



PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural

ISSN: 1695-7121

info@pasosonline.org

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PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, vol. 13, núm. 1, enero-abril, 2015, pp. 175-189

Universidad de La Laguna
El Sauzal (Tenerife), España

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The role of tourist destination in international students' choice of academic center: the case of erasmus programme in the Canary Islands

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Abstract: The study measures the importance of the university and the tourist destination factors in the international students' choice of placement for their studies and their further satisfaction. Using a sample from the Erasmus Exchange Programme in the Canary Islands, one of the main European tourist destinations, the results show the potential that academic tourism could have for the host destination and in particular, the importance of the attraction factors linked to the destination rather than those associated with the academic center. Hence, to take advantage of this potential, it is essential to develop collaborative strategies among the managers of the destination and those responsible for the academic center analyzed.

Key Words: international students, academic tourism, destination image, university.

O papel do destino turístico na escolha dos alunos do centro académico internacional: o caso do programa erasmus na universidade de la laguna

Resumo: O estudo propõe aferir a importância da universidade a par dos fatores do destino turístico na escolha dos alunos internacionais face ao posicionamento para seus estudos e ao seu posterior grau de satisfação. Usando uma amostra a partir do programa de intercâmbio Erasmus, nas Ilhas Canárias, um dos principais destinos turísticos europeus, os resultados mostram o potencial que o turismo académico poderá ter para o destino de acolhimento e, em particular, a importância dos fatores de atração ligados ao destino. Neste sentido, para aproveitar esse potencial, é essencial desenvolver estratégias de colaboração entre os gestores do destino e os responsáveis pelo centro académico analisado.

Palavras-Chave: Estudantes internacionais, turismo académico, imagem do destino, universitários.

1. Introduction and research question

One of the links that could be established between the universities and the tourist destinations could be *educational tourism* (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999);(Ritchie, Carr, & Cooper, 2003);(Weaver, 2003);(Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008) and inside it *academic tourism* (Pawlowska & Roget, 2009) defined as groups of people who travel from their place of residence in order to do academic courses of less than a year of duration in the tourist destination (Department of Economic and Social

Affairs, United Nations, 2010).

This kind of tourism has been described as organized, commercial tours that offer an intentional and structured learning experience as a key component of the touristic experience (Pitman, Broomhall, & Majocha, 2011). Despite the importance of academic tourism has grown over the past few decades, it

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has not been yet widely analyzed in the literature. The majority of articles dealing with various aspects of international student mobility: are focused on the behavior of the students, while others are related to the costs and economic impacts of the exchanges (Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012). Alternatively, authors like Leutwyler & Lottenbach (2011); Teichler (2004), Luginbühl (2011); Meri (2011); Daly & Barker (2010); Di Pietro & Page (2008) and Doyle et al. (2010) have mainly analyzed the students themselves; meaning their motivations and the obstacles they face when deciding to make a stay abroad.

However, to date few research projects have established links between education and travel in the host country despite the international students' obvious requirement to travel to their chosen study destination (Glover, 2011). One noteworthy study along these lines was the one carried out by Llewellyn Smith & McCabe (2008). This study analyzes the attraction factors for exchange students, comparing the host destination ones and the university ones, as well as evaluating the level of satisfaction of the exchange experience in Australian universities. Similarities with the present study can be found regarding international students as the group being analyzed, the analysis of students' motivations (the so called "push" factors) and the attraction factors ("pull") of both: universities and destination. There is as well a common point in the suggestion that the involvement among universities and destination is essential for improving the student exchange programs. There are, however, significant points of difference in our study aiming to expand on and confirm the conclusions that Llewellyn and McCabe draw. First, this paper is framed in the European context, focusing attention on a mature tourist destination like the Canary Islands, mainly oriented to sun and sand tourism. In addition, the students considered are part of the "European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students", more commonly known as the Erasmus Program. In the literature, most of the studies related with satisfaction of international students, like Alves & Raposo (2009), have focused on the characteristics of the host academic centre and not on the variables and resources linked to the tourist destination where the university is placed. In the present work, an integral position will be adopted to determine the importance of various factors and to highlight strategies for their utilization.

In this context, we have conducted a qualitative study focused on distinguishing about the importance of factors linked to the tourism destination and the ones related to the host university. The main question to be answered is: *Which factors - the tourist destination or the university ones- have a greater influence on the choice of a place for an Erasmus exchange?*

The study begins analyzing the academic tourist and its characteristics. After that, it proposes a dual model (university – destination) for the factors of attraction of international students. The following section describes the context in which the empirical work was carried out: the Canary Islands, University of La Laguna and the Erasmus Programme. Then, the design and the main results of the empirical work are set out and finally; the main conclusions and recommendations are discussed.

2. Literature review

2.1. International students and destination choice:

The choice of destination by the international student has been aimed by several studies through the years. Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman (2012) conducted an Empirical Research on International Student Decision Making showing that the different factors considered for the election of a destination are a mix between those related with the university (i.e. quality of courses, university reputation) and destination (cost of living, similarities of cultures)

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) supports the consideration of international students as tourists establishing that a visitor is a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment for less than a year and for any purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2010). Among the categories of visitors, the same organization determines one for students taking short-term courses (less than one year), and includes education and training as one of the categories inside the classification of tourism trips.

2.2.1. Features of Academic tourist

Following Rodríguez et al. (2012) the main characteristics of this segment will reside first in the objective of stay, that is, to take part in studies organized by higher education institutions with a duration

of the stay that is typically much longer than conventional tourist. About consumption patterns, those are more akin to the resident's ones than to the conventional tourist which is specially visible in the type of accommodation once foreign students tend to stay mostly in shared apartments, dorms, with families, and in college-organized housing and not in touristic accommodations. Lastly, The high capacity of generating new visits, given that the vast majority of these students receive visits from family and friends during their stay is another factor to consider.

Other considerations can be found in the motivations of international students taking part in exchange programs, which include enjoying the "tourist and cultural attractions" and "scenery and natural environment" of the destination (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008), which often leads to an increase in expending on travel during the period of study abroad (Souto Otero & McCoshan, 2006). Several studies indicate that finding out about the new cultures is the main reason for initiating an exchange (Arteaga Acosta, 2004); (Krzaklewska & Krupnik, 2005).

Destinations normally have to face the choice between mass tourism and sustainable tourism. International exchange students, characterized by a high educational level and a long-term stay, could contribute to increasing the local demand for this last option that constitutes, according to Ritchie et al. (2003, 112), a basis on which tourism can be planned and developed.

To sum up, in spite of exchange students [inside the Erasmus Programme], unlike full-time international students, do not contribute to the host university by paying fees, they still have the potential to make a significant contribution to the local economy through spending on accommodation, food, travel and leisure (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). International students bring an economic benefit, since they have multiple opportunities to travel while staying in the host country (Hsu & Sung, 1997; Shanka, Ali-Knight, & Pope, 2002; Sung & Hsu, 1996). From this potential and following (Min-En, 2006), (Stynes, 1997), (Pădure & Turtureanu, 2005), the effects of international students on the tourist destination might be classified not only as direct, but also as indirect and induced.

2.2. Dual model of Academic tourist segment: university and tourist destination factors

According to Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008), a dual model can be proposed for the relationship between international students and tourist destinations: one that includes tourist destination and university factors.

The role of the university in the international exchanges

The growth in the number of international students shows a shift in overseas study from an elitist experience to one involving mass movements (Naidoo, 2010). International students are part of an educational program; therefore, the resources and capabilities of the host university should play an important role in attracting these students.

Scholars have given little attention to universities from the resources and capability perspective. An exception is the study of Araya Guzmán & Chaparro Peláez (2005), who propose two models: one for a general level and another adapted to each organizational area of the university (for instance: government of the university, technical assistance, etc.). Moreover, the European Commission through CHEPS, INCHER-Kassel, & ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd (2008) carried out a study into the impact of the Erasmus program on European universities' quality and Qiang (2003) studied the conceptual framework of the internationalization of the universities.

In addition to these studies, Alves & Raposo (2009) tried to determine what could be considered as the key resources in the relationship between the university and students: they reviewed previous studies in this field beginning from three different theory bases. The study of Krzaklewska & Krupnik (2005) on the Erasmus experience all over Europe should also be named.

Regarding university factors, Franklin & Shemwell (1995) highlighted the importance of their infrastructure, whereas authors like Bailey, Bauman, & Lata (1998) mentioned the human capital (professors and administrative staff) as a key factor in the attraction of the students. Special relevance has also been given to the tradition and prestige of the university. The institutional image has a significant effect on the decision of students, by both keeping current students and attracting potential ones (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007). Universities with good reputations attract students from other countries, whose aims are to benefit from studies at a higher quality level or specialization not available in their countries. (Kearney & Huisman, 2007).

Related to this last factor is the existence and dimension of the so called "triple helix" explained by Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt, & Terra (2000). The possibilities of enlarging field of action of the university offering more possibilities that can go beyond the academic framework can also result

attractive when choosing a destination. The table 1 shows a list of the most common resources cited in literature according to the Grant (1996, p. 155) classification.

Table 1. University resources.

<i>Kind</i>	<i>Resource</i>
<i>Tangible</i>	Infrastructure
	Office for managing Erasmus program
	Didactic and informational material
	Didactic and informational material in other languages
	ICT
	Economic and financial resources
	Economic and financial resources from exchange programs
<i>Intangible</i>	Organizational culture
	Adequate information system
	Tradition, prestige and recognition
	Language courses
	Subjects in other languages
	Integration activities with local students
	Sources of information in other languages
	Human capital
	Language knowledge
<i>Human</i>	Personnel of the University
	Students’ associations
	Personnel dedicated exclusively to the Erasmus program
<i>Relational</i>	Agreement to collaborate and cooperate with other universities
	Belonging to international networks
	Adequate environment of relationships and values.
	Motivation to international openness
	Relations with public and industrial spheres.

Source: Own elaboration from the studies of several authors.

Tourist Destination factors

The resources related with the destination that could influence in the international students’ destination choice are the second part of the model. From the resources-based view, we can distinguish one or up to three broad perspectives: the ideographic definition and description of attraction types, the organization and development of attractions, and the cognitive perception and experience of tourist attractions by different groups (Lew, 1987). Tourism literature has focused on resources like infrastructure (Melián-González & García-Falcón, 2003);(G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1999);(Crouch, 2011); natural resources (Enright & Newton, 2004);(del Bosque & Martín, 2008);(Fuchs & Weiermair, 2004)

and price (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000);(Alegre & Garau, 2011);(Yoon & Uysal, 2005); (Turismo de Tenerife, 2011) as the main factors of attraction for a tourist destination.

To all of these, the special importance of the factors related to language skills can be added (Meri, 2011; Pietro & Page, 2008) as one of the main determinants in the final decision in choosing the destination for the stay of a group of International Students. The table 2 shows a list of the most common resources cited in literature according to the Grant (1996) classification

Table 2. Destination Resources

Tangible resources
Natural resources
Price
Infrastructure (Transport)
Cultural and historic resources
Gastronomy
Shops
Accessibility (inside tourist destination)
Nightlife
Restaurants
Accommodation
Information services
Intangible resources
Culture and history
Leisure Activities
Security
Health and Hygiene
Peaceful
Familiar environment
Human Resources
Human resources

Source: Own elaboration from the studies of several authors.

2.3. The Canary Islands' tourism destination and international students

2.3.1 Canary Islands and the role of tourism

The Canarian Archipelago, an autonomous region in the Spanish State is considered by the European Union as an ultra-peripheral region. The region is approximately 1000 km from the Spanish mainland coast, and the closest and furthest distances from the African coast are 100 and 500 km, respectively. Its economy stands out because of the key role of the third sector and more specifically for its focus on activities related to the tourist sector. Tourism accounts for more than 50% of the GDP of the Canary Islands, a leading European destination receiving more than 12 million tourists a year, and it is a typical example of a “sun, sand and sea” tourism destination in the mature stage (Oreja Rodríguez, Parra-López, & Yanes-Estévez, 2008). Table 3 shows the characteristics of the tourists, who come mainly from Europe and with more than half being over 44 years of age.

Table 3. Number of foreign tourists by nationality visiting the Canary Islands in 2010

Country	TOTAL	%
United Kingdom	3,061,333	36%
Germany	2,232,247	26%
Nordic Countries	1,213,112	14%
Holland	385,193	4%
Ireland	353,506	4%
Switzerland	156,567	2%
Other Countries	1,207,013	14%
TOTAL	8,608,971	100%

Source: Canarian Institute of Statistics

According to Garín-Muñoz (2006), it seems that in the Canary Islands' destination, there is a high degree of consumer loyalty or an important effect of word of mouth in determining its tourism demand. Several authors' predictions are pessimistic and state that such a position is not sustainable in the long run, and there is clearly a need for the islands to diversify their tourism product base as a first step towards destination rejuvenation (Alonso, 2009).

Furthermore, tourism activity effects go far beyond economic impacts and are important at a social, cultural and environmental level, with many social and cultural effects being emphasized by this activity. Apart from sun and beaches, other elements that may not be so apparent to outside travelers – and even locals – can potentially add to their visit (Alonso & Liu, 2011).

The tourist sector in the Canary Islands is currently facing a situation of infrastructural obsolescence and excessive degradation in some natural areas due to the high tourist/resident ratio (6.7:1) in a destination of just 7447 square kilometers. This phenomenon has been reinforced by the high expansion of tourism experienced by the islands in the last decade of the twentieth century, leading to an increase of the local society's concern about sustainability (Santana-Jiménez & Hernández, 2011).

2.3.2. The University of La Laguna (ULL) and the international students

In the context of a tourism destination in the mature stage of its life cycle, the University of La Laguna, a public university, is located in the biggest of the seven Canary Islands in Tenerife. It is the educational institution with the highest number of students in the present and in the past in Canary Islands: 25,103 students during the academic year 2009-2010.

The Erasmus Program (one of the most known components of the Lifelong Learning Program in the EU) has funded the transnational learning mobility of 900,000 European citizens, including 720,000 students on mobility and 180,000 teachers/trainers/staff mobility. More than 50,000 European organizations have taken part in a transnational partnership funded by the program. It can be estimated that around 4 % of all European students participate in the Erasmus program at some stage during their studies (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2011).

In the case of the University of La Laguna, more than 400 Erasmus students (from those, 55.85% women) have been received in the academic year 2010/2011, which means around 1.6% of the total student population: significant growth can be observed over the last 5 years (see table 4).

At a European level, and according to the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture (2010), the University of La Laguna was ranked 107 out of 583 universities regarding the number of incoming Erasmus students. Moreover, it was positioned 202 for outgoing students, with a balance that shows a clear prevalence of receiving students, following the national tendency in Spain within this part of the program.

Table 4. Evolution of the number of incoming Erasmus students to the University of La Laguna

Course	Nº Erasmus	Men	Women	Rate of Growth
2005-2006	292	126	166	-
2006-2007	333	155	178	12.31%
2007-2008	372	146	226	10.48%
2008-2009	384	193	191	3.13%
2009-2010	360	166	194	-6.67%
2010-2011	403	167	223	10.67%
Total	2144	953	1178	38.01%

Source: Own elaboration with the data of the International Relation Office of ULL

3. Methodology

The population used in the empirical study consisted of the Erasmus students who have come to the University of La Laguna (Tenerife) over the last 5 years, which represents 2144 people. A survey was sent electronically in English, Italian and Spanish. The total number of responses obtained was 146, which implies an error margin of $\pm 5.22\%$, with a confidence level of 95.5 per cent.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section covers the main and general motivations for going on an exchange and focuses more on personal motivations than on the destination or university factors. These motivations were selected following the most common conclusions of several studies in the field, particularly from the studies of Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008); Krzaklewska & Krupnik (2005) and Teichler (2004). The second section, in which a Likert scale of 7 was used for the assessment, covers the factors concerning the university and tourist destination to assess the level of attraction of each factor and includes an evaluation of each one. For the university factors, the studies of, Araya Guzmán & Chaparro Peláez (2005); CHEPS et al. (2008) and Qiang (2003) have been analyzed and especially the study of Alves & Raposo (2009) on student satisfaction. Meanwhile, for the tourist destination factors, studies of Blanke & Chiesa (2011); Enright & Newton (2004); Melián-González & García-Falcón (2003); del Bosque & Martín (2008); Chi & Qu (2008); Kozak & Rimmington (2000); Alegre & Garau (2011); Yoon & Uysal (2005); Fuchs & Weiermair (2004); Turismo de Tenerife (2011); Meri (2011); Di Pietro & Page (2008) were used as the basis. A prior reorganization of the factors, which can be seen in table 5, was carried out in order to have a clearer classification of resources. Once the factors were selected, they were classified using the Grant (1996) methodology.

Table 5. Grouping of the tourist destination factors

Cited resources	Category
Cuisine	Gastronomy
Museums and Heritage	Cultural and historical resources
Beaches, Landscapes, Flora. Fauna, Environment	Natural Resources
Cleaning	Health and hygiene
Knowledge	Culture and history
Telecommunications, TICs, materials in other languages and information	Information
Infrastructure	Transportation, accommodation, restaurants, night life, shops.
Hospitality, Kindness, language proficiency	Human Resources

Source: Own elaboration

The respondents were asked to evaluate two aspects regarding the factors, the importance they had when they choose their destination and their satisfaction with them. The final section collects personal data on the Erasmus students in order to characterize them. The general characteristics of the respondents are summarized in table 6:

Table 6. General characteristics of the respondents

% of genders	69.44%Female 30.56% Male
Average age when doing Erasmus:	23.29 years
% among countries	Germany = 41. 01% Italy = 18.49% France = 7.64%
Average duration of the exchange	6.72 moths
Preference for ULL	77.40% YES 22.60% NO
Average value for Total Factors	4.078
Average value for Destination Factors	4.284
Average value for University Factors	3.88

Source: Own elaboration

Following the confirmation of normality and linearity, the internal consistency of the “importance” and “satisfaction” scales was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient. This showed that the values obtained both for the importance (0.97) and satisfaction (0.96) scales easily exceed the minimum values required in the literature (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1999).

4. Results

4.1. General motivations of academic tourists

There are three clear, general motivations for students to take part in an Erasmus exchange: *Improve the knowledge of other languages; meet other cultures and personal development*. All of them receive a mean score of between 6 and 7, which shows that students give a major importance to the culture of the destination (considering language as a part of this culture) when considering an exchange placement.

4.2. Assessment of tourist destination and the university

The average assessment of the resources of the tourist destination is superior to those from the university, 4.28 against 3.88 on the 7-point Likert scale, which represents around 6% difference. However, one noteworthy point is that among the 10 most positive resources, almost all of them, except the ones in the last two positions, belong to the area of the destination while the situation is completely the opposite when considering the 10 least positively considered resources, which belong to the university, as can be observed in table 7 and 8.

The high scores of the natural resources, culture and history and the possibility of leisure activities give evidence of the great power of attraction that the destination has over the university. This is confirmed by the fact that students gave little consideration to the subjects in other languages, teaching materials and the so-called triple helix factors linked to the university.

Table 7. Top 10 attractions for Erasmus Students

R33 Natural resources of the destination (beaches, mountains, landscapes, etc.)	5.83
R9 The destination has an attractive culture and history	5.09
R2 Possibility of doing leisure and cultural activities (such as nature, outdoor, sports activities, theatre...)	5.05
R28 Affordable prices (accommodation, food, etc.)	4.97
R32 Kindness and empathy of the destination's inhabitants (willingness to help with problems, language proficiency)	4.73
R37 Safety in the destination	4.55
R25 Image of Tenerife as a tourist destination	4.54
R17 Image of Canary Islands as a tourist destination	4.50
R12 Existence of integration activities for exchange students with local students (carried out by the university or student associations)	4.44
R6 Links between your university and the university of La Laguna (exchange agreements, positive experiences, etc.)	4.42

Source: Own elaboration

Table 8. Bottom 10 attractions for Erasmus Students

R26 University staff dedicated exclusively to international programs	3.66
R41 Shopping (variety of places)	3.63
R42 Tradition, prestige and recognition of the destination university	3.61
R21 Information about the university in other languages	3.58
R35 Restaurants (quality, variety, hours of opening)	3.58
R30 Recommendation of the University of La Laguna by a friend	3.47
R5 Familiar environment of the destination (quiet place, not very different from the origin)	3.43
R34 Relationship of the destination university with enterprises and other organizations of the environment.	3.16
R22 Teaching materials available in other languages apart from Spanish	3.14
R23 Subjects in other languages apart from Spanish	2.98

Source: Own elaboration

Furthermore, to remark the importance of the factors, we constructed an index that expresses the percentage of respondents that value it with 5 or more points. The results are shown in table 9 and confirm the previous statement of the clear prevalence of destination factors over university ones. It is remarkable the importance given to price that reaches third place. The consideration of the existence of affordable prices is in line with the results of Souto Otero (2008) and Souto Otero & McCoshan (2006). They concluded that economic factors are one of the determining factors for participating in the Erasmus Programme.

Table 9. Importance of the factor Index (value with 5 or more)

Factor	Importance
R33 Natural resources of the destination (beaches, mountains, landscapes, etc.)	85.09%
R9 The destination has an attractive culture and history	69.30%
R28 Affordable prices (accommodation, food, etc.)	68.42%
R2 Possibility of doing leisure and cultural activities (such as nature, outdoor, sports activities, theatre...)	68.42%
R32 Kindness and empathy of inhabitants	63.16%
R37 Safety in the destination	60.53%
R17 Image of the Canary Islands as a tourist destination	57.02%
R25 Image of Tenerife as a tourist destination	56.14%
R44 Nightlife (bars, discos, clubs...)	55.26%
R27 Study plan of the University of La Laguna.	55.26%

Source: Own elaboration

4.3. Satisfaction of Erasmus students

A satisfaction index was calculated by subtracting the percentage of answers between 5 and 7 from the answers between 1 and 4. This index was applied to the group of international students that had finished their stay in Tenerife. The factors of satisfaction among Erasmus students seem to be closely linked to the resources of the tourist destination. Natural resources are again at the top, which shows that tourism needs to comply with sustainability criteria to maintain its level as a tourist destination (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009). In the top ten resources that present a higher satisfaction index just one of them, the environment of the university, is considered important (see table 10). The positive assessment of these factors together with the high score given to the kindness and empathy of the local population shows the importance of emotions in tourism satisfaction, which has been studied in the literature, for example by Brunner-Sperdin, Peters, & Strobl (2011). The importance of food and gastronomy previously remarked by authors like Nield, Kozak, & LeGrys (2000) and Kim, Suh, & Eves (2010) is clearly represented with the presence of the restaurants and the gastronomy inside the cited top ten.

Table 10. Top ten resources in the Satisfaction Index

Top 10 Resources	Index	Field
R33 Natural resources	86.52%	Destination
R32 Kindness and empathy of inhabitants	79.78%	Destination
R 28 Affordable prices	75.28%	Destination
R35 Restaurants	75.28%	Destination
R37 Safety	75.28%	Destination
R2 Possibility of doing activities	68.54%	Destination
R9 Attractive culture and history	68.54%	Destination
R16 Gastronomy	61.80%	Destination
R4 Environment of the university	59.55%	University
R44 Nightlife	59.55%	Destination

Source: Own elaboration

In addition, in line with the above-mentioned trend, the ten least valued resources all belong to the area of the university. There is an especially negative assessment of two factors related to languages: the material and the subjects in other languages (see table 11). This fact is worrying for the University of La Laguna in the framework of the Bologna process, which implementation should drive the growing importance and value given to mobility and internationalization and to pressure policy-makers to adopt a better language policy (Kerklaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008). According to those results, the impression of the students is that it is currently insufficient.

Table 11. Bottom ten resources in the Satisfaction Index

Bottom 10 Resources	Index	Field
R20 Quality of the teaching material	-1.12%	University
R10 Organization and management of the program	-5.62%	University
R40 ICTs	-14.61%	University
R11 Language courses	-16.85%	University
R42 Tradition, prestige and recognition	-21.35%	University
R14 Accessibility to the information in other languages	-30.34%	University
R21 Information in other languages	-43.82%	University
R34 Relations with other Sectors	-50.56%	University
R22 Material in other languages	-50.56%	University
R23 Subjects in other languages	-68.54%	University

Source: Own elaboration

5. Discussions and Conclusion

Answering our research question - *Which factors - the tourist destination or the university ones- have a greater influence on the choice of a place for an Erasmus exchange?* - the factors related with the destination seems to have more power of attraction over university for the Erasmus students when choosing a destination of the characteristics of Canary islands for the stay. The general motivations for involving in an academic exchange are related more with the personal than the academic development, specifically “*improve knowledge of other languages, and get to know other cultures and personal development*”. These motivations are linked, simply to the fact that travelling to different places with a different cultural and language characteristics is of interest, without any relation to the specific features of the destination or academic centre.

Related to this, it is observed that the potential that academic tourists present for tourist destinations like Canary could be wider developed. However, to take advantage of this potential it is important for the managers of the destination to carry out strategies directed at improving this segment. This potential also seems to be transferred to the levels of satisfaction with the tourist experience, considering that the satisfaction index is very high when compared with that obtained for the academic experience. This fact could contribute, in the terms pointed out by Jang Hyeon, Ekinci, & Whyatt (2011) and Wang, Zhang, Gu, & Zhen (2009), to improving the levels of loyalty of these tourist with respect to the destination in the future, increasing the possibilities of repetition (in this study, almost 100%) and its positive impact on other potential tourists through “word of mouth”. The induced effect is particularly remarkable due to the potential that this segment presents for attracting friends and relatives during their stay and being a sort of ambassadors for Canary that would have reduced or not cost.

Regarding this last point, specific marketing strategies to communicate and effectively value the attractive elements of the destination for this kind of public need to be developed, both in a direct way for the students, as well as in an induced way for their relatives. It is evident that the socio-demographic

characteristics and expectations are different from the traditional large-scale tourism segment. The responsible for the touristic activities should place activities towards a better knowledge of the traditional culture from the international students that have already proved successful when carrying out by the ULL's student organization that has deal with the Erasmus for more than 5 years.

In this line, it is essential that the managers of the destination and host educational institution of international students (in our case the ULL) develop collaborative strategies when defining and communicating products that are competitive and directed towards this emergent segment. It is also clear that, although the elements of the destination are more important than the academic ones, in different stages of the product marketing process an integrated communication strategy could provide important synergies. For example, the communication campaigns made by academic managers in educational institutions could incorporate elements of the destination and vice versa.

Regarding further studies, it is suggested that the present line of research should be studied in greater depth in the future. Following Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe (2008) the data generated could be used to develop an exchange student profile and could be used to assess the economic impact on the tourism destination in terms of expenditures in accommodation, food, leisure, etc. In addition to this and as the above study suggests, universities could identify which factors should be encouraged and improved. Moreover, how tourist destinations could be made more attractive to the academic tourist group and profit from its potential could be explored.

To sum up, the main contribution of this research is to establish a starting point for other universities both at national (being Spain the leader country in sending – receiving Erasmus) and European level. It would be interesting to analyze to what degree the results obtained here can be generalized to other universities with different levels of academic competitiveness and different potential attractions for the students, determining the role that the tourist destination plays in each case and the impact it produces on the international students segment.

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Recibido: 21/02/2013

Reenviado: 15/07/2014

Aceptado: 26/07/2014

Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos