Book Reviews

Maiworm (Friedhelm), Steube (Wolfgang), Teichler (Ulrich) *Learning in Europe. The ERASMUS Experience. A Survey of the 1988-89 ERASMUS Students*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 1991, 192 pp. (ERASMUS Monograph No. 14). ISBN 1-85302-527-5

The ERASMUS programme is known well by all Europeans. While the Community's foreign policy arouses heated debates – with the fishermen battling over their cod and sardines – students profit, without problems, from polite exchanges and education organized by academic staff who act as mediators in their work and who are, in their turn, dedicated to the pursuit of a European educational experience according to the Brussels formula.

One has known for some years the spectrum of reactions of academic staff to the possibilities and requirements of the ERASMUS programme. It moves from work carried out with idealistic conviction, with competition between institutions aimed at ensuring visible signs of academic Europeanism, to the point of fatigue and indifference – in a university *Reigen*, in which a number of partners define the institution's status. Thanks to the work of researchers at the University of Kassel, it is now possible to have a global view on the prospects of more than three thousand students who have, during 1988–89, participated in the ERASMUS programme. According to the results of a questionnaire submitted to participants during their academic period abroad, their experiences are quantified and clarified in several sectors. These include the academic and administrative support given by the host institutions, the differences between the style and contents of the education in the host institution, financial and residential aspects, the recognition of the studies by the sending institution, and the linguistic progress made by the students during their stay. A final section of the questionnaire allows the participants to give a general evaluation of the programme.

It is certainly essential that all evaluation of the ERASMUS programme takes into consideration the reactions of the participants. The Task Force and the ERASMUS Bureau have succeeded in launching this programme with a well-qualified administration keenly aware of the needs of the university world. A management that would only rely on technical efficiency would lose its goal. As part of a continuous evaluation, this questionnaire is of great value but aside from the rest of the evaluation it lacks a certain concrete aspect. Since there are many points on which the participants' evaluation is limited to individual viewpoints, these statistics need to be completed to be adequately interpreted. The most subjective are the verdicts given by the students on their academic progress or on the development of their linguistic abilities. (One might question if the English language – still favoured by the authors, who, despite a few darker regions in the veritable forest of statistics, show themselves to be masters – has not contributed, because of its uncontrolled expansion, to the success of the programme, viz. the situation of 'minority' languages). A statistical elaboration of the determinants of this progress (p. 176) would also be more convincing if the teachers had the occasion to judge the progress of their students. But such a survey goes beyond the scope of the study.

The function of this book for the directors of ERASMUS will certainly be to make them sensitive to these problems. Practical solutions are not offered. A teacher in Ireland (or, indeed, Portugal or Greece) who would question why German students have the impression that they have progressed less rapidly during their stay in their country (p. 140) (and would recollect the protestations of the German students against the intensity of the studies in the host institutions), would only find a speculative response – whether it be the Guinness (which could be considered part of the 'cultural impact', p. 144 f.), simple accommodation (p. 101), or even the willingness of the teachers to participate in extra-curricular discussions (p. 78). Another example is the Italian teacher, confronted by a hundred thousand students in his institution, asking himself how to react faced with the opinion

expressed by students coming from other universities that contact with the Italian teachers is never as strong as at home (p. 82).

To sum up, the statistics give useful insights, but do not lead either to concrete conclusions or a new orientation for ERASMUS policy. It is possible to argue, for example, from the financial point of view, against the authors' conclusions. The conclusion according to which the students do not come from higher socio-economic groups (p. 34), or that the scholarships correspond to general needs (p. 126), has become suspect. The inequalities between students from Member States for whom an ERASMUS grant covers the additional costs of study abroad (p. 126) and others for whom the grant is far from being sufficient, and the under-financing of the programme since 1988–89; the devaluation of various currencies; and the effects of population movements on the availability of accommodation – all this has led to an aggravation of the situation since these replies were collated. This volume will not be of major importance without objective statistics and comparative study with those of the coming years. But it does serve as data for all evaluation, and one should respect, and be grateful for, its conclusion where it is mentioned that the programme obtained a remarkable success, had insured a significant increase in value, and positively changed for the better the university landscape of Europe.

Translated from French

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