

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

**AN ANALYSIS OF EXCHANGE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION
FACTORS FOR CHOOSING LJUBLJANA AS A STUDY
DESTINATION**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMOs – Destination Marketing Organizations
ESN – Erasmus Student Network
EU – The European Union
eWOM – electronic Word of Mouth
HEIs – Higher Education Institutions
ISM – International Student Mobility
NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations

PCD – Perceived Cultural Distance
SAPs – Study Abroad Programmes
TDI – Travel Destination Image
UL – The University of Ljubljana

INTRODUCTION

Since 1975, international student mobility has been increasing rapidly. In 1987, the European Commission established the Erasmus+ programme to encourage study abroad among European countries and students (Kritz, 2016). The main economic aim of promoting student mobility is to develop a flexible labour market with individuals that will be capable of working and communicating across borders. It stimulates young people to share European values by enriching their home countries and local communities with different perspectives and diverse heritage since Europe as a study destination is still a place of diverse cultures and different education systems (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019). In 1999, Slovenia also joined the Erasmus+ programme and since then the number of incoming students has been increasing (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011).

A student's decision to study abroad is time-consuming, with high personal risk, and considers a wide range of possibilities and alternatives. The decision involves three stages: a student's decision to study internationally, the choice of a country, the choice of an institution (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010). Furthermore, a student's decision to study abroad is influenced by the push and pull motivation factors (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016). On the one hand, push factors make a student decide to study abroad, while on the other hand, pull factors refer to the host country characteristics that make it more attractive than other potential destinations (González, Mesanza & Mariel, 2011, pp. 418–419). Jupiter et al. (2017) identified the following major factors that are associated with the student's decision to study abroad: lack of information, access to the higher education institution, career prospect, school funding issues, culture, environment, family and friends' influence, immigration prospect, university facilities, international experience, perceptions of the quality of higher education systems abroad, marketing and promotion initiative, quality of life, security of the country, educational background, staff recognition, opportunity to learn English as a non-native language, geographical distance of the host country, reputation quality of the institution in the host country, courses offered, university environment, and visa application for non-EU students. Therefore, for any learning institution, it is important to know how to tend to the international student population and their experiences. In addition, as international students bring diverse backgrounds and academic contexts from their home universities, it is important to recognise the differences (Bista, 2019).

Furthermore, students' motivation factors to study abroad are similar to tourists' motivation factors, which include opportunities to travel, new experiences, and learning about different cultures and languages (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Studying abroad is comparable to a tourist experience, while also one of the fastest-growing segments of study abroad. With travelling, students gain functional knowledge, personal growth, and intercultural awareness (Stone & Petrick, 2013). A good educational tourism image and attractive surroundings of a host country will bring these students back as tourists and they will spread the favourable word of mouth about the host country to future tourists (Lam & Ariffin, 2019). Education travel

is becoming a stable ongoing industry. For that reason, it is relevant to examine the motive that drives students to study abroad (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015).

Exchange students in Ljubljana may be more stimulated by the tourism attractiveness of Slovenia rather than the benefits of the university (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011). What makes Ljubljana and Slovenia attractive? Slovenia and Ljubljana have become popular tourist destinations, especially for European markets. Tourists can enjoy tourism linked to the Alps and winter sports, urban tourism, coastal tourism, and health resorts. Additionally, Ljubljana is located at the crossroads of Central and Southeastern Europe, its geographical location within Slovenia and transport connections make it well connected to other cities of the neighbouring countries (Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017).

The main purpose of this master's thesis is to analyse exchange students' motivation factors when choosing Ljubljana as their study abroad destination, conduct a literature review of the main factors that students usually take into consideration when choosing their study abroad destination, and apply these factors to the case of Ljubljana. Furthermore, the master's thesis analyses whether students are more attracted to study in Ljubljana based on the image of the University of Ljubljana or the image of the destination itself.

The main research goals of the master's thesis are:

- examining the scientific literature based on destination choice, study abroad, and mobility programmes,
- using a quantitative methodology and creating a questionnaire for the exchange students who studied in Ljubljana,
- Accepting or rejecting the formulated hypotheses by conducting empirical research with a sample size of at least a hundred exchange students.

The main hypotheses will be formulated and tested based on the following research questions:

- Do exchange students choose Ljubljana as a study abroad destination because they find it attractive as a tourist destination or is their decision based on the study programmes and courses that are offered to the exchange students?
- Where do students get the most information related to the study exchange in Ljubljana?
- What are the main factors that students find attractive and important about Ljubljana as a tourist destination?
- Were students satisfied with their decision of choosing Ljubljana as their study abroad destination?

This master's thesis consists of the theoretical and the empirical part and is divided into six main chapters. The first chapter starts with the introduction of mobility programmes and explains the beginnings of student mobility, introduces the Erasmus+ programme and its advantages. Furthermore, the Erasmus+ programme in the European Union, and more

specifically in Slovenia, is explained, while also discussing the most popular countries among students to be chosen as a study destination. The second chapter continues with motivation factors that influence students to study abroad. These factors are divided into push factors, when a student decides to study abroad, and pull factors when a student decides on a destination based on its characteristics. Chapter three is dedicated to the links between studying abroad and tourism and explains the process model of studying abroad, tourist motivations, benefits, and challenges of studying abroad that influence students as well as travellers. The fourth chapter explains the influences on the study destination choice. The destination choice can be influenced by the image of a country, the image of a city, or the image of an institution, taking into consideration its programmes, courses, teaching language, and international environment. Additionally, the choice of the study destination can also be influenced by lower cost of living, location, and geographical proximity from the home country, cultural distance, past travel experiences, and recommendations of family, friends, and social media. The fifth chapter presents Slovenia and Ljubljana as travel destinations, their main travel products, and their attributes. Moreover, it describes the main motives that drive tourists to visit Ljubljana. The sixth chapter is dedicated to empirical research and examines the factors that motivate exchange students to choose Ljubljana as their study abroad destination. To examine these factors, a questionnaire that was sent to the exchange students who studied in Ljubljana was created. In the seventh chapter, the main findings based on the obtained results are presented while also the limitations of the research and the potential future research are explained. The thesis ends with a conclusion in English and Slovene.

1 MOBILITY PROGRAMMES

Since 1975, international student mobility has increased rapidly and is expected to continue doing so in the future. Due to insufficient higher education, especially at the graduate level, and lack of training opportunities at home, in the 1960s and 1970s, bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies, private foundations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) invested in scholarship programmes that enable students to get international study experience (Kritz, 2016, p. 99). Erasmus Mundus Programme, Tempus Programme, and bilateral exchange agreements help foster the international flow of students between the European Union (EU) and other geographical areas. As universities accept limited numbers of students and students have to compete with each other to be accepted to their desired university, universities have to compete with each other for the reputation to attract more students (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 192). Moreover, universities in smaller countries have more difficulties developing comprehensive study programmes in wide-range specialised fields and therefore attracting more international students (Kritz, 2016, p. 103).

1.1 Study abroad programmes (SAP)

Study abroad programmes (SAP) are attractive from financial and educational perspectives. Financially, international students usually stay longer and spend more money in hosting countries than tourists spend. Educationally, SAPs provide sociocultural and educational experiences for both, international and local students (Shin, Noh & Lee, 2018, p. 254).

Studying abroad contributes to the development of global citizens and students' understanding and knowledge of foreign cultures and languages, tolerance, flexibility, open-mindedness, and interpersonal soft skills. It also contributes to the rise of national economic growth, productivity, and the internationalisation of democratic values. When students return from their study abroad, they contribute to the faster creation of new knowledge and help other people acquire skills without any direct costs (Perna, Orosz, Jumakulov, Kishkentayeva & Ashirbekov, 2015, p. 174).

Behnke, Seo and Miller (2014) categorised SAPs, in terms of educational and professional experience, into educational travel/study tours, summer programmes, semesters abroad, internships, and international exchange programmes. Additionally, based on the purpose and duration of the study programme, Cardon, Marshall, and Poddar (2011) categorized three types of SAPs: study tours, credit-seeking study abroad, and degree-seeking study abroad.

While international students want to enrol in credit-seeking SAPs, the main selection criteria are education, facilitating factors, and tourism. The educational factors that influence the students' decisions are academic design, course content, and quality, while also the image and reputation of the institution. Furthermore, language barriers and communication are considered the main facilitating condition for credit-seeking SAPs. Study abroad is also a form of tourism as many SAPs include tourism activities focused on exposure to the host country's culture and intercultural experiences. The tourism factors include tourism activities, tourist attractions at the destination, quality, and accessibility of accommodation from the host institutions. Tourists and international students are highly sensitive to safety at a given destination and students perceive lower risk from the Erasmus+ programmes based in well-known locations (Shin, Noh & Lee, 2018, pp. 257–258).

1.2 Erasmus+ programme

In 1987, the European Union launched the Erasmus+ programme (European Region Action Scheme of the Mobility of University Students) to support actions in the field of education, training, youth, and sports (European Council, 2017).

The programme consists of three key actions (European Council, 2017):

- supporting education and long-lasting benefits to the participants,

- encouraging the participating countries to work together and develop best practices and innovative approaches in the field of education,
- providing grants for a wide variety of actions in the exchange of knowledge, training, and youth.

The programme is associated with a strong brand name that is widely recognized; all of its actions and activities have to use the Erasmus+ brand name (European Commission, 2020a):

- Erasmus+ Comenius: a programme related to the field of pre-university education;
- Erasmus+ Erasmus: related to the field of higher education and targeting Programme countries;
- Erasmus+ Erasmus Mundus: related to the Erasmus Mundus joint master degrees;
- Erasmus+ Leonardo da Vinci: a programme related to the field of vocational education and training;
- Erasmus+ Youth in Action: related to the field of youth non-formal and informal learning;
- Erasmus+ Jean Monnet: a programme associated with the field of European Union studies;
- Erasmus+ Sport: a programme related to the field of sport.

There are 33 countries taking part in the Erasmus+ programme, including the EU-28 countries, plus Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, North Macedonia, and Turkey (European Commission, 2020a).

However, to study abroad with the Erasmus+ programme, students and institutions must fulfil the following conditions (European Commission, n.d.b):

- the students must be registered in a higher education programme that leads to a degree or tertiary-level qualification,
- the students in the first cycle must be at least in the second year of their studies,
- the study abroad period must be relevant to the student's degree,
- an inter-institutional agreement between the home and receiving institutions must exist.

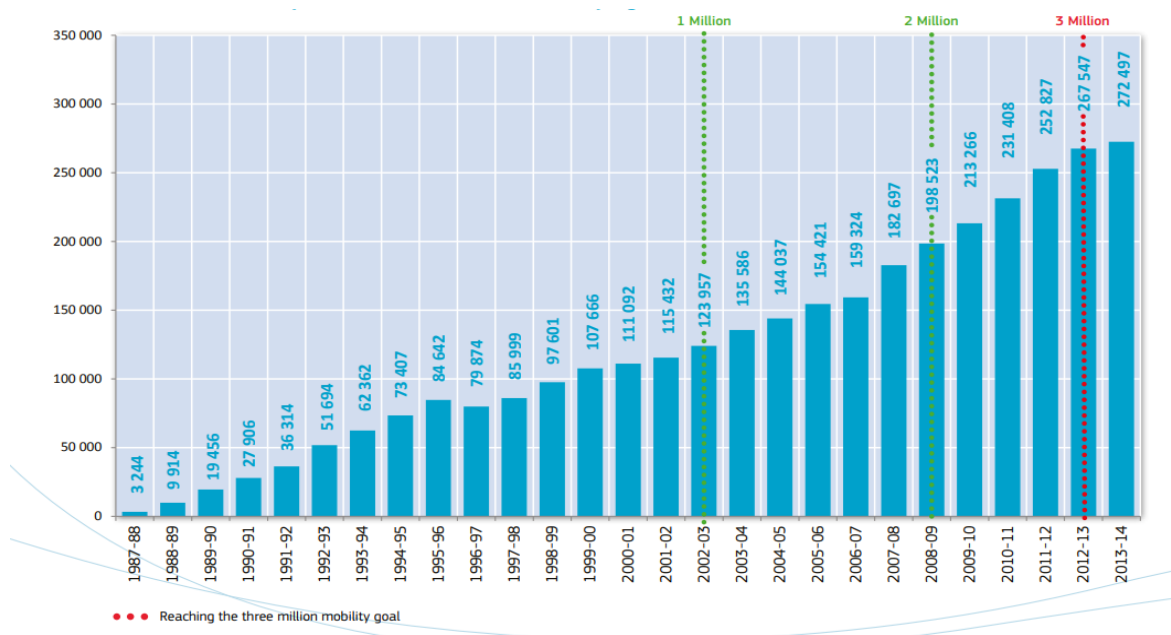
Students who fulfil the conditions of the programme are allowed to spend 3 to 12 months at another university in another country and promote intercultural skills, linguistic abilities, autonomy, resilience, independence, and other competencies. Due to the specific conditions of the programme, such as no tuition fees at foreign universities and scholarships at foreign universities as well as a cover of travel and accommodation costs, Erasmus students differ from students in other parts of the world (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 2). The financial support for students as a contribution to travel and subsistence costs varies according to the differences in living costs and the distance between the home country and the destination country, the number of students applying for an Erasmus+ grant, and the availability of the grants (European Commission, n.d.b). At the beginning of the existence of the programme,

it was discovered that Erasmus students came from the three highest professional-paying classes and since then, students with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds can apply for additional scholarships (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 2).

The current Erasmus programme (2014–2020) runs with a budget of 14.7 billion euros. In 2018, the European Commission suggested increasing the Erasmus+ budget to 30 billion euros for the period 2021–2027 and fulfil the EU's goal of having 20% of university graduates with experience of studying or working abroad. This suggestion aims to increase the number of beneficiaries (pupils, higher education students, trainees, teachers, trainers, youth workers, sports coaches, learning staff), reach out to people from all social backgrounds, build stronger relations with the rest of the world through a combination of physical and virtual mobility, promote forward-looking study fields (renewable energy, environmental engineering, artificial intelligence), and promote a European identity with travel experience to discover Europe's cultural heritage and diversity (European Commission, 2018).

Figure 1 shows continuous growth in the number of students taking part in the Erasmus+ student mobility in all countries that are part of the Erasmus+ programme. At the beginning of the existence of the programme, in the academic year 1987/1988, only 3,244 students took part in the programme, while in the academic year 2013/2014 the number rose to 272,497 students. Moreover, the red line in the graph represents the reached mobility goal of 3 million exchange students by 2012 (European Commission, 2015).

Figure 1: Growth of Erasmus+ student mobility since its existence



Source: European Commission (2015, p. 30).

1.2.1 Erasmus mobility in the EU

The main economic aim of promoting student mobility is to develop a flexible labour market with individuals that will be capable of working and communicating across borders. It stimulates young people to share European values by enriching countries and local communities with their different perspectives and diverse heritage since Europe as a study destination is still a place of diverse cultures and different education systems (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 2). The Erasmus+ programme has contributed to the growth of student mobility within Europe and thus, some higher education institutions (HEIs) are maintaining selectivity and prestige, while others have become devalued and welcomed the increasing numbers of less privileged students (Courtois, 2018, p. 99).

A report on Erasmus facts, figures, and trends shows that in the academic year 2013–2014, 272,497 students went to study or train in another European country. The biggest student senders were Spain, Germany, France, and Italy that have the largest student populations in Europe. Among European students, the most popular study abroad destinations were Spain (39,277 exchange students), Germany, France, the UK, and Italy. The average EU grant that was received by the students monthly was 274 euros, while the average duration of the student exchanges was 6 months (European Commission, 2015, pp. 6–8).

In 2017, according to the Eurostat (2019c) learning mobility statistics, there were 1.7 million students from abroad who were undertaking tertiary level studies across the EU-28. These students were studying for a bachelor's degree (45.6%) or master's degree (41.9 %), while the rest (9.3% of students) were studying for a doctoral degree or followed short-cycle tertiary courses (3.1%). Students from abroad who were undertaking tertiary level studies were mostly from Europe (37.8 %), Asia (30.1%), and Africa (13.0%) (Eurostat, 2019c).

Moreover, in 2017, 436 thousand students (25.5% of the total) from abroad studied in the United Kingdom, which is far more than in any other EU member state (European Commission, n.d.b). Apart from the UK, the largest numbers of students were recorded in Germany (259 thousand) and France (258 thousand). Furthermore, the EU-28 countries with at least one-tenth of all tertiary education students in 2017 were Austria, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, and Hungary. Countries with the smallest proportion of tertiary education students from abroad were Slovenia (3.9%), Greece (3.4%), Spain (3.2%), and Croatia (2.9%) (Eurostat, 2019c).

The share of students from Europe who study in some of the EU member states is often very high as students are likely to do their exchange in neighbouring countries that reflects in a common language and former colonies. Although across the EU, the most common country of origin for tertiary students from abroad in 2017 was China, including Hong Kong (11.2% of the total). Most of the Chinese students studied in Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Moreover, the most popular fields of study abroad in the EU-28 were business,

administration, and law, followed by engineering, manufacturing, arts, and humanities (Eurostat, 2019c).

1.2.2 Erasmus mobility in Slovenia

The University of Ljubljana (UL) is one of the biggest research institutions in Slovenia with a reputation for high-quality study programmes in social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, medicine, technical programmes, and arts that are designed in line with the Bologna process. The university encourages internationalisation and provides multidisciplinary study programmes while cooperating with the most distinguished foreign universities (The University of Ljubljana, n.d.a).

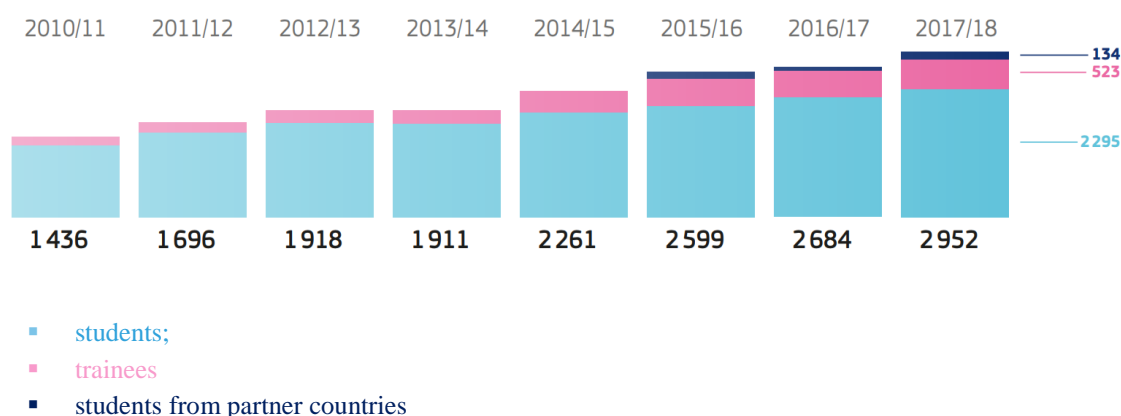
Slovenia joined the Erasmus+ programme in 1999 and since then, the number of incoming students has been increasing. Two national agencies that coordinate the Erasmus+ programme in Slovenia are The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS), and the Institute for Development of Youth Mobility (MOVIT). On the one hand, MOVIT covers the field of youth; while on the other hand, CMEPIUS covers the field of education, training, and sport (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes, n.d.).

1.2.3 Exchange students in Slovenia

According to the latest available numbers for 2018, Slovenia hosted 9,455 Erasmus+ programme participants that benefited mostly from mobility in higher education, followed by youth education, vocational education and training, pre-university, and adult education. The total amount of the Erasmus+ grants consisted of 15.89 million euros and the top 3 receiving countries were Spain, Germany, and Austria (European Commission, n.d.a).

In Figure 2 below, we can see the continuous growth in the number of incoming students and trainees. The total number comprises students, trainees, and students from partner countries. It shows the number of students for each academic year for the biggest Slovenian universities, i.e., the University of Ljubljana, the University of Maribor, and the University of Primorska (European Commission, n.d.a).

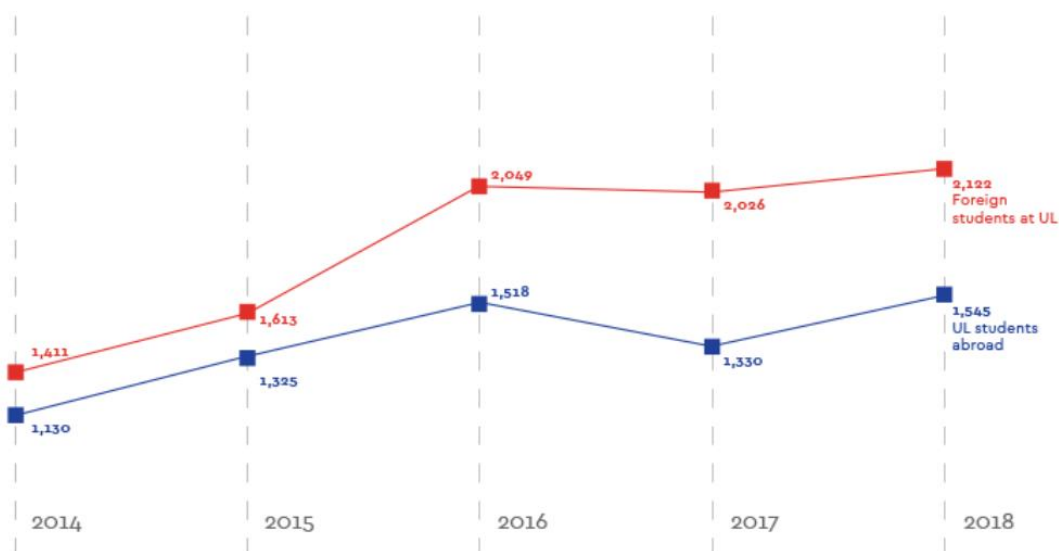
Figure 2: Incoming students and trainees in Slovenia in 2010–2018



Source: European Commission (n.d.a, p. 2).

The following Figure 3 shows the number of exchange students that were enrolled at the University of Ljubljana (UL) at all three study levels (bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral studies). In 2018 there were 2,122 exchange students enrolled at the UL, which is almost double the number from 2014. The figure also shows that the number of incoming students was higher than the number of outgoing students. Compared to Figure 2 above, around 90% of all exchange students were enrolled at the University of Ljubljana.

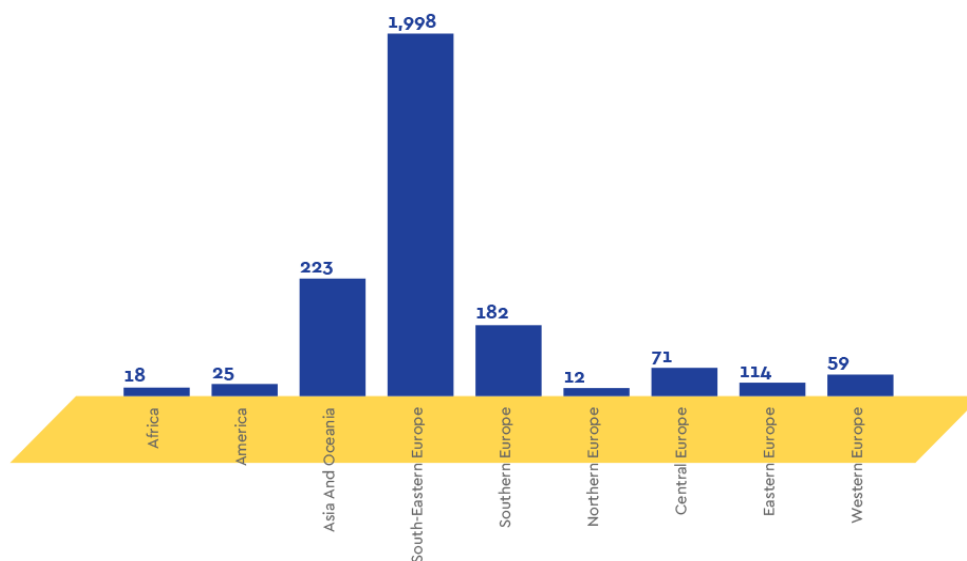
Figure 3: Number of exchange students enrolled at the UL in 2014–2018.



Source: The University of Ljubljana (n.d.a).

When it comes to the geographical distribution of exchange students enrolled at the UL in 2018, the majority of them come from Southeastern Europe, followed by students from Asia and Oceania, and Southern Europe. A detailed geographical distribution of students is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Geographical distribution of exchange students at the UL in 2018



Source: The University of Ljubljana (n.d.a).

In 2018, the University of Ljubljana had 2,971 individual agreements with other faculties and academies, of which 2,479 were Erasmus agreements (The University of Ljubljana, n.d.a). Like domestic students, the exchange students that are on the exchange in Slovenia are also entitled to receive subsidised student meals in many Slovenian restaurants and the faculty canteens. Moreover, exchange students can apply for subsidised transport that must be approved by the faculty in which the student is enrolled. While staying in Ljubljana, students can reside in student dormitories, rent a private room or a flat, while students in postgraduate study programmes can be housed in the House of Postgraduates (The University of Ljubljana, n.d.b).

Furthermore, the University of Ljubljana organises many extracurricular activities such as sports activities, art and culture, volunteering and charity, social activities, health and environmental protection. The main purpose of these activities is to acquire skills and competencies in areas that are not directly part of the study programme. Besides, through these activities, the university raises its reputation, recognition at home, and abroad (Univerza v Ljubljani, n.d.a).

Additionally, faculties, as a part of the University of Ljubljana, provide exchange students with tutors who help students integrate into a new environment and cultural differences. A tutor gets in contact with an exchange student before their arrival to Slovenia and helps them with the accommodation search and administrative duties, such as transportation cards and subsidized meals. Moreover, a tutor updates students on the activities and events organised for exchange students by the UL or other organisations (Univerza v Ljubljani, n.d.b).

1.3 Internationalisation and global trends in international student mobility

Internationalisation has a big influence on higher education when it comes to new rationales, new programmes, new regulations, new risks, and new challenges. In terms of student mobility, the word internationalisation refers to academic mobility for students and teachers, international workshops and projects, and new international academic programmes. Moreover, it means delivering education to other countries through new types of arrangements, while also including an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the teaching-learning process. Student mobility is often seen as the face of internationalisation and is becoming increasingly important and more complex. Besides, international education has changed from a development framework to a partnership, commercial, and competitiveness model and turned into a big business of international student recruitment (Knight, 2012, pp. 20–22).

The global economy is in great need of highly skilled professionals and due to an exponentially increasing student demand, studying abroad has become very important. Internationalisation has become a part of changes in the higher education system worldwide, and it is no longer just the exchange of knowledge and academic excellence. Therefore, universities compete aggressively to attract top students and shore up their international rankings (Bista, 2019, p. 11). Countries and institutions that want to attract more international students need to think about the importance of the push and pull factors that influence the students' decision-making process to study abroad (Lee, 2014, p. 364).

The previous studies have shown that one of the trends in students' decision-making process is a desire to stay and study in a big city (Jupiter et al., 2017). In general, large cities have a bigger appeal to Erasmus students than the best and prestigious universities. However, students from Northern Europe are mostly attracted to higher education at excellent institutions and are not the most over-represented group in Eastern and Southern European cities, except for Prague. On the other hand, Southern European students are shown to be mainly overrepresented in other Southern European cities as well as in Polish and Lithuanian cities (Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016, p. 86). Over the last 20 years, several studies have concluded that the main international student senders are Asian countries, while the main receivers are economically developed countries with popular languages such as English, French, Spanish, and German (Kondakci, Bedenlier, & Zawacki-Richter, 2018, p. 518).

Furthermore, positive word of mouth has become a significant factor that attracts international students and is one of the most important forms of promotion and communication between students and universities. Therefore, higher education institutions should improve their foreign student support services by organising welcome programmes and educational opportunities in the English language to increase the students' experience at the incoming university (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016, p. 137).

Since the early 2000s, the technological revolution has drastically changed traditional marketing approaches and brought marketers to a new era. Furthermore, social media as a marketing recruiting tool has been used by universities globally. Social media has reached a significant status in university students' lives and has become a primary source of information. Modern society has become more communicative and engaged in content sharing and therefore, universities need to adopt the latest changes to differentiate and make their message more memorable. Social media allows users to share content and ideas and to listen to their friends, trust them, and be influenced in the decision-making process (Galan, Lawley & Clements, 2015, pp. 287–289).

The development and use of social media platforms have become crucial for universities to attract more students. Research revealed that when choosing universities or programmes, students like to use social media for finding out about student life and reading reviews from former students. Through research, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were indicated as the most used social media networks among students. Universities have started using social media channels to attract more international students, but to attract more students, they need to learn about their needs and behaviour towards the use of social media (Moltaji, 2018, p. 6).

Additionally, when choosing an Erasmus country, the students' factors motivate them to pick a destination with a certain level of attractiveness and various tourism products, which satisfies their travel-oriented needs. Thus, students are inspired by leisure and vacation-related desires and would rather travel to countries in which they are familiar with the language and lifestyle and, at the same time, are not very expensive to live in. However, they try to avoid destinations with a high level of commercialised tourism activities (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015, p. 377).

2 EXCHANGE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION FACTORS FOR STUDYING ABROAD

Motivation factors are the factors that influence exchange students to participate in a study abroad programme and select a particular study destination. Motivation to learn is an inner process that is always goal-oriented and satisfies the student's needs Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015, p. 364).

The decision to study abroad is time-consuming, with a high personal risk, involves significant expenses, and must consider other possibilities and alternatives (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010, p. 233). The factors influencing the decision of students to study abroad are an important aspect of the process of internationalisation. By identifying the students' motives, universities can plan their marketing strategy and communication and thus increase the enrolment of students at the international level (Jupiter et al., 2017).

2.1 Push and pull motivation factors

International students are real people with real-life experience who are constantly pursuing their dreams of studying in a foreign country (Bista, 2019, p. 9) and have been pushed to study abroad by the general globalisation of labour markets and internationalisation (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 1). Students' decision-making process is like a travel decision-making process - a combination of push and pull motivation factors. Motivation factors influence individuals and push them into a travel decision, while pull factors indicate where to go (Eder, Smith & Pitts, 2010, p. 234). In a student's decision-making process, push factors make the student decide to study abroad. Once the student decides to move, they focus on the pull factors of the host-country characteristics that make it more attractive than other potential destinations (González, Mesanza & Mariel, 2011, pp. 418–419).

When selecting a study destination, there are three stages of the decision-making process (Jianvittayakit, 2012):

- the student decides to study internationally,
- the student chooses the host country,
- the student selects the host institution.

Kouba (2020) specified personal and professional growth as the main push factors. Additionally, Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap and Axelsson (2015) listed self-confidence, self-reliance, widening the horizons by getting to know new people, different environments and diverse cultures, academic development, better career opportunities, while also leisure and relaxation as some of the factors related to personal and professional growth that motivate students to study abroad. Push factors can either be positive, i.e., the attraction factors of the destination country, or negative when considering the repulsive characteristics of a country (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016, p. 127). Lee (2014) took into consideration the geographical location of the host country, living costs, education system, the language used, perceived image, recommendations, weather, culture, the social and economic position of the country as pull factors influencing a student's decision. Moreover, Kouba (2020) identified university rankings and the quality of its programmes as one of the increasingly important pull factors for international student mobility that has shown that the higher-ranked universities receive more Erasmus students. Pull factors are usually positive and related to the attraction factors of the destination country, the reputation and international recognition of the university, and directly influence the choice of a certain institution (Branco Oliveira & Soares, 2016, p. 127).

Furthermore, prior studies identified lack of information, access to higher education institutions, career prospect, school funding issues, culture, environment, family and friends' influences, immigration prospect, university facilities, international experience, perceptions of the quality of higher education systems abroad, marketing and promotion initiative, quality of life, security of the country, educational background, staff recognition, opportunity

to learn English as a non-native language, geographical distance of the host country, reputation quality of the institution in the host country, courses offered, university environment, and visa application for non-EU students as the major factors that are associated with the student's decision to study abroad (Jupiter et al., 2017).

Jupiter et al. (2017) categorised the factors that influence students' decisions into three groups:

- Communication (communication quality): online and offline communication channels;
- Location (attraction and study destination): study destination, university image, programme and courses;
- Social (social network): family and friends, academics, student testimonials.

Communication is a key factor in influencing the students' decision to study abroad and refers to the communication between international students and the host university before and after the student's arrival at the university. Google is said to be the most popular channel used by students, while the university's website also plays an important role in the initial communication quality between students and universities. Through the website, the university can provide students with sufficient information to attract their attention to attend the programmes that are offered at the university. A significant part of online communication is also email feedback from the university administration regarding any concerns and questions that may influence the student's decision. Meanwhile, offline communication refers to a face-to-face interaction between students and universities, where university representatives can influence the decision of these students (Jupiter et al., 2017). Furthermore, Moltaji (2018) indicated the positive influence of the use of social media in affecting the student's decision-making process by reading reviews about student life from former students. Facebook has been identified as the most used social media channel, as it also helps students contact other students about course assignments and group projects (Moltaji, 2018, p. 10).

The location of a study destination is associated with useful information that influences the decision of international students when choosing the study abroad location. Location refers to the good reputation of the country, low unemployment, economic stability, cultural diversity, international education standards, size of the city, infrastructure, housing placement, transportation system, while also social life of the country and events that are organized by the student associations throughout the year (Jupiter et al., 2017).

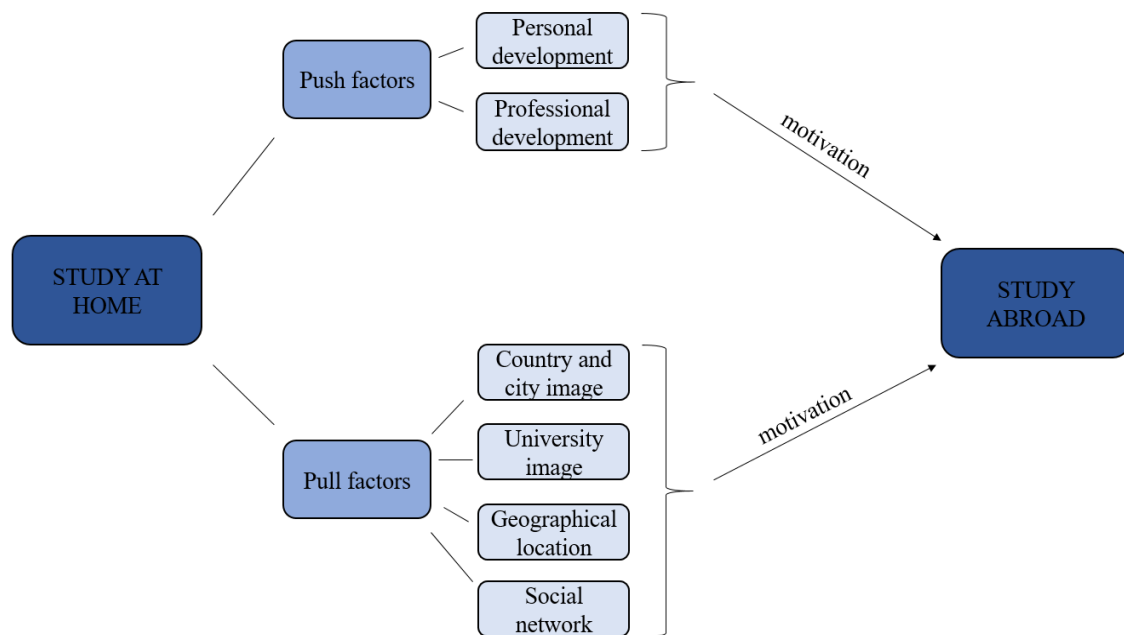
The social factor that influences the choice is the social network that includes the relationship with family, friends, academics, and staff from the preferred university. Students make their decisions about their destination country based on their knowledge. However, the family and friends' support and feedback have a strong indirect influence on an individual's perception. Moreover, suggestions, recommendations, and reliable information from academics are considered to be highly credible and help boost students' confidence towards the chosen

university. Through the website or directly to the student groups on social media, students' testimonials can also make a significant impact on the selection. Students' experiences and insights give a clearer picture of countries, universities, and programmes (Jupiter et al., 2017).

Depending on the economic situation, culture, educational opportunities, and length of the exchange programme, students from diverse backgrounds prioritise these motives differently. European students are more motivated knowing that studying abroad would increase their chances of employment outside their home country. Studies have shown that students from Western European countries are mostly motivated by their personal growth, while students from Eastern European countries are more motivated by financial and educational rationales. Furthermore, Erasmus students are more likely to get inspired by leisure and vacation-related desires, and therefore countries with developed tourism and attractive climate (Mediterranean countries) are more attractive and thus receive more exchange students (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015, p. 367).

Figure 5 shows the push and pull factors that influence students' motivation to study abroad.

Figure 5: Conceptual framework of a student's decision-making process



Adapted from Eder, Smith & Pitts (2010, p. 245).

3 LINKS BETWEEN STUDYING ABROAD AND TOURISM

3.1 Studying abroad and learning

Learning is a lifelong process of people uncovering knowledge on their own, usually because of personal experience. Furthermore, experiential learning means learning through experience and proposes that knowledge and skills that a person learns in one situation can help them understand and react in similar experiences. Experiential learning leads to personal growth, which leads to openness and more learning. Consequently, learning may provide a connection between travel and education through tourist events, field trips, seminars, internships, study abroad programmes, and teaching (Stone & Petrick, 2013).

Education and travel have been linked for centuries, with young people going abroad to learn new languages and about other cultures (Stone & Petrick, 2013). The earliest study abroad was evidenced by the traditional excursion throughout Europe, called the Grand Tour. The Grand Tour was necessary for expanding knowledge of the world by travel and it was mainly taken by the upper-class European men who wanted to foster an appreciation for music and art. Since the Grand Tour, education has come a long way and nowadays, students need to take courses about global awareness (Mody, Gordon, Lehto & Adler, 2017, p. 127).

Travel has become a central component of studying abroad as well as tourism, as neither of them can exist without travel. Thus, studying abroad is impossible without travel and is always influenced by, or is even a direct result of, travel and tourist activities. Due to the travel component of studying abroad, studies have shown that the educative outcome of a traveller's experience is learning. Furthermore, travel is often a developmentally powerful experience that helps gain interpersonal communication, self-confidence, and cross-cultural skills. Among international students, a study about youth travel showed that their main motivations for travel are exploring other cultures and increasing their knowledge. Furthermore, through travel, students gain an appreciation of and interest in learning about other cultures, increase tolerance of differences, and gain more self-knowledge (Stone & Petrick, 2013). As a result, students seek more adventurous, different, or exotic destinations that expand their horizons and have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives (Mody, Gordon, Lehto & Adler, 2017, pp. 127–128).

However, studying abroad may affect students' development of intercultural sensitivity (Bloom & Miranda, 2015, p. 571). It gives students the confidence and intercultural understanding to embark on international travel more often. While studying abroad, students develop a travel-specific manifestation of intercultural competence. Moreover, students learn to travel, to see the world from another perspective, and to discover the host culture's way of life (Mody, Gordon, Lehto & Adler, 2017, pp. 127–128).

The role of the host society in the acculturation of exchange students has been described as a two-way process where both, home and host culture, change because of being in

continuous contact. In the adjustment process of exchange students in a different country, the attitudes of local students, professors, and university staff play a significant role (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 5).

3.2 Students' tourist motivations and travel behaviour

In the past years, youth travel has been on the rise as young people have gained access to more disposable income and travel has become more affordable. The growing trend of exchange programmes, international internships, reduced fares, and flight connections has led to increased student travel (Marques, Mohsin & Lengler, 2018, p. 87).

When it comes to travel, university students have a limited budget but flexible time (Deng & Ritchie, 2018) and thus usually stay longer at a destination than the average tourist (Marques, Mohsin & Lengler, 2018, p. 87). Young travellers prefer to travel independently, visit multiple destinations, and not settle on the usual travel routes. They are more likely to use informal information from their peers, family, internet, and social network websites. When travelling, a lack of travel experience, age, perceptions, and behaviour might place them at risk (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, pp. 455–456).

Students, specifically those who participate in studying abroad, are a growing and unique tourist segment. Study abroad programmes, with significant economic and social impact, constitute a major international tourism activity. Since student mobility involves arrivals from and departures to several countries, student mobility programs are multidirectional (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011, pp. 205–206). Furthermore, study abroad motives are similar to tourist motives as studying abroad includes many activities such as travel and tourist activities, education, interaction with other cultures, and interpersonal contact (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Many students are motivated to study abroad not only for education and career but also because of non-academic desires for international travel. Study abroad programmes enable students to fulfil their travel desires and to combine the study abroad programme structure with short periods of independent travel. Most universities provide study abroad programmes with the opportunity to gain experience, travel, and explore the world (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011, pp. 205–206).

Students' travel behaviour base on both, the importance of having fun, socialising and relaxing after studies, as well as learning about other cultures and history. However, there are similarities and differences in travel motivations, the role of gender and culture, and motives that may differ among individuals and student segments. Nowadays, a student traveller wants to experience unique memorable holidays based on social interactions and is more prepared to take risks. Thus, some of the students' travel motives are adventure-seeking and discovering new experiences that influence their touristic activities. The choice of a destination could be influenced by promoting its activities and attractions that foster meaningful and memorable experiences (Marques, Mohsin & Lengler, 2018, pp. 88–89).

Travel motives and behaviours differ significantly between international exchange students and domestic students. Domestic students travel more frequently and their main travel motives are making friends, entertainment, and nightlife, while exchange students prefer to choose safe holiday destinations with natural attractions, go shopping and sightseeing, learn about the country where they study, experience local culture, taste local food, explore new places, and enjoy the sun, sea, and sand. On the other hand, exchange students' travel is not without risk since they leave their family, friends, and country of origin and can consequently experience loneliness, loss of social networks, and isolation (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, pp. 455–456).

3.3 Benefits and challenges of studying abroad

3.3.1 Benefits of studying abroad

Studying abroad brings many beneficial outcomes that result in favourable evaluation and a positive attitude towards it. Firstly, a potential benefit of studying abroad is better labour market prospects. Compared to the students without study abroad experience, those who spend a period abroad are more likely to earn more and get a pay raise more often. Studying abroad indirectly signals high-risk taking, productivity, and a high willingness to become mobile and help employers in the recruitment process. Secondly, by studying abroad, students can develop their personalities by increasing their openness, understanding of other cultures through the discovery of other cultures and languages. Finally, the benefits of studying abroad can also result from leisure and travel activities related to the country's natural and cultural attractions (Petzold & Moog, 2018, p. 38). Studying abroad allows students to develop new skills and establish new friendships that can result in future professional and personal benefits. Belongingness and establishing friendships benefit academic success, especially in coursework, and encourage cross-cultural interaction (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015, p. 3).

Mody, Gordon, Lehto and Adler (2017, pp. 127–128) explained that when studying abroad, students are gaining their early experience with travel which might be fundamental for the development of their type of a traveller. Intercultural and personal development that occurs when studying abroad enables students to develop a greater intercultural competence through their travel careers. Thus, studying abroad makes an impact, especially on cross-cultural benefits and internal change, language learning, and international and cognitive knowledge growth. It can result in a change of perspective, independence, self-confidence, intercultural development, global engagement, while also dispelling stereotypes among participants. Through study abroad, students learn new information about political and social issues, people, geography, history, and culture of another country (Stone & Petrick, 2013).

Moreover, international students bring benefits to the university and the destination. On one side, incoming students are consumers, and on the other side, the university is a site for

conspicuous consumption. Additionally, host cities benefit from exchange students as they are not only going abroad to learn to be a tourist, but they later return to the city or invite their friends and family (Cairns, 2017, pp. 735–736).

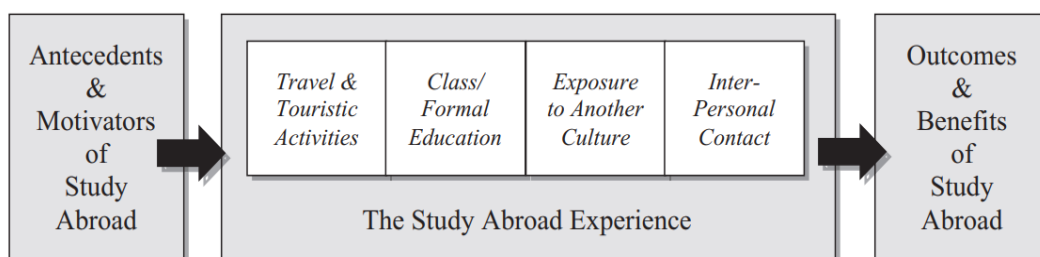
3.3.2 Challenges of studying abroad

When studying abroad, students may be facing challenges such as discrimination, racism, limited social support, feeling of isolation from family and friends, financial difficulties, adaptation to a new culture, potential cultural shock, and challenges when adapting to new educational and learning systems (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015, p. 2). Discrimination is a factor that can negatively affect a student's perception and experiences and it has been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, it has also been found that students' learning can be negatively associated with cultural and physical distance and therefore the social distance theory indicates that students prefer travelling to countries that are similar to their home country (Mody, Gordon, Lehto & Adler, 2017, pp. 127–129). Therefore, to attract and retain exchange students, higher education institutions have to offer proactive support to meet the social, academic, and practical needs of these students and help them face new challenges (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015, p. 3).

However, when researchers compared students who studied abroad with those who did not, differences in knowledge, cultural relativism, world geography, as well as increased academic performance of those who studied abroad were noticed (Stone & Petrick, 2013). When comparing short-term and long-term study abroad, studies have found that students who stay longer receive more intercultural benefits and greater long-term impact from the host country (Bloom & Miranda, 2015, p. 570).

Figure 6 presents a process model of study abroad. The process starts with students' motives for activities, formal academic education, exposure to new environment and culture, interpersonal contact, and ends with the outcome and benefits of a study abroad experience (Stone & Petrick, 2013).

Figure 6: A process model of study abroad



Source: Stone & Petrick (2013, p. 736).

4 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF STUDY DESTINATION

How tourists perceive a destination is a critical success factor in the framework of global competitiveness. In the destination choice process, the image and attitude dimensions and what a place has to offer as a travel destination are the critical elements in this process. Destinations with more positive images and stronger brands are more likely to be chosen by tourists. The tourist industry seeks differentiation by individuals' expectations, beliefs, dreams, and fantasies and consequently, to induce positive images, the destination has to be successfully promoted to its target markets and be favourably different from its competitors by creating an appealing destination brand image to feed the individuals' imaginary (Cardoso, Dias, de Araújo & Marques, 2019, pp. 81–82).

Furthermore, Cardoso, Dias, de Araújo and Marques (2019, p. 82) categorised the tourists' image of their destination choice as a dream and favourable destination. A dream destination is a destination that a tourist has never visited, but has a desire to visit in the future. Meanwhile, a favourable destination refers to a destination that a tourist has already visited and based on his or her retrospective memory considers the destination as the best for a specific type of travel.

The destination image includes three sub-dimension (Cardoso, Dias, de Araújo & Marques, 2019, p. 82):

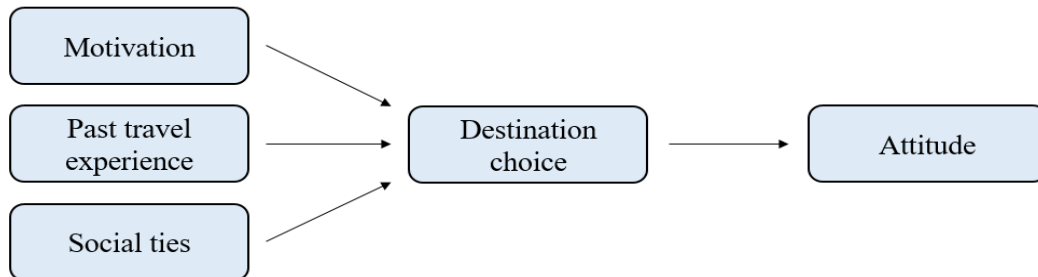
- Attributes: what tourists think a destination has to offer and what the destination's characteristics are;
- Benefits: personal values and what the destination can do for tourists;
- Brand attitudes: tourist behaviour at the destination choice, and their overall evaluation of a destination brand.

Tourists' experiences are mostly based on intangible attributes and their perception of the quality of products or services compared to the offer. Therefore, the destination quality evaluation depends on the so-called perceived quality. Additionally, a tourist's attachment to a destination brand is part of destination loyalty (Cardoso, Dias, de Araújo & Marques, 2019, p. 82).

Figure 7 presents the conceptual model of destination choice and the role of motivations, prior travel experiences, and social ties in influencing the study abroad destination choice. Social ties are associated with people's relationships in a foreign country, meaning if they have good friends, a partner, or any relatives who live in the foreign country. Moreover, attitude is stored in memory and persists over time until it is activated automatically. Over time, through the learning process and newly acquired knowledge, the development of attitudes occurs. When a person has no direct experience, the knowledge function of attitude becomes stronger and thus the media plays a significant role in attitude formation by

following selective news about the destination (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011, pp. 207–211).

Figure 7: Conceptual model of destination choice



Adapted from Nyaupane, Paris & Tey (2011, p. 210).

4.1 Travel destination image

Travel destination image (TDI) is importantly related to an individual's decision to travel and was found to be a critical variable in selecting the appropriate destination compared to other tourist locations. TDI consists of an individual's knowledge, feelings, and global impressions about the destination. Furthermore, TDI does not only influence a pre-travel decision, but it also has a direct and indirect influence on a person's travel experience and post-travel behaviour (Lam & Ariffin, 2019, pp. 501–502).

Three hierarchical components form the destination image (Lam & Ariffin, 2019, p. 502):

- the cognitive or perceptual dimension that is the sum of beliefs and knowledge about the destination attributes,
- the affective dimension that refers to an individual's feelings and relates to the actual destination, and
- the conative dimension that is based on cognitive and affective dimensions and is related to destination loyalty or an individual's intention to revisit.

Furthermore, it is important to focus on the international students' perception of a country and TDIs as they could influence the students' overall university experience and learning outcome (Lam & Ariffin, 2019, p. 502). Consequently, perceived destination value could help shape a favourable destination image and evoke positive behaviour (Lam & Ariffin, 2019, p. 504).

4.1.1 Past travel experience

When choosing a travel destination, tourists are attracted by the level of tourism-related development, such as the safety and leisure infrastructure, the general standard of living, as well as a certain degree of popularity or image. Infrastructure and image refer to the elements that are needed for living, such as accessibility, safety, and security. Moreover, leisure activities, such as culture, arts, history, and entertainment, can contribute to the image of a destination in terms of popularity, sustainability, and security. Meanwhile, lifestyle factors, such as high cost of living, language, and tourism commercialisation, can harm the number of tourists (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015, p. 373).

Past travel experience strongly influences future behaviour and might enhance the behavioural intentions to revisit the same destination. Meanwhile, it can also turn people away from a destination due to any unpleasant experience with the same or similar destination (Liu, 2014, p. 15). Experienced individuals are more likely to worry about socio-cultural problems and psychological concerns while less experienced individuals are more concerned about health and well-being, terrorism, and safety. Moreover, less experienced individuals are more likely to additionally perceive financial and performance risk and therefore change their plans when confronting potential difficulties (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, p. 462). On the one hand, performance risk has been acknowledged as the possibility that a trip will not provide satisfaction and can be measured as travel value, environment, landscape, attraction, entertainment, infrastructure, accessibility, and relaxation. On the other hand, financial risk expresses the possibility that a trip will not provide value for money and therefore, the money will be lost (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, p. 459). Consequently, the past travel experience is important as it can create awareness and knowledge of potential risks while also influencing travel intentions. International university students with limited travel experience may be more vulnerable to travel risk (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, p. 462).

4.2 Image of a country

The image of a country is created by the country's characteristics that are constructed from the perception of its economic development, political aspects, quality of life, culture, technology, and tourism aspects. Moreover, it is a sum of people's beliefs, ideas, and impressions and it is represented by a large number of informational associations and indications connected to the country (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 194). It also includes stereotypes and perceptions about the country that are believed by consumers while processing their decision (Herrero-Crespo, San Martín Gutiérrez & del Mar Garcia-Salmones, 2016, p. 699). Researchers have discovered that university students first choose the country of their study and later the university (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 194).

For exchange students at many universities, the country's higher education services represent their image of a specific product category. In higher education institutions, the brand quality

framework has been used for tangible products and services. Brand quality has been extended to countries and brand equity of the products can be associated with the country of origin (Herrero-Crespo, San Martín Gutiérrez & del Mar Garcia-Salmones, 2016, p. 692). Therefore, if students consider a country's universities as international, they will have more positive associations and higher perceived quality (Herrero-Crespo, San Martín Gutiérrez & del Mar Garcia-Salmones, 2016, p. 699).

As already mentioned, in a student's decision-making process, the pull factors influence the selection of the study abroad country and the evaluation of the services before the experience. Therefore, a student's perception of the country positively influences their satisfaction with the destination. However, students normally have more relevant perceptions about countries and usually less clear knowledge about smaller regions (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 195). For understanding the educational exchange, the country's natural and cultural attractions (environment, architecture, weather) are primary motivators. Therefore, the host country's characteristics can help students achieve subjective life goals of visiting the desired host country. Thus, the more desired the host country, the stronger the intention to study abroad (Petzold & Moog, 2018, p. 38).

4.3 Image of a city

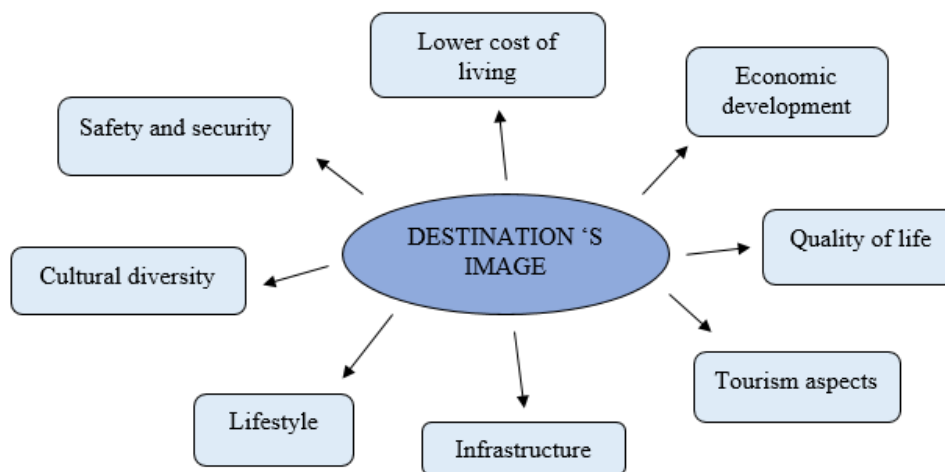
The image of a city generates a series of positive or negative associations in students' minds and creates perceptions of the location and the city's infrastructure that influences the evaluation of the educational programme. Its image is associated with job opportunities, lifestyle, quality of life, cost of living, safety, and cultural diversity. Furthermore, the city represents a place with educational services that are provided and consumed by the students who are temporary citizens in that place (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 194).

Higher education and local culture are an important part of the city and university image building in many cities. Cities are building their city image and city branding to be more attractive while competing with other places to get attention, investments, tourists, companies, events, and a qualified workforce. Additionally, the attractiveness of a city may bring potential students and foreign students. Students not only seek the university's image and reputation, but they also look for a good city environment. Therefore, cities and universities should build synergy since both could benefit from hosting students (Roostika, 2017, pp. 250–251).

City life satisfaction is created from the needs, expectations, perceptions, and qualities of the city, as different residents rate the city's features and attractions in a different way (Roostika, 2017, p. 251). Resident satisfaction is a combination of objective and subjective qualities of a place. Level of urbanism, socio-economic status, income, population density, and mobility is part of the objective qualities, while noise, traffic, neighbours, safety and security, shopping, and other community facilities are part of the subjective qualities (Roostika, 2017, p. 252).

In the students' decision-making process, perceptions about countries and cities have a relevant role and therefore, specific place branding actions targeting talented people, such as students and highly qualified professionals, need to be developed. Cities that focus on this branding strategy would become so-called “knowledge cities” with competitive advantages in a knowledge-based economy and attract more international university students (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, pp. 192–193).

Figure 8: Factors influencing a destination's image



Adapted from Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña (2015); Roostika (2017).

4.4 Image of a university

Before studying abroad, students familiarise themselves with the educational institution through personal (word of mouth) and commercial (web pages) information and evaluate the educational programme. A student's evaluation of the programme is not only influenced by the academic elements and quality of the services at the host university, but also by the different country and city dimensions where the university is located. Therefore, country and city branding is a key tool for capturing international university students (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 193).

The university image is the sum of opinions, ideas, and impressions that students have about the university as well as the results in the evaluation process of different attributes of the institution. Moreover, the university image is defined based on perceived quality, such as global reputation, physical facilities, academic programmes and courses, and academic staff. It plays an important role in attracting students and their loyalty and influences their decision-making process. A positive relationship between the students' preference for the university and its actual image has been found. A student's satisfaction with the assigned

destination for an international exchange programme depends on the good perception of the university (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 193).

In the students' decision-making process, the location of the university, academic facilities, and life outside the university play an important role in this process. Students evaluate the central aspect and peripheral aspects in their choice of study institution. On the one hand, the central aspect covers the quality of the academic programme; while on the other hand, the peripheral aspect covers the host university's service quality and the city's attributes (Roostika, 2017, pp. 250–251).

As universities and exchange programmes have a limited number of places, the students' academic stay is not always their first choice. Moreover, not being assigned to the desired destination and university for an exchange study abroad may affect a student's satisfaction with the final destination. Consequently, the assigned destination for the international stay will affect the student's prior satisfaction such as university image and reputation, as well as the perceptions of the country and the city of the exchange (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, p. 192).

4.4.1 Programme, courses, and teaching languages

The university programme is also one of the factors that attract international students when making their selection. Typically, students refer to programmes that are fulfilling the job market's requirements and consist of courses that add value-added to their interests (Jupiter et al., 2017). Course contents are important components from an academic and cultural perspective of a study abroad. By identifying course expectations and requirements, students become more aware of what is expected from them academically (Mills, Vrba & Deviney, 2012, p. 958).

Students show a tendency to select countries that use English as a compulsory language or countries with more widely spoken European languages (Jupiter et al., 2017). However, countries with less widely spoken languages offer more programmes taught in English to attract international students (Mikuláš & Jitka, 2019, p. 3). Moreover, the help of the local community and the university can encourage the students' interest and desire to learn the local language as well. The local language gives international students confidence and adds value for the future (Jupiter et al., 2017).

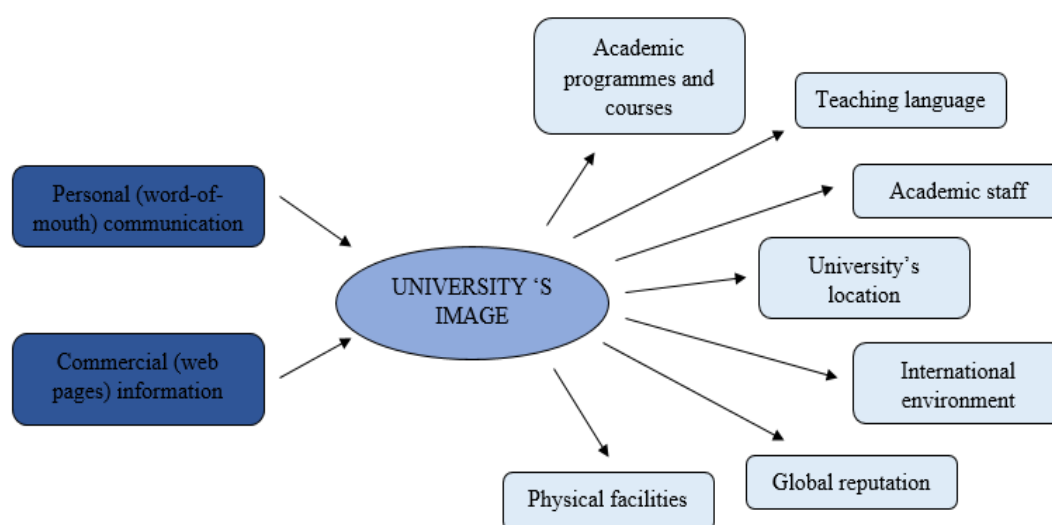
4.4.2 International environment

A university that encourages students from a wide variety of cultures is more attractive for the selection of the study abroad destination. A university's internationalisation can be identified through its website that can be accessed in different languages and provides international students' feedbacks. Through feedback, students can turn the cultural gap into

an attraction of experiencing the culture of a host country and give them a different perspective about cultures (Jupiter et al., 2017).

Students come to a new university with an individual background, motivation, academic preparation, study skills, goals, and intentions that influence their ability to integrate academically and socially into the new university environment. On the one hand, academic integration means becoming part of the university's culture as well as student interaction with the university in and outside the lecture hall. On the other hand, social integration refers to a student's interaction with peers. Students who do not fully integrate academically and socially into the new university environment run the risk of being isolated within the new environment. A student can either fully adapt to a new culture, or try to change their behaviour, values, and beliefs (Ugwu & Adamuti-Trache, 2019, p. 7). Studying abroad and living in a new environment provides students with an opportunity for personal and intellectual development, but it might also threaten their well-being (Nguyen, Serik, Vuong & Ho, 2019, p. 2).

Figure 9: Factors influencing a university's image



Adapted from Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña (2015); Roostika (2017); Jupiter et al. (2017).

4.5 Cost of living

Studying abroad is associated with various direct financial costs that include travel costs, housing costs, living expenses, and tuition fees (Petzold & Moog, 2018, p. 39). Financial consideration has been identified as one of the main criteria when selecting a study destination. When deciding about a destination abroad, the cost of living and therefore the economic stability of the country's destination are major considerations (Jupiter et al., 2017). Even if it only concerns the living costs, the consumer cost dimension has a major influence

on the destination choice. Rather than evaluating the academic quality of potential host institutions, decisions about the study destination depend on whether the destination is affordable or not (Cairns, 2017, p. 736). As a result, low-cost countries are more attractive to incoming students than high-cost countries (Cairns, 2017, p. 737).

However, many students receive funding from the government during their exchange. Tuition fees and cost of living are mainly taken into account for the students who are not receiving any scholarships. Therefore, students without substantial financial support will choose a country with a low cost of living (Jupiter et al., 2017), and a higher intention to study abroad is expected if financial support is provided (Petzold & Moog, 2018, p. 39). As a result, the exchange programmes need to reinforce the participation of students with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities by providing more scholarship funding (Cairns, 2017, p. 737). “The cost of studying abroad can be minimal; however, the rewards can be enormous” (Fox & McIntyre, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, international students contribute to a host destination as an important source of revenue. Students are not only going abroad to learn but also to be tourists. A destination has to be affordable and there should be travel opportunities (Cairns, 2017).

4.6 Destination familiarity and geographical proximity

Destination familiarity is an important psychological factor influencing tourists’ selection process and is defined as several product-related experiences or the amount of product-related information. Familiarity includes the level of knowledge about a destination, amount of information, and previous visits (Liu, 2014, p. 24).

Destination familiarity, in terms of the search of tourist destinations, is divided into self-rated familiarity, informational familiarity, and experiential familiarity. Self-rated familiarity reflects on overall familiarity with a destination, informational familiarity refers to the amount of destination-related information received from various sources and experiential familiarity refers to previous experience visiting the destination (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 301). Moreover, product familiarity refers to the number of information consumers possess about a product and therefore, destination familiarity may decrease the perceived cultural distance (PCD). Tourists’ cultural knowledge of a destination is positively associated with destination familiarity, which may decrease PCD between the home and destination country. On the other hand, greater uncertainty and increased PDC could be influenced by little familiarity and cultural knowledge about a destination. Therefore, higher destination familiarity could lead to a greater PCD and similarity between the home and destination country (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 301).

Additionally, individuals’ perceptions of cultural distance may be affected by geographical distance, as countries that are geographically closer have a smaller cultural distance. People that live in closer geographical proximity share similar values, language, religion (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 302). Geographical distance affects destination-related decisions

concerning time and costs, as distant destinations usually require long travelling time and higher travelling expenses. Cultural geography implies similar cultural factors and therefore people might perceive countries that are close in geographical proximity as culturally closer as well (Liu, 2014, pp. 15–16).

4.7 The connection between destination choice and cultural distance

Cultural differences are one of the tourists' primary motivations for leisure travel and pose many challenges to students, such as miscommunication and cultural conflict. The cultural difference between the tourists' home and destination countries influence the individuals' behaviour and decision-making process. Moreover, the cultural distance may negatively or positively influence destination choice. Some tourists are more inclined to visit destinations that are culturally more similar to their home countries, while others prefer to visit destinations that are culturally different (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 300). Diverse cultural backgrounds of individuals show different behaviours, thinking, feeling, reacting, and cross-cultural interactions between cultural groups. Culture is shaped by the changing political, social, economic, and technological forces, while also by language, region, and traditions (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 301).

Perceived cultural distance (PCD) has an important role in human behaviour (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 300). It reflects temporal changes in individuals' cultural values and value heterogeneity within the same country. Consequently, people with different cultural backgrounds might have different cultural perceptions due to individual heterogeneity. Additionally, PCD due to personal attitudes and perceptions that directly drive tourists' behaviour decisions predicts individuals' destination choices (Liu, Li, Cárdenas & Yang, 2018, p. 301).

Moreover, cultural differences in language, standard of living, habits, transportation, or food, could lead to stress, anxiety, and uncertainty (the so-called cultural shock) or even cultural conflicts with local people (Liu, 2014, p. 22).

4.8 Influence of family, friends, and social media

4.8.1 Family and friends

The average age of an Erasmus student is 23 years and therefore, these students might not have ever lived outside their parental home, let alone in a foreign country. At that age, young people do not have the requisite personal attributes in terms of independence from family (Cairns, 2017, p. 736).

In studies abroad, the family has been found as the dominant factor, as the family members' views can greatly influence the behaviour of an individual. Furthermore, the family's

encouragement and suggestions in the home country is an important factor to be considered when making a decision. Additionally, friends also have a major influence on the students' selection of the host institution for their studies. Student's contacts and peers who were studying at the same institution can share their personal experiences (Jupiter et al., 2017). Meanwhile, relatives or close friends that live in a foreign country, also play an important role. As a result, destination choice is often a reflection of the norms and values of the reference group of the students (Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011, p. 213). Both, the influence of friends and family, are connected with communication by word of mouth that represents objective support with no commercial interest and the intention of giving non-profit information (Jupiter et al., 2017).

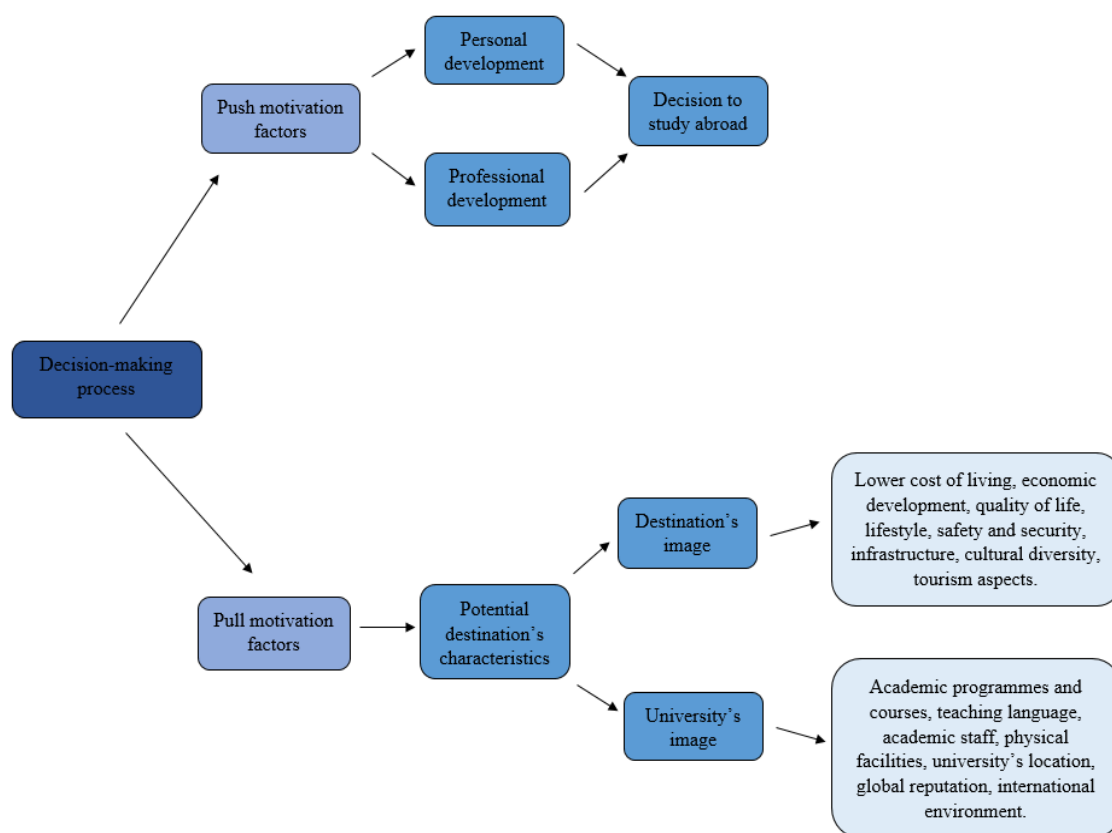
4.8.2 Social media

Social media or consumer-generated media is a tool used to influence consumers to achieve business and marketing objectives. In other words, social media is based on the relationship between the customers' expectations and the actual performance of the product or service and is driven by word of mouth, the most trusted source of information. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a dominant channel influencing consumer behaviour and decision-making. Therefore, social media as a platform for sharing travel experiences has a positive influence on people; they use it for choosing their destination as well as a guide for their trips (Moltaji, 2018, p. 9).

A similar trend has been found among students that use social media for information-seeking, collaborative activities, and social interactions. Social media can positively affect students and thus, it is reasonable to believe it affects the students' decision-making process (Moltaji, 2018, p. 9). As a social environment, it allows communication by sharing information in various forms, such as pictures and files. Therefore, the decision-making could automatically be affected by the visual and textual information on social media, which means students can be affected by the information shared on social media by the universities and student recruitment (Moltaji, 2018, p. 11).

However, when selecting a higher education programme and university, it has been found that students prefer traditional communication channels. Meanwhile, future students are more interested in social media, their social interactions, and information seeking. Especially in higher education, social media is becoming one of the most important communication tools among students. It is used as an educational environment that improves student involvement, classroom practices, as well as reading and writing skills when learning a foreign or second language. Moreover, students use social media for educational purposes that have a positive impact on their academic performance, as they can interact with peers and teachers. Students' decisions are also based on advice from social networks in addition to all the formal sources (Moltaji, 2018, pp. 9–10).

Figure 10: Study abroad decision-making process



Source: own work.

5 LJUBLJANA AND SLOVENIA AS TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Since its independence in 1991, Slovenia has recognised the importance of tourism for the national economy and began to promote itself as an independent state. Moreover, after becoming a member of the EU and adopting the euro, it has become a popular tourist city for European markets (Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017). In the last decade, Slovenia has experienced marked tourism growth and tourism is becoming an important industry in many Slovenian regions. Tourism development within a country is influenced by many factors such as accessibility, changes, economic conditions, environmental situation, government policies, political environment, fashion, etc. (Cigale, 2019, p. 5).

5.1 Attributes of Slovenia

Slovenia is a relatively small country but it is characterised by the Alps and by the Mediterranean coast. With its climate, Slovenia falls within the Alpine, continental, and Mediterranean climate zones (Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008, p. 295). It offers beautiful

landscapes, a stable economy, and a secure environment. Furthermore, Slovenia has strong direct overland transport links with neighbouring Austria and Italy while also expanding its flight connections with Germany, which are the major regional source markets (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b, p. 6). Proximity, strong cross-border connections with major highways and rail routes, and lack of visa requirements are also some of the country's benefits (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b, p. 8). However, Slovenia, as a small market in terms of the development of tourism, needs to improve air transport connections with new routes and thus increase visitor numbers (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b, p. 4).

Despite its small market, Slovenia has a diverse tourism market to offer with cultural, healthy, natural, and active holidays. Apart from Lake Bled as a popular summer destination and the coastal region, Slovenia also has a well-developed winter holiday market in the Julian Alps. Important attractions of the country are also food and drinks. Additionally, the capital Ljubljana offers many popular attractions, including the Old Town and the Ljubljana Castle (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b, p. 18).

Slovenia's main tourism products are divided into 4 groups (Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017):

- tourism linked to the Alps and winter sports;
- health resorts;
- coastal tourism, and
- urban tourism.

Additionally, at the national level, ten main touristic products have been recognised: holidays in the mountains and outdoor activities, business meetings and events, health and well-being, nature experiences, gastronomy, culture, sun, and sea, sports tourism, round trips, and rural tourism (Ministrstvo za gospodarski razvoj in tehnologijo, 2020).

However, for the majority of tourists, Slovenia is only a transit destination, whereas their final destinations are located on the Adriatic coast. Because of Slovenia's small territorial size, tourists who travel to Slovenia are often multi-destination travellers, meaning that they visit Slovenia and at least one other country. Tourists mostly come from neighbouring and other nearby countries (Cigale, 2019, p. 8). Memberships in the EU and the Schengen area are two of Slovenia's strengths that make it easily accessible to key source markets in Europe, while its small area with strong transportation infrastructure makes the country more accessible to visitors. Furthermore, its natural attractions provide many tourist attractions for visitors and it is an attractive business environment in terms of the EU membership investment benefits. The biggest weaknesses of Slovenia are its short coastline that limits over-sea arrivals and beach resort options, limited accommodations with a small number of global chains, regional markets such as Croatia and Hungary that could affect the growth of tourism, and its small population that limits the expansion of domestic tourism industry. Slovenia's biggest opportunities are its option to provide a year-round tourism industry with

many holiday options and the country's green marketing that attracts many visitors that are concerned with nature and sustainability. Moreover, increased international flight connections bring more visitors and attract higher-spending visitors, such as those from Asia and the Middle East. The biggest threats for Slovenia would be the economic downturn of the regional markets such as Italy and Germany and the UK's exit from the EU that could limit travel. The economic downturn could also threaten Slovenia's reliance on tourism and industry growth (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b, p. 5).

The culture of Slovenia has been shaped by its geographical position in contact with nature, social, political, and cultural environment in the heart of Europe. With accessible forests and natural beauty, outdoor activities such as hiking and mountaineering are some of the most popular ways to enjoy leisure time. Despite various linguistic influences such as German and Serbo-Croatian, the Slovenian language belongs to the Western subgroup of the South Slavic languages and is one of the 24 official and working languages of the European Union (Urbanc, Hribar & Kumer, 2019). Additionally, in 2016, 84.1% of the population aged 25 to 64 spoke one or more foreign languages (Eurostat, 2019a).

Central Slovenia with the capital Ljubljana is the strongest region in Slovenia in terms of economic development. In recent years, Slovenia has been achieving economic growth and has reduced unemployment (European Commission, 2019). Additionally, Slovenia performs well in health status, social connections, education and skills, work-life balance, environmental quality, and personal security (OECD, n.d.). Moreover, Slovenia maintains a low international profile and therefore gives a strong performance from the crime and security perspective. It is perceived as one of the most politically stable countries of the former Yugoslavia (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019a).

The main expenditures in Slovenia are housing (rent, heating, and electricity), food and drinks, and transport. Rents in Ljubljana are around 20% higher than in other Slovenian regions and prices for a two-room flat in the centre of the cities range from approximately 600 to 700 euros/month (European Commission, 2020b). However, when comparing consumer price levels in Slovenia with the European Union average, prices in Slovenia are lower. For example, in 2018, housing prices in Slovenia were 30.5% lower than the European Union average, transportation and food prices were only around 2% lower, while alcoholic beverages and tobacco were 21.8% lower than in other EU countries (Eurostat, 2019b).

5.2 Attributes of Ljubljana

Tourism is a relatively new industry in Ljubljana, but Ljubljana has become a popular tourist attraction with its investment in sustainable urban tourism development and an integrated marketing mix to attract tourists (Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020, p. 1). In recent years, Ljubljana has developed into an urban tourism destination and has changed considerably (Grah, Dimovski, & Peterlin, 2020, p. 7). In 2018, it recorded 1,022,862 tourist arrivals and

2,179,916 tourist nights, the majority of which took place in the high season from May to October (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019, pp. 7–8). Cheap flight connections make Ljubljana a popular destination for short city breaks and backpackers (Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017).

Ljubljana with its 280 thousand inhabitants is not only the capital of Slovenia but also is the administrative, cultural, political, and economic centre (Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020, p. 7). It is recognisable by extensive green areas with parks, forests, agricultural lands. Moreover, it offers high-quality public spaces spread throughout the entire city area that are accessible to all residents and are safe, well kept, and respectful towards cultural heritage, natural resources, and environment (Nastran & Regina, 2016, p. 123). Since 2015, Ljubljana has been part of the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism and has made it to the Global TOP 100 Sustainable Destinations list for the fifth time in 2019. Furthermore, in 2016, Ljubljana held the title of the European Green Capital (Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020, p. 7).

Ljubljana is a lively capital close to unspoilt and easily accessible nature. Central Slovenia and Ljubljana are part of Slovenia's macro destinations along with the Alpine, Pannonian, and Mediterranean Slovenia. The main tourism products in Central Slovenia, including Ljubljana, are business meetings, events, culture (city discovery, rich history, festivals, and art), circular travel, and gastronomy (urban and rural food). Additionally, supporting products are outdoor activities, nature experience, special interests, shopping, and gambling (Ministrstvo za gospodarski razvoj in tehnologijo, 2017). Moreover, some of the attributes of Ljubljana are also its rich historical heritage based on medieval times and the Roman settlement Emona, while also its closeness to the Alps, Mediterranean sea, as well as other sightseeing destinations such as Postojna Cave, and Bled, as well as Venice, Milan, Vienna, and Salzburg (Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020, p. 7).

5.2.1 Tourists' motives for visiting Ljubljana

Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic (2017), throughout their research, observed the tourists' motives for visiting Ljubljana. The cultural motive was found to be the most dominant one. Ljubljana is known for its valuable and rich cultural heritage and it has many cultural monuments, a castle, churches, and fountains. These sites are promoted as cultural tourism resources by the Ljubljana Regional Office of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, which is responsible for cultural heritage in the Ljubljana region. Moreover, entertainment and nightlife were the second-ranked motives, especially by the younger age groups, who have a strong interest in night-time experiences and socialising. Ljubljana as the capital city with its location in the centre of the country offers dynamic nightlife and entertainment opportunities. Additionally, as the biggest and the capital city of Slovenia, entertainment venues and businesses are located there and, therefore, it holds the biggest music events and festivals in Slovenia. The third highest ranked identified motive is shopping. Ljubljana has several shopping centres offering both domestic and

international brands. Furthermore, education was identified as the fourth most dominant motive for visiting Ljubljana. The oldest and the biggest educational institution in Slovenia is the University of Ljubljana with a large number of students even from abroad. It is among the largest universities in Europe and has an excellent location in the centre of the country, which makes it easily accessible to students. The fifth identified motive to visit Ljubljana is festivals and other cultural events, as Ljubljana holds more than 10 thousand cultural events and 14 international festivals each year. Ljubljana also has a diverse offer of international and domestic restaurants, with a high level of quality food and service; therefore, gastronomy is the sixth-highest motive for visiting Ljubljana. Moreover, the Open Kitchen market with numerous restaurants from different parts of the country, demonstrating the gastronomy culture of the destination to the visitors, has become a very popular festival in Ljubljana. The natural environment is the next identified motive, as Slovenia is known for its well-preserved natural environment. Ljubljana has many parks and promenades but there are many larger parks, bike tracks, and pedestrian and hiking trails that are just a few kilometres from the city. Those who come to visit Ljubljana are primarily motivated by its natural values but there is also a high number of tourists who want to spend time in nature and therefore travel outside the city. Slovenia, as a land of many successful athletes, is also attractive for sports and sporting events, especially since the construction of the sports facility Stožice was finished. Ljubljana is a capital city, with many companies and enterprises; business is also one of the motives to bring business tourists to the city.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research for this master's thesis was conducted through a comprehensive literature review to gain an understanding of the main motivation factors of exchange students when deciding to study abroad and to analyse the main factors that influenced their decision when choosing a study abroad destination. These gave a clear direction for the creation of the questionnaire that we shared among the exchange students who were on their exchange in Ljubljana.

6.1 Questionnaire and used methods

For the empirical part of my thesis, quantitative research was conducted. The questionnaire was designed by using the insights from the literature review. The main goal was to cover all the attraction factors of the University of Ljubljana, while also of Ljubljana as a destination itself. The questionnaire consists of 14 closed-ended and open-ended questions. The given questions cover the main motivational factors that influenced the decision to study abroad, the factors that were taken into consideration when choosing the host university and the study abroad destination, the importance of social networks, non-academic motives, and Ljubljana's attributes as a study destination. When answering closed-ended questions, the participants could select one or more answers. Meanwhile, for the questions where the

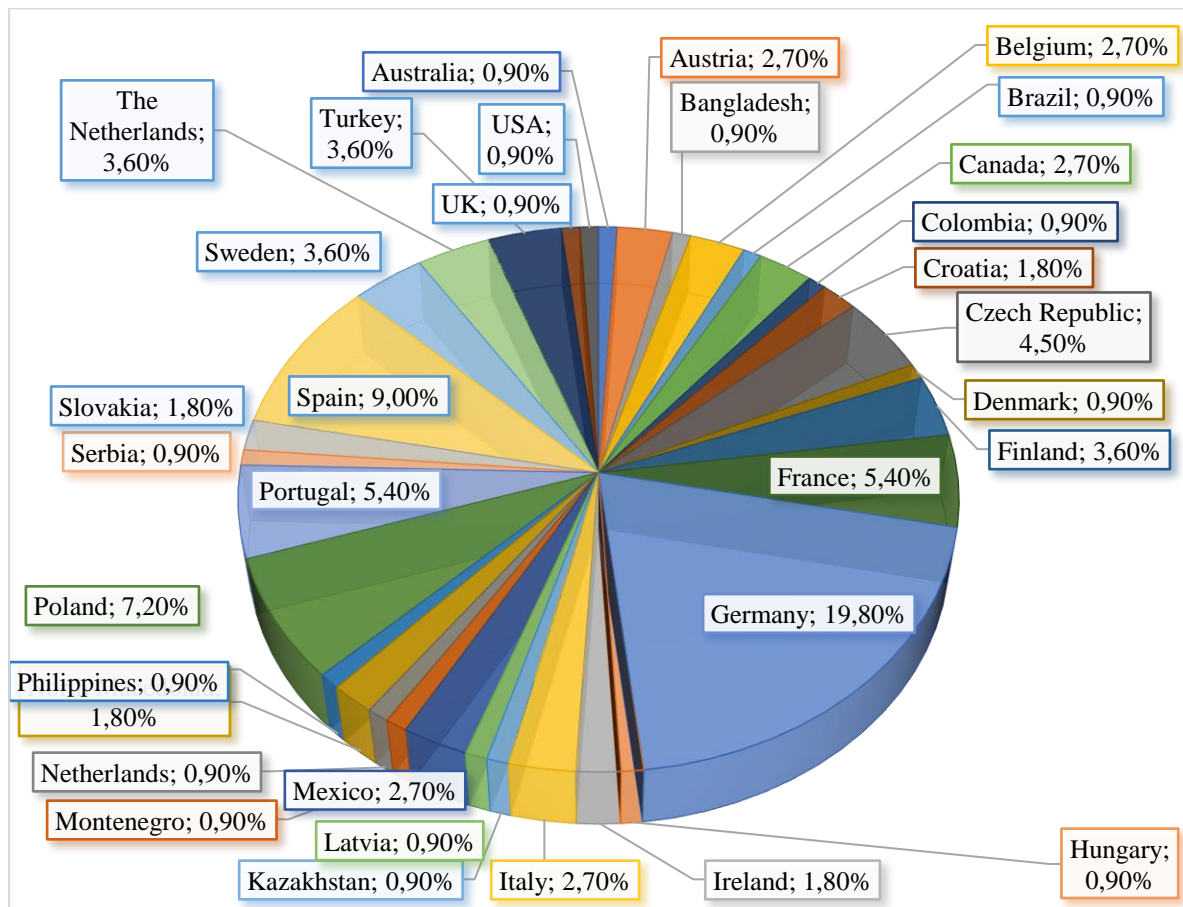
participants had to rate the importance of the specific motive, Likert 5-scale questions were used. Using the Likert scale, the participants specified their level of agreement with or importance of a specific statement, number 5 indicating “strongly agree” or “very important” and number 1 indicating “strongly disagree” or “not at all important”. The last section of the questionnaire was about demographics, where the participants were asked about their country of origin, education level, gender, and age.

6.1.1 Research process and sample size

Before sharing the link of the questionnaire among the exchange students, I first shared it with my friends and tested it for any ambiguities. Afterwards, the questionnaire was uploaded on the web portal www.1ka.si and was open from the 25th of August until the 19th of October 2020. The link to the questionnaire was sent via Facebook or Instagram directly to the exchange students in Ljubljana. Additionally, the link was shared in Facebook groups that were created for the exchange students in Ljubljana. Furthermore, other SEB LU tutors, the International Office of the School of Economics and Business, the University of Ljubljana, and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Ljubljana helped me by sharing the link among the students on their Facebook pages.

Out of 162 students, 111 students' responses were fully usable for further research. Out of the 111 participants, 64 were female (57.7%) and 47 were male (42.3%) with the minimum age being 19 and the maximum 32. During the time of the exchange in Ljubljana, the majority were enrolled in the bachelor's degree programmes (60.4%) and the rest (39.6%) in the master's level of education. Moreover, 45.0% of the participants studied in Ljubljana during the winter semester and 40.5% during the summer semester, while 14.5% spent a full study year in Ljubljana. There were students from 33 different countries participating in the questionnaire. The majority of them came from Germany (19.8%), Spain (9%), Poland (8.1%), Portugal (5.4%), and France (5.4%). Figure 8 shows the percentage of students from each country. Figure 11 shows the percentage of students for each of the 33 countries the participants come from.

Figure 11: Percentage of students based on their home country



Source: own work.

6.2 Research questions and hypotheses

Based on the existing literature review, research questions and hypotheses were formulated. The research questions are as follows:

- Do exchange students choose Ljubljana as their study abroad destination because they find it attractive as a tourist destination or is their decision based on the study programmes and courses that are offered to the exchange students?
- Where do students get the most information related to the study exchange in Ljubljana?
- What are the main factors that students find attractive and important about Ljubljana as a tourist destination?
- Were the students satisfied with their decision of choosing Ljubljana as their study abroad destination?

As per Herrero, San Martín and del Río Peña (2015), before studying abroad, students familiarise themselves with the educational institution and evaluate the educational programme. However, a student's decision is not only influenced by the academic elements,

but also by various country and city dimensions. The city itself represents a place with the provided educational services, which are consumed by the students who are temporary citizens in that place. Furthermore, Roostika (2017) explained that students not only seek a university's image and reputation but also a good city environment and, therefore, the city itself may attract potential students and foreign students. Based on that, the following hypothesis 1 was formulated.

H1: The tourism image of Ljubljana is positively correlated with the image of the host university.

Herrero, San Martín and del Río Peña (2015) pointed out that a student's satisfaction with the assigned destination for an international exchange programme depends on the good perception of the university. They defined a university's image as the sum of opinions, ideas, and impressions that students have about the university based on perceived quality, global reputation, physical facilities, and academic programmes, courses, and staff. The university's image, such as the location of the university, academic facilities, and life outside the university play an important factor in the students' decision-making process. Furthermore, Jupiter et al. (2017) recognised the university programme as one of the most important factors attracting international students when making their university selection. The students showed the tendency to select the countries where English is a widely spoken language and the universities offering programmes taught in English. Based on those factors, hypothesis 2 was formulated.

H2: The students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on their academic performance, evaluated the image of the University of Ljubljana significantly higher than the students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on Ljubljana destination attributes.

Studies identified family and friends' influences as one of the major factors that are associated with the student's decision to study abroad. Jupiter et al. (2017) define an individual's social network group formed by family and friends, academics, and student testimonials. Social network includes a relationship with family, friends, and academics, claiming that family and friends' support has a strong indirect influence on an individual's perception. Moreover, recommendations and reliable information are considered to have high credibility and impact on students' decisions towards the chosen university.

Students' motivation factors to study abroad are similar to tourists' motivation factors, as studying abroad can be equated with a tourist experience. These factors include opportunities to study, gaining new experiences, learning about different cultures and languages (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Juvan and Lesjak (2011) explained that exchange students might be more attracted by the tourism attractiveness of the destination rather than the benefits of the university. Individuals have different expectations, beliefs, dreams, and fantasies; therefore, destinations with more positive images will more likely be chosen (Cardoso, Dias, de Araújo & Marques, 2019, pp. 81–82). If a host country offers an educational tourism image and

attractive surroundings, it will bring those students back as tourists and they will spread the favourable word of mouth about the host country to future tourists (Lam & Ariffin, 2019). In their research, Jupiter et al. (2017) wrote that students' experiences and insights give a clearer picture of a certain country, university, and programme and that students' recommendations can make a significant impact on the selected study abroad destination. Based on that, hypotheses 3 and 4 were formulated.

H3: There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of revisiting Ljubljana in the future.

H4: There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students.

6.3 Data analysis

The collected data was analysed with the help of the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software. Categorical variables are presented with the use of frequencies and relative frequencies (percentages), whereas numerical variables are presented with the use of arithmetic means, standard deviations, and medians. Numerical variables were also tested for deviations from normality, and since they violate the normality assumption, non-parametric methods were used for testing the hypotheses. Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 were tested using the Spearman correlation coefficient, while hypothesis 2 was tested with the Mann-Whitney.

6.3.1 Main motivation factors influencing the decision to study abroad

When analysing the main motivation factors influencing the students' decision to study abroad, the factors that stood out were personal growth, professional growth, meeting new people, a better understanding of different cultures, the influence of friends and classmates, opportunities to travel, or other motives. Personal growth (73.0% of the students), opportunities to travel (72.1% of the students), and meeting new people (65.8% of the students) are recognised as some of the main factors. The influence of friends and classmates (16.2% of the students) was not recognised as a very important factor in comparison to others. Additionally, four students (3.6%) specified other motives, which are as follows:

- “I wanted to go on an exchange in a country that was not in advance too familiar to me.”
- “I had to spend a semester abroad.”
- “Move away from home.”
- “Courses offered and positive opinions of the students who had been there before.”

When deciding about the study destination, 74 students (66.7%) chose Ljubljana based on its attributes, whereas 37 students (33.3%) chose Ljubljana based on the university and the programmes and courses that it offers. Table 1 below shows the importance of each motivation factor by the number and percentage of the students' ranking of the chosen factors from the highest to the lowest.

Table 1: Factors when choosing the study abroad destination

Statements	Chosen		Not chosen	
	Count	Row N (in %)	Count	Row N (in %)
Personal growth	81	73.0	30	27.0
Opportunities to travel	80	72.1	31	27.9
Meeting new people	73	65.8	38	34.2
A greater understanding of different cultures	47	42.3	64	57.7
Professional growth	43	38.7	68	61.3
Influence of friends/classmates	18	16.2	93	83.8
Other:	4	3.6	107	96.4

Source: own work.

Table 2: Choice of Ljubljana as the study destination

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (in %)
Based on the destination and its attributes	74	66.7
Based on the university and the programmes and courses offered	37	33.3
Total	111	100.0

Source: own work.

6.3.2 The University of Ljubljana as a host university

This section analyses the factors that the students were taking into consideration when choosing Ljubljana as the host university. The students needed to rate the given statements by using a 5-point Likert scale. When choosing Ljubljana as the host university, the highest-rated factor that the students took into consideration was English as a teaching language with a mean of 4.46, while the second-highest factor was courses offered with a mean of 4.00. The lowest agreement was given to the university's location in the city and the email feedback from the host university administration with means of 2.86 and 2.95, respectively. The results are shown in the following Table 3.

Table 3: Factors taken into consideration when choosing the University of Ljubljana

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
English as a teaching language	111	4.46	5.00	.882
Courses offered	111	4.00	4.00	.924
Recommendations from previous students	111	3.80	4.00	1.069
Academic reputation and rankings of the university	111	3.41	4.00	.919
Students benefits from the host destination (student events, discounts, student accommodation, etc.)	111	3.35	3.00	1.033
Housing facilities at the destination	111	3.03	3.00	1.022
Email feedback from the host university administration	111	2.95	3.00	1.060
University's location in the city	111	2.86	3.00	1.013

Source: own work.

Moreover, when expressing agreement or disagreement with the given statements related to Ljubljana as a study destination, the strongest agreement was given to the statement that Ljubljana provides a good quality of life with a mean of 3.92. It is followed by safety and security at the destination with the mean of 3.88, social life at the destination with the mean of 3.86, and lower costs of living with the mean of 3.76. On the other hand, the strongest disagreements were given to the factors such as the language used at the destination with the mean of 2.99, past travel experiences with the mean of 2.85, and the geographical proximity from the home country with the mean of 2.78. All results related to each statement are shown in the following Table 4.

Table 4: Factors taken into consideration when choosing Ljubljana as the study destination

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Quality of life at the destination	111	3.92	4.00	.822
Safety and security at the destination	111	3.88	4.00	.850
Social life of the destination	111	3.86	4.00	.909
Lower cost of living	111	3.76	4.00	.946
Size of the city where the university is located	111	3.32	3.00	1.018
Diverse culture	111	3.16	3.00	1.014
Economic stability of the destination	111	3.11	3.00	.985
Language used at the destination	111	2.99	3.00	1.049
Past travel experiences	111	2.85	3.00	1.208
Geographical proximity from the home country	111	2.78	3.00	1.209

Source: own work.

6.3.3 Social networks and non-academic motives

Furthermore, the students had to rate the importance of social networks and communication on their decision about the study exchange in Ljubljana. On a scale from 1 to 5, number 1

presented “not at all important” and 5 represented “very important”. Based on the importance of the decision to choose Ljubljana as the study abroad destination, the options that stood out were family support, friends’ support, recommendations from previous students, and information provided through the university’s website. When choosing Ljubljana, the students found that the available information provided through the university’s website was the most important, with a mean of 3.64, followed by recommendations from previous students with a mean of 3.60, family’s support with a mean of 3.53, and the lowest importance was given to friends’ support with the mean of 3.18 and social media with a mean of 2.81. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Importance of social networks and communication

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Information provided through the university’s website	111	3.64	4.00	.882
Recommendations from previous students	111	3.60	4.00	1.122
Family’s support	111	3.53	4.00	1.069
Friends’ support	111	3.18	3.00	.974
Social media	111	2.81	3.00	1.100

Source: own work.

When rating the importance of the non-academic motives that influenced their decision, the strongest importance was given to combining study with an opportunity of travel with a mean of 4.58. It was followed by socialising with a mean of 4.33, having fun with a mean of 4.23, interacting with other cultures with a mean of 4.11, and relaxing after studies with a mean of 3.69. To provide a better picture, the results for each non-academic motive are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Importance of non-academic motives

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Combining study with an opportunity to travel	111	4.58	5.00	.668
Socialising	111	4.33	4.00	.679
Having fun	111	4.23	4.00	.786
Interaction with other cultures	111	4.11	4.00	.846
Relaxing after studies	111	3.69	4.00	.951

Source: own work.

6.3.4 Ljubljana as a destination

While on exchange in Ljubljana, the students could experience several activities, and the most popular activities are listed below. Out of 111 students, 105 (94.6%) of them experienced Ljubljana’s nightlife, 103 (92.8%) explored other tourist attractions besides

Ljubljana, 102 (91.9%) went sightseeing in the city, 101 (91.0%) experienced Slovenia's well-preserved nature. While all the mentioned activities received a lot of attention from the students, on the other hand, only 77 of them (69.4%) went shopping and only 72 (64.9%) visited any festivals or cultural events. Table 7 shows the number and percentage of the students who experienced all the mentioned activities during their exchange in Ljubljana. The results shown in Table 7 are ranked from the highest chosen activity by the students to the lowest.

Table 7: Activities during the study exchange in Ljubljana

Statements	Chosen		Not chosen	
	Count	Row N (in %)	Count	Row N (in %)
Experienced Ljubljana's nightlife	105	94.6	6	5.4
Explored other tourist attractions besides Ljubljana	103	92.8	8	7.2
Went sightseeing	102	91.9	9	8.1
Experienced Slovenia's well-preserved natural environment	101	91.0	10	9.0
Tasted local food	97	87.4	14	12.6
Travelled to any nearby countries and cities (e.g., Zagreb, Budapest, Vienna, Venice)	96	86.5	15	13.5
Went shopping	77	69.4	34	30.6
Visited any festivals or cultural events	72	64.9	39	35.1

Source: own work.

The following Table 8 shows the students' agreement or disagreement with the statements related to the study exchange in Ljubljana. With a mean of 4.76, the students agree that Ljubljana is a safe destination and would recommend a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students. Followed by a mean of 4.69, the majority of the students will most likely revisit Ljubljana in the future. Although no major deviations were observed as all statements were rated with the mean of at least 4, the statement "Ljubljana is very accessible and well connected to other tourist attractions in Slovenia as well as to other countries" was rated with a mean of 4.18 and followed by the students' satisfaction with the quality of the higher education system at the University of Ljubljana with a mean of 4.14.

Table 8: Agreement with the following statements about Ljubljana as a study destination

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I would recommend a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students.	111	4.76	5.00	.471
Ljubljana is a safe destination.	111	4.76	5.00	.526
I will likely revisit Ljubljana in the future.	111	4.69	5.00	.519
Ljubljana is an attractive tourist destination.	111	4.59	5.00	.562

table continues

*Table 8: Agreement with the following statements about Ljubljana as a study destination
(cont.)*

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Ljubljana met my expectations as a study abroad destination.	111	4.50	5.00	.631
Ljubljana is very accessible and well connected to other tourist attractions in Slovenia as well as to other countries.	111	4.18	4.00	.926
I was satisfied with the quality of the higher education system at the University of Ljubljana.	111	4.14	4.00	.757

Source: own work.

The students agreed that they benefitted greatly from studying abroad. The major recognised benefit with a mean of 4.50 was the establishment of new friendships, followed by developed personality with a mean of 4.31, deepened understanding of other cultures with a mean of 4.09, improved language skills with a mean of 4.04, and better labour market prospects with a mean of 3.35. The results related to the benefits are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Benefits of studying abroad in Ljubljana

Statements	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Established new friendships	111	4.50	5.00	.659
Developed personality	111	4.31	4.00	.629
Deepened understanding of other cultures	111	4.09	4.00	.695
Improved language skills	111	4.04	4.00	.797
Better labour market prospects	111	3.35	3.00	.849

Source: own work.

6.4 Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis 1: The tourist image of Ljubljana is positively correlated with the image of the host university.

The Spearman correlation coefficient between the image of Ljubljana and the image of the host university has a value of .096, which implies a positive but very weak correlation between the variables. Furthermore, the coefficient is not statistically significant ($p = .159$). Therefore, we cannot conclude that the image of Ljubljana itself is positively correlated with the image of the host university. Results are shown in Table 15 in Appendix 3. Hypothesis 1 cannot be accepted.

Table 10: Hypothesis 1 testing

Hypothesis testing		image_Ljubljana
Image_university	Spearman Correlation Coefficient	.096
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.159
	N	111

Source: own work.

Hypothesis 2: The students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on academic performance, evaluated the image of the University of Ljubljana significantly higher than the students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on Ljubljana destination attributes.

The median level of agreement with the fact that the University of Ljubljana has a good image for the students who chose Ljubljana based on the academic performance is 3.67. On the other hand, the median level of agreement with the fact that the University of Ljubljana has a good image for the students who chose Ljubljana based on the destination and its attributes is 3.33. The results of the Mann-Whitney test show that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant ($U = 884.000$; $p = .001$). Therefore, we can conclude that the median level of agreement with the fact that the University of Ljubljana has a good image is higher for the students who chose Ljubljana based on the university and the programmes and courses offered than for the students who chose Ljubljana based on the destination and its attributes. Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 11: Hypothesis 2 testing

Hypothesis testing	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mann-Whitney test	
					U	Sig. (1-tailed)
Based on the destination and its attributes	74	3.31	.695	3.33	884.000	.001
Based on the university and the programmes and courses offered	37	3.75	.535	3.67		

Source: own work.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of revisiting Ljubljana in the future.

The Spearman correlation coefficient between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of revisiting Ljubljana in the future has a value of .397, which implies a moderate positive correlation between the variables. Furthermore, the coefficient is statistically significant ($p < .000$). Therefore, we can conclude that the likelihood of revisiting Ljubljana in the future is positively correlated with the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination. Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Table 12: Hypothesis 3 testing

Hypothesis testing		I will likely revisit Ljubljana in the future.
Ljubljana met my expectations as a study abroad destination.	Spearman Correlation Coefficient	.397
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
	N	111

Source: own work.

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students.

The Spearman correlation coefficient between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students has a value of .431, which implies a moderate positive correlation between the variables. Furthermore, the coefficient is statistically significant ($p < .000$). Therefore, we can conclude that the likelihood of recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students is positively correlated with the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination. Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Table 13: Hypothesis 4 testing

Hypothesis testing		I would recommend a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students.
Ljubljana met my expectations as a study abroad destination.	Spearman Correlation Coefficient	.431
	Sig. (1-tailed)	< .001
	N	111

Source: own work.

Table 14: List of accepted and not accepted hypotheses

H	Hypotheses	Accepted (✓) or not accepted (✗)
H1:	The image of Ljubljana is positively correlated with the image of the host university.	✗
H2:	The students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on academic performance, evaluated the image of the University of Ljubljana significantly higher than the students, who chose the University of Ljubljana based on Ljubljana destination attributes.	✓
H3:	There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of revisiting Ljubljana in the future.	✓

table continues

Table 15: List of accepted and not accepted hypotheses (cont.)

	Hypotheses	Accepted (✓) or not accepted (✗)
H4:	There is a positive correlation between the degree to which Ljubljana met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination and the likelihood of recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students.	✓

Source: own work.

7 DISCUSSION

This chapter reviews the findings of the factors that drove the exchange students to choose Ljubljana as their study destination. When making the decision to study abroad and selecting the study abroad destination, the destination itself has a much bigger influence on the decision than the university with its programmes and courses offered. With testing hypothesis 1, it is accepted that the image of Ljubljana as the host destination and the image of the University of Ljubljana are not positively correlated. With testing hypothesis 2, it is accepted that students who chose the University of Ljubljana based on their academic performance, evaluated the image of the University of Ljubljana significantly higher than the students who chose the University of Ljubljana based on Ljubljana destination attributes. It was shown that the majority of exchange students chose Ljubljana as the study destination based on the destination and its attributes (66.7% of students) rather than on the university and its programmes and courses offered (33.3% of students). When comparing the semester of their study in Ljubljana, no big differences were recognised; however, the majority of the participants completed their exchange during the winter semester. Moreover, only 14.5% of the students studied abroad for a full year. During the exchange, they were mostly enrolled in the bachelor's degree programmes (60.4%). The participants came from 33 different countries, mostly from Germany, Spain, Poland, Portugal, and France as based on the European Commission's report (2015), Spain, Germany, and France are some of the biggest student sending countries in Europe. Furthermore, the share of students from Europe who study in some of the EU member states is often very high as students are likely to do their exchange in neighbouring countries that reflects in a common language and former colonies (Eurostat, 2019c). The participants in the study exchange in Ljubljana were between 19 and 32 years old. Students are not only going abroad to learn but also to be tourists and a destination has to be affordable and there should be travel opportunities (Cairns, 2017). Stone and Petrick (2013) identified students' motivation factors to study abroad similar to tourists' motivation factors, which include opportunities to travel, new experiences, and learning about different cultures and languages. With travelling, students gain functional knowledge, personal growth, and intercultural awareness. Through the research, personal growth, opportunities to travel, and meeting new people were identified as the main factors that influenced exchange students' decision to study in Ljubljana. Some students also

pointed out that they wanted to move away from home or they were required to spend a semester abroad.

The university's image plays an important role in the students' decision-making process. Jupiter (2017) in his study showed students' tendency to select countries that use English as a compulsory language or countries with more widely spoken European languages. Moreover, Mikuláš and Jitka (2019) identified that countries with less widely spoken languages offer more programmes taught in English to attract international students. The exchange students at the University of Ljubljana recognised English as a teaching language and courses that the university offers as the most important factor. When selecting the study destination, they heard positive opinions of students who had been on exchange in Ljubljana before or they wanted to go to an exchange in a country that was not very familiar to them. Furthermore, email feedback from the university administration and its location in the city centre of Ljubljana was not recognised as important factors, which would define the image of the University of Ljubljana. Moreover, family support was quite important for students, more than their friends' support. A big role in the students' decisions was also played by the information provided on the website of the University of Ljubljana. Jupiter et al. (2017), identified family and friends' support and feedback, students' testimonials, suggestions, recommendations, and reliable information to have a strong influence on the chosen university. While on exchange in Ljubljana, the students recognised the high importance of the possibility to combine study with an opportunity to travel, socialising, interacting with other cultures, and having fun. Marques, Mohsin and Lenger (2018) through their research identified similarly, i.e., students' behaviour is based on the importance of having fun, socialising and relaxing after studies. Additionally, when choosing the study destination, the students recognised Ljubljana as a safe destination with good quality and social life, and lower costs of living. Exchange students who are temporary citizens in that place students prefer to choose safe destinations with natural attractions, go shopping and sightseeing, learn about the country where they study, experience local culture, taste local food, and explore new places (Deng & Ritchie, 2018, pp. 455–456). During their exchange in Ljubljana, almost 95% of the students experienced Ljubljana's nightlife. Additionally, more than 90% of the students went sightseeing, explored other tourist attractions besides Ljubljana, and explored the well-preserved natural environment of the country. As mentioned, the students attributed high importance to combining study with an opportunity to travel, and therefore, 86.5% of them took this opportunity and travelled to Ljubljana's nearby countries and cities. However, geographical proximity from the home country and past travel experiences did not play a significant role in their decision. A lower percentage, but still more than half of the students (64.9%), visited festivals or cultural events during their stay in Ljubljana.

Studying abroad allows students to develop their personalities by increasing their openness and understanding of other cultures through the discovery of other cultures and languages. Moreover, it develops new skills and establishes new friendships that can result in future professional and personal benefits (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015, p. 3).

The students recognised newly established friendships as the most important benefit of their study exchange in Ljubljana. They also highly agreed that during their exchange they developed their personality, deepened their understanding of other cultures, and improved their language skills.

When choosing a travel destination, tourists are attracted by the level of tourism-related development, such as the safety and leisure infrastructure, the general standard of living, as well as a certain degree of popularity or image (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015, p. 373). The image of a destination is based on Herrero, San Martín and del Río Peña's (2015) research associated with job opportunities, lifestyle, quality of life, cost of living, safety, and cultural diversity. Exchange students recognised Ljubljana as a safe and attractive tourist destination that will likely revisit in the future. Moreover, hypotheses 3 and 4 accepted that there is a positive correlation between the statement that Ljubljana met the students' expectations and the likelihood of their revisiting in the future, as well as between Ljubljana having met the students' expectations as a study destination and recommending a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students. Lastly, the students strongly agreed that Ljubljana met their expectations as a study abroad destination and would recommend it to other students which based on Cairns (2017) brings benefit to the city as these students might later return to the city or invite their friends and family.

The questionnaire was shared among the exchange students who had already finished their study exchange in Ljubljana. Therefore, motivational factors among the students could slightly vary depending on the year of exchange. Moreover, the conducted research was based on the students who studied at the University of Ljubljana and not at a specific faculty. We can conclude that the majority of them studied at the School of Economics and Business, the University of Ljubljana. Secondly, there was no age groupset. Based on the minimum age of 19 and the maximum age of 32, the students might have taken into consideration different factors, might have different values, and might recognise different benefits received through the study abroad. A direction for future potential research could be analysing motivation factors based on specific age groups of the exchange students or based on the level of education (bachelor, master) as those motivation factors may be different depending on the age and the level of education. It would be interesting to examine whether the bachelor's students are more driven by having fun and travelling and if the master's students are more driven by academic factors. It would also be interesting to compare motivational factors of students from different faculties of the University of Ljubljana and identify if individual faculties potentially have a specific or stronger influence on their decision. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, potential research could analyse how the pandemic affected study abroad opportunities, how much, if at all, the number of exchange students decreased compared to previous years when the numbers were increasing, and above all, what were the main motivation factors of the students who still decided to physically participate in a study abroad.

CONCLUSION

Due to the increase in international mobility (Kritz, 2016, p. 103) and the increasing number of incoming students in Ljubljana since 1999 when Slovenia joined the Erasmus+ programme (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes, n.d.), the main purpose of this thesis was to analyse the exchange students' motivation factors when choosing Ljubljana as their study abroad destination. The goal of the research was to examine the literature based on destination choice, studying abroad, and mobility programmes and apply it to the case of Ljubljana as a study abroad destination. Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap and Axelsson (2015, p. 364) defined motivation factors as the factors that influence exchange students to participate in a study abroad programme and to select a particular study destination. Furthermore, for the research, a quantitative methodology was used and a questionnaire with 14 questions was created. The questionnaire was shared among exchange students who participated in a study abroad exchange in Ljubljana. Based on research questions, four main hypotheses were developed and tested. Three out of four hypotheses were confirmed.

Based on the obtained data, this master's thesis can conclude that the majority of the students who participated in the study exchange in Ljubljana chose Ljubljana based on the attractiveness of the destination rather than the university and its programmes offered. Students pointed out that personal growth, opportunities to travel, and meeting new people were the most important factors influencing the decision to study in Ljubljana. Based on the image of the University of Ljubljana, the research confirmed that positive recommendations from previous exchange students played an important role. Moreover, family support was quite important for students, more than their friends' support. A big role in the students' decisions also played the information provided on the website of the University of Ljubljana. Apart from that, English as a teaching language and the courses offered also strongly influenced the decision. The numbers of students during the winter and summer semesters did not differ significantly, but not many of them participated in a full-year study abroad. Students came from 33 different countries, the majority from Germany, Spain, Poland, Portugal, and France, which demonstrates great diversity. Students recognised newly established friendships as the most important benefit of their study exchange in Ljubljana. Furthermore, they highly agreed that during their exchange they developed their personality, deepened their understanding of other cultures, and improved their language skills. When rating Ljubljana as a destination, the exchange students recognised it as a safe destination with a high standard of living and developed social life. They experienced many different activities such as Ljubljana's nightlife, sightseeing, and well-preserved natural environment. Overall, Ljubljana has met the students' expectations as a study abroad destination; they would recommend it to other students and revisit it in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek

Glede na povečanje internacionalne mobilnosti (Kritz, 2016, str. 103) in števila prihajajoči tujih študentov v Ljubljano od leta 1999, ko se je Slovenija pridružila programu Erasmus+ (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes, n.d.), je bil glavni namen magistrske naloge analizirati motivacijske faktorje pri izbiri Ljubljane kot študijske destinacije. Cilj raziskave je bil aplicirati pregled literature na temo izbire destinacije, študijske izmenjave in študijskih programov na primer Ljubljane kot izbrane študijske destinacije.

V svoji študiji so Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap in Axelsson (2015) definirali motivacijske faktorje kot faktorje, ki vplivajo na tuje študente pri odločitvi o študiju v tujini in pri izboru same študijske destinacije. Odločitev za študij v tujini je časovno zamudna (Jupiter in drugi, 2017) in je sestavljena iz treh delov: študent se odloči za študij v tujini, izbere gostujočo državo in gostujočo univerzo (Jianvittayakit, 2012). Spodbujevalni motivacijski faktorji vplivajo na pozameznike in jih spodbujajo pri o odločitvi o študijski izmenjavi, medtem ko faktorji privlačnosti vplivajo na karatkaristike in atraktivnosti potencialne študijske destinacije (González, Mesanza & Mariel, 2011, str. 418–419). Na podobo destinacije vplivajo zaposlitvene priložnosti, življenski slog, kakovost življenja, življenski stroški, varnost, kulturna raznolikost, na podobo gostujoče unvierze pa vplivajo zlasti študijski programi in ponujeni predmeti, akademsko osebje, svetovnih ugled univerze (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015, str. 194) in angleščina kot učni jezik (Jupiter in drugi, 2017).

Pri empiričnem delu magistrskega dela je bila uporabljena kvantitativna metoda zbiranja podatkov. Na podlagi pregleda literature je bil oblikovan anketni vprašalnik, ki je sestavljen iz 14 vprašanj zaprtega in odprtega tipa. Anketna vprašanja so se navezovala na glavne motivacijske faktorje, ki so vplivali na odločitev študentov pri izbiri gostujoče države in univerze, na pomembnost neakademskega motivov in atributov Ljubljane kot študijske destinacije. V raziskavi je skupno sodelovalo 111 študentov, od tega 64 žensk in 47 moških z najnižjo starostjo 19 let in najvišjo starostjo 32 let. Študenti so prihajali iz 33 različnih držav, od tega največji odstotek iz Nemčije, Španije, Poljske, Portugalske in Francije. Postavljena so bila štiri raziskovalna vprašanja, na podlagi katerih so bile potavljene in testirane štiri hipoteze. Rezultati raziskave so bili testirani s pomočjo programa IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Hipoteze 1, 3 in 4 so bile testirane s pomočjo Spearmanovega korelacijskega koeficienta, hipoteza 2 je bila testirana z uporabo Mann-Whitneyjevega testa. Z uporabo omenjeni testov hipoteza 1 ni bila potrjena, ostale hipoteze pa so bile potrjene. S potrjenimi hipotezami je bilo dokazano, da se študenti, ki so izbrali univerzo glede na študijski program in izbor predmetov, bolj strinjajo s tem, da ima Univerza v Ljubljani dobro podobo, kot tisti študenti, ki so Ljubljano izbrali zaradi same destinacije in njenih atributov. V nadaljevanju je hipoteza 2 potrdila, da so študenti, ki so Univerzo v Ljubljani izbrali na podlagi akademskega uspeha, ocenili višje kot tisti študenti, ki so Univerzo v Ljubljani izbrali glede na attribute Ljubljane kot same destinacije. Hipotezi 3 in 4 pa sta potrdili, da obstaja pozitivna povezava med dejstvom, da je Ljubljana kot študijska destinacija izpolnila pričakovanja

študentov z možnostjo ponovnega obiska v prihodnosti, kot tudi priporočilom ostalim študentom njihove domače univerze.

Glede na ostale pridobljene rezultate anketnega vprašalnika je večina študentov, ki so bili na študijski izmenjavi v Ljubljani, Ljubljano izbrala na podlagi atraktivnosti same destinacije bolj kot na podlagi programov in predmetov, ki jih ponuja Univerza v Ljubljani. Študentje so poudarili osebno rast, priložnosti za potovanje in spoznavanje novih ljudi kot nekatere izmed najpomembnejših motivacijskih dejavnikov pri svoji odločitvi. Na podlagi podobe Univerze v Ljubljani je bilo z opravljeno raziskavo potrjeno, da so na odločitev pri izbire destinacije močno vplivala pozitivna priporočila študentov, ki so že bili na študijski izmenjavi v Ljubljani. Poleg tega je imela velik vpliv tudi angleščina kot učni jezik in ponujeni učni predmeti s strani same univerze. Med zimskim in poletnim semestrom ni bilo zaznati večjih razlik v številu študentov, medtem ko jih je celo študijsko leto v Ljubljani preživelo le manjši odstotek. Pri ocenjevanju Ljubljane kot same destinacije so jo tuji študenti prepoznali kot varno destinacijo, z visokim življenjskim standardom in razvitim družabnim življenjem, kot tudi z nižjimi življenjskimi stroški. Študenti so preizkusili številne aktivnosti, od nočnega življenja do ogledov naravnih znamenitosti in neokrnjene narave. V času izmenjave so prepoznali osebni napredek, poglobili razumevanje drugih kultur in zaznali napredek v jezikovnih spretnostih. Na splošno je Ljubljana izpolnila njihova pričakovanja kot študijska destinacija, ki jo bodo z veseljem priporočili drugim študentom in jo po vsej verjetnosti ponovno obiskali v prihodnosti.

Potencialna nadaljnja raziskva bi lahko analizirala motivacijske faktorje študentov glede na starost ali glede na vpisano stopnjo izobrazbe (dodiplomski, podiplomski študij), saj bi se motivacijski dejavniki pri izbiri študijske destinacije pri študentih morda lahko razlikovali. Zanimivo bi bilo preučiti, ali so dodiplomski študenti bolj motivirani z vidika zabave in priložnosti za potovanje, medtem ko bi lahko na podiplomske študente bolj vplivali akademski motivi. Poleg tega bi nadaljnja potencialna raziskava lahko temeljila na pandemiji COVID-19 in analizirala, kako je epidemija vplivala na priložnosti za študijske izmenjave. Ali je pandemija vplivala na upad števila tujih študentov in za koliko se je število študentov zmanjšalo v primerjavi s preteklimi leti, ko je bilo število tujih študentov vsako leto višje, ter kateri so bili glavni motivacijski dejavniki za študente, ki so se kljub pandemiji odločili za fizično udeležbo na študijski izmenjavi.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Dear all, my name is Lara Slabe and I am finishing my Master's degree, specializing in Tourism, at the School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana. Currently, I am writing my Master's Thesis with the title "An analysis of exchange students' motivation factors for choosing Ljubljana as a study destination". Therefore, I created a questionnaire and would kindly like to ask those of you, who did a study exchange in Ljubljana, for your participation. The questionnaire is anonymous and will only be used for my thesis.

Thank you for your cooperation!

1. What were the main motivation factors influencing your decision to study abroad?

Select one or more answers.

- ☐ Personal growth
(Kouba, 2020)
- ☐ Professional growth
(Kouba, 2020)
- ☐ Meeting new people
(Kouba, 2020)
- ☐ A greater understanding of different culture
(Kouba, 2020)
- ☐ Influence of friends/classmates
(Jupiter et al., 2017)
- ☐ Opportunities to travel
(Stone & Petrick, 2013)
- ☐ Other, please specify:

2. How did you choose Ljubljana as a study destination?

Select one answer.

- ☐ Based on the destination and its attributes
- ☐ Based on the university and the programmes and courses offered

3. When choosing the University of Ljubljana as the host university I took into consideration:

Rate your opinion using the scale below.

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Academic reputation and rankings of a university

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

English as a teaching language	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Courses offered	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
University's location in the city	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Housing facilities at a destination	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Students benefits from the host destination (student events, discounts, student accommodation, etc.)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Recommendations from previous students	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Email feedback from the host university administration	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Adapted from Jupiter et al. (2017).

4. When choosing Ljubljana as the study abroad destination I took into consideration:

Rate your opinion using the scale below.

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Economic stability of the destination (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Quality of life at the destination (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Lower cost of living (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Safety and security at the destination (Herrero, San Martín & del Río Peña, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Size of the city where the university is located (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Social life of the destination (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Geographical proximity from the home country (Lee, 2014)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Diverse culture (Lee, 2014)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Language used at the destination (Lee, 2014)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Past travel experiences (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

5. Rate the importance of social networks and communication on your decision about study exchange in Ljubljana by using the following scale:

1=Not at all important, 2=Low importance, 3=Neutral, 4=Important, 5=Very important

Family's support (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Friends' support (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Recommendations from previous students (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Information provided through the university's website (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Social media (Moltaji, 2018)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6. Rate the importance of the non-academic motives that influenced your decision about study exchange in Ljubljana by using the following scale:

1=Not at all important, 2=Low importance, 3=Neutral, 4=Important, 5=Very important

Having fun (Marques, Mohsin & Lenger, 2018)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Socialising (Marques, Mohsin & Lenger, 2018)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Interaction with other cultures
(Stone & Petrick, 2013) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Relaxing after studies
(Marques, Mohsin & Lenger, 2018) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Combining study with an opportunity to travel
(Nyaupane, Paris & Teye, 2011) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

7. While being on exchange in Ljubljana I:

Select one or more answers.

- Went sightseeing in Ljubljana
(Deng & Ritchie, 2018)
- Explored other tourist attractions besides Ljubljana
(Deng & Ritchie, 2018)
- Tasted local food
(Deng & Ritchie, 2018)
- Visited any festivals or cultural events
(Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017)
- Went shopping
(Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017)
- Experienced Ljubljana's nightlife
(Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017)
- Experienced Slovenia's well-preserved natural environment
(Bozic, Kennell, Vujicic & Jovanovic, 2017)
- Travelled to any other nearby countries and cities (e.g. Zagreb, Budapest, Vienna, Venice)
(Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020)

8. Rate the following statements related to your study exchange in Ljubljana by using the scale:

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

I was satisfied with the quality of the higher education system at the University of Ljubljana.
(Bista, 2019) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Ljubljana met my expectations as a study abroad destination. (Roostika, 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Ljubljana is an attractive tourist destination. (Grah, Dimovski & Peterlin, 2020)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Ljubljana is a safe destination. (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019a)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Ljubljana is very accessible and well connected to other tourist attractions in Slovenia as well as to other countries. (Fitch Solutions Group, 2019b)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
I will likely revisit Ljubljana in the future. (Lam & Ariffin, 2019)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
I would recommend a study exchange in Ljubljana to other students. (Jupiter et al., 2017)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

9. Rate the achieved benefits during your study abroad in Ljubljana using the following scale:

1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Better labour market prospects (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Developed personality (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Deepened understanding of other cultures (Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona & Nicholson, 2015)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
Improved language skills (Stone & Petrick, 2013)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Established new friendships
(Milian, Birnbaum, Cardona &
Nicholson, 2015)

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

10. What is your home country?

11. Which semester did you study in Ljubljana?

Select one answer.

- ☐ Winter semester
- ☐ Summer semester
- ☐ A full-year study abroad

12. At what level of education were you enrolled in at the time of your exchange?

Select one answer.

- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree

13. Your gender:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

14. What is your age?

Appendix 3: Descriptive statistics for demographic part of the research

Table 1: Semester of the study exchange in Ljubljana

Semester of study exchange	Frequency	Percent
Winter semester	50	45.0
Summer semester	45	40.5
A full-year study abroad	16	14.4
Total	111	100.0

Source: own work.

Table 2: Level of education at the of the exchange in Ljubljana

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor`s degree	67	60.4
Master`s degree	44	39.6
Total	111	100.0

Source: own work.

Table 3: Gender of exchange students that participated in the study exchange in Ljubljana

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	47	42.3
Female	64	57.7
Total	111	100.0

Source: own work.

Table 4: Minimum and maximum age of students

N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
111	24.60	25.00	2.498	19	32

Source: own work.

Table 5: Exchange students based on their home country

Country	Frequency	Percent
Australia	1	.9
Austria	3	2.7
Bangladesh	1	.9
Belgium	3	2.7
Brazil	1	.9
Canada	3	2.7
Colombia	1	.9
Croatia	2	1.8
Czech Republic	5	4.5
Denmark	1	.9
Finland	4	3.6

table continues

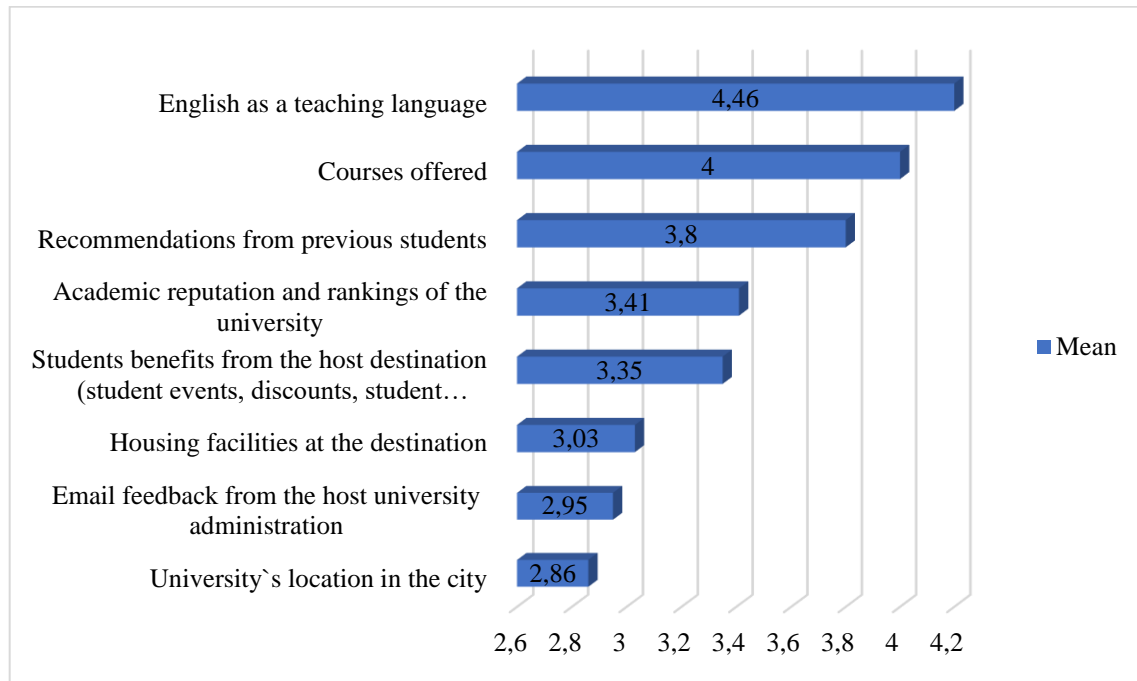
Table 5: Exchange students based on their home country (cont).

Country	Frequency	Percent
France	6	5.4
Germany	22	19.8
Hungary	1	.9
Ireland	2	1.8
Italy	3	2.7
Kazakhstan	1	.9
Latvia	1	.9
Mexico	3	2.7
Montenegro	1	.9
Netherlands	1	.9
North Macedonia	2	1.8
Philippines	1	.9
Poland	8	7.2
Portugal	6	5.4
Serbia	1	.9
Slovakia	2	1.8
Spain	10	9.0
Sweden	4	3.6
The Netherlands	4	3.6
Turkey	4	3.6
UK	1	.9
USA	1	.9
Total	111	100.0

Source: own work.

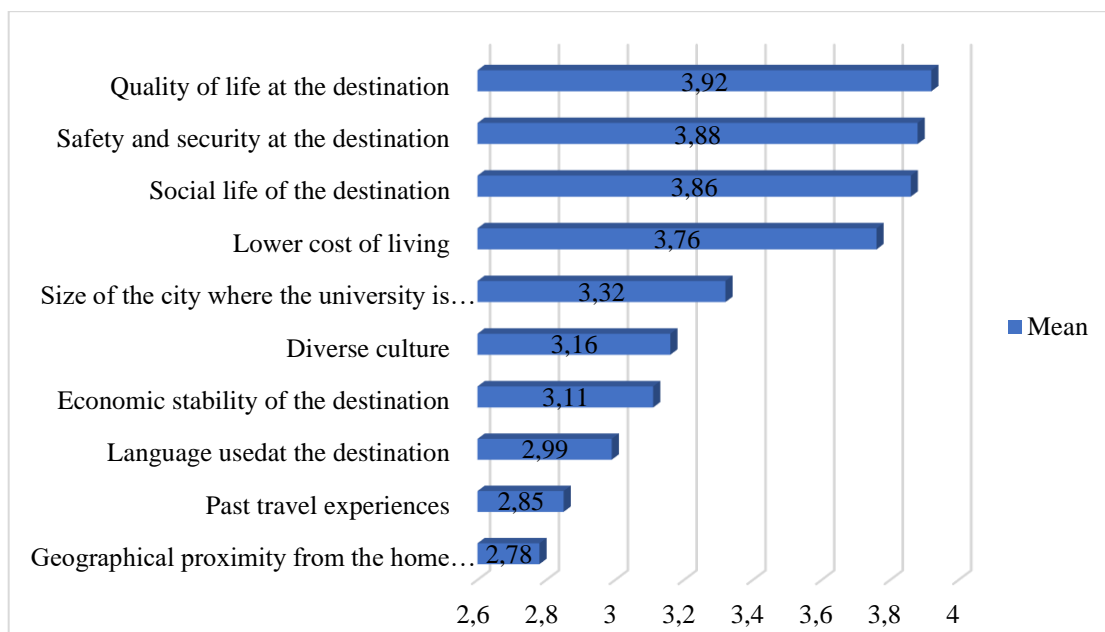
Appendix 4: Graphical representation of the obtained data

Figure1: Factors taken into consideration when choosing the University of Ljubljana as a host university



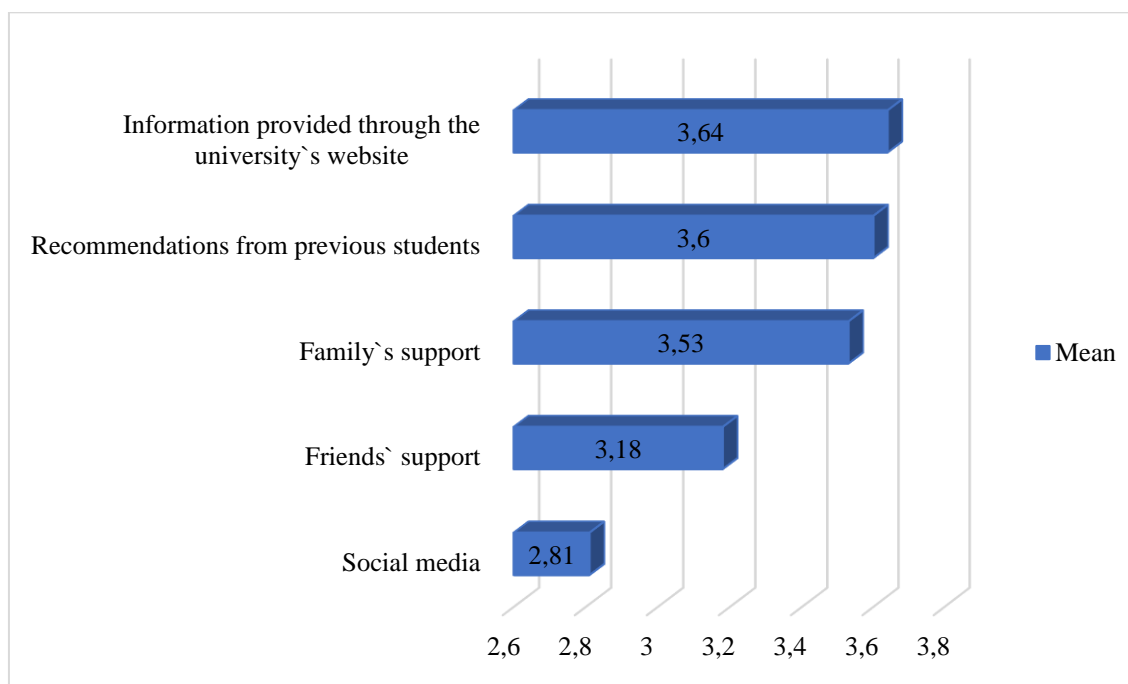
Source: own work.

Figure 2: Factors taken into consideration when choosing Ljubljana as the study destination



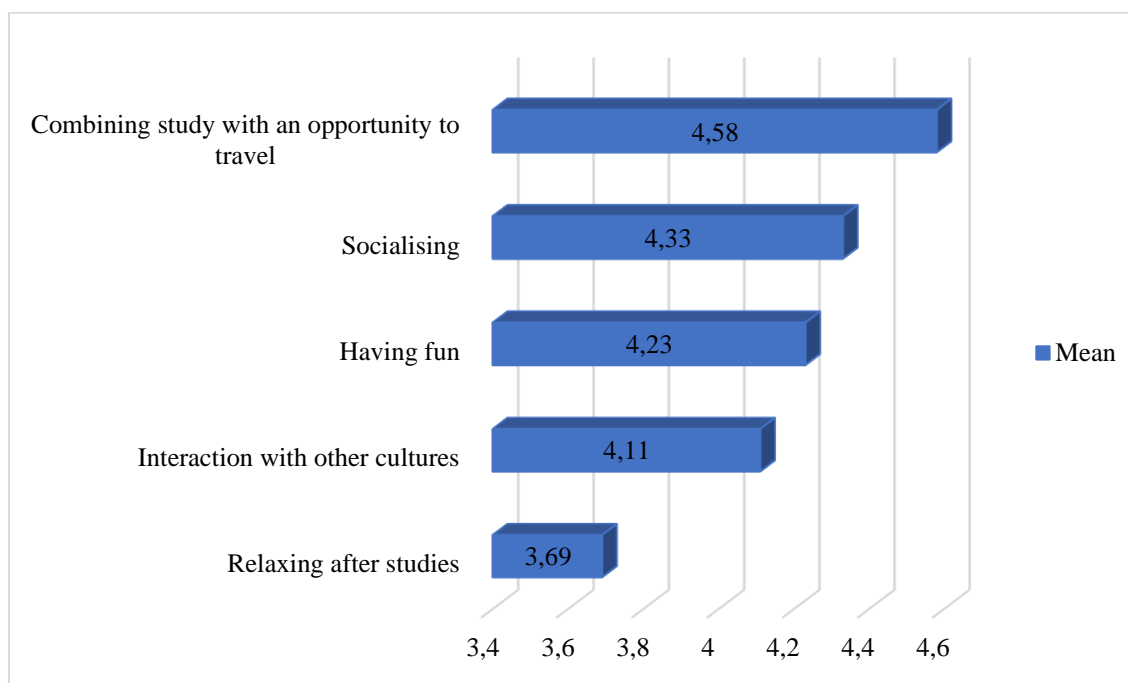
Source: own work.

Figure 3: The importance of social networks and communication



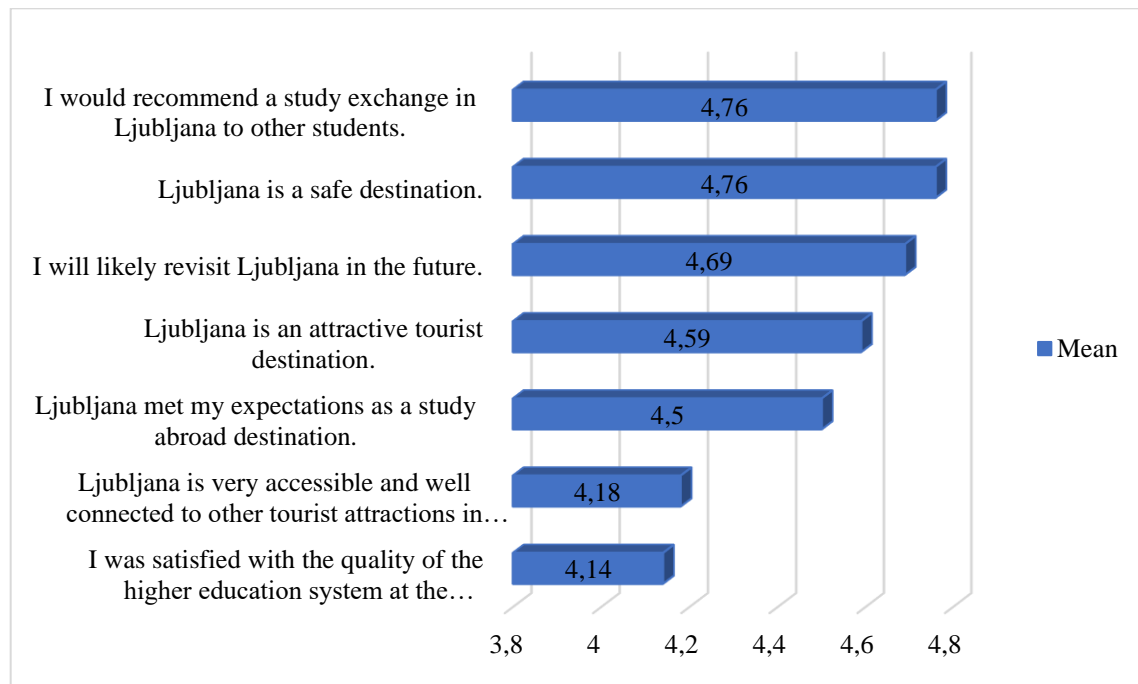
Source: own work.

Figure 4: The importance of non-academic motives



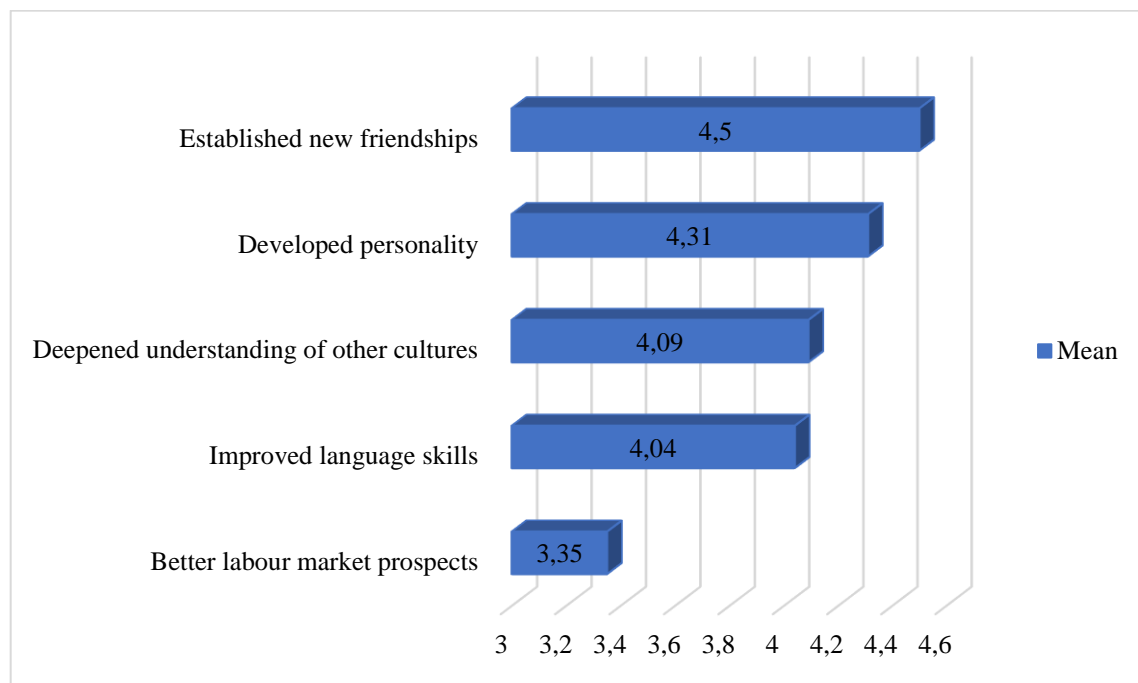
Source: own work.

Figure 5: Agreement with the following statements about Ljubljana as a study destination



Source: own work.

Figure 6: Achieved benefits during study abroad in Ljubljana



Source: own work.