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Master thesis - English summary

**Running projects with help of EU or other public funds
Difficulties encountered in the international academic cooperations**

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1) Introduction

The international academic cooperations are part of an internationalisation policy in the universities. These cooperations are effective in numerous fields, which can be the Research or the Education. In the field of research, they can have scientific objectives but also the objective to exchange know -hows and knowledge in between universities. The international cooperations are targeting various audiences which can be students, academic researchers, workers, trainees, interns, pupils. Several programmes funded by the European Union or other public funds are targeting these publics and have different objectives such as education, research, sport etc. Since it entered into force in 1999, the Bologna Declaration has allowed the European Union to standardise the higher education. This declaration supports the internalisation of universities and the academic mobilities. The international academic cooperations are participating in the self- development of the students and all the people who can benefit from the mobility programmes, but it contributes in the long run to the country development. My research focuses on the actors of these cooperations who the higher education institutions and theirs are projects leaders and project managers. These actors have a significant work to do and might encounter obstacles on their way to the creation of international cooperation.

The objectives of this master thesis are to answer the question: what kind of difficulties are encountered in the international academic cooperations? In order to answer this question, I conducted a qualitative research with the help of three semi-directive interviews. Two project leaders and one project manager took part in the interviews. The three interviewees work in a French University.

In a first part, I have researched information about difficulties in international cooperation in the existing literature. I also tried to find definitions of the relevant terms of the research question such as international cooperation, and university partnership, the tools and programmes used in the international cooperations. The second part is dedicated to the methodology used in my research, and the methodology used to conduct the interviews. The third part will present data collected during the interviews. The last part is the discussion part which will include a critical analysis of the methodology used and an interpretation of the results.

2) Literature review

Declaration of Bologna

In 1999, the Declaration of Bologna was signed by the ministers in charge of the higher education of 29 European countries. The Declaration was signed to harmonise the higher education systems in the European Union. The signatory countries must follow six objectives. The higher education institutions have produced diplomas which can be comparable to other diplomas in other European countries, they have to divide the study system in two cycles: bachelor degrees and master degrees. In order to facilitate the recognition of the study semesters, the universities and other higher education establishment, must use the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS). The Bologna declaration encourages the development of international mobilities, the cooperation to guarantee a high-quality level and a development of the European dimension of the higher education system (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation). These objectives permit an easier internationalisation of the universities and the creation of programmes such as Erasmus +.

Europe 2020 Strategy

Europe 2020 is a strategy which is focused on employment and growth for a ten-year period. This is the European Union agenda which promote a sustainable, smart and inclusive growth as a mean to improve the European competitiveness and productivity to achieve a sustainable and social market economy. (Eurostat)

5 sectors are concerned by this strategy: employment, development and research, climate change and energy, poverty and social exclusion. Regarding the education, the two objectives are to lower the rate to 10 % of the youths leaving the education system early, and to reach a rate of graduates of 40% of the youths from 30 to 34 years old. (Eurostat)

Partnership for the higher education

According to the Erasmus + Agency, a partnership is a cooperation project which has to last between 24 and 26 months and which is agreed at least by three parties from three countries of the programme (agenceerasmusplus.fr, 2020). Academic cooperations are partnerships in which the universities are equal and agreed on the same objectives (Stoessel-Ritz, Blanc, Grodwohl, 2011, p.2).

Erasmus +

Erasmus + is the European programme which support actions in the fields of education, continuing education, youth and sport. The programme allows to the people of less than 30 years old, especially students, interns, trainees, professional the opportunity to stay abroad in order to acquire new skills to increase their employability. Moreover, Erasmus support the organisations to work in the frame of international partnerships and to exchange knowledge and know-hows in the sector of education, continuing education and youth. In the higher education, Erasmus + contributes to open an international dimension. Activities of academic cooperations, youths and workers mobility are participating to open this international dimension (info.erasmusplus.fr).

Erasmus + projects are gathered under four categories which are called Key- action.

Key Action 1: Mobility: Learning mobility of individuals

Key action 2: Cooperation: Cooperation for innovation and good practices

Key Action 3: Policy: Support to policy reforms

Sport: Promoting the development of the European dimension in Sport

My research focuses on the projects which can be found under Key Action 1 and Key Action 2.

3) Methodology

As I did my internship, in Projects and Partnership office in the Faculty of Science and Engineering in Sorbonne Université, I decided that I will interview my colleagues. Hanna is a project leader and Vyara a is project manager. I interviewed Isabelle as well, who is a project leader of the International Mobility office in the same faculty. I conducted three semi-directive interviews. I constructed my questionnaire according to three hypotheses that imagined after

having found in the existing literature some examples of difficulties in the academic cooperations.

Hypothesis 1 : Project managers encounter legal issues or institutional issues

Hypothesis 2 : Project managers encounter communication issues with the partners :language issues and intercultural issues

Hypothesis 3 : Project managers encounter issues linked to cases of force majeure

Through the interviews, I will collect data in order to confirm or invalidate these hypotheses.

I transcribed the interview with the software Folker and used the GAT 2 convention. I used the minimal transcript without the conventions for the voice intonation which I found here not essential for the research question.

4) Results and conclusion

I will compare the information found in the existing literature and the data collected during the interviews. I will confirm or invalidate the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: The interviewees encountered legal issues in the process of creation of international cooperation. In my point of view, they were minimal. The problem of transfer of the mobility grants where more a technical problem than a legal problem. The bank systems and functioning are different according to the countries. However, matters of co-ownership of the intellectual property is a real and serious legal issue. For example, as a result of a scientific research within an academic cooperation, a discovery was made. Some parties of the cooperation could argue on the intellectual property for the new discovery. On another aspect, I have read in the literature that some project leaders had issues to obtain visas for their students from Algeria who were supposed to do a mobility in France. This legal issue caused some delays in the arrival of the students in France.

Projects managers also encounter difficulties at the university level (institutional level) because the functioning of the academic instance is not the same in every country. The major issue explained by the interviewees is the academic calendar as it is different in all the countries. It can create some delay in the implementation of a project. The process of validation of cooperation agreements which can be different according to the universities can be seen as obstacles for the signature of the agreement. In the existing literature, it was written that the

European study cycle LMD – Licence Master Doctorat or in English Bachelor Master Doctorate and the ECTS system, has created inequalities for the countries which don't have the needed infrastructures for this model. The hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

Hypothesis 2 : Project managers encounter little communication issues. In the creation of academic cooperations, English language is mostly used and almost all the partners speak in English. In context of international projects, it is common to speak English. One of the interviewees noticed that she got used to different accents and she has less difficulties to understand people from many nationalities when they speak English, that at the beginning of her career. There are no big language issues in the academic cooperation. The hypothesis is invalid

However, the project leaders have observed cultural differences with some cooperation partners. The interviewees have encountered these differences, especially with partners from Asia. But it doesn't impact strongly their work and they don't consider it as a huge difficulty. In the context of international project, they are used to deal with situations. In the literature, Raynal and Chédru, said that every project is unique and misunderstandings which result from cultural differences are usual. The hypothesis is valid.

Hypothesis 3 : Cases of force majeure are obstacles which can intervene in the process of creation of academic cooperations. The authors Stoessel-Ritz, Blanc et Grodwohl, reported that the political climate was instable in Algeria when they implemented their projects. There were a risk of terrorist attack. In Chile, the interviewee told that the political climate was unsure, and they had with her office to interrupt mobilities in this country. Regarding natural hazard, Japan also had to suspend the mobilities for a year when the nuclear accident occurred in Fukushima. The recent epidemia Covid -19 has strongly impacted and slow downed all the projects of the International Projects and Partnership office and the office for the international mobility of Sorbonne Université. The hypothesis is confirmed.