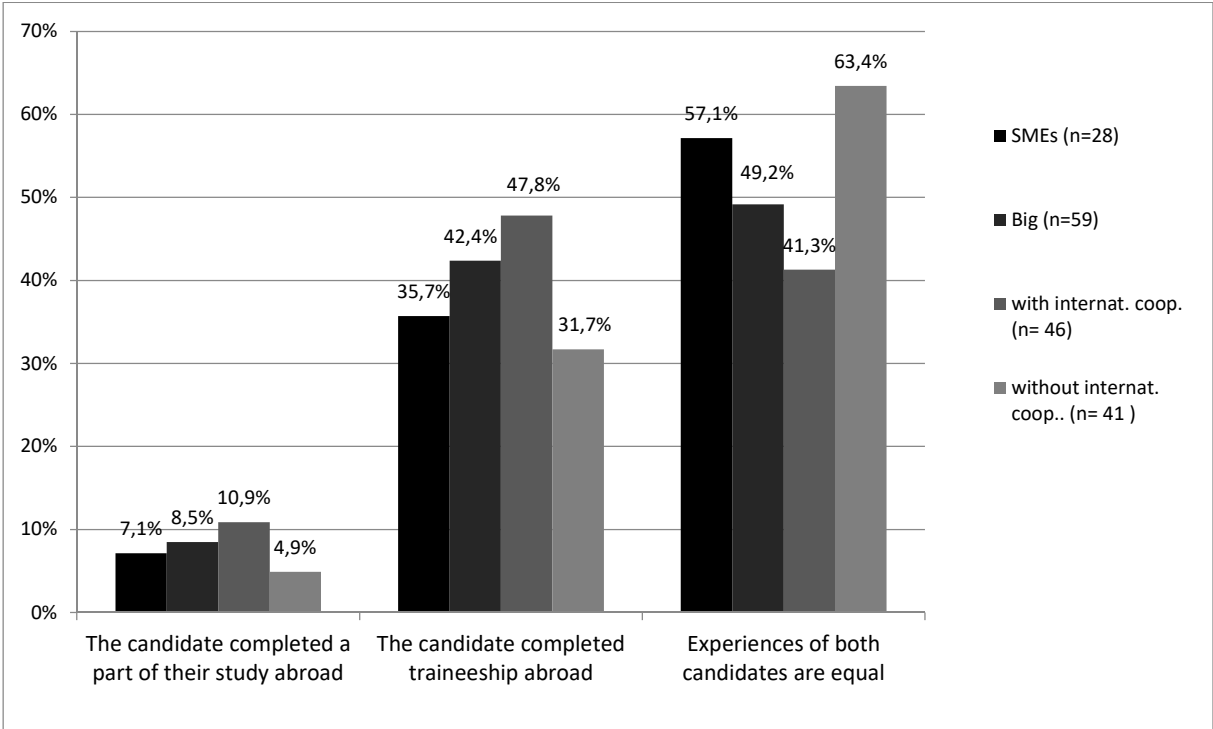
**Figure 5. Percentage of employers which believe education or traineeship abroad are important or very important, by company size and international cooperation**



We also graded the employers' attitude by presenting different situations which included the possibility to select

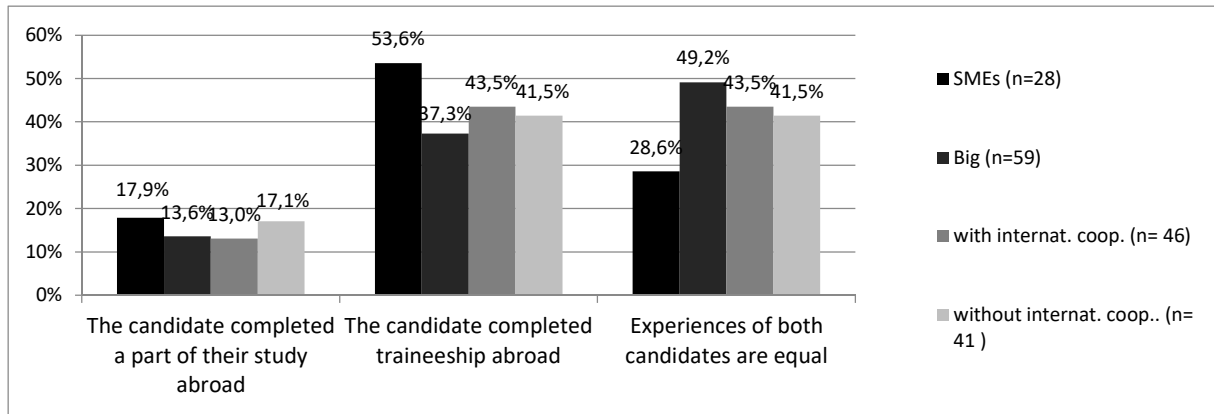
between two young graduates who apply for a job with their organisation. We requested them to select the option which would constitute an advantage for one of both candidates under the assumption that the other candidate would be the same in all other characteristics. When presenting candidates who differed only due to their international experience (one of the candidates completed a part of study at a foreign higher education institution, while the other completed traineeship in a foreign company) a total of 40.2% gave advantage to the candidate who attended the traineeship abroad, while 51.7% believed that both candidates were equally good, and only 8% stated that advantage would be given to the candidate who studied abroad. When comparing results by company size and international cooperation the results do not change: companies with international cooperation and large companies gave advantage to candidates with international practical experience (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Who has an advantage during recruitment? Comparison of study mobility with mobility for traineeship, by company size and international cooperation**



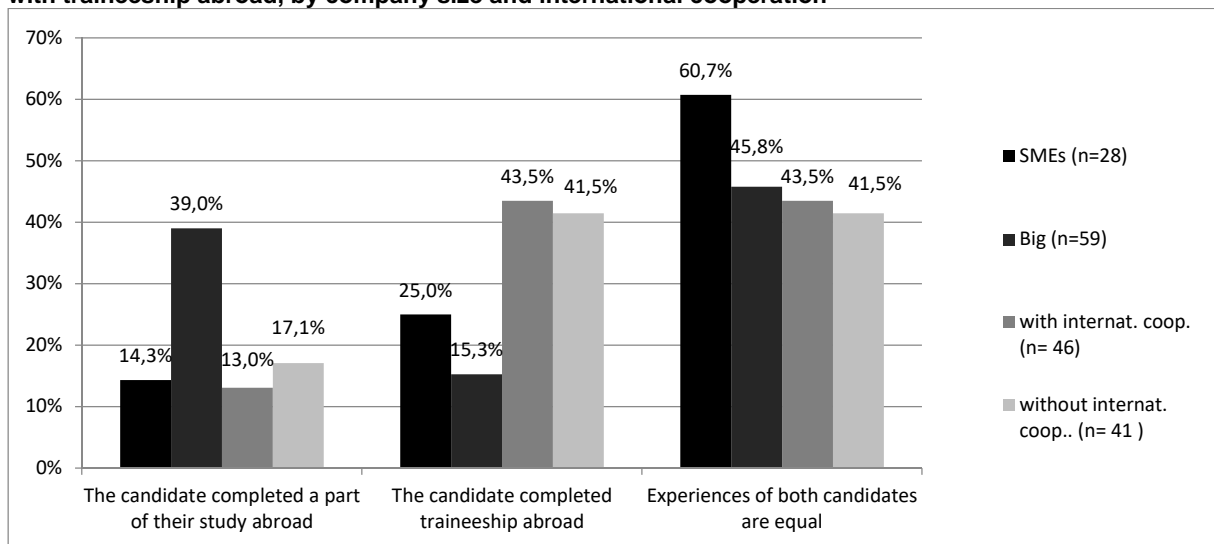
When comparing candidates who completed a part of study abroad with candidates without international experience but with rich work experience in Brazil, a total of 42.5% of all employers gave advantage to the candidate with work experience in their own country, an equal percentage of respondents answered that both candidates are equally good, while only 14.9% of respondents would give advantage to the candidate who studied abroad. When analysing the results by company size and international activity the results did not change significantly; the only deviation was observed only in the SME group, which is the group that most values work experience in the home country (53.6%) (Figure 7)

**Figure 7. Who has an advantage during recruitment? Comparison of study mobility with traineeship in the home country, by company size and international cooperation**



In the employers' assessment of both candidates of which one had a work experience in a foreign company during their study, while the other had no international experience, but rich work experience acquired in Brazil, a mere 31% of employers would give advantage to the candidate with international work experience compared to the candidate with work experience in their own country (18.4%). However, half of employers believed both candidates are equally good (50.6%). When analysing the answers by size of company, the large companies give priority to international work experience (39%), while international cooperation is not a variable which would significantly impact the companies' opinion (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Who is given advantage during recruitment? A comparison of traineeship in the home country with traineeship abroad, by company size and international cooperation**



### 3.6. USP students' experience with international mobility

The in-depth interview with dr. Adni highlighted the significance of the communication and promotion of knowledge acquired through international experience (Appendix 2). However, we need to do more, i.e. implement communication and promotional activities, specifically intended for employers. Another lessons which we learned from the USP experience with ISM is that more attention should be dedicated to international experience, which includes traineeship rather than study. USP made an important step in this direction since it introduced its own scholarships for internships in companies (Appendix 2). It is recommended that the competencies related to language skills are developed within domestic universities (i.e. another aspect addressed by the USP) so that the students can get the most from their international experience.

### 4. Conclusions

The studies regarding the relationship between international student mobility and their employability are rare, while most of them refer to the EU or USA. We could not find any studies on the topic in Latin America, not even Brazil, where the existing studies primarily focus on the students' opinion on their employability, while ignoring the employers' perspective. This is the first such study and we expect that it will encourage further research in Latin American countries.

The research helped gather data on the requirements which employers consider the most important in the

process of recruitment and selection of young graduates, as well as data on competencies and skills, which they hope young graduates master. Second, from the aspect of international student mobility the study defined the competencies which the employers believe are strengthened by students on account of international mobility during their studies, and how these skills meet companies' demand. Third, we also acquired information on the attitude of employers towards international mobility, and how it affects their decisions during recruitment and selection of young graduates who recently completed their higher education.

Employers' requirements during recruitment of young graduates are linked to academic competencies and experience from experience-based learning, regardless of students' international experience. In general the results in companies are similar, regardless of their site and level of internationalisation. Competencies sought by companies show the same action pattern; international competencies are not important in the recruitment process; in general different types of companies have the same attitude towards this topic.

Employers do not believe that ISM activities contribute to acquisition of competencies which they seek; this finding is consistent with the review of expert literature. The only skills which Brazilian employers believe are strengthened by ISM is "self-initiative", which happens to be also one of the competencies sought by employers when recruiting new graduates. Employers stated ISM is not a requirement for employment, nor a decisive factor, although people with international cooperation tend to hold a more positive view. In general companies place more significance on practical activities, rather than academic activities abroad.

The research led us to the conclusion that we must promote students' international activities so they will be more focused on traineeships, whereby the competencies acquired by students must be more effectively communicated to companies. With respect to competencies of students engaged in ISM we must link learning outcomes of students abroad with the general and specific competencies sought by employers. In this respect we must define competencies which are acquired or strengthened within the scope of international mobility within higher education institutions, since this would enable students that after their graduation they can more specifically present the competencies, developed during their international experience. Moreover, universities will be able to report stakeholders on these benefits, i.e. the strengthening or acquisition of competencies, so that they will be considered when deciding on the recruitment of new graduates.

It is important to highlight that the findings of this study are linked to the specific environment of the São Paulo federal state. Brazilian economy is oriented within, it has a big and growing domestic market, which, besides the lack of government policy for the promotion of internationalisation of companies, can be a significant factor due to which companies do not consider international companies when selecting young graduates. It is important to mention that the study was conducted at the Faculty of Economics and Administration at the University of São Paulo, so the results can be slightly biased, since this is an elite university, although the study aimed to analyse the recruitment of higher education institutions' graduates regardless of their university. The main methodological deficiencies of the research are the application of random sampling and sample size. The results reflect primarily the positions of large companies, there are very few represented small and medium-sized companies. All of them come from São Paulo, the federal state with the best socio-economic indicators in Brazil, so it can be only a partial reflection of the reality of this big country.

From the aspect of IMS there are the following deficiencies: first, the analysis of ISM was conducted without consideration of the time factor – we analysed the results of both short term and long term ISM together; the separation of ISM by length might have led to different results. Second, we did not separately address the geographic location of the mobility; this is another factor which could impact employers' opinion. Third, the research did not evaluate the level of employers' knowledge about ISM; it was based on the assumption that the companies are familiar with this activity implemented by higher education institution, although we are aware that the European research found that the level of employers' knowledge about ISM is rather low.

We recommend that further studies would include research in other Latin American countries as well as other Brazilian federal states in order to gather more comparable results. Moreover, we further recommend the implementation of a qualitative study which would enable an in-depth research of the needs of companies and future forecasts related to the training of graduates and skills, which should be developed due to international mobility. We need studies which include control groups to compare the results of employability of mobile students compared to non-mobile students, which would be based on comparison of students with the same or similar characteristics to allow for their comparison, and students with similar jobs in similar company within the same sector.

## **Appendix 1**

### *Questionnaire for employers*

*Regarding the recruitment of young people who recently completed higher education and gained a bachelor's or master's degree*

Dear Sir or Madam

In order to collect the data for the study of employability of young university graduates we kindly request that you use this questionnaire to report information on your experience in the process of recruitment and selection of candidates.

The questionnaire is a part of my postdoctoral study at the Faculty of Economics, Business Administration and Accounting (FEA) of the University of São Paulo, Brazil (USP).

All submitted information will be processed in accordance with data protection rules. It will be analysed aggregately and anonymously. At the same time I will try to provide for publication of the research results to the maximum possible extent.

If you require additional information or if you have any questions in connection with the survey please contact me by email at: valeska.geldres@usp.br or by phone at 55-11-995325625.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Valeska Geldres W., PhD, researcher

I agree that the submitted information can be used in the research

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#### I. Organisation

1. Name of the person completing the questionnaire
2. Email of the person completing the questionnaire
3. Name of organisation
4. What is the main field/sector of your organisation's activities? Please select only one option (agriculture and forestry, fishing, mining; processing; power supply; gas and water; construction, trade and services, hotels and catering, transport, warehousing and communication; financial mediation; real estate, lease of business premises; public administration; education; health and wellness; other community, social or personal services)
5. What is the legal status of your company? Public limited company; Limited liability company; Other (Please use X to mark the relevant option which suits your organisation. If you select "Other", please specify.)
6. Is your organisation a public or a private organisation? Please select one option: Public; Private.
7. How many employees does your organisation have in Brazil?
8. Position of the person completing the questionnaire (e.g. head of HR department)

#### II. International relations/networks

9. Does the work of your organisation include cooperation with other countries? Yes; No.
10. If yes, how? (export / foreign sales; import; subsidiary of a foreign company; collaboration with foreign partners; participation in international projects; other)
11. Is cooperation with other countries a part of employees' work assignments? Yes; Occasionally; No.
12. Did you ever work or study abroad? Yes; No.

#### III. The process of recruitment of young higher education graduates

13. How important do you consider the following characteristics linked to knowledge and experience during the recruitment of young people who have just completed their higher education? 5-level scale where 1 means: not important and 5 means: very important; see, requirements in the spreadsheet)

14. How important do you consider the following competencies of young graduates? 5-level scale where 1 means: not important and 5 means: very important; see, requirements in the spreadsheet)
15. Which of the following statements best describes your attitude towards international graduates' experience during their education? Please select one of the following options.
- During recruitment we do not consider it important if students have international experience.
  - International experience during study is a positive thing, however, it is not important for employment with our company.
  - When we recruit students, we consider their international experience, however, it is not a decisive factor in the recruitment of candidates
  - International experience of candidates during study is a positive thing, however, it is not a requirement for employment.
  - We demand international experience for the majority of positions and tasks delegated to recruited young graduates.
16. What do you think about the study or traineeship abroad, as a part of the study programme at a higher education institution? 5-level scale where 1 means: not important, and 5 means: very important; Study abroad, traineeship abroad.

Here are a couple of situations including two young graduates applying for a job with your organisation. Please select your preferred option given that all other characteristics of both candidates are the same.

17. Which candidate would be given priority? Please select one option only.
- The candidate who spent more time studying abroad (at a higher education institution).
  - The candidate who spent more time on a traineeship abroad (at a company).
  - Both candidates are equally good.
18. Which candidate would be given priority? Please select one option only.
- The candidate, who is a student and who completed a part of their study abroad.
  - The candidate without international experience, but rich work experience in Brazil.
  - Both candidates are equally good.
19. Which candidate would be given priority? Please select one option only.
- The candidate who worked with a foreign company during their study.
  - The candidate without international experience, but rich work experience in Brazil.
  - Both candidates are equally good.
20. Which candidate would be given priority? Please select one option only
- The candidate, who is a student and who completed a part of their study abroad.
  - The candidate without international experience, who graduated with merits from a Brazilian higher education institution.
  - Both candidates are equally good.
21. Which candidate would be given priority? Please select one option only
- The candidate who graduates in Brazil.
  - The candidate who graduated abroad.
  - Both candidates are equally good.
22. Please select three items which you believe constitute the most important knowledge and experience acquired by students due to study or traineeship abroad: Improvement of foreign language skills; Flexibility; Increased self-esteem; Entrepreneurship and self-initiative; Awareness of other cultures and environments; Introduction to new forms of work; Improving professional knowledge and experience in the field of study; Establishing of contacts with foreign students/companies.

## Appendix 2

### Interview (17 January 2014) with Adnei Melges de Andrade, Vice-chancellor for international relations at the University of São Paulo in Brazil (2010-2013)

1. *One of the research results indicates that when selecting young graduates employers give priority to those with international traineeship experience than those with mere study mobility experience. Did USP adopt any criteria regarding the priority treatment of specific international student mobility for traineeship or study? Do simply the students choose what they intend to do abroad?*

The decision, whether to support study mobility or mobility for traineeship at the USP, depends mainly on the student's study programme. In engineering, administration or economics one or the other option are always available. The "Duplo diploma" programmes which last two years always include traineeship. A general policy exists. When USP created the programme for awarding 1,100 scholarship for the international mobility of students it separated 150 scholarships for international traineeship, and for activities linked to entrepreneurship which can be carried out by universities, innovation institutes, government bodies or companies. The programme was established in 2011 and has been ongoing for two years, while its annual budget amounts to USD 19 m.

2. *The main requirements set by both Brazilian and European companies for young graduates, when they are applying for a job, include work experience in their field of study or general work-experience. Overall, are the criteria related to work experience in the field of study or general work experience a part of the international mobility policy at the USP?*

Professional training (engineering, economics, administration, medicine, stomatology, communication science) at the USP promotes both domestic and international traineeships named internships (work placements) The majority of all USP schools (a total of 42) encourages students to complete traineeship; the specifics of such traineeships depend on the relevant school.

3. *One of conclusions of our research is that students do not know how to effectively describe knowledge acquired from international experience, in the sense of general competencies strengthened by such experience, e.g. responsibility, reliability, self-initiative, ability to search for and process information and the ability to apply knowledge in new situations. Did USP adopt any measures for the support and learning of students how to effectively describe knowledge acquired due to their international experience?*

USP students are capable of describing their knowledge to potential employers. The best and most motivated students are selected. At the USP campus such experience has been ongoing for over ten years. Students of engineering, physics and mathematics, as well as others return from exchange highly motivated and the independently propose activities in their respective organisations, with the aim to transfer the acquired knowledge to their peers. This way they learn how to transfer knowledge acquired through their international experience.

4. *Results show that both Brazilian as well as European employers believe that the main competencies acquired by students through mobility are linked to international competencies (e.g. improvement of foreign language skills and acquisition of knowledge of other cultures and countries). Those of us, who experienced international mobility and those active in this field, know that the students also acquire skills, sought by employers, i.e. responsibility, reliability, self-initiative, ability to search for and process information, and the ability to apply new knowledge in new situations. Does USP carry out any activities to improve the general skills acquired or strengthened by students due to their international experience?*

Students learn and significantly improve the target country language and English language skills. At the same time they get to know the culture of the target country, especially in longer programmes, whereby we believe that one semester is good, two are better and four semesters are the best from the aspect of benefits of the international experience, since this way the students can acquire two academic titles (degrees). E.g. the students can observe the differences in consumer habits between both countries, which can be very useful in international business sectors in our country, for both working in Brazil as well as working as the contact person for the country they visited. Students become aware that they are different and that they were entitled to a privilege.

5. *Does USP enable students, who return from an international experience, to learn how to transfer and communicate the skills acquired through international experience to potential employers?*

USP promotes and demands that students who receive entrepreneurial scholarships (for entrepreneurship) hold seminars at the USP Innovation Agency upon their return. This experience helps students to learn how to communicate their knowledge.

6. *Does USP implement any activities with stakeholders, which could help with the presentation of results which the students acquired through international mobility activities?*



The BRAFITEC and BRAFAGRI programmes of the Brazilian government include ten universities. Programme coordinators from different Brazilian and French universities meet on an annual basis to share their results of their mobility experience. At these meetings participants discuss how to improve the collaboration of students and teachers with companies during traineeships by exchanging relevant information. Another innovation in Brazil is the “Science without Borders” government programme with the aim to promote international mobility of postgraduate students.

7. *Do you have any recommendations how to improve international mobility of undergraduate students in Brazil?*

Today we must encourage long-term mobility, however, with better linguistic preparation. In Brazil the state established the “Science without borders” programme, which led to the establishment of “English without Borders” programme, while both are implemented in parallel. However, language must be the top priority, since scholarships do not suffice for the success of mobility; students must know the language of the target country in order to fully exploit all learning opportunities at the academic, professional and social level. E.g. multi-national companies are interested in graduates with an international experience in the company's home country, since they appreciate knowledge of cultural aspects, which the students get to know through such experience.

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