Intercultural competence: European Erasmus mobilities and their afterlife among Romanian student beneficiaries.

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Our paper addresses conference topic 3 (“What is done with culture after studying abroad?”) and it grows out of previous research on Erasmus student mobilities, assessed in terms both of their contribution to the formal and informal Europeanization of Romanian higher education (Salajan & Chiper, 2013) as well as of the values and benefits of such mobilities for their Romanian student beneficiaries (Salajan & Chiper, 2012). Our research shows that the latter perceived Erasmus mobilities as life-changing and enriching experiences of cultural learning.

The objective of the current study is to analyze Erasmus student mobility beneficiaries’ perception of how their intercultural competence is capitalized on in the classroom, in the sending institution in general and/or in the workplace, upon their return to Romania. Particular questions that we address are: to what extent are students provided with a context in which their intercultural knowledge and competence can be fructified? How do teachers of foreign languages or intercultural communication acknowledge mobility beneficiaries’ intercultural knowledge and competence? How do mobility beneficiaries contribute to the process of intercultural learning among their Romanian peers and to the enculturation of incoming Erasmus students?

Our methodology is a combination of classroom and digital ethnography, performed via participant observation, in-depth interviews and surveys, conducted over a period of three months. Data have been collected from Romanian universities situated in three different geographical areas (Iasi, in the North East; Bucharest, in the South; and Timisoara, in the West). We expect to identify examples of good practices in the use of students’ intercultural knowledge and competence, as well as to provide suggestions as to how mobility beneficiaries could be better enlisted in the process of intercultural learning in the sending institutions.

References
