



CEEPUS

THE IMPACT OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN EXCHANGE PROGRAM
FOR UNIVERSITY STUDIES (CEEPUS) IN THE HUNGARIAN HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED

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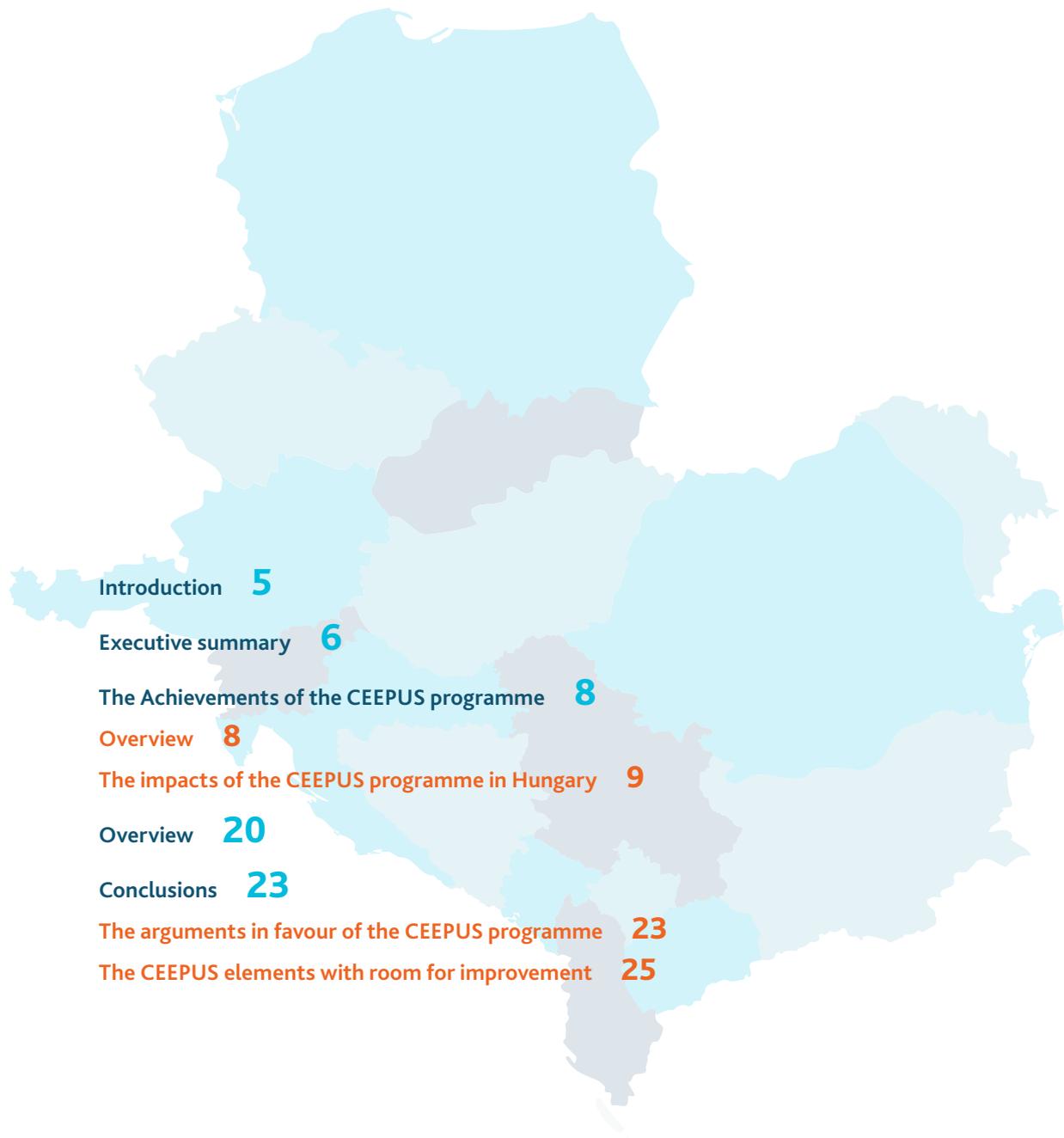
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Introduction

The CEEPUS programme celebrated its 25th anniversary in the academic year 2018-2019. On this occasion, the publication seeks to look back upon the Hungarian outcomes of the past decades, presenting the impact on Hungarian higher education institutions. Besides giving a summary, the volume also serves to contemplate the future, as the decision about the continuation of the programme after 2025 is soon to be made. The Member States will be voting on the continuation – or discontinuation – of CEEPUS in autumn 2019. In order to make preparations for the Hungarian decision, the Hungarian coordinator of the programme, Tempus Public Foundation commissioned an assessment study which seeks to gather input to provide a solid basis for the decision-makers through summarising the documentation available in the subject matter, analysing statistical data and consulting the coordinators of the higher education institutions affected.

The summary also seeks to put the CEEPUS programme itself into context, beyond its outcomes. What other regional or even European level partnerships with similar goals are there? Do they strengthen or rather weaken the impact which CEEPUS seeks to achieve? Can we draw a parallel between them, can these programmes serve as a 'continuation' in case CEEPUS is discontinued?

Besides the decision to be made in the near future, the publication also wants to contribute to shaping the further future. The current phase of CEEPUS, Phase 3, will end in 2025. If the Member States vote for continuing the programme, the next few years will provide enough time for some further fine tuning and implementing

potential changes. For this very reason, we also make suggestions in the publication about how to increase the impact of the programme, as well as the effectiveness of its operation.

In order to provide an overview, we relied on the following documents when preparing the summary:

- ▶ *Small Programme with Big Impact* – Slovenian EXPERIENCE with the CEEPUS Programme, CMEPIUS, May 2019
- ▶ *The 25th anniversary of the CEEPUS programme* – ppt, 2019
- ▶ *A Summary of the CEEPUS – Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies* (ministry background paper, 2019)
- ▶ *Questionnaire for CEEPUS coordinators* (a summary of the survey by the Croatian CEEPUS office, 2019)
- ▶ *26th International Commission Networks 2019/20*, Virtual, April 5, 2019 – ppt
- ▶ *CEEPUS Top Contenders 2005 – 2019*
- ▶ *The Uptake of European Programmes in the CEEPUS Cooperation Area*, ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation, 2019
- ▶ TPF's dedicated CEEPUS web page : ceepus.hu
- ▶ Central CEEPUS website – ceepus.info
- ▶ *Agreement concerning the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies* ('CEEPUS III')
- ▶ *Evaluation of Nordplus 2012-2016*, Melin, Terrell and Henningsson, 2016
- ▶ *International Higher Education: Shifting mobilities, Policy Challenges, and New Initiatives*, Bhandari, Robles, Farrugia, UNESCO, 2018

Executive summary



8 times

a CEEPUS Network coordinated by a Hungarian HEI got the Ministers' Prize

The agreement establishing the CEEPUS programme was signed in 1993 by the six forming countries, including Hungary. CEEPUS is the abbreviation for 'Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies'. The Programme started on 1st January 1995. The Programme is in its third phase now, which main objectives are: focus on joint PhD programmes, especially joint researches and joint doctoral programmes.

The following study has a twofold aim: (1) summarizing the Hungarian results both from qualitative and quantitative tools, while (2) outlining the Hungarian aspects of the future decision on the Programme.

Concerning the results, the study summarizes the followings:

- ▶ Hungary has been awarded by the Ministers' Prize several times: altogether **there has been eight occasions when a CEEPUS network coordinated by a Hungarian higher education institution got the award** since 2002.
- ▶ **There have been 90 committed CEEPUS networks coordinated by Hungary altogether.** However, the number of committed networks per year do not grow. The highest number of committed networks was 9 in some years, but nowadays there is about 4-5 committed networks coordinated by Hungarian universities, colleges. It suggests that Hungarian institutions tend to be partners not coordinators in a network.
- ▶ On average there are 22 Hungarian universities or colleges which participate in the CEEPUS programme. This number is a bit higher with those higher education institutions which hosted freemovers out of the CEEPUS networks. It added four more

institutions in 2017/18. Taking into consideration the faculties and departments, **the number of participating institutions in the CEEPUS programme is significantly higher, currently it reaches 120 departments.**

- ▶ Both the month-quota and the use of grant amount ratio is high. It means that grant consumption has improved over the last 10 years, both in terms of months and financial resources.
- ▶ The teachers' mobilities in months did not reach the quarter of the total CEEPUS mobilities in 2009/10, while it almost reached the half of the CEEPUS months in 2018/2019. The trend of growing number of teachers' mobility, which is true in case of the total CEEPUS mobility numbers, can be examined in Hungary, too. **Besides the students, the teachers are also active,** their mobilities are increasing, thus approaching the student mobility numbers.
- ▶ **Concerning the incoming mobilities, the highest number of participants have come from Romania, Poland and Slovakia** in the last 10 years. The number of incoming participants increased significantly when the Hungarian month-quota was almost doubled in 2015. Parallel to that increase, the number of incoming teachers and short term student mobility months grew as well, while the long term student mobilities did not increase significantly. In other words, **one of the attractions of the CEEPUS programme is the flexibility in terms of mobility duration.**
- ▶ **Eötvös Loránd University was the host with the highest number of months,** altogether they hosted 820 months in the last 10 years. The second on the list is the Szent István University



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with 490 months, then comes University of Szeged with 408,5 months, the University of Miskolc with 354,4 months and the University of Debrecen with 301 months. **There are 13 higher education institutions where there were CEEPUS mobilities in each academic year.**

- ▶ Having a look at the **outgoing mobilities**, there are differences concerning the target countries of the CEEPUS students and teachers. **A quarter of the teachers choose Romanian universities, while one-third of the students travelled to Austria.** The most popular higher education institution among the students was the University of Vienna with 273 outgoing Hungarian mobilities, then comes the Babes-Bolyai University (95 student mobilities) and the University of Ljubljana (93). The list is different in case of teachers: Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (161 teacher mobilities), Babes-Bolyai University (107 outgoing teachers) and the Technical University of Kosice (106 teacher mobilities).

Beyond analysing the statistical data, an **online questionnaire was sent to the CEEPUS network coordinators** and a **focus group discussion** was carried out. Based on these methods, **the following strengths and benefits were identified concerning the CEEPUS programme:**

- ▶ regionality, closeness in terms of geography and history;
- ▶ diverse range of partners beyond the EU members;
- ▶ short term mobility types;
- ▶ freemover status.

Based on the SWOT analysis which was prepared as a part of the focus group discussion, and the evaluation of the CEEPUS programme identified **the following elements as need-to-be developed:**

- ▶ difficult administration, practices varying from country to country;
- ▶ no support or grant for administration;
- ▶ low scholarships in some countries;
- ▶ the monthly quota cannot always support the growth of the partnerships;
- ▶ there is a lack of common minimum quality standards for programme management.

Although the CEEPUS programme is well-known among the one-third of the Hungarian higher education institutions, these institutions actively participate and apply and the Programme can really contribute to the Central European educational cooperation, the study concludes some elements which need to be developed. In the absence of the developments, the CEEPUS programme can find itself at a competitive disadvantage compared to other international scholarship programs. Although there are several regions in Europe where similar scholarship opportunities exist for higher education (e.g.: *Nordplus*), it has also been identified that these programs need to be developed in a way that is 'aligned' with the leading European scholarship, the Erasmus+ opportunities. This development work is relevant in case of the CEEPUS programme, too. While the uniqueness of the Programme, such as regionality, shorter mobility programs and the professional work of the CEEPUS networks must be preserved, as well.

The Achievements of the CEEPUS programme

Overview

Launched in 1993, the programme is currently in Phase 3. The programme was initiated in Austria, and the foundation agreement was signed in Hungary. At that time, the number of countries involved was as low as 6; the founding members were Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Today, the CEEPUS programme involves as many as* 16 countries. In accordance with the agreement, the programme was launched on 1 January 1995, so the first mobilities were implemented in the spring semester of the academic year 1994-1995.

Besides the partnerships within the network of institutes, the professional projects and the mobilities implemented thereunder, the programme also identified various focus areas during its three phases:

- ▶ Phase I (1995 – 2004): multilateral partnerships, ECTS
- ▶ Phase II (2005 – 2010): international joint degree programmes
- ▶ Phase III (2011 – now): joint PhD programmes with special emphasis on supporting research activities and joint doctoral

programmes, as well as on cooperation under the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The focus areas build on each other and **demonstrate professional insight**. Phase I – connected to the development of the European Higher Education Area – focused on the partnerships and their recognition, whereas the next two phases could already rely on it and address, beyond the establishment of partnerships, **content development**.

Back in the academic year 2005/2006, the programme only supported 35 networks – which in the academic year 2019/2020 rose to 80 at the level of the entire programme. Considering the total number of networks coordinated during the 15 years, Austria (174), Poland (113) and Romania (109) lead the ranking. **Hungary ranks fifth in this imaginary list, with a total number of 90 winning networks coordinated**. With regard to mobilities, the European-level summary of the programme (a study commissioned by the Central CEEPUS Office) focuses on the period between the academic years 2005/2006 and 2019/2020. 24,940 student mobilities were implemented, although upon examination of the send/receive ratios of each country it turns out that there are some less balanced countries (e.g. Austria and Slovenia tend to be host countries, whereas Serbia, Croatia and Poland are predominantly senders). In the case of Hungary, the two figures are quite balanced.

* Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo* (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.), North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Besides student mobilities, the programme also supports teachers' study trips (unlike the Erasmus+ programme, CEEPUS does not offer mobilities for non-teaching staff) – the number of these trips during the above-mentioned period was 20,010. That is very close to the number of students, which is outstanding. The highest numbers of teaching staff were sent by Slovakia**. Besides the above, the programme also supported 6,500 freemovers, that is, mobilities implemented independently of any network, between the higher education institutions of the CEEPUS countries.

Apart from mobility figures, the programme also lays great emphasis on quality. One of the means to achieve it is the **CEEPUS Ministers' Prize**, established in 2001, with the goal of recognising high-quality network partnerships. The prize has been awarded annually since 2002. Hungary is an exceptional eight-time winner of the prize: that is how many times Hungary-coordinated networks have won the prestigious recognition, awarded based on the judgement of international professionals (Hungary has won the prize 8 times, Austria 4, Romania 3, Poland 2 times, and Slovakia and Slovenia were both one-time winners). The decision is made according to a pre-specified schedule and criteria of form and content, and each application nominated for the prize is considered by an external expert from each of the countries involved. It means that each network is examined by as many experts as the number of countries involved in the partnership. The criteria of form also require that the network should have been operating for at least 3 years, with at least 85% of its full capacity. Therefore, the candidates for the prize will be the ones using the resources efficiently. Taking into account these requirements, as well as the international competition, the high number of Hungarian prize winners is especially outstanding.



The impacts of the CEEPUS programme in Hungary

The findings of the questionnaire survey

As part of the assessment study, the 114 Hungarian network or partner coordinators received a questionnaire on the outcomes and the future of the CEEPUS programme. The system registered a total of 64 completions, out of which 41 can be regarded as complete and duplication-free – we took these into consideration when preparing the analysis. The large majority of the 41 respondents were network or partner coordinators, some of them institutional coordinators (IROs); however, we did not differentiate between the respondents in this respect. In total, therefore, we registered a completion rate of 35.9%.

With regard to the institutional background of the respondents, they represent 22 different universities and colleges altogether, which means that the scope of applicants was largely covered. As regards experience, the respondents typically have at least 5 to 10 years' experience; 12 people have worked as coordinators for less than 5 years, and the large majority of them can be considered very experienced, with up to 20 years spent in the programme.

** Source: The Uptake of European Programmes in the CEEPUS Cooperation Area, ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation, 2019

From the point of view of participants' motivation, the reasons behind both student and teaching staff mobility are quite similar, irrespective of the direction of the travels. From among the 7+1 options, **shorter mobility opportunities, interest in the network's (professional) focus area and the particular destination country** rank first, in a varying order.

As a result of mobilities organised under the CEEPUS programme, students' knowledge and skills mainly improved in the following areas (with the same number of votes):

- ▶ Gaining professional knowledge (N: 28)
- ▶ Improving language skills (N: 28)
- ▶ Gaining intercultural competencies (N: 28)
- ▶ Establishing new personal relationships (N: 28)

In the case of teaching staff (in the order of votes):

- ▶ Establishing new personal relationships (N: 34)
- ▶ Learning about the higher education of other countries (N: 26)
- ▶ Gaining new professional knowledge (N: 24)
- ▶ Gaining intercultural competencies (N: 23)

The questionnaire also included statements which the respondents needed to rate on a scale of 1-5. The ratings showed the following results (the sums of the ratings on a scale of 1-5 are indicated as points):

- ▶ The CEEPUS programme greatly contributes to the internationalisation of Hungarian higher education (176 points)
- ▶ The regional nature of the CEEPUS programme is more of an advantage than a disadvantage (169 points)
- ▶ The CEEPUS programme greatly contributes to the increased international recognition of Hungarian academia (publications, materials, references, etc.) (164 points)
- ▶ The focus area of Phase III of CEEPUS (research activities, joint doctoral programmes) are an attraction for participants (161 points)



Interestingly, among the four statements, the focus area of Phase III of CEEPUS received the lowest scores. It means that the focus area is less attractive for the respondents, and this finding is also supported by other parts of the questionnaire.

Good practice: Szent István University operates a dedicated website to provide information about the training programme and to allow application. All the information is available from the dedicated website, where you can also download the application documentation:
sziu.hu/international-joint-degree-programme



Using the same rating of 1-5, the questionnaire summed up the outcomes of CEEPUS, where the feedback indicated the following order (the sums of the respondents' ratings on a scale of 1-5 are indicated as points):

- ▶ Trust building among participants (189 points)
- ▶ Organising short term mobilities (183 points)
- ▶ Effective operation of inter-institutional networks (181 points)
- ▶ Improvement of teaching skills (175 points)
- ▶ Successful implementation of joint events (175 points)

- ▶ Teachers gaining new knowledge (173 points)
- ▶ Conducting joint research (173 points)
- ▶ Creating joint publications (173 points)
- ▶ Students gaining new knowledge (172 points)
- ▶ Improvement of students' skills (169 points)
- ▶ *The development and modernisation of Hungarian curricula (151 points)*
- ▶ *The creation of common educational materials (141 points)*
- ▶ *Issuing joint degrees (113 points)*

Referring back to the focus area of the programme, this rating also shows that **the lowest scores were given to the development of curricula, the development of common materials and issuing joint degrees.** In the case of this latter, administrative obstacles are likely to stand in the way of issuing joint degrees, but curricula and educational materials could be developed by higher education institutions, on their own initiative. The designated focus area is less successful, which is also confirmed by the 18 'yes', 17 'no' and 6 'I don't know' answers given to the question 'Was there any research activity, joint doctoral programme and/or joint degree programme implemented within your network?'. **It means that in the case of more than half of the respondents, the CEEPUS network did not achieve any results with respect to the focus area.**



Good practice: the network partners implement joint master's programmes relying on a number of international partnerships, making maximum use of the given mobility opportunities (e.g. partly through CEEPUS and then through Erasmus+ and the International Visegrad Fund, thus covering the mobility duration required to obtain the joint degree).

Accordingly, the vast majority of the respondents gave 'no' and 'I don't know' answers to the question 'Was any summary prepared at the relevant faculty/department about the outcomes and im-

pacts of the CEEPUS programme(s) implemented?'. Even the respondents who gave positive answers had mainly prepared summaries for internal use within the network and the university in the form of reports, accounts, departmental reports and newsletters. Many of them also mentioned the dissemination channels ensured by the programme host Tempus Public Foundation. **Therefore, the proper summary of the network's work and the targeted dissemination of the results is still an unexploited area.**

According to the mobility research of UNESCO, besides the physical mobility of students and teaching staff there is a discernible increase in the mobility of contents, educational programmes and institutions, either in the form of actual mobility or contents available online. The contents developed within CEEPUS networks can provide a good basis for that, and making them available in an online form could be a future strategic goal.

The number of Hungary-coordinated projects is low in Horizon 2020 – accordingly, only three institutions reported the continued use of the outcomes of any of their CEEPUS activities here. None of the institutions mentioned the Marie Curie programme, and only one respondent indicated the COST programme. There were two positive answers about the Interreg programme. **Only the number of references to the Erasmus+ programme was high: 18 respondents indicated carrying over the outcomes to this programme, and 16 reported using the outcomes in programmes running at the institution. There were 9 references to domestic development programmes (TÁMOP, EFOP). Besides, three institutions reported applying to the International Visegrad Fund. Therefore, the continued benefits of the CEEPUS programme – in the case of Hungary – should be examined in other areas than the ones identified in the Central**

Office's study, as the majority of those options are less realistic for Hungarian institutions.



Good practice: A number of institutions reported having further developed or developing their CEEUPS network activities under Erasmus+ strategic partnerships. Following that, they finally managed to fund the new training material from EFOP budget, but relying on the CEEUPS project. The programme fully overlaps with the V4 countries, so the applicants often 'commute' between these two programmes, efficiently finding the one which provides funding for the activity that suits their needs.

The fact that the outcomes of the networks have mostly remained within the institutions can also be due to the fact that most respondents chose the option 'less than 5 people' (28) in reply to the question about the number of participants working in the network from the Hungarian side. Six respondents answered that they worked alone on the network in Hungary, and only seven chose the larger option which included 6-10 people. **Inherently, the outcomes of the programme, too, are limited in Hungary, or have more difficulty getting beyond the gates of such a small group and/or the given organisation unit.**



Good practice: The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pécs (PTE-BTK) integrates the outcomes in the form of a summer university, relying on the CEEUPS network. Every year, more and more faculties offer summer courses, organised into a so-called Summer Semester by the Centre for Internationalisation and Connections. Originally built on the foundations of a joint MA programme, the network has, over the years, successfully integrated the summer courses into its activities. The subject matter of the summer university is social science,



overarching various fields of science, which is a bit different from the 'classic' topics of the Faculty of Humanities (Hungarian studies, Hungarian language and culture), and considering the fact that the Faculty organises relatively few summer courses in social sciences, it integrally complements the course offer of the Faculty. Due to the summer university, some participants even got to like the city and the university so much that later they returned using other mobility opportunities, or encouraged their peers to apply to the university under CEEUPS or some other mobility programme.



Good practice: When developing the joint programmes, the network partners agreed on modular training – visiting students study a particular module. The university regulations specify the ECTS credits for courses completed abroad, including the compulsory credit points. A part of the subjects are taught in a tandem system, that is, there is a guest lecturer, possibly for each module, which ensures an international environment.

As programme advantages, the respondents mostly mentioned:

- ▶ regionality,
- ▶ shorter mobility opportunities,
- ▶ the freemover status and
- ▶ the smaller and therefore more human programme.

However, the advantage of easier availability of countries which are otherwise not available, and the flexible system were given few votes – two-thirds of the respondents did not consider them an advantage. **Some of the comments also point out that the amount of scholarship is so low in certain countries** that it leads to cancellations, or there are no applicants at all after finding out about the conditions. **It may also explain why the rate of mobility to certain countries is so low.**

The focus group discussion provided more information about the low mobility figures. The disproportionately large bureaucracy which varies from country to country, the low scholarship amounts, but also the availability of low-cost airlines affect the number of mobilities to a particular country.

Please find the details of the discussion below.

As regards the effective number of partners involved in the network, the answers partly coincide with reality, since the existing

networks typically involve fewer than 10 partners, and there are some partnerships with 15-21 members. The respondents considered the following number of partners effective:

- ▶ 6-10 partners (19);
- ▶ 11-15 partners (9);
- ▶ 4-5 partners (6);
- ▶ 16-20 partners (5);
- ▶ 21-25 partners (1), 26-30 partners (1).

The answers given to using a total of three quality criteria are thought-provoking: the majority of them are 'no' or 'I don't know':

Using quality assurance criteria, based on the questionnaire answers (N:41)

Quality criterion	Yes, namely: ...	No	I don't know
Is there any internal evaluation (at a mobility / project / partnership level) in your CEEPUS network?	15	17	9
Do you have tracking processes in place in your CEEPUS network?	8	18	15
Do you use any other quality assurance tool in the operation of the CEEPUS network?	4	22	15

Therefore, there are still unexploited opportunities in the programme in terms of evaluation, tracking and other quality assurance tools.

The answers suggest that we have definitely hit a blind spot here, since one of the questionnaire questions (15, 'Which are the areas of operation where the CEEPUS programme would need improvement after 2025 in terms of departments and faculties involved?') addresses these very fields to be improved, and **the respondents identified the following areas as ones which do not require improvement:**

- ▶ tracking (does not need improvement: 35)
- ▶ submission of a new application (does not need improvement: 34)
- ▶ evaluation of the network's activity (does not need improvement: 33)
- ▶ sustaining, and the sustainability of, outputs and achievements (does not need improvement: 31)

Whereas, the following were identified as elements to be improved:

- ▶ planning, ease of planning (yes: 21)
- ▶ communication with the students (yes: 18)
- ▶ communication within the network (yes: 17)
- ▶ the depth and definition of professional work (yes: 17)
- ▶ utilisation of budget (yes: 17)
- ▶ Besides, they also highlighted the issues of low scholarship amounts and excessive administration in the case of certain countries or durations.

In this context, it is questionable on what information the respondents based their answers when rating the current activities of the CEEPUS network according to whether it requires improvement – it works fine, but still has some potentials – or it is used to its full potential, with no room for improvement. **In accordance with the mobility figures, the best ratings were given to teaching staff mobility: here, most respondents chose the 'it works fine, but still has some potentials' option (23), whereas 10 respondents said this activity was used to its full potential.** Most of them

thought that the areas with the most room for improvement were students' short term mobility (29), students' short term excursions (28) and special courses (summer schools or intensive programmes) (27). However, in the case of the freemover status, more respondents chose the 'it works fine, but still has some potentials' option (students – 18, teachers – 23), and fewer chose the status to be improved (students – 19, teachers 15).

The questionnaire also asked them about the future of the CEEPUS programme after 2025, from several aspects:

- ▶ elements to be improved
- ▶ the potential survival of the work done in the network, in case the programme itself is discontinued.

In the case of the elements to be improved, only two suggestions received major support from respondents:

- ▶ a more dynamically growing yearly quota (23)
- ▶ more shorter-term mobility opportunities (23)

The rest of the options were not supported by the respondents, and the comments did not include any new variants, either. Despite the fact that the focus area was not fully covered (see above), they do not support the identification of a new focus area (no: 39). Likewise, they refused shifting the focus on innovation (no: 36). The involvement of new target groups (no: 25) was not supported, either - despite the fact that this latter, that is, e.g. offering staff mobility, appears in another part of the questionnaire among comments. But most of the respondents did not seem open to new application types, either (no: 32), and more simple, Erasmus+ – like 'request' type applications were also largely rejected (no: 23) – although the comments also included the harmonisation of administration with the Erasmus+ programme.



The focus group discussion was mostly in harmony with the above, and partly yielded conflicting answers. Similarly, the SWOT analysis highlighted quotas as an element to be improved, and shorter-term mobilities as the advantage of the programme. However, the mobility of the staff as a new target audience and longer-term network applications were expressly emphasised, while in the questionnaire they were mostly rejected.

As for the question whether they could continue their current network activity in case the programme discontinued after 2025, most respondents answered 'partly' (17) or 'no' (13). Only one institution answered they could fully continue operation without the programme, and one-quarter of the respondents could not answer this question (10).

As regards actual details, they would not be able to continue one of the main attractions of CEEPUS, short term student mobilities (30), and the partnerships with CEEPUS partner countries (e.g. Western Balkan countries) would be adversely affected (22).

The findings of the focus group interview

Based on the questionnaire, a focus group interview was conducted with some network / institutional coordinators of the universities involved in the programme. Since the participants fully overlapped with the questionnaire respondents, the focus group discussion provided an opportunity to discuss the questionnaire in detail rather than to validate the results. As part of the interview, the participants prepared a SWOT analysis of the programme, which showed the following results:

The strengths of the CEEPUS programme

- ▶ varied mobility and professional opportunities and flexible periods adjusted to the beforementioned
- ▶ the common historical past of the members, they understand each other more easily
- ▶ regionality, geographical proximity
- ▶ strengthening Central European linguistic relationships
- ▶ a diverse range of partners outside the EU
- ▶ freemover option
- ▶ an opportunity to involve many partners
- ▶ professional work: research opportunities, partnerships, PhD co-supervision, joint programmes
- ▶ favourable scholarship amounts in Hungary
- ▶ some elements of administration are clear: obvious deadlines, easy cooperation with the office and within the network, easy application for the participants, trackable processes, assessment phases
- ▶ opportunity to build personal relationships



The strengths are rather dispersed among a number of smaller units, regionality and the related elements (common history, linguistic relations, geographical proximity) are predominant, besides shorter and more flexible mobility options.

As regards the weaknesses of the programme, the shortcomings were identified along more marked lines:

- ▶ **Ease of planning:** annual obligation to apply, which makes planning difficult, and it is also difficult to renew every year.
- ▶ **Scholarship amounts:** low scholarship amounts in other countries, often accompanied by a disproportionate rate of administration.

- ▶ **Administration:** administrative practices and rules which differ from country to country and are usually cumbersome and bureaucratic. Payment is slow and often made afterwards. Also, the new system, the new Traffic Sheet makes it harder to use the funding awarded, the application deadlines and administrative duties are not harmonised with the typical periods of operation in higher education (exam period, holiday, summer holiday). Besides all these, however, administrative duties are not funded in Hungary. Thus, some of the IRO coordinators do their jobs out of enthusiasm, and try to 'economise' elsewhere; they cannot travel to attend meetings, as it is not supported by the programme.
- ▶ **Quota:** the network's need to grow vs. available quota. In the case of larger networks, the quotas per institution are lower. In case there are several partners from the same country, they will be competitors.
- ▶ In contrast to other programmes, there are a number of **competitive disadvantages** (e.g. Erasmus+); they are better promoted, pay higher scholarship amounts, administrative procedures are less complex.
- ▶ Some **minimum quality requirements are missing:** mobilities can be rejected without any explanation by the host side, the same network can be rejected in a year, even though it had received funding in previous ones.

There were fewer statements about **opportunities and threats**, and even those were not so much about external factors (just as strengths and weaknesses refer to internal elements, opportunities and threats are about external ones). Thus, only presenting the elements which refer to external factors, we can see the following:

Besides the coordinators of higher education institutions, staff members of Tempus Public Foundation, as well as two external experts were also interviewed. The comments largely overlap in some elements, only addressing the issue from different aspects.



OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ flat-rate travel expense per country
- ▶ staff mobility opportunity
- ▶ better utilisation of CEEPUS as a brand
- ▶ providing organisation budget



THREATS

- ▶ administration differing from country to country
- ▶ Traffic Sheet
- ▶ annual application
- ▶ competitors: Erasmus+, Campus Mundi (a scholarship for Hungarian students)

According to experts, the applications primarily improve in terms of content. The networks are more and more experienced and complex, and over the years, due to the increasingly intense professional work, some of them have actually achieved the joint training programme status. There are more and more networks which succeed in implementing real double degree programmes. Although the term itself is not defined, thus the focus area of Phase III of the programme provides sufficient flexibility for both beginner and experienced applicants, as they define the joint evaluation and joint supervision of theses as such – but they can as well get to joint training programmes, even in a number of fields within the same network. Of course, administrative difficulties which go beyond the programme and stem from the higher education regulations of the given country may arise here, and may as well deter the network from developing an actual double degree programme; according to experts, however, more and more networks decide to launch such programmes, even with only a few years' experience.

Apparently, of course, the older the network the more mature the cooperation.

Within the programme, the concept of 'joint degree programmes' is not defined.

The question is, how much the quite flexible interpretation promotes the strengthening of the European Higher Education Area, long-term partnerships and the strategic role of the Central European (educational) region.

For beginner applicants, it is probably an advantage that the priority area can be broadly interpreted, and following a rigid definition may as well fail due to the administration of the individual countries (requirements associated with the implementation of double degree programmes).

We should consider, however, that if in the long term, currently non-EU member CEEPUS countries wished to

establish closer relations with the European region in the field of higher education, these very administrative obstacles should be eliminated first.

If the CEEPUS programme sets more marked requirements in the field of joint degree programmes, these requirements must be compensated for.

This, at the same time, makes it harder for newcomers to get in, since beginners and experienced ones compete in the same race. Therefore, beginners should get some support.

Meanwhile, although the networks are developing, some of them seem to lower their professional standards. In order to promote the programme and recruit participants, some have apparently begun to offer 'lighter' professional programmes. Although these are connected to the professional partnerships, they are still less academic.

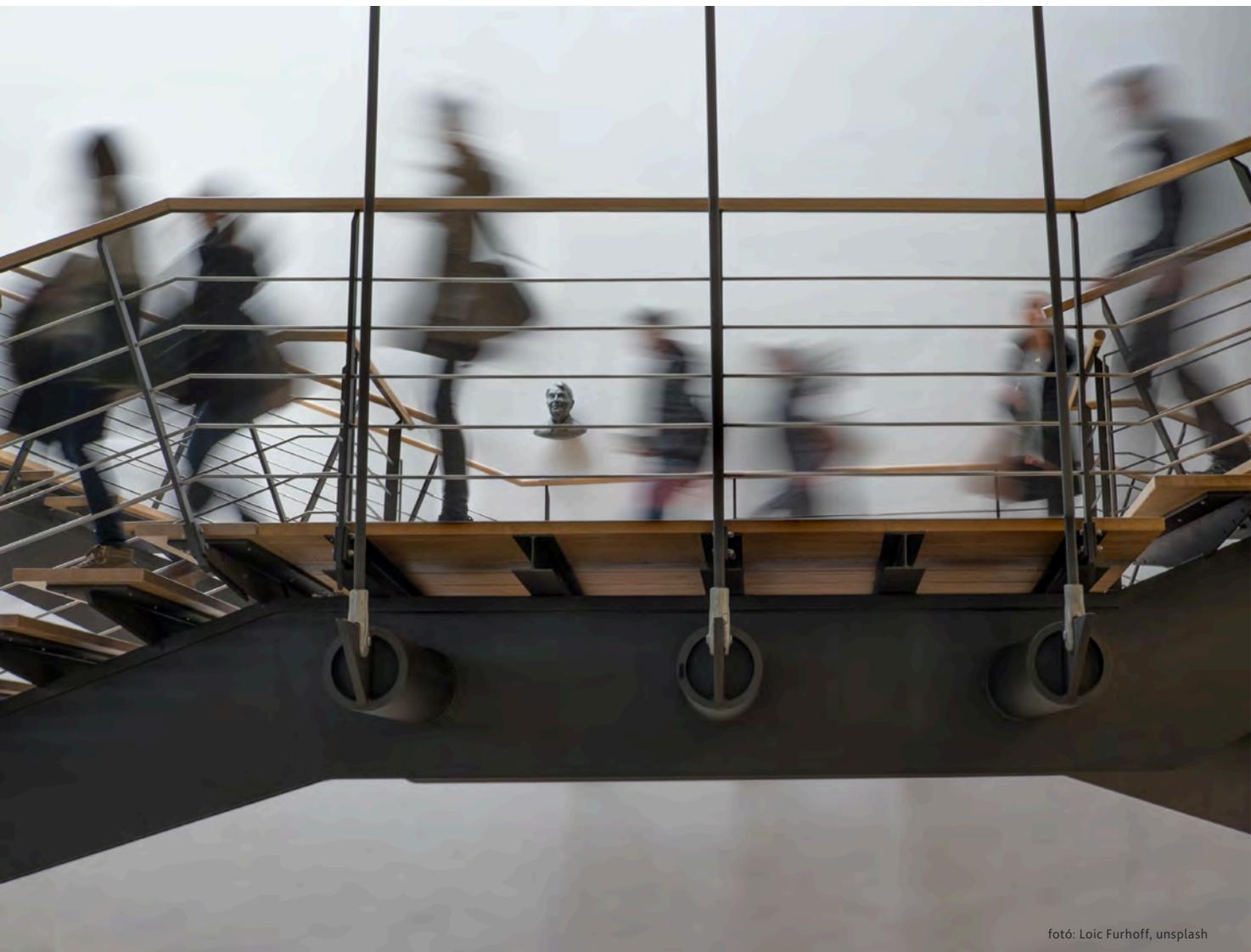
According to experts – due to the expected knowledge transfer – Western countries (e.g. Austria) are more popular; besides that, humanities find easier contact points. Languages, common history and geography are typical topics within a network, whereas there are fewer partnerships in the field of natural sciences. It means that STEM fields and innovation are not necessarily given special emphasis, while currently this would be a priority area of education (and economy)*.

* A comment by Tempus Public Foundation: about one-quarter of all the running CEEPUS networks are implemented in the field of technology and engineering, with an additional 16% in natural sciences, that is, 40% of all the partnerships are implemented in STEM areas.

Experts also reported that applicants often rely on their former materials both in the application writing and reporting phases. It is in accordance with the applicants' comment (focus group) that it is difficult to submit an application annually, and it is hard to 'renew' in such a short term.

In sum, the CEEPUS programme allows more and different types of partnerships than, for example, the Erasmus+ programme. Shorter term mobilities can be an attraction for students, since, for various reason, many of them are put off by a longer stay abroad. The network cooperates in special subjects which they specify, thus they can work together in a more informal manner. **So, networks are born as grassroots initiatives – but they are not necessarily linked to current priorities of national or international educational policy** (e.g. innovation, STEM fields). However, they definitely contribute to sustaining historical, cultural and linguistic heritages. Networks may cover diverse activities.

From students' point of view, the 'risk' that goes with participation in the CEEPUS programme is low. Credit recognition administration and being forced to defer a semester are less common. Therefore, shorter – and thus, for 'beginners', more readily available – mobility programmes are definitely an attraction of CEEPUS.



fotó: Loic Furhoff, unsplash

Overview

After summarising the sheer outcomes of the CEEPUS programme, it is worth getting an overview of **other, similar scholarship programmes**. The study which analyses the outcomes of the entire CEEPUS programme also reviews various programmes in order to assess where the programme should be channelled in case it is discontinued after 2025. The study in question compares CEEPUS with the following programmes:

- ▶ Horizon 2020;
- ▶ Erasmus+;
- ▶ Marie Curie scholarships;
- ▶ COST programme.

We think that among these, **only the comparison with the Erasmus+ programme** may be relevant, not the other three, as they don't entirely cover the target audiences of the CEEPUS programme, only one or another, and some only allow individual applications, not institutional ones. Except for the Erasmus+ programme, only an inconsiderable number of positive answers were given about channelling the CEEPUS network outcomes into the other three programmes. Furthermore, in certain programmes – especially in Horizon 2020 – the rate of Hungarian participation is very low (at least in a coordinating role), which goes beyond Hungarian higher education, and it would require further promotion, funding and

other tools at a systemic level to help Hungarian applicants apply and also win projects.

The comparison with the Erasmus+ programme was discussed in detail above at the relevant parts, so we will skip it here.

Also, we think that it would be useful to consider that, although the Erasmus+ programme covers the current scope of CEEPUS applicants (by programme or partner countries), **still, there are (simultaneous) regional scholarship funds in Europe. It goes to show that other countries consider it useful to support the educational partnerships of smaller regions besides pan-European ones.** Such scholarship programmes include, for example:

- ▶ the higher education partnership of Nordic countries. There are several references to the higher education partnership of the 5 countries concerned (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland, and also the Faroe Island, Greenland and Åland Islands as autonomous regions). Currently, there is one active programme, the **Nordic Master Program***, the goals of which are quite in

* Source: oph.fi/en/programmes/nordic-master and nordicmaster.org and norden.org/en, Download: 2019 09 11

harmony with the goals of Phase III of CEEPUS, focusing on joint programmes, even though at a master's level. The programme has run since 2007 and has supported 34 projects so far. The partnerships are smaller scale here, as two higher education institutions from two different countries (1 coordinator, 1 partner) are sufficient to apply and develop a joint programme.

- ▶ There is also a scholarship programme between Finland and Russia, called **FIRST+**^{**}, also offering student and teaching staff mobility exchange for longer and shorter periods.
- ▶ The **Nordplus**^{***} programme supports broader regional cooperation, between the Scandinavian and the Baltic countries. Moreover, the programme does not only cover higher education, but also public education and adult learning. In the area of higher education, at least three institutions from three partner countries can apply at Bachelor's and Master's levels. The projects must be submitted at an institutional level, but students, teachers and university staff may also be involved. In fact, the activities are identical with the project types available under Erasmus+: development projects, intensive courses, network support, joint training programmes, as well as student and teacher mobilities can receive funding.

Of course, the review of the programme^{****} **makes references to the Erasmus+ programme, the similarities and differences.** The staff coordinating the programmes (administrators) highlight similar elements to the ones often mentioned in favour of the CEEPUS programme:

- The Erasmus+ and the Nordplus programmes are regarded as mutually complementing programmes, not as competitors.
- Notwithstanding the strong overlap between the two programmes, they are aware of the added value of the Nordplus programme, too (see below), the programme equally contributes to the internationalisation of the higher education area.
- The Nordplus programme is more simple and serves as a sort of entry level, from which partnerships often proceed to Erasmus+ (for a broader range of partnership and higher funding levels).
- Nordplus also offers shorter mobilities (express mobility), which is highly popular.
- According to coordinators, the application and reporting processes are simpler – but funding is also often lower than in the case of Erasmus+.
- There are certain project types which are no longer available under the current Erasmus+, or only as a separate programme – e.g. the organisation of intensive courses.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the programme suggests enhancing the complementary nature of the two programmes.

- ▶ We cannot find a similarly elaborated system for the partnership of the Baltic countries. **Baltic Center** supports cooperation and scholarship programmes between the Baltic countries, as well as the US and Uzbekistan. There are also signs that at a university level, or bilaterally, the cooperation between the higher education systems of the three countries are definitely supported.
- ▶ The mostly higher education scholarship programmes funded by **EEA and Norway Grants** do not need any introduction, as they were elaborated and implemented by Tempus Public Foundation in Hungary. These partnerships were not built on regional bases, but ones determined by the supporting countries, and they supported higher education partnerships between the three donor countries (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein) and the supported

** Source: oph.fi/en/programmes/first-programme, Download: 2019 09 11

*** Source: nordplonline.org, Download: 2019 09 11

**** Evaluation of Nordplus, Melin, Terrell and Henningsson, nordplonline.org/Documents2/Documents/Evaluation-of-Nordplus-2012-2016, Download: 2019 09 11

countries (including Hungary). The programme considerably contributed to the increasing rate of mobilities between the three donors and Hungary, since students' programmes and teachers' study trips in this direction are not common in Erasmus+.

- ▶ A similar funding system is the **Visegrad Fund**, which involves the V4 countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). It supports the cooperation between the countries listed above in various types of projects. The programmes are distinguished as 'grant' and 'mobility' types. Grant programmes can be applied for by institutions, as described below, in specific topics.
 - *Strategic Grant*^{*****} – partners from all the V4 countries must be involved.
 - *Visegrad Grants*^{*****} – requires a partnership of at least 3 V4 countries. Or, it specifically supports cooperation between border countries, under a project of at least two neighbouring organisations of two neighbouring countries.
 - *Visegrad+ Grants*^{*****} – requires the active involvement of at least 3 V4 countries and 1 entity from the Eastern Partnership region or the Western Balkans countries.

***** Priority areas: implementing projects addressing the political, social and economic aspects of Brexit / supporting an entrepreneur-friendly environment, intelligent industry and innovation / implementing projects seeking to raise awareness about the Visegrad partnership of the V4 region.

***** Priority areas: Culture and common identity / Education and capacity building / Innovation, R&D, Entrepreneurship / Democratic values and the media / Improving the effectiveness of public policy decision-making in a regional context / Regional development, environment and tourism / Enhancing an inclusive society and solidarity within the region.

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Mobility type programmes are closest to CEEPUS. Here, individuals and groups can apply in 4 programme types.

- *Academic Mobility* – those engaged in Master's and post-Master's programmes, as well as researchers from the countries of the V4 region can apply for scholarships in the accredited higher education institutions of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia or Ukraine; also, V4 countries can receive applicants for similar purposes from these countries. Mobilities can range from one or two semesters to up to 4 semesters, covering the entire training period.
- *Visual and Sound Arts* – specifically for artists and those working in cultural areas; the participants can spend 3 months in one of the Visegrad countries.
- *Performing Arts* – also for V4 citizens, art groups and troupes engaged in theatre art and dance, offering grant and study opportunities in any of the Visegrad countries.
- *Literature and Journalism* – grant opportunities for talented writers and journalists between specific universities and other institutions, receiving one writer from each of the four countries, who do their own work but are also involved in the events organised by their host institutions.

Some of the higher education institutions involved in the CEEPUS programme continue their network activity under the Visegrad Fund (questionnaire, 3 answers).

Conclusions

Based on the document analysis, the summary of statistics and using various qualitative methods, a large amount of information has been gathered for assessing the CEEPUS programme. There are a number of arguments in favour of the CEEPUS programme, while we can also see now the elements which urgently need improvement to prevent the programme from losing its attraction.

The arguments in favour of the CEEPUS programme

1. The CEEPUS programme is a **good starting point** for a faculty, a department, a coordinator, or even a student, with little experience in international partnerships.

The programme supports the internationalisation of less experienced higher education institutions (especially ones not yet involved in the Erasmus+ programme, or only involved as a partner country) by allowing partner countries to learn from Central and Eastern European countries, which may also result in establishing further relations, and it also puts these CEE countries in a more favourable position 'against' Western European countries. The lessons drawn from the partnerships, as well as the partnerships themselves, may later contribute to larger scale mobilities (Erasmus+) and/or research and development

programmes (Horizon 2020)*. This is also confirmed by the fact that some networks also continue their cooperation in other programmes.

While there is a kind of 'abundance' of scholarships in Hungarian higher education with the number of students decreasing, this abundance is not necessarily common in the other CEEPUS countries, especially in the Western Balkans region. For these countries, the CEEPUS programme may serve as a preparation for a later accession (EU / Erasmus+). The existence of a programme which specifically supports this region is also beneficial for Hungarian higher education institutions.

2. Highlighting **regional cooperation** as an advantage has been justified by Hungarian applicants, experts and the Office at every forum. They all named it as a main attraction of the programme, even though there seems to be a contradiction here inasmuch as mobility figures are mostly high in countries also available in the Erasmus+ programme – administrative and other problems make mobility to other countries more difficult.

* Source: Small Programme with Big Impact – Slovenian EXPERIENCE with the CEEPUS Programme, CMEPIUS, 2019.

- It is the very regional nature that can counterbalance mobilities to the typically popular destination countries through the study opportunities offered in countries considered less popular in this broader context.
 - The question is whether higher education relations in the Western Balkans can be sustained and developed without CEEPUS. It is an important issue from the perspective of the future EU-accession of Western Balkans countries. Hungary (and the other CEEPUS countries) may gain a competitive advantage or a more favourable position through the programme during the (pre-)accession of the Balkan countries.
 - In fact, a 'united' Europe is more than the whole of country groups unified by regional, economic, historical or other traditions. Traditionally, German-French cooperation has been important, the Baltic states seek to preserve their integrity, Scandinavians have their own regional cooperation, the Visegrad Four try to strengthen their regional position, etc. – these all indicate that within a 'great' Europe, smaller regions play an important role.
 - The programme contributes to two of the relevant goals of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR):
 - » *To establish well-being:* to develop a knowledge-based society / to support the competitiveness of businesses / to invest into people and skills.
 - » *To strengthen the region*
 The EU Strategy for the Danube Region itself may serve as a stronger framework of cooperation.
 - With regard to the regional nature of the **CEEPUS programme**, we should emphasise that it can simultaneously cover a number of smaller regions, and therefore we can call it a **macro level regional programme**, since it involves the V4 countries, the former Yugoslavian states, the Slavic states – these in themselves represent or could represent separate regions. Therefore, CEEPUS represents a high-level, complex cooperation in the field of education, with still unexploited potentials.
3. **Professional cooperation between departments / faculties.** Compared to the Erasmus+ programme, CEEPUS is definitely a grassroots cooperation for development purposes, based on the professional interest of faculties connected in a network, where student and teacher mobility is only one of the 'products'. The partnerships of the thematic network are diverse, and there are different outcomes within such networks – which, in the current phase, focus on joint programmes. **It goes beyond the bilateral partnerships characteristic of the Erasmus+ programme, where mobility is the main 'product'.**
 4. **The programme is very flexible**, and in some respect, it offers absolutely unique opportunities. Students' scholarships are more flexible in terms of duration: they do not require cross-registration for an entire semester, they allow as short as one month's stays abroad (while requiring the application of ECTS, that is, the acquisition and recognition of credits), and they even allow short term excursions for student groups, which is unique. A similarly unique opportunity is the freemover scholarship, which allows teacher or student mobility using up the remaining months. This, in fact, increases the efficiency of the programme; the unused capacities can be utilised, which is a win-win situation for both the higher education institution and the freemover student or teacher.
 5. The programme eliminates most of the **effect arising from the exchange rate fluctuations** of the different countries by always paying the costs where they occur. Therefore, this – compared to the Erasmus+ programme – 'reverse funding' (not outbound but inbound participants' costs are compensated for in local currency, and travelling is financed in the home country, through the National Office, where applicable) is convenient for CEEPUS countries, which mostly lack a common currency. There is no central budget (apart from the operation of the Vienna office), and there are no financial transactions related to the programme between the countries involved.

What is the unique selling point of CEEPUS?

The study requested by the central office lays great emphasis on this issue; it finds that this unique quality was lost in the competition with the other scholarship programmes. They see uniqueness in the higher education partnership opportunity and regionality - they think it was lost in the competition with the Erasmus+ programme, which has more and more fully involved partner countries (formerly only available in CEEPUS).

Hungarian respondents, however, have a different view, their answers are consistent in this respect, and the individual target groups identified more or less the same topics:

- regionality in Central and Southern Europe: besides geographic proximity, shared historical, cultural and linguistic aspects;
- shorter mobilities, activities better harmonisable with the given activities and goals. This allows a wide range of partnerships and addressing various issues;
- historical connections, the presence of minor languages, linguistic diversity;
- The CEEPUS Office highlighted professional cooperation, content development and multilateral partnerships – in the programme, mobilities are the common minimums, but it also allows development work, which would be a different project type elsewhere.

These buzzwords partly coincide with the answers of the questionnaire prepared by the Croatian CEEPUS office. There, the respondents highlighted simplicity, flexibility, short term mobilities, diverse activities, the freemover opportunity and scholarship amounts. As opposed to Hungarian responses, Croatian coordinators regard regionality as a restricting factor.

The CEEPUS elements with room for improvement

Although the programme has been available for a quarter of a century, **unfortunately, it has not used this long time efficiently in terms of improvement.** We can identify a number of areas where **CEEPUS does not only need improvement, but must be improved in order to remain competitive.** We need to differentiate between elements which the Hungarian office can directly affect and ones which can be initiated through central control – or, in lack of that, as a grassroots initiative –, by presenting the good practices of a number of CEEPUS countries.

Improvement areas which the Hungarian office can directly affect:

1. **Identifying and communicating uniqueness.** The study requested by the Central CEEPUS Office concludes that the CEEPUS programme has lost its unique selling point, as now more and broader scholarship programmes are available, primarily Erasmus+, which now also covers the Balkan countries, even though in a partner country status. The respondents can still see **the uniqueness which lies in regionality; this, however, is lost in the competition**, as Western knowledge transfer can be more attractive to participants. It must be reconsidered and highlighted what actual benefits the regionality of the CEEPUS programme means for those involved.

Although the 'big brother', Erasmus+, is more easily and more widely available, we should examine the points where CEEPUS can offer more and something different from Erasmus+. Such aspects could be, among others, multilateral instead of bilateral partnerships, professional developments beyond mobility, or the involvement of non-EU countries.

The question is, how much CEEPUS can function as a brand – and what qualities are now associated with this brand? It is an issue which goes beyond the scope of this study – but, similarly to the Erasmus+ programme and other regional European scholarship programmes, it is worth investing more in promoting the programme and/or using more effective methods.

There are a number of similar programmes in Europe the goals and activities of which largely overlap with those of Erasmus+. It would be worth studying the way they work in more detail (e.g. Nordplus), and discussing the dilemmas with those concerned either as part of a study trip or a broader discourse. In sum, a (more) conscious brand building is necessary.

2. **Setting goals and making them visible.** The country determines the direction of the CEEPUS programme through the budget and the quotas, but it does not use any indicators which can be tracked and checked to measure the success of the programme in Hungary, or at least, we are not aware of such indicators. **The question is whether the Hungarian office regards the CEEPUS programme as a strategic tool in the efforts made to establish the European Higher Education Area, and if it does, what improvement goals does it set?**
3. **Modern, user-friendly and reliable database(s).** The requirement of reliable and accessible data is, unfortunately, not met. The central database is operated by the CEEPUS office in Vienna, but it only allows limited access to data, even with regard to one's home country. The database does not provide an overview of the 25 years of the programme, the network data are only available from the academic year 2005/2006. Considering the current level of digitalisation, it does not imply a user-friendly background system which adequately supports analyses, and therefore it needs modernisation. Apart from that, the scope of available data is limited and they lack the necessary structure, for example:

- a. Registering the academic level – Bachelor, Master, PhD – of student mobilities would provide useful information.
 - b. Using as many recorded data and drop-down menus as possible would improve transparency and handling the data in the (either domestic or central) system. It would prevent the same higher education institution to be registered under different names in the database, making it difficult to aggregate the data. Or, the classification of various disciplines would also provide useful background information, instead of keyword search.
4. **Quality assurance, using PDCA (plan-do-check-act)** cycle.** According to the questionnaire responses, the rate of using various quality assurance tools, or at least, their conscious use, is low. It would be worth checking what (planning, assessing, tracking, development) tools other organisations or other units of a given higher education institution use, and whether there are international good practices within the CEEPUS programme. **The quality standards developed in connection with the Erasmus+ programme may also serve as points of reference**, it is not necessary and effective to use completely new processes. However, quality improvement tools **cannot be used without any compensation – administration and organisation require financial support**. In case there is no budget for that, we should examine which of the institutional processes tried and tested in Erasmus+ can be adopted at minimum cost or without any cost in CEEPUS.
 5. **Hungarian commitment to the programme goals.** Reliable and stable operation requires dependable government funding in Hungary. It fell outside the scope of the study – and also,

** In other words: plan-do-check-act. PDCA is an iterative four-step management method used in business for the control and continuous improvement of processes and products (source: Wikipedia).

the lack of time and other resources made it impossible – to examine how much the significantly cut quota in the academic year 2010-2011 (from 550 months to 315 months) threw back interest and trust in the CEEPUS programme. This cut was in force for 5 academic year, when the programme did not grow or only at an insignificant rate.

Although the economic crisis may justify this cut, it is worth following the view of the European Commission and OECD***, which sought to regard education as a future investment during the crisis.

Also, we should keep in mind the trend that the number of network partners is increasing. This increase can only be limited by the partnership, as it is not restricted by rules. However, it may result in the same budget being shared among more partners, thus becoming too fragmented and less motivating for the higher education institutions involved.

6. Reaching the target audience. It is safe to say that the programme can only reach a part of the target audience in Hungary. It is not in the scope of this study to identify the motivations of the applying institutions, but it is definitely an area for further study if the programme is to be continued (even if only until 2025), particularly if a higher education institution is involved in a partnership with an institution in a CEEPUS country, but does not apply within the programme.

7. The reasons for withdrawals and cancellations. Similarly, it may be useful to gain a deeper insight into the various reasons for failed mobility projects, since their average rate is 12.8% now, but there were years when it fluctuated between 25-36%. According to what was reported in the focus group discussions, the main reasons for cancellations were scholarship amounts and administrative duties.

Further examinations can identify the points where the office can step in to help reduce the rate of cancellations.

With regard to the CEEPUS programme, the decision-making body is the Joint Committee of Ministers, which means that the programme is highly embedded in education policy, and the decision-makers of education have a direct view of the operation and outcomes of the programme. This 'embeddedness' could be mobilised for development measures.

The lobbying power is justified by the fact that the number of Hungarian quotas is high in the programme, so Hungary is clearly committed to the programme, too, and the representation of development needs can also be convincing at the level of the entire programme.

As we have mentioned, **there are a number of points of development which are beyond the decision-making competence of the Hungarian office**, and they require central development. What is apparent here is that no decisions were made about certain measures in the past 25 years for quality assurance and establishing CEEPUS as a brand. In return, the countries were allowed great freedom of implementation; however, with the appearance and transformation of the other scholarship programmes, this quality is apparently more of a disadvantage than an advantage.

A. Goals and strategic approach. Although the programme seeks to support the development of the Central and Eastern European Higher Education Area, primarily through developing joint (PhD) programmes, they have still not been elaborated or made measurable through indicators, either in terms of the whole programme or the individual countries. It would be necessary to update the strategic goals of the CEEPUS programme, taking into consideration the changed higher education area and the available programmes.

*** oecd.org/education/investineducationtobeatrecessionboostearnings.htm

The ability to plan and a strategic approach could be enabled by years of network funding granted to the higher education institutions involved.

- B. Back to the roots – establishing the European Higher Education Area.** According to the feedback, inbound participants are faced with different administrative measures in different countries, and even with some highly bureaucratic elements which seem disproportionate to the length of the stay and/or the rate of the grant received. It means that even the Erasmus+ programme countries (e.g. Croatia, Serbia – according to some questionnaire respondents) fail to implement easy mobility smoothly – and, in the case of the Balkan countries, it may also explain low mobility rates. This may be due to the fact that here, inbound mobilities are directly financed from their own budgets, and therefore they have stricter controls of who can receive funding. **However, the key to the success of CEEPUS, as well as to retaining regionality as an attraction, is to eliminate these (excessive) administrative rules which hinder mobility, and to stipulate common requirements in this respect.**

The system of scholarships requires similar revision. Although determining the budget falls within the competence of the individual member countries, in order to retain or increase the attraction of the programme, budgets need to be increased, too, so they can ensure participants reasonable support. **Low quotas and scholarships prevent the utilisation of the very 'Central Europeanness' of the programme** – the rate of mobility is the lowest in the Balkan countries, and due to the low budget, these new member states have a smaller chance to position themselves in the CEEPUS map, although they are the ones who would need the most support.

Credit recognition is still a critical point, which does work at an administrative level, but not very smoothly in reality. It goes to show that the programme has been through the first phase too quickly, and a return to the foundations would be necessary.

As a quality requirement, the countries should be accountable for ensuring the conditions, and they should also receive more support in that.

- C. Setting a focus area along the modernisation of education and the Central European educational priorities.** The current, 3rd phase of the CEEPUS programme focuses on joint PhD programmes and the cooperation within the Strategy for the Danube Region. The question is whether more marked priorities focusing on the modernisation of education and/or innovation and/or other areas (e.g. promoting subjects, developing entrepreneurial skills, digital skills, skills required in the labour market, etc.) are needed in the higher education of the 21st century. Another question is how much these focus areas need to be defined together.

- D. Quality assurance, using PDCA cycle.** In order to retain the competitiveness of the CEEPUS programme, cross-national **minimum quality requirements** should be defined. It can be done by adopting the procedures applied in Erasmus+ or defining new rules. By now, however, it is apparent that the freedom of the countries in terms of managing the programme does not properly promote increasing the quality standards. This puts CEEPUS at the great risk of falling behind other scholarship programmes, despite the fact that in many respect it offers more favourable conditions and activities in the region than other programmes.

It could be useful to gather the good programme management practices used in the individual countries, and rely on the tried and tested practices to define a common minimum.

- E. Ensuring equal opportunities.** The cooperation between networks funded by CEEPUS often go back many years or even decades. However, the available budget is limited, and therefore smaller networks which are new in the programme can perform

less successfully than their experienced peers with lots of achievements. That is why an overall and transparent decision-making mechanism is needed to enable newcomers to join in.

- F. Modern, user-friendly and reliable database(s).** The central database is operated by the CEEPUS office in Vienna, but it only allows limited access to data, even with regard to one's home country. The database does not provide an overview of the 25 years of the programme, the network data are only available from the academic year 2005/2006. Considering the current level of digitalisation, it does not imply a user-friendly background system which adequately supports analyses, and therefore it needs modernisation.
- G. Needs analysis for new target audiences.** Compared to other scholarship opportunities, the CEEPUS programme is put at a competitive disadvantage at two points: it does not provide mobility quota for the non-teaching staff engaged in the successful implementation of networks, nor funding for organisation activities. It means that the universities involved suffer serious loss here, as they cannot fund these activities or only from other sources, which, again, is a gain for other scholarship programmes. Also, student mobility mainly means inbound and outbound mobility for educational purposes; however, the programme can / could also allow practice or internship. It is mostly implemented within the host higher education institutions; the question is, to what extent internship could be implemented outside the institution. It would require a stronger involvement of the world of work, companies and NGO's. It is already possible in a status called 'silent partner'; however, according to the focus group discussion, it is only implemented along the universities' existing dual relations, and less associated with the CEEPUS programme – the respondents did not highlight this aspect.

Under the auspices of Tempus Public Foundation, the Hungarian CEEPUS Office has an overview of a number of other higher education scholarship programmes and the way they work. This exceptional situation offers an opportunity to adopt good practices within the office and disseminate and share them among the partner countries, thus assuming an active, developer role.

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