Recognition Matters:
Conclusions Paper

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Start: 15-10-2017 - End: 14-10-2021

Project Reference: 586329-EPP-1-2017-1-PT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Programme: Erasmus+
Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
Action Type: Capacity Building in Higher Education

Website: http://rec-mat.up.pt/

Disclaimer:

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

IN MEMORIAM:

The members of the project dedicate these final conclusions to Mrs. Laura Benedetti, from Universidad del Sur, who tragically left us in early 2020. Without her initial insights and her continuous dedication to her work, none of these outcomes would have existed. We could only make it this far thanks to Laura's decisive inspiration during the first half of the project. At this final stage, our thoughts go out to her and her family.

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Abstract

The Recognition matters: conclusions paper aims to summarize the most important findings and results of actions that took place during the project's life cycle. Through innovative approaches, a peer-to-peer view and a combination of actions linking the policy and the practical dimensions, Rec-Mat intended to boost academic recognition between Europe and Latin America and reduce bureaucratic barriers to mobility between the two regions, thus facilitating and pro-moting the student exchange between Latin America and Europe.

This Paper will highlight the background of Rec-Mat, introduce the partners involved in the initiative and its specific objectives, propose activities designed to overcome barriers to credit recognition, and present the final results and impact of this Erasmus+ project.

Key Words: recognition; peer-to-peer view; credit systems; Latin America; Europe.

1. Background

Higher-education development is considered a great **instrument for sustainable economic growth**, and as in other parts of the world, it is a common denominator in the Latin American region. According to the European Commission, successful learning mobility requires academic recognition and transfer of credits[1] . Shaped by diversity, most Latin American countries have no credit system nationally applied to Higher Education Institutions. The majority have regulations to provide a framework for mobility abroad, but handle recognition on an institutional basis. This impacts students negatively once the equivalence is made, even when no grades are involved. In an era of globalization and intercultural competencies, international mobility experiences are in high demand as a tool in the qualification of higher-education students and future professionals. Dialogue between Europe and Latin America underlined efforts to promote integration of higher-education systems through academic cooperation and highlighted the need to develop a common higher-educational credits/qualification system. In this context, although there is still a long road toward streamlined mobility recognition with fair credit transfer and grade conversion, this project worked hard to understand the main difficulties of the recognition process and came up with additional innovative tools and resources to address them.

Responding to **priorities set by the European Commission** for cooperation with the region, and based on the European Union's external policy, RecMat is in line with the Erasmus+ goals of enhancing the quality of higher education in Europe and beyond, creating mutually beneficial partnerships with key non-European countries.

To explore a real scenario, it joined **partners from Argentina, Brazil and Europe**, with the core aim of contributing tools to promote mobility between Europe and Latin America, reducing barriers related to academic recognition and building Latin American Higher Education Institutions' capacity to implement a fairer recognition process.

Argentina is one of Latin America's largest economies and has witnessed significant growth in the past decade, with heavy investment in education (6% of GDP). All its governments outlined policies to strengthen human resources training, oriented to priority areas defined by the social/productive needs and to continue public Higher Education Institutions' expansion. Student/staff training

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[1] ECTS users[1] guide - European Commission. (2021). Retrieved 3 June 2021, from https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/ects/users-guide/mobility_en.htm

abroad in areas connected with innovation/technology was considered a good strategy for this improvement. In the last decades, the **Brazilian** government supported the expansion of Higher Education Institutions, adopting a proactive internationalisation policy. It oversaw an unprecedented strengthening of its co-operation, making Brazil one of the most experienced Latin American actors in international education. Between 2003 and 2010, the education sector was the third highest priority, receiving 12% of Brazil's development cooperation expenditure. In 2011, Brazil created the Science without Borders Programme to expand and internationalise science, increase R&D+I and facilitate competitiveness through mobility. However, Brazil's economic/political crisis and its inability to make the necessary policy adjustments posed challenges and budget rigidities to public Higher Education Institutions.

Concerning the mobility issues addressed in this project, long-term cooperation between Europe and Latin America shows many differences **between the two regions' higher-education systems**, mainly in recognition principles, practices and tools. Most Latin American Higher Education Institutions differ considerably in workload based on class/hours. The ECTS, in contrast, measures students' learning outcomes. Variations are evident at Higher Education Institutions in the same country as well, showing that regulations and different procedures in schools for recognising courses undertaken abroad are major challenges for Latin American Higher Education Institutions concerning mobility. The majority of institutions have regulations to provide a framework for mobility periods and experiences, but recognition is handled on a case-by-case basis. Only two Latin American partners in this project have guidelines for grade conversion, as an example. Support for cooperation continues through Erasmus+, and credits obtained abroad must be recognised by home Higher Education Institutions. The effort to increase opportunities is hindered by these barriers making evident the need to improve the quality of cooperation and solve the existent problems.

To address this problem, the **Rec-Mat project targeted teachers and Programme coordinators/directors who are still distant** from the Bologna and ECTS rationale. In view of different contents, programmes, names, courses and different workloads, teachers show strong resistance to be flexible and to adopt alternative guidelines to harmonise recognition. It is a challenge especially at the undergraduate level, where study plans are more rigid and have few research components. Predominance of undergraduate mobility represents less academic collaboration with international peers than at postgraduate level and hence less knowledge of programmes offered by partners. Optional courses

done abroad are more frequent than core units and direct equivalence without grading is still very common in Latin American Higher Education Institutions, having a negative impact on students' GPA.

Those assumptions were confirmed by the **results of a survey** of 43 Latin American Higher Education Institutions carried out by the Brazilian Association of International Education (FAUBAI) in September 2016, which constituted the basis of the Rec-Mat initiative. This survey, answered by staff members from International Offices, reveals resistance towards recognition (70%). 29% of the respondents indicated it mainly occurs at the level of academic staff, 52% at the level of programme coordinators and 19% due to programme/course incompatibility. Latin American Higher Education Institutions also recognised the lack of technical tools and training to ease the conversion process.

In this context, the Latin American partners of this project identified internationalisation as a broad strategy aiming to:

- internationalise academic offers and train teaching and non-academic staff for internationalisation;

- increase mobility, improve the skills of students and staff; train academic and non-academic staff on credits' systems and credits' transfer;

- develop information systems for students' affairs, International Office and financial management;

- improve the quality of the student support services.

Previous initiatives addressed some of the identified challenges to Latin American/European cooperation from a policy framework, focusing on quality assurance reforms and creation of a common Higher Education Area, while also enhancing recognition of degrees and qualifications reference frameworks. The Rec-Mat project worked to form synergies with these and other initiatives, involving external stakeholders in its activities. The project partners were invited to link **the policy and practical dimensions** behind academic recognition. As previously mentioned, unlike preceding initiatives, Rec-Mat targeted not only International Officers, but mainly teachers who are the main decision-makers in Latin American Higher Education Institutions where academic recognition is concerned. By involving teachers in blended training and in piloting concrete

case studies which would provide evidence of practical successful processes, the project aimed to present an innovative problem-solving approach. It contributed to raise teachers' awareness about the importance of ensuring full recognition and stimulating fair grade conversion. Rec-Mat activities empowered Higher Education Institutions to provide a formal framework for recognition and equipped them to better liaise with IT teams. By providing training to IT staff Latin American Higher Education Institutions were able to outline concrete technical solutions to ease recognition processes.

Taking the above background, **Rec-Mat aimed to foster the academic recognition** between Europe and Latin America, and reduce barriers to mobility, showing that bureaucratic processes can be simplified and raising awareness among academic staff and authorities about the benefits of international mobility and full recognition of studies. Improving the quality and transparency of collaboration in student exchanges among Latin American and European Higher Education Institutions through enhanced recognition will certainly contribute to foster modernisation and internationalisation.

1.1 Project members

Five European partners (Universidade do Porto, Universidad de Valladolid, Université de Lille, Universiteit Gent and the SGroup – Universities in Europe) and **five institutions from Latin America** (Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Universidad Nacional del Sur and Universidad Nacional del Litoral) led the project, with close support from the two associate institutions: Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo (**AUGM**) and Associação Brasileira de Educação Internacional (**FAUBAI**). Each institution brought into the consortium specific strength and experience in a determined area, as highlighted below:

The European partners have many years of experience in student mobility and academic recognition, mostly motivated by the existence of the Erasmus Programme for more than 30 years.

The Latin American partners were also involved in international projects at different levels through previous funded programmes, having good rapports at the regional level and with European partners.

Moreover:

- **UFRGS** is one of Brazil's top Higher Education Institutions and has been implementing a proactive strategy focusing on internationalisation, mobility (1000 incoming students in 2016-2017) and joint programmes. UFRGS co-led WP3 together with U. Gent, and together were responsible for producing the Digital and Interactive Compendium and for mapping IT tools.

- **UFRJ** is a top-10 Latin American Higher Education Institution, and one of the most experienced in cooperation with the European Union. Having led the implementation of Work Package 5, together with UNS, UFRJ was responsible for monitoring the pilot mobility exchanges implemented by partners in the project framework.

- **UNESP** is one of the largest Higher Education Institutions in Brazil, with visibility at the regional level. UNESP was proactive in identifying barriers to recognition at the institutional level in Latin America and suggesting effective ways to involve teaching staff. UNESP led WP1- Preparation, and co-led WP4 – Policy Influence activities with UNL, given their matching and complementary expertise at the regional level in Brazil and Argentina, respectively.

- **UNL** was involved in the creation of regional mobility programmes and in the proposal of a Latin American and Caribbean mobility platform.

- **UNS** is strongly linked to regional development and recently initiated its internationalisation aimed at promoting mobility and joint programmes, thus constituting a potentially relevant scenario for testing methodologies and results.

- **SGroup** is experienced in other bottom-up initiatives to improve higher education and contributed to Egracons. It leads as a gateway to 30 European universities for its non-European partners. SGroup led WP8 – Dissemination, actively guiding all partners and associates and coordinating the Rec-Mat Consortium's dissemination and exploitation efforts. SGroup also liaised with the associated partners to effectively address external authorities and relevant stakeholders.

- **U.Gent** has a solid internationalisation policy and extensive experience in European- funded projects. It is constantly innovating projects to solve problems commonly faced by Higher Education Institutions through transnational cooperation (Egracons[2] /Erasmus Without Paper[3]). Apart from the work carried out with UFRGS in WP3, U.Gent led WP6 and was responsible for the training of IT staff.

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2 http://egracons.eu/
3 https://www.erasmuswithoutpaper.eu/

• **ULille** has extensive experience in European projects, joint programmes, and credit/degree mobility with Latin American Higher Education Institutions. It has worked diligently to boost its teaching staff's intensive collaboration in Latin America with technical expertise. ULille was the leader of the Work Package on Quality Assurance (WP7), and was therefore responsible for ensuring swift and careful implementation of the planned activities, co-organising, together with all partners, the external assessment of the project and liaising with the external evaluator.

• **U. Porto** has a tradition of cooperation with Latin America. The links are not only linguistic/historical, but have been developed over years of bilateral co-operation. More important is its experience in project management (17 Erasmus Mundus Action 2 projects in Latin America). U.Porto was responsible for overseeing the project outline. In its coordination and management of all project activities, U.Porto kept in close contact with all partners, adopting a democratic and inclusive approach.

• **UVa** has experience within Europe delivering training on mobility and international cooperation. Together with U.Porto, and with contributions from all European partners, UVa led a WP2–Blended Mobility Programme for Latin American academic Staff.

Specifically, the participation of associate partners constituted a real asset for this project given the potential for formation of regional networks to actively mobilise external stakeholders.

Rec-Mat was based on the experience of partners in the Latin American region and the challenges identified over time, in relation to different educational systems, principles, practices and tools to support academic recognition. It brought proven innovation through its activities, linking the political and practical dimensions inherent to the recognition of academic training during student mobility. (These dimensions include policy debate activities, teaching staff training activities and piloting of case studies).

1.2 Project objectives

Rec-Mat was a Key Action 2 Capacity Building project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, with a life cycle from 2017 to 2021.

With an innovative perspective, based mainly on the used methodologies and the ultimate target groups, the project had as **specific objectives**:

1. to raise awareness among Latin American academic staff about the importance of ensuring a full academic recognition by a) eliminating existent prejudices regarding internationalisation; b) eliminating resistances and current barriers to full post-mobility recognition (stimulating credit transfer and fair grade conversion); and c) highlighting the benefits of internationalisation and full recognition through a peer-to-peer approach, i.e. involving mainly academic staff and not only International Officers.

2. to capacitate and provide information to Latin American Academic and IT staff on concrete ways to facilitate the implementation of a full recognition process.

3. to contribute to facilitating the harmonization of academic recognition processes between Latin American institutions.

2.   Methodology and implementation

The Rec-Mat project objectives were pursued through activities structured in different work packages - from preparation, development, management, quality and dissemination, with the active contribution of all partners and under the guidance of each of the work package leaders.

As briefly stated before, partners worked at two levels, linking the policy and practical dimensions behind academic recognition through a wide range of activities having the peer-to-peer approach as a common denominator. For many years, Higher Education Institutions have had internationalisation as a primary goal. Different approaches have been tested and implemented in order to further internationalise institutions. These included both the top-down approach, through policies and regulations, and the bottom-up approach, through specific initiatives that seek to "convince" authorities about the importance of internationalisation for a competitive institution. In all cases, these approaches end up being ineffective, as they prove extremely volatile and deeply linked with the existing conditions.

A **peer-to-peer approach**, though, presents an innovative method of pursuing a far more effective internationalisation strategy. Since it relies on peers sharing successful experiences, it largely reduces all existing understanding barriers among different stakeholders, thus motivating the needed structural change and creating a swift, solid and lasting change.

Based on this assumption, the Rec-Mat project developed a blended training targeted at academic staff members at Latin American Higher Education Institutions and implemented a series of pilot mobility cases monitored by specific Working Groups. The implementation of these mobility activities constituted a hands-on approach whose purpose was to lead teachers to be the main actors and, based on their own positive experience, change their mindset and bring them to acknowledge the benefits of internationalisation, student mobility and recognition.

Still following a peer-to-peer approach, the Rec-Mat project delivered a training specifically organised and targeted to IT staff members who develop information systems for supporting academic recognition. As a result, the IT staff members were able to present to their universities' leadership concrete proposals which would further develop and improve currently existing processes, systems and tools.

In the **policy dimension**, the Rec-Mat project **worked** at both the partner level and the national regional level, both by addressing internal regulations and by organising regional policy fora. These fora brought the topic of academic recognition into wide discussion among different stakeholders, encouraged a high number of Higher Education Institutions to adopt similar processes and shared potential solutions raised by the Rec-Mat project.

To ensure an efficient dissemination of such solutions, the consortium produced specific outputs, namely the Digital Interactive Compendium and the present Conclusions' Paper, among other useful documents. Rec-Mat added value by contributing to the effective use of European transparency and recognition tools, to enhance the quality and internationalisation of Higher Education.

The next sections present each of the actions that were developed in the project in further detail. For this, the proposed Work Packages are thoroughly described.

2.1 - WP 1 - Setting-up of conditions for implementation of the activities, led by UNESP

The purpose of this Work Package was to set up the conditions for implementation of the activities. To do that, several tasks were planned and are presented below:

- Organisation of the first consortium meeting

- Elaboration of guidelines for internal preparatory meetings at each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution

- Organisation of internal preparatory meetings at each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution

- Elaboration and distribution of a survey among Latin American teaching staff, and analysis of results

- Selection of teaching staff at each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution to participate in the training

The first consortium meeting was held in Porto (Portugal) in March 2018

and convened representatives of all partners. It was successful in defining the details regarding the project's management and implementation.

Subsequent initiatives consisted of the organisation of **internal preparatory meetings** at each Latin American partner to provide clear details and information about the project, based on guidelines developed for each target group. To ensure the most effective communication strategy, meetings were organised specifically and separately with each of the three target groups to be addressed at each partner university: 1) governing bodies; 2) academic staff; 3) students. The technical staff from the international office responsible for implementing the Rec-Mat project at each Latin American partner institution organised the different meetings within the institution with different objectives, apart from the general one of presenting the project, methodology and proposed goals:

- governing bodies: to raise awareness for the relevance of the topic;

- academic staff: to clarify all the details regarding the training and their potential participation in the Working Groups (under the scope of WP5);

- students: to present the European partner institutions and their academic offer and to motivate them to undertake a mobility period in one of them by explaining in detail the advantages of full academic recognition.

A total of 19 meetings were held, gathering together 325 students, 220 teachers and 58 authorities.

Under the scope of this Work Package, the consortium also elaborated a survey with the purpose of gathering accurate information about the level of familiarity Latin American partner Higher Education Institutions' teaching staff had with several concepts of internationalisation and their ability to define in detail the topics to be covered in the training proposed for teachers under Work Package 2. The **survey gathered ca. 800 answers** and was conducted among Rec-Mat partners and also other Higher Education Institutions in Latin America (45 in 5 countries), to allow the consortium to get the widest possible pool of information.

During this phase of project implementation, each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution selected five teachers from five predefined fields of study (Education; Social Sciences; Natural Sciences; Engineering; Health Sci-

ences) to participate in the planned project training sessions. This selection was based on a transparent process that followed commonly established criteria and required the involved institutions' staff to sign the Statements of Absence of Conflict of Interests.

Upon conclusion of the preparatory stage and selection of teaching staff, the project started the training activities through online and physical programmes for the aforementioned target group.

2.2 - WP2 – Training of teachers, led by UVa and U.Porto

This Work Package was designed to target actors side-lined by previous initiatives and who **play a crucial role in the entire process of academic recognition: teachers and academic programme coordinators** in the Latin American institutions. The core activity of this Work Package was the development of a blended training in two main stages: a physical training that took place at the University of Valladolid (December 2018) and a MOOC of five modules delivered in two editions (November 2020 and March 2021). The activities planned to implement these actions were as follows:

• Definition of a complete programme of training based on the results of a survey previously delivered to target groups/participants

• Selection of trainers at each European partner Higher Education Institution

• Design of contents for blended training

• Organisation of physical study visit

• Development and evaluation of the physical study visit

• Design of structure and syllabus of the MOOC

• Elaboration of different teaching materials and learning activities for the MOOC (videos, quizzes, good practices sample documents, …)

• Pre-design of the MOOC and evaluation based on scientific evidence

• Production of MOOC

- Dissemination of MOOC (1st edition)

- Development and assessment of MOOC (1st edition)

- Production of an improved version of MOOC

- Dissemination of MOOC (2nd edition)

- Development and assessment of MOOC (2nd edition)

Five teachers from each Latin American partner representing each of the 5 broad fields previously defined by the consortium (Education; Social Sciences; Natural Sciences; Engineering; Health Sciences) participated in the **one-week training at the University of Valladolid**, Spain (UVa). The training programme included theoretical and practical working sessions on concepts and practices to ensure fair and transparent academic recognition. Twenty selected academic recognition experts from the 4 European Higher Education Institutions developed and delivered the blended training for Latin American academics. They also formed the Subject Area Groups in academic recognition, particularly active during the University of Valladolid training.

The training was a suitable combination of talks, conferences, workshops and plenary discussions. The complete and detailed Teachers Peer Training Week programme can be consulted at Appendix I. One of the most relevant parts of the training was the set of four thematic workshops where participants had to address different key questions. The topics addressed and the main conclusions coming from the discussion and peer-to-peer work carried out by the participants are summarized in Part 3.

Rec-Mat partners also worked on the development of **two online editions of the MOOC (massive online open course) "Academic Recognition: Promoting Student Exchange between Europe and Latin America"**. The MOOC is divided into 4 modules[4]: 1) Student-centred learning approach(es), which explains this particular method of learning and teaching, providing a European perspective to the topic); 2) Student workload, which provides insights on student workload in both European and Latin American systems, with a particular focus on the European Credit Transfer System; 3) Learning outcomes, which outlines, from a European standpoint, procedures for defining the learning outcomes and their relevance as part of a course information package; 4) Learn-

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[4] For detailed information on the contents of each modules, please refer to https://academia.up.pt/lms/theme/academia/pages/courseinfo.php?id=282&lang=en

ing agreement and diploma supplement, which highlights the key documents for ensuring academic recognition. In addition to these modules, case studies are provided to give a practical overview of the recognition process, showing how the whole process is organised in different countries and contexts, with examples from Portugal, Spain, Brazil and Argentina. The course is conducted in three official languages: Portuguese, English and Spanish, and all videos are subtitled. The MOOC also incorporated different learning resources such as videos, quizzes, forums, guides and learning agreement templates, in order to ensure the MOOC's core aim, i.e. raising awareness of the importance of academic recognition of student mobility by providing information on this topic, as well as providing tools to facilitate the process for teachers.

The MOOC reached an important audience during the project's lifetime, as shown in further detail in Part 3.

Including among others the results of these training activities, the consortium proposed the production of a Digital Interactive Compendium, which will be described in detail in the next topic.

2.3 - WP3 – Digital Interactive Compendium, led by U.Gent and UFRGS

This Work Package had as its main goal the production of a Digital Interactive Compendium to compile and disseminate the project results through the following activities:

- Mapping of existing IT tools for supporting academic recognition process

- Planning the Digital Interactive Compendium

- Producing the Digital Interactive Compendium

The consortium proposed to host the **Digital Interactive Compendium** at the project's official website: https://rec-mat.up.pt/digital-interactive-compendium/. The idea was to divide the Compendium into three categories. The first

category, 'Regulation', gathers from several Higher Education Institutions in Latin America and Europe **examples of official internal regulations** relating to academic recognition. The examples also include those regulations elaborated within the scope of Rec-Mat. The second category, 'IT Tools', entails existing **tools that support student mobility and facilitate recognition**. Finally, the third category, 'Testimonial', was planned to include **testimonials of students and staff** gathered in the context of the pilot mobility cases implemented under the scope of Work Package 5.

The objective was to develop the Digital Interactive Compendium as an interactive tool where users could explore content based on intuitive interdependent filters and tags. This tool uses responsive design technology, making it available on any IT device (PC, tablet, smartphone) and thus fostering its wide use. The resources shared during the online training week (see 2.6) were added to the Digital Interactive Compendium, making them available to a wider public. Academic and technical staff members contributed to the compendium development, whereas the mapping of IT tools was assured by IT staff members and International Officers.

As a first activity, UFRGS and U.Gent started by determining the scope of the tools to add to the Digital Interactive Compendium. Given that there are not many of tools intended for sole-purpose use, they decided to widen their scope towards tools supporting student mobility management (as this is indirectly linked to recognition). The concept of "tools" was also expanded to include all processes related to recognition (and not to restrict to specific IT systems). UFRGS and U.Gent did a mapping exercise for identifying tools to be added to the Digital Interactive Compendium.

The second activity was the actual development of the Digital Interactive Compendium by the U.Porto, wherein UFRGS and U.Gent provided input and feedback on the functionality. The tools, regulations and testimonials gathered by the teams were added to the Digital Interactive Compendium.

Finally, the prototype was finalized into the production version of the tool with an admin function through which new content can be added. The **final version** was presented during the online consortium meeting in March 2021. Further development took place during IT Training Week (organised online in May 2021), dedicated to IT solutions for managing student mobility. A series of technologies and platforms, developed by each partner university, have been presented and discussed, as described in further detail in 2.6.

In parallel with this step of the project, other members of the consortium led the work on activities under the theme of policy development in Latin America, which will be described in the following section.

2.4. WP4 – Policy-influence activities, led by UNESP and UNL

This Work Package performed a bottom-up analysis regarding academic recognition in international student mobility. In addition to mapping the reality of recognition, recommendations were made not only to Rec-Mat Latin American partners, but also to representatives of other institutions and higher levels of Higher Education management. The planned activities were as follows:

• Mapping and analysis of the Latin American partner Higher Education Institutions' internal regulations framing academic recognition

• Mapping and analysis of existing instruments geared towards the formal recognition of the value of internationalisation for teaching staff

• Elaboration of a tailored proposal for each partner Higher Education Institution to improve current regulations

• Elaboration of a tailored proposal for each partner Higher Education Institution to implement a formal recognition of the value of internationalisation by teaching staff at institutional level

• Preparation and organisation of two policy debate fora

• Elaboration of the Rec-Mat Conclusions' Paper

Analysis and mapping of the status of recognition of academic activities were pursued, taking as a sample, from the universe of European and Latin American universities, the Higher Education Institutions from both regions that participated in this project and to which three other public universities in Argentina have been added. It was intended to identify and analyse the processes of academic recognition of the activities carried out by students who undertake partial studies in institutions abroad.

For the development of this analysis, a **survey** was prepared for the Argentinean and Brazilian Universities. The survey requested information from each institution regarding the: a) existence of regulations for student mobility; b) administrative procedures and forms used; c) actors involved in the process; d) necessary documents to conclude the process; e) criteria that are considered to make the recognition; f) percentage of students who make modifications in the Learning Agreement; g) the mandatory nature of recognition; h) percentage of recognised studies; i) percentage of recognized compulsory subjects; j) inclusion of the activities undertaken abroad as an integral part of the student's academic record; k) inclusion of grades in the student's academic record; and l) time frame for conclusion of the entire process.

A **comparative analysis** was carried out to understand the differences in academic recognition between the European and Latin American countries involved in the Rec-Mat Project.

Finally, besides the topic of academic recognition of studies, and given the fact that it is deeply associated with the involvement of academic staff in their own international activities, the Rec-Mat project also addressed very pointedly the issue of the formal recognition of such activities for academic staff. As part of Work Package 4, existing **instruments geared towards the formal recognition of the value of internationalisation for teaching staff were mapped**, with the aim of elaborating a proposal to be presented to the institutions' leadership. The objective was to exhort Latin American partners to formally recognise the value of internationalisation for teaching staff through the creation of a programme of incentives or by using indicators of internationalisation for the assessment of teachers' performance. In this way, teachers may see in **internationalisation activities a benefit for their own career** and become more open to the internationalisation of their students.

To carry out the analysis, the universities participating in the Rec-Mat project and four other national universities in Argentina were consulted. The consultation was aimed at investigating how and where international academic activities are registered and accredited and then, how they are weighted and how they contribute to the teacher's career.

Analysis of the survey results was integrated in **a final report of this Work Package** and is included in the present Conclusions' Paper as Appendix II. This constituted the basis for the elaboration of **tailor-made proposals for each Latin American partner** - so as to respect the specificities of each institution

– and targeted its own institutions' governing bodies for the improvement of the currently existing regulations and procedures.

The activities developed under this Work Package comprised the policy dimension of Rec-Mat. Academic and technical staff members of all partner institutions contributed to develop this activity, which involved close interaction between the project team and partners, as well as other external bodies. Indeed, the consortium undertook several policy-influence activities targeted not only at the Rec-Mat Latin American partners, but also at other Higher Education Institutions' representatives and other external stakeholders.

Following the preparatory stage, training of teachers, planning of the Compendium and mapping of existing regulations, the partners started to work on implementing the pilot mobility cases, as described in the following section.

2.5. WP5 – Implementation of pilot mobility cases by Working Groups, led by UFRJ and UNS

This step of the project was dedicated to implementing the pilot student mobility real cases, in order to **test academic recognition practices in Working Groups** composed by European and Latin American teachers and technical staff. The activities planned to reach this goal were:

• Allocate possible scholarships to Rec-Mat mobility flows

• Check the list of applications of students at each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution to undertake a mobility period in a Rec-Mat partner Higher Education Institution

• Select pilot mobility cases

•Organise meetings with all course coordinators of pilot mobility students

• Elaborate Guidelines for the Working Groups

• Organise Working Groups meetings to a) define Learning Agreements, b) monitor the mobility periods and c) trigger the academic recognition process

To ensure the existence of financial support to the planned mobility flows, consortium partners committed to pursue all possible means to provide such support. This included scholarships from mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ or Santander. Some institutions even foresaw the possibility of allocating internal financial resources to support the Rec-Mat mobility cases.

The **consortium selected Latin American students** from the five broad study areas selected in the project (Education, Health and Welfare, Engineering, Manufacturing and construction, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences). These students were nominated to undertake a mobility period in one of the European Rec-Mat partner institutions. Each of these case-study students was **accompanied by a specific Working Group**, which was made up of four actors:

- the course coordinator at the home Latin American Higher Education Institution,

- the course coordinator at the host European Higher Education Institution,

- an international officer at the home Latin American Higher Education Institution[5],

- a teacher from the corresponding broad field of study who has participated in the physical training organised by the project in Valladolid (December 2018).

Regarding mobility flows, the Working Groups monitored the following pilot mobility cases:

	UFRGS	UFRJ	UNESP	UNL	UNS	TOTAL
U.Gent	0	1	2	0	1	**4**
ULille	0	0	0	0	1	**1**
U.Porto	0	1	0	1	1	**3**
UVa	1	1	2	1	2	7
Total	**1**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**5**	

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[5] In some cases, European hosting institutions also integrated an international officer in the Working Group

The teacher who participated in the training monitored the entire process, explaining concepts and procedures that (s)he has learned with this experience, bringing new approaches to the process. (S)he was expected to be a multiplying agent within the institution.

In this activity, it was important to highlight the peer-to-peer approach, which is one of this project's assets. The international officer also played a crucial role as liaison between the project's activities and the internal institutional policies/regulations.

The goal of the Working Groups was to monitor the entire mobility process from the preparation phase (Learning Agreement) to the post-mobility stage (Transcript of Records issued by the host Higher Education Institutions and recognition process at the home Higher Education Institutions). To support the Working Groups' activity, the consortium elaborated specific Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies – see Appendix III. This document contains a thorough description of all the steps and elements that must be followed to ensure academic recognition, including grade conversion.

Following the pilot mobilities, the consortium developed Information Technology activities as part of the structure for successful international credit recognition. Details of the work and proposed activities will be described next.

2.6. WP6 – Training of IT staff, led by U.Gent

This step of the project was designed to promote discussion on digital tools and systems that facilitate academic recognition after international mobility. The planned activities were:

• Selection of Latin American IT staff to participate in the training

• Mapping and preparation of information on existing information systems at each Latin American partner Higher Education Institution

• Definition of trainers

• Definition of contents for training

• Preparation of contents for training

- Organisation of training

- Guidance of Latin American IT officers in the development of the proposal for creation/improvement of information system.

The training contributed to the project objective of facilitating and promoting student exchanges between Europe and Latin America. To achieve this, it is crucial to reduce the barriers to mobility and enable Latin American Higher Education Institutions to implement a fairer academic recognition process. **IT solutions can contribute to fairer academic recognition** by supporting student mobility management and providing the necessary tools and functionalities needed for fair and transparent academic recognition. The following training goals were defined:

- Understand the importance and potential of IT solutions to support the recognition process;

- Identify features of IT systems to support the recognition process;

- Distinguish good practices that could be applied in their own context & systems.

A **first step survey** was carried out in order to better understand the IT tools used by the Latin American partners. Based on these survey results, consortium members began brainstorming solutions. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the training was postponed for one year and took place online from 03.05.2021 to 07.05.2021, instead of in person in Ghent, Belgium. The resources shared during the online training week have been added to the Digital Interactive Compendium, making them available to a wider public.

The training programme was structured with sessions focusing on recognition and others on technical aspects. One important session was a presentation by the Latin American partners, which included a SWOT analysis. The training also included a session about the proposal for development/improvement of information systems to be carried out by the training participants after the training. The details of the training established beforehand, were as follows:

- Training should include two staff members per Latin American partner.

- Staff members should be English-speaking.

- Staff members should be experts in some of the specified topics.

- Impact on decision-making

- Staff should be selected by Latin American partners based on planned topics.

- A staff member from IRO should serve as business process owner (IT development requires close cooperation with business owners).

After the training, each Latin American partner was asked to **draft a proposal for development/improvement of their own information system**. This document includes the SWOT-analysis presented during the training alongside a proposal for development of additional functionalities, structured as follows:

- Context

- Tool(s) to be improved or developed

- Impact on recognition of mobility

- Scope

- Technical requirements

- Number of estimated working days for IT development

- Departments/services involved

- Gantt chart

Latin American partners were free to adapt this structure based on the requirements for creating such proposals at their own university. The main goal was to **present this document to the institution's decision-making bod-ies** as a proposal to develop/improve the system currently in place.

With the pilot mobility cases and the resulting guidelines, Rec-Mat succeed-

ed in drawing up highly customized, peer-to-peer recommendations. With the MOOC, the Digital Interactive Compendium, and the policy fora, Rec-Mat succeeded in broadening its public and raising awareness on academic recognition at the regional and national levels.

Based on the information and structures presented above, this Paper will now describe in detail the outcomes and results from the Rec-Mat activities.

3. Project outcomes and results

This section will present and analyse the **main outcomes and results** produced by the project as well as their relevance and usefulness for other institutions that are in the process of developing or improving their current systems of academic recognition.

3.1. Development of training content (deliverable of WP2)

One of the core components of the Rec-Mat methodology relied on the training of the Latin American partners' teachers. The **peer-to-peer approach** was crucial, as it is perceived most effective for changing the mindset of teaching staff, leading them to acknowledge through first-hand experience the relevance and benefits of internationalisation in Higher Education.

The training followed a blended-mobility scheme. In the first stage, the participating teachers undertook a **physical training at UVa** which was prepared and delivered by their peers in December 2018. During this training, they participated in formal sessions addressing relevant topics on academic recognition and they also had the opportunity to discuss with peers from all European partners aspects of broad academic relevance (contents of courses, learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, etc.). This training was important in identifying similarities and differences between Latin America and Europe credit systems and academic programmes, as well as in comprehending difficulties, needs and opportunities for operative future collaboration.

From a more detailed perspective, Workshop 1 analysed the "**Institutional approaches to academic recognition**" and delivered a critical comparative summary. The experiences from different countries reflected the development of different approaches according to the specific national legal framework. Workshop participants reflected upon the role of international offices that are not in place across all the countries. The role of academic coordinators and scientific committees in academic recognition was also discussed, acknowledging that decisions are taken based on specific cases. They also devoted time to discussing concepts of recognition, equivalence, the structure of national higher-educational systems and, more importantly, the purposes of academic mobility for students.

In the case of Workshop 2, "**Instruments for academic recognition**: sources and tools", the six questions to be addressed were considered as a whole. The discussion confirmed that different approaches should be considered to give suitable answers to the complex problem of academic recognition. These different approaches would result in the use of several sources and tools to monitor and ease the process. In addition to the information provided by official and formal sources (university webpages, study plans and programs, international specific agreements, international relations offices...) the participants' collective experience, together with personal contacts between scholars and coordinators, also served as valuable information sources. It must be said that neither competencies nor learning outcomes were at the core of the answer to the question of which information should be considered for the conclusion of academic recognition. Thus, "equivalence" between subjects (or blocks of subjects in some particular cases) had more to do with the number of credits, the "in class" workload of the student or the corresponding syllabus. In particular, ECTS credits, as they were conceived and defined, do not yet seem to be considered as a reliable measure for recognition. Regarding transcript of records, some participant institutions resort to the use of formulas and algorithms in order to manage the large numbers of individual student-mobility cases as "fairly" as possible. Some others still prefer to analyse each situation case-by-case, with a strong dependence on teachers' and coordinators' features as well as the student's academic trajectory. Finally, it was pointed out that although international academic recognition and national/local academic recognition should show similarities, there are in practice distinct problems that are sometimes solved through very different procedures.

Workshop 3 addressed the crucial question "**What makes recognition a difficult task?**", so a critical analysis of the main difficulties in ensuring academic recognition was carried out. These were some of the main aspects discussed among the group:

1) the types of obstacles found at a legal or institutional level: Parameters for academic recognition are very strict regarding the equivalence of class workload, and this rigor comes from the legislation in force in each country;

2) academic barriers which impose limits on academic recognition, or impede it altogether: the existing expectations in the institutions, their differences with the policies practiced and, finally, the effectiveness of the existing tools for academic recognition. Sometimes courses may be full, while others may

not be open; there may be problems with schedules, with the course level, with the expectations of the students, all of this potentially leading to an unsuccessful outcome;

3) potential negative consequences on the future progression of students that a poor academic recognition process can generate: The main negative consequence is the students' perception that their experience was useless from the point of view of their education. Another problem would be the delay of the academic recognition which may have consequences for completing the degree and thus for applying to fellowships, jobs, etc.; this is just the opposite of the exchange program's intent.

4) potential risks of a non-collegiate approach to academic recognition: There should be a limited number of persons on the mobility committees who should be committed to favour exchanges and willing to do them.

5) impact of the professional attribution associated with a degree on academic recognition: Companies are looking for professionals who have undertaken training periods, as this experience is decisive for the development of a more qualified professional, especially when it comes to peer-to-peer interaction.

6) institutional realities that usually impact on the administrative academic recognition process: Sometimes international offices are not a priority for the universities.

Finally, Workshop 4, entitled "**Good practices in academic recognition**", allowed participants to share recommendations for success, such as:

• Prior to an efficient academic recognition (thus mobility), there is a need to recognize and confront differences in culture, values and realities among partner institutions, in order to determine how a compromise (e.g. grades added in Diploma Supplement) may be reached;

• Promoting the exchange of teachers would help solve many problems of academic recognition, including those of: addressing divergences to reach a common ground, and promoting a student's mobility, as it would build trust;

• Promoting academic mobility (exchanges of students and professors) improves (i) the understanding of national and institutional approaches (ii)

awareness that context-based practices must necessarily be developed to build trust;

• Developing a language policy and strategies (language for academic purposes) at the institutional level aligned with the 'recognition' of the added value of academic/professors' involvement/engagement in mobility activities.

As a result of this activity, the study fields in which the in-person training was delivered (Education; Social Sciences; Natural Sciences; Engineering; Health Sciences) will also be better prepared for future exchanges thanks to the close and direct interaction of staff from the European and Latin American partner universities. Also, the activity increased knowledge about academic recognition among academic and administrative staff.

After the study visit in Europe, the teachers forged connections with one another, and as a result they experienced increased interest in and awareness of the topic's relevance. Entering a second stage, the **MOOC** was then developed. It integrated four modules covering different topics, all of them providing the teachers with new information about academic recognition and the Bologna Process, plus one additional module of study cases. The MOOC was delivered in two editions, one in November 2020 and another one in March 2021, which followed on the success of the first edition and improved upon it, as described below in further detail.

The MOOC was called "**Academic Recognition: Promoting Student Exchange between Europe and Latin America**" and used a peer-to-peer approach. It was first and foremost planned to target mainly teachers who work with academic mobility. Nevertheless, it was designed to be useful for every person interested in this subject.

A total of 197 participants joined the first edition on Miríadax´s official platform, which was a noteworthy number of participants considering that the main purpose of this first edition was to serve as trial version before massive implementation of the training. Moreover, the percentage of participants who completed the whole course was about 19% which is much higher than the usual percentage achieved nowadays by standard MOOCs. **Over 75% of participants classified the course as good or very good**. However, about one third of participants marked the course as difficult or very difficult. An analysis performed by the WP leaders concluded that such results were mainly related to lack of time

and to the demands of the evaluation tools for each module. On the other hand, among the main positive aspects, participants mentioned the following:

• It was an opportunity for knowledge-gaining and -sharing;

• Trainers were professors with clear knowledge and deep understanding of the addressed topics;

• The course and units offered an overview of interesting and relevant topics.

Upon an internal evaluation performed by the WP leaders of the first-version results, the MOOC was improved and a second version was then launched. Among the main improvements, the following are particularly noteworthy:

• International cooperation among participants was fostered when performing the MOOC's activities, thereby increasing mutual knowledge and forging a closer interaction between participants from different backgrounds.

• A stronger interaction between participants and tutors was promoted throughout the whole course.

• Several forums were included: a social forum to exchange questions, reflections, topic proposals, etc.; and one forum inside each Module to answer different types of questions linked to the topics or tasks as well as to provide peer-to-peer formative evaluation.

Apart from some technical details which helped to make the MOOC more user-friendly and additional video documents that supplemented information about academic recognition and mobility, the **inclusion of learning assessment instruments and learning outcomes** was the key improvement in the second version. As a matter of fact, the second version included not just quizzes, but also tasks which required participants' interaction with teachers and peers from the very beginning. Thus, teachers had the tools to better follow up on actual learning, analysing written tasks and giving general feedback (or individual feedback if necessary), and at least each participant who

completed the MOOC's second version had the opportunity to interact with at least two of their peers on the other continent through the performed tasks.

Moodle Forums were added to the MOOC with the purpose of creating a **learning community** where teachers and students could share and comment on real teaching and learning experiences throughout the Modules. The tasks developed helped the teachers observe that participants could understand, reflect and put into practice contents related to: students-centred teaching and learning (Forum Tasks 1 and 2), European and Latin American credit systems (Forum Task 3), how to create a cross-continent learning agreement (Forum Tasks 4). But also, (especially through Forum Task 4) this format led participants to contact their peers and create institutional links across the Atlantic Ocean. Next, we describe each Module forum together with the main learning outcomes made explicit by participants' responses and comments.

In Module 1, the assessment forum task consisted in writing reflection texts on how student-centred teaching and learning activities are present in each participant's university courses. Participants provided rich written contributions showing that Module 1's core contents on student-centred teaching and learning had been generally understood. Specific achievements included: encouraging autonomous learning through research-action and experiencing procedures; promoting group interaction; considering the teacher as a guide towards knowledge-building giving orientation about paths, feedback, and effective modelling (scaffold); adapting the teaching and learning process to the students' diversity using inclusive differentiated learning if necessary, and so on.

For Module 2, the writing topic compelled each participant to reflect on their own university credit system, comparing Latin America and European systems. With the help of their peers and teachers, participants generally noted that the main difference between the Latin American and European methods of assigning credits to a subject is the fact that in Europe the student's individual homework is a factor in determining credits, while in Latin America the number of credits assigned to a course does not include homework.

As feedback, teachers pointed out that, for an adequate and fair Learning Agreement to be signed, it is important that the staff responsible for the student's mobility in both institutions be in proper contact with each other, in order to provide information on the workload for each subject – not just in-school but also out-of-school hours – and the number of home credits ex-

pected for an average student to complete each semester. Besides this, participants were reminded that working hours are not the only indicator for academic recognition. Another important indicator is to analyse whether the competencies of the degree studied through the chosen subjects are being adequately developed.

Contributions to Module 3 showed that participants understood the concepts the module deals with. Many participants classified their self-designed "student-centred learning outcomes" in different categories: knowledge (learning to know), skills or abilities (learning to do) and attitudes (learning to be); and others went even further, presenting general and specific learning outcomes.

Finally, the task in Module 4 was slightly improved with respect to the one designed in the first version. This time, detailed attention to cross-continent exchanges was required, and peer assessment was implemented using a checklist designed by the teachers. Participants were very engaged and exchanged information. Based on their contributions and the revision of the checklists used for peer assessment, we noticed that participants considered all the required aspects in elaborating an appropriate cross-continent Learning Agreement. Thus, it can be reported that the **MOOC's learning outcomes were achieved**.

Data gathered from the second version of the MOOC indicates that from the **991 registered participants in the MOOC**, 197 completed Module 1 and of those, 143 (72,5%) participants completed the entire MOOC, which confirms that the improvements introduced were effective. It is also possible to conclude that roughly **50% of the persons who registered for the course were teachers**, which proves that the Rec-Mat consortium succeeded in reaching its main target group and even more important, that the main target group indeed confirmed the course raised their for the relevance of this topic and increased their interest in gaining knowledge about it. . When considering the total participants who completed the course, however, the scenario changes, as teachers represent 26%, whereas administrative/technical staff represent 42% and students 32%. It is also relevant at this point to consider the reasons given by the participants for quitting the course, especially the main reason, lack of time. Both results should not be analysed separately, as indeed teachers are the group facing the highest constraints in time availability.

Data also showed that many participants acknowledged having no previous experience in international mobility and academic recognition and, at the same

time, a high percentage of them completed the MOOC. From the forum discussions and the answers to the satisfaction survey, it is possible to conclude that participants have understood the specific features of the European and Latin American education systems linked to academic recognition and that they have gained better skills and tools to apply in the recognition of their own students. Over 80% of participants rated the MOOC overall as Good or Very Good. This figure is even more relevant if one considers that most of them had participated previously in online training. Only 11% of participants now rated the course as being difficult (none said it was very difficult). Moreover, 95% of participants considered the duration of the course to be suitable. Based on this, it is expected that **impact at regional level might be promising**. Indeed, due to this wide outreach, it is believed that the academic recognition process within Latin American universities has been enhanced.

Considering the two versions of the MOOC, a total of 1.414 persons registered to attend it and roughly 200 concluded the five modules and respective evaluation. The MOOC has been disseminated to universities in countries other than Argentina and Brazil, such as Peru, Dominican Republic, Panama, Chile. Even universities outside Latin America, in such diverse countries as **Uzbekistan, China, Cape Verde or Romania**, have participated in the course.

Looking to the future and the usefulness of this project's deliverable for other Higher Education Institutions not only in Latin America but worldwide, it is highly expected that the MOOC may constitute a relevant source of information for all that seek to foster knowledge on the topic of academic recognition. Indeed, it is available for consultation by staff and students from other institutions who can take full advantage of its contents.

The results have been disseminated widely among academic and administrative staff of all partners from different projects or programs related to international mobility.

3.2. Development of reference material (deliverable of WP3)

The consortium developed a Digital Interactive Compendium and hosted it on the project's official website: https://Rec-Mat.up.pt/digital-interactive-compendium/.

Even if the main output/deliverable is the online **Digital Interactive Compendium** itself, one should also consider how it can adapt to the user's requirement, thanks to its ability to filter by keywords or by category. There are two important elements in the sustainability of the main result:

• **Hosting:** The Digital Interactive Compendium is hosted on the Rec-Mat website that is part of U.Porto's domain. Thus, long term hosting and availability are guaranteed.

• **Content:** The consortium is committed to ensuring a biannual update of relevant contents through the international offices of the partner universities.

Two updates were done before the end of the project: 1) one that considered information gathered by Work Package leaders with new input from the partners. 2) another that took place during the final meeting of the project and which originated from a call for external stakeholders to provide examples of tools for recognition. We aim to integrate this new material, which will amplify the results and promote the Digital Interactive Compendium.

At the regional level, the Digital Interactive Compendium provided **inspiration, testimonials, good practice and useful resources on the topic of academic recognition for Higher Education Institutions in Latin America, Europe and beyond**. We used the consortium meetings in Buenos Aires (2018) and in Belem (2019) to engage representatives from the Ministries of Education of those two countries, and thereby work to increase regional impact. The Latin American partner institutions also supported regional impact by promoting the Digital Interactive Compendium at their national and regional associations and fairs (FIESA in Argentina, FAUBAI in Brazil, AUGM in Latin America). Each of the partner institutions can use the Digital Interactive Compendium as an important resource for academic recognition. Peer-learning is thus encouraged. The partner institutions have both provided information and received examples of regulations and good practices from other institutions that have contributed to the DIC. It is important to emphasize that the mere fact that they provided information has served as an exercise of self-analysis for the partner institutions: It definitely raised awareness about the internal processes for recognition, their strengths and their current limitations. At the individual level, the members of the partner institutions who contributed to the result gained a better understanding of the processes and IT solutions for recognition.

External to the consortium, someone looking for information about academ-

ic recognition can find in the Digital Interactive Compendium good practices, testimonials and information on IT tools. At the very least, (s)he can find successful practices showing it is possible, in European and Latin American institutions, to recognize studies abroad. Many reflections in the consortium point to a necessary action at two levels: a) the technical one, to have systems that support and enforce given processes for recognition; b) the "political" one, so that the institution is formally engaged to support those processes. The Digital Interactive Compendium is an attempt to list both kinds of initiatives, through regulations and IT solutions. The Digital Interactive Compendium has the **potential to be a universal compendium about academic recognition**. It is now targeted at cooperation between Europe and Latin America but with some minor adaptations it can be developed as a standard resource about recognition for staff members supporting student mobility worldwide.

3.3. Policy influence development on credit recognition (deliverable of WP4)

One of the main activities developed under this Work Package was to map and analyse Latin American Higher Education Institutions' internal regulations framing academic recognition, and existing instruments for formally recognising the value of internationalisation for teaching staff. In both cases, the methodology consisted of the elaboration of a survey and distribution to the following Argentinean and Brazilian Universities (UNL, UNQ, UNNOBA, UNS, UNCu, UFRGS, UFRJ and UNESP).

Regarding academic recognition of studies, the results show that although most of the Universities regulate student mobility there is a) **diversity of procedures and forms of recognition** of the studies, b) **very slow recognition processes** in several of them, and even c) **failure to comply with the recognition commitment**.

Where internationalisation of teaching staff is concerned, conclusions show that in general **universities do not have their own regulations for the recognition of teachers' internationalisation activities**. In Argentina there is the Comprehensive Management and Evaluation System (SIGEVA) [6], which all university academic faculty/ researchers use to accredit their academic activities. There is no standard or at least one common criterion to carry out

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[6] https://sigeva.conicet.gov.ar/

the recognition of teacher's activities abroad. In other words, the available tool does not reflect all the internationalisation activities that teachers can develop. In this way, international activities are implicit or subsumed in the teaching, research and extension or transfer activities carried out by the teacher. Among these activities, publications in high-impact scientific journals are the most recognised as an international activity. However, in many cases, the limited training in foreign languages, particularly English, restricts some teachers from publishing in these magazines.

In Brazil, institutional internationalisation activities focus mainly on postgraduate programs with strong governmental support. Internationalisation policies seek excellence through the development of international research projects, external funding, joint publication, citation and patents. The Lattes platform[7] is the only public tool to demonstrate international activities of teachers and researchers. In the context of Brazilian universities, teacher evaluations take into account international activities related to research and not to teaching. The international mobility of teachers is not yet recognized institutionally.

Considering there is no universally accepted way of carrying out the accreditation and/or recognition of academic activities conducted abroad, a clear difference between Europe and Latin America is observable. In Europe, most international student mobility occurs within the framework of the Erasmus Programme, which is part of the European Union's strategies to achieve a European higher- education system. Additionally, for mobility outside Erasmus, European universities usually apply the ECTS User Guide. With regards to Latin America, **there is no political will firmly oriented towards the creation of a Latin American system of Higher Education** and for now it functions as a universe of very diverse national and/or regional systems. Consequently, each university, country or region establishes its own internationalisation policies, including student mobility policies, which are organized according to their traditions, visions and possibilities. For this reason, a multiplicity of criteria and procedures is generated for administering mobility, and achieving the recognition of studies.

Due to the above, and given the factual impossibility of establishing recommendations and/or suggestions for each Higher Education Institution in particular, it has been decided to propose at the macro level a series of **general recommendations for better administration of student mobility** and associated academic recognition. These recommendations are intended to serve as a basis

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[7] https://lattes.cnpq.br

for the analyses that each University may develop, in order to improve and/or update the rules and procedures that regulate the aforementioned activity.

The recommendations for recognition of studies are as follows:

• Higher Education Institutions must define **clear official norms and procedures** that promote, regulate and facilitate student mobility in order to safeguard student effort and ensure rapid and effective academic recognition. Ultimately, it should be understood that recognition constitutes a benefit and a result of the work carried out not only by the student but also by the institutions involved.

• Each university must **designate institutional and academic managers specifically in charge of managing student mobility** and carrying out the corresponding recognitions. To achieve efficient management of student mobility, two different roles or functions must be defined within the management scheme: that of head of administrative management and that of head of academic management. It is recommended that this last role is assumed by a professor in the degree programme, with administration responsibilities if possible (for example, being the director of the degree programme).

• Each university must **promote transparency** through clear and complete academic information. It is recommended that universities generate and publicize clear information on the study plans and the teaching and study regimes specifying the hourly loads of each subject and the institution's own criteria for measuring said loads, be it clock hours, class hours, academic credits, etc.

• Each university must **promote and facilitate prior dialogue** between the administrative and academic coordinators of both universities, and with the student himself. This communication, together with clear and precise information, significantly facilitates the preparation of the learning agreement, and subsequent compliance with it. This issue is key in the case of Latin America, where teaching is based on learning content (and progress in careers depends on it), not the acquisition of skills.

• Each university must **streamline the processes for registration and validation** of the recognition of studies. It is recommended they simplify the administrative procedures for recognition of studies in such a way as to reduce the time periods between completion of the student's mobility, recognition of the academic activities carried out and definitive accreditation in their personal file.

It is often helpful to computerize procedures with electronic signatures and validate the procedures during the mobility period, not only once it is over, in order to streamline academic bureaucracies.

• Each university must **define a scheme that allows for comparison of its grading system** with the scheme of its counterpart universities. The recognition must include transfer of the qualification that the student obtained when approving the courses or activities carried out within the framework of his or her mobility, for which the institutions must generate specific regulations and guarantee public availability of the information.

Regarding in particular the **recognition of the internationalisation activities carried out by teaching staff**, Rec-Mat enabled institutions to analyse the limitations of each individual Higher Education Institution in that regard. Upon the implementation of the project, it was concluded that some new initiatives, targeted towards the national policy-makers (e.g. a structural project), would be necessary to advance further. Even so, in the scope of the Rec-Mat project, the consortium has succeeded in drawing up a considerable number of specific recommendations that could also be analysed by the targeted institutions to ensure a broader recognition of all relevant international activities carried out by the teaching staff. Such recommendations are as follows:

• Consider postgraduate degrees (masters or doctorates) carried out by teachers in foreign universities;

• Consider teacher participation in joint projects with foreign institutions (Erasmus projects, for example);

• Consider work missions (internships, third-party services, etc.) carried out by teachers in foreign universities;

• Consider receiving and accompanying foreign professors during their stay at the university (as part of teaching mobility programmes, such as Escala AUGM, PILA, Erasmus, etc.);

• Consider representing the university in activities related to internationalisation;

• Consider teacher participation in the organisation of international events;

• Consider the reception of students in their classes (adaptation of study material, presentation of case studies, etc.);

• Consider tutoring foreign students;

• Consider, in the case of ordinary competitions, the internationalisation activities that the teacher does and that, in the case of Latin American universities, is not taken into account;

• Consider the internationalisation activities of the curriculum that the teacher carries out in his/her teaching practice.

Another important result of this Work Package was the organisation of **two public** fora held at different stages in the project's implementation. AUGM and FAUBAI (both associate partners) played a particularly active role in the dissemination of these events among the networks' members, and they provided additional support to the consortium in ensuring the right stakeholders were present at the events.

The first **forum** took place roughly six months after the official launch of the project. It allowed the consortium to present the project; analyse Latin-American institutions' current status for academic recognition; debate the reasons causing the currently observed constraints in Latin America; and raise discussion on the relevance of academic recognition for establishing a closer collaboration between Europe and Latin America in higher education. The forum relied on the participation of Rec-Mat partners and associates and was open to other Latin American Higher Education Institutions and stakeholders. It was held in **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, on November 14, 2018. 116 people, among them Argentineans, Brazilians, Paraguayans and Uruguayans, took part in the event, in addition to two representatives of the Rec-Mat partner institutions. Much of the audience was composed of university international relations coordinators, as well as postgraduate- and research-level vice-presidents. The event opening was attended by rectors of Argentinean institutions, representatives from the Argentinean Ministry of Education, Justice Department and External Relations Office. Participants also included representatives of the Portuguese Embassy in Buenos Aires. Among the forum's topics, it is worth highlighting the presentation of the representative of Argentina's Ministry of Education, which provided important and novel information to the foreign public about the recognition of credits in Argentina and its application in international mobility. In the same session, a representative of the University of Porto, provided relevant information on mechanisms for the recognition of credits in Europe and its use in constructing solid partnerships between institutions. The forum also presented the results of the

surveys conducted through the Rec-Mat project regarding the status of internationalisation and recognition of credits in Latin American partner institutions. The results provided new and extremely relevant information on the differences in understanding of the subject from the Argentinean and Brazilian point of view and highlighted the institutional diversity of each country. The Montevideo Group University Association closed the forum with a presentation of practical results from the Latin American Escala mobility programme. Their presentation included data from the Tuning project on the structure of credit as a foundation for reconstitution and internationalisation.

The **second forum** took place on April 13, at FAUBAI Conference 2019, in **Belem, Brazil**. The goal of the forum was to present partial results, analyse concrete changes in the policies of Latin American partner Higher Education Institutions resulting from the project's implementation, and encourage further discussion on academic recognition between Latin America and Europe. Higher Education Institutions, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders took part. The event also relied on the participation of a representative of Brazil's Ministry of Education, who described the importance of academic recognition between Latin America and the European Union and highlighted national priorities. The forum presented valuable information on the role teachers play in the process of credit recognition, elaborated the perspective of institutions, and outlined the peer-to-peer approach. Finally, a round table, with audience participation, returned the teachers' role **to the centre of the debate**. This forum closed an important phase of the project exploring themes and experiences in the construction of a path for better international academic recognition.

Overall, this WP was specifically dedicated to the policy dimension and therefore the **close involvement of Ministries of Education and other stakeholders** was crucial for the project to succeed in raising awareness of the topic at the national level. The work carried out allowed the consortium to draw up specific conclusions. The first conclusion was that the Ministries of Education and the university councils in each country should promote schemes and mechanisms that facilitate the comparability of each university's curricula with that of its counterparts in other countries. The absence of comparability schemes is undoubtedly a major problem for recognition, which is exacerbated by a lack of dialogue between the national higher education systems. Promoting common standards, such as a common regional academic credit system, would greatly facilitate academic recognition. In the case of Argentina there is the possibility that the National System of Academic Recognition (SNRA) becomes the national

scheme for a better international comparison of studies. On the other hand, in Brazil there are no government initiatives regulating the recognition of studies in student mobility. The second conclusion was that, it is expected the **recommendations** made in the framework of the Rec-Mat project may be **adopted by a significant number of institutions**, extending their impact, to the rest of the Latin American countries, which have, in general, a similar problem of internationalisation in higher education. It is also expected that the recommendations will be taken into account by the Ministries of Education of the countries. In the case of the Latin American universities participating in the Rec-Mat Project, the reflections and recommendations developed have made their governing bodies aware of the need to update internal regulations and recognition procedures. The participants in the Project have achieved a level of knowledge and training in academic recognition processes that they did not have previously, and they are expected to transmit this new skillset to their peers, both at their respective universities and others.

3.4 Development of Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies between Latin American and European Higher Education Institutions (deliverable of WP5)

One of the main products of the Rec-Mat consortium was a guide which serves as a reference document for mobility, the Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies, which is included in the present document as AppendixIII. These guidelines were developed primarily to serve as a reference document for the Working Groups that have been set up to follow the pilot mobility cases under the scope of WP5. Indeed, the document has constituted a basis for the work carried out but simultaneously it, too, ended up benefiting from the experiences of those taking part in the pilot mobility cases. Therefore, the final version represents an improved document that is currently available for all Higher Education Institutions dealing with international student mobility and academic recognition of studies.

The Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies is a descriptive document with suggestions of **steps to ensure the academic success of student mobility**, from the beginning of the selection process until the academic recognition process is concluded. Indeed, this is a complex and multistep process that

begins with the student's application and ends with the process of credit recognition once the student's mobility period is over. The Guidelines outline the process of academic recognition under the following topics:

1. Academic recognition commitment

2. Workload equivalence

3. Establishment of deadlines for changes/amendments

4. The Transcript of Records

5. Credit Revalidation

This document not only describes all steps necessary, but also highlights the concepts involved in a successful academic recognition. It is a tool that should be used as a **good-practice manual** for all involved (student, technical staff, coordinator, and teaching staff), where each actor should understand his/her role, rights, and duties during the academic recognition process. It also provides a thorough description of the differences between the Latin American and European schedule systems for credit/unit transfer in an informative table presenting the grade system of each institution of the referred regions. It is important to highlight that there are significant **differences in how** European and Latin American students, and the society as a whole, **perceive international mobility**. In Latin American culture, lengthening the time of their education due to international mobility is not seen as a major problem, a vastly different perspective from that of European students, for whom it is important to complete their graduation in the expected period of time.

In any case, full academic recognition is essential for student mobility, as it allows the period of study abroad to replace a period of study at the home institution, although the content of the study programme may not be the same, and provided it is duly agreed-upon in advance between the parties involved (student, home and host Higher Education Institutions). A condition that is valuable mainly for European students is that the **mobility period abroad shall not lead to graduation delays**. The core principle in the academic recognition process, advocated by the Rec-Mat project, is that **the study plan abroad should be based on workload and learning outcomes rather than on specific subjects.** Therefore, the tables of equivalences used in the past should

be abolished as they induce a comparison of subjects and contents based on a one-to-one recognition of course units. With this approach, it becomes challenging for mobile students to have exchange activities recognised as replacements for those they should carry out at home. It is particularly relevant to **inform and update professors and programme directors** about student-mobility processes; further, it is necessary to modify and explain the teaching-learning practices in place at the host Higher Education Institutions, as well as the grading system used during mobility preparation. **Advance conversations between coordinators are essential** for the process of academic recognition. In order to ensure the sustainability and exploitation of this result, each institution must disseminate the Guidelines to their faculties and designate   at least two people responsible for each academic recognition process: a general coordinator who watches over the interests of the institution (generally from International Relations Office) and a coordinator from the student's "home faculty", who is the essential actor for the academic recognition. It is important that the teaching staff should be made aware of the importance of academic recognition.

The work developed under this WP also allowed us to conclude that a huge difficulty encountered in almost all institutions (Latin American and European) is the lack of up-to-date information on websites (mainly schedule of disciplines, but also content, and language, for example). It is strongly recommended that any Higher Education Institutions interested in attracting foreign students should **keep their information updated on their websites**. It is not rare that the student discovers an overlapping schedule only after his/her arrival at the host Higher Education Institution. Only a person-to-person contact could easily solve this issue or any other unexpected problem. By referring to the Guidelines and making use of Working Groups institutions can overcome any obstacle, ensuring a successful academic recognition. The **exchange of the names and contact information of the persons involved** in student mobility is strongly recommended. It depends on the Higher Education Institution's structure, but in general, the proposed Working Group is composed of at least the course coordinator for each Higher Education Institution (or corresponding position) and an international officer of the home Higher Education Institution (staff or teacher staff). It is imperative that this information be shared during the first student-mobility discussions and stated in the Learning Agreement.

Students undertaking mobility abroad should have a quality experience, one that guarantees them access to learning content that is similar and at the same time complementary (even if it is in learning methods) to what they would have

at their home institution. It is also fundamental that they bring this experience back home. Moreover, to allow a successful and rewarding experience, students must benefit from a fair credit-transfer system, so that mobility does not delay their graduation. It is also important to avoid any negative impact on their academic performance or employability (an important issue mainly for the European system).

The experiences of Rec-Mat partners show that one possible reason for the **lack of trust around students' mobility** is a fragile process which cannot clearly and unquestionably guarantee that:

- the courses chosen by the students at the host institutions are relevant for their studies at home;

- the marks or credits gained by the students abroad reflect the exact quality of the student's work;

- the students have obtained at the host institution the learning outcomes required by the home institution.

In this context, to further develop academic mobility (exchanges of students and professors), **it is imperative that the existing mindset and attitudes be changed and that the importance of international experiences be politically reinforced**. Additionally, it is necessary to improve and consolidate administrative processes, fairly and transparently, in order to build trust at the institutional level. Finally, for a smoother student mobility process, it is important to increase knowledge of the teaching system of partner institutions, to boost partnerships, reinforce trust and prepare solid knowledge and work bases.

This Work Package intended to follow a second round of pilot mobility cases, but no student mobility occurred during 2020 due to the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic affecting exchange of students, staff and researchers.

3.5 Development in IT systems (deliverable of WP6)

In addition to the May 2021 training of Latin American IT staff, project partners implemented the project proposals for IT systems development. One of the

criteria for selecting attendees was their potential impact on decision making, in order to facilitate the adoption of the proposals by decision-making bodies. From the mapping survey distributed among partners, it was clear that several Latin American **institutions have some functionality for managing student mobility and supporting recognition but are lacking an overall effective management system for student mobility**. Such a support system seems an important prerequisite for supporting academic recognition in a more structured way. During the online presentations, it soon became clear that most partner institutions are acutely aware how to improve their system but it is **very difficult to find resources and put the issue high on the agenda of priorities**.

The good practices shared during the online training and subsequent development plan should lead to better IT support for student mobility. Having a good working system in place will improve recognition processes at the institutional level. The main challenge in this respect has to do with a lack of resources and difficulties in setting priorities. The Argentinean Higher Education Institutions also need the cooperation of the national IT team that develops the SIU system. In this system, the SIU-Guaraní records and administers all the academic activities of Argentinian students. Therefore, it is important for recognition purposes that the SIU-Guaraní be adapted to improve its procedures for evaluating foreign credits.

Training participants offered assurances that they would **report back to their colleagues on what they learned** during the training. Staff members that attended the training got inspiration from European IT systems and from Latin American colleagues who support mobility and recognition processes. They had to reflect and translate those examples to their own local context in order to ensure impact in their respective institutions.

4. Final Remarks

The Rec-Mat project can be considered an important tool and guide for Higher Education Institutions that seek to foster and improve their internationalisation, particularly the process of academic recognition of studies and the recognition of the internationalisation activities carried out by academic staff members. A repository of good practices (included in the Digital Interactive Compendium), models of training and monitoring of mobility processes, a MOOC, the present Conclusions' Paper — all these provide **technical insights and ideas, good practices and examples that can be followed**. More essentially, Rec-Mat highlights the importance of the concept, and that once the institution and its individual staff members consider it as part of the ethos of their work, they will find practical solutions. For instance, we have compiled tools to compare credits, formulas to define equivalencies among grading systems, etc. But since one size does not fit all, it is more important to show that it is possible to define equivalencies, and that a given magical formula would not always work.

With the Work Packages described in detail throughout this Conclusions' Paper, the consortium addressed the core topics of the project following innovative approaches, and their relevance and efficiency have been confirmed. Nonetheless, some additional reflections are useful at this final stage concerning such innovative approaches, namely the peer-to-peer approach and the dual dimension of the project's actions — both policy and practical.

The **peer-to-peer approach** has indeed been at the heart of Rec-Mat, with excellent results, as presented above. It is definitely an **important tool to overcome structural constraints** on the one hand, and individual resistance on the other. It enables the institutions to accumulate success stories, which in turn can be used to promote structural changes or to showcase positive outcomes when someone is pessimistic. However, peer-to-peer training is also a slow process and limited by the individual potential of each academician to promote his/her positive experience.

For this reason, we confirmed that peer-to-peer approaches must be mitigated by two other approaches:

1) **Use peer-to-peer training at different levels:** with junior professors, and with senior ones; with course coordinators and with "basic" teachers; with academic staff and with administrative staff; with academic staff and with IT staff.

When the multiple levels of a Higher Education Institution are targeted in parallel, they echo among the different peers. Then, the individual experiences complement themselves and resonate, and a critical mass is reached.

2) **Combine peer-to-peer-oriented actions with structural ones**. The peer-to-peer experiences are individual. They need, at some point, to meet halfway with "top-down", institutional policies. Those actions can induce them; good practices provide a sound basis to define policies, but individuals will always be limited if there is no support or understanding "from above". For this reason, we recommend structural actions as well: In the context of Erasmus+, Structural CBHE projects could be useful to complement a project such as Rec-Mat, for instance, to make sure that governmental policy makers are on the same page as the faculty members. This recommendation to work in parallel on two fronts corresponds with Rec-Mat's work on both pilot mobility cases plus a Digital Interactive Compendium, for example, on one hand (practical dimension), and the involvement of decision-making bodies in the fora and presentation of this Conclusions' Paper to national authorities, for example (policy dimension) on the other. There is also a fine balance to be found between general principles (as in the guidelines) and case-by-case analysis. Especially in a region such as Latin-America, where the national directives hardly provide an overall framework for credit transfer and recognition, and where each individual Higher Education Institution has considerable autonomy regarding the format of the courses, a unique procedure is bound to fail. It would not be compatible with the many possible situations, let alone with an international, regional situation which is far from being as homogeneous as the European Higher Education Area.

A further final consideration leads us to discuss the **core meaning of academic recognition in Latin American countries** — or at least in Argentina and Brazil. Both policy fora have made it possible to present Rec-Mat's work and tools for academic recognition. They have also been important opportunities for the Argentinean and Brazilian authorities (at both the ministerial and university levels) to present their views and priorities on the topic of academic recognition. A commonality is the importance of degree recognition ("Acreditación de Carrera"/ "Reconhecimento de Diplomas"). Both countries have emphasised their experience on this topic, prior to credit recognition. A regional initiative, ArcuSur, has been at the heart of Mercosul Educativo since the early 2000. It is also worth noting that, in 2019-2020, UNESCO and its regional office for Latin America, IESALC, also gave top priority to this matter. The recognition of credits can derive from the recognition of degrees. Both require a curriculum analysis.

The first forum, in Argentina, led to a deep presentation of Argentina's credit system ("Reconocimiento de Trayecto Formativo — RTF", from the Sistema Nacional de Reconocimiento Académico). This presentation gave a renewed notion of a system of credits, followed by 90 institutions in the country and motivated by justifications that were proposed to the country – namely, the need to promote international/national mobility and credit transfer. Indeed, this framework will allow institutions, on a voluntary basis, to make agreements (intra- and inter-institutional) to mutually recognise each other's subjects, cycles and training practices, giving students alternatives until graduation, breaking down bureaucratic barriers and facilitating student mobility and curricular innovation. Academic recognition was promoted for reasons that exist in Europe, but that were not the main motivation identified at the beginning of Rec-Mat.

A third point is that for many Latin-American students, but also for many academic staff members, the experience of studying and living abroad (and specifically in Europe) itself is seen as a unique experience, with intrinsic, intangible worth. Getting some academic recognition for the stay abroad, and in particular revalidating credits, is not always perceived as important, in comparison to the "non-academic" benefits of the mobility. The study cycles are also of varying length and adaptable to the student's needs in Brazil and Argentina. Most students told us they were ready to extend an already flexible study cycle in their home university and delay graduation, if this enabled a longer stay abroad. The perception of student life, international mobility, and academic recognition in Latin America compared to Europe is to be considered when one works on tools to facilitate recognition. It would be important to **start from the local perception of the mobility process**, to devise appropriate tools afterwards. For instance, it might be more strategic to think about academic recognition as a motivation to improve curricula, than as a way to motivate students.

And a final, inevitable remark has to do with the **Covid-19 pandemic** that occurred in the middle of the Rec-Mat project's implementation, bringing obvious limitations to traditional mobility, worldwide. In the context of Rec-Mat, and apart from the direct implications already explained in previous sections, this situation has also made clearer that academic recognition is relevant, but not limited, to physical mobility. It is in fact extremely relevant to **dissociate recognition from (physical) mobility**. Of course, recognition mechanisms have been discussed and promoted for pilot mobilities and in the Guidelines. But one can also notice how much the MOOC discussed at length topics like pedagogy, quality, inverted classroom and student-centred teaching. These aspects of the

recognition process are paramount, as much, if not more, than its treatment as a simple mechanism to revalidate the learning plans of mobility students. This aspect of recognition is already at the heart of renewed discussions on mobility, centred now on virtual exchange.

Appendices

1. Teachers' peer training week programme

2. Final report of Work Package 4

3. Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies

Appendices

1. Teachers' peer training week programme
Universidad de Valladolid

Monday 10 December

Venue: Aula Triste, Palacio de Santa Cruz

09:00 Registration

09:30 Official opening of the event: institutional welcome

Prof. Antonio Largo Cabrerizo, Rector of the University of Valladolid

Prof. Maria de Lurdes Fernandes, Vice-President for Education, Academic Affairs and International Cooperation at the University of Porto

Prof. Pilar Garcés García, Directora General de Universidades e Investigación Junta de Castilla y León

Prof. Paloma Castro, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation at the University of Valladolid

09:45 Presentation of Rec-Mat: objectives of the week. Expectations survey. Prof. Valentín Cardeñoso, Universidad de Valladolid

10:15 Talk C1: Nuts and bolts of the Bologna process

Prof. Maria de Lurdes Fernandes, Vice-President for Education, Academic Affairs and International Cooperation at the University of Porto

Venue: Edificio Rector Tejerina

11:00   Coffee break & networking

11:30   Talk C2: A primer for academic recognition

Prof. Frederik De Decker, Ghent University

12:15   Workshop W1: Institutional approaches to the process of academic recognition

Prof. Frederik De Decker, Ghent University

Prof. Julio Theiler, Universidad Nacional del Litoral (Argentina)

Prof. Altair Soria, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

14:00   Lunch time & networking

15:30   Workshops W1 (parallel sessions)

16:30   Plenary session: discussion & conclusions of W1

Venue: Edificio Rector Tejerina

09:30   Talk C3: Diploma Supplement

Prof. José Ramón González, University of Valladolid

10:15   Talk C4: Qualifications frameworks

Prof. Amélia Veiga, University of Porto

11:00 Coffee break & networking

11:30   Talk C5: Quality assurance I: quality certification seals

Prof. Juan Carlos Fraile, University of Valladolid

12:15 Workshop W2: Instruments for academic recognition: sources and tools

Prof. Fernando Remião, University of Porto Prof. João Pedro Pêgo, University of Porto

14:00 Lunch time & networking

15:30 Workshop W2 (parallel sessions)

16:30 Plenary session: Discussion & conclusions of W2

Venue: Edificio Rector Tejerina

09:30 Towards the accreditation of internationalisation. Speaker: José Ángel Domínguez, Director of "Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León" (ACSUCYL)

Round table RT1: Academic, social, economic and organisational implications of internationalisation

Prof. Paloma Castro, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation of the University of Valladolid Prof. Valentín Cardeñoso, University of Valladolid

Members of Rec-Mat Consortium

11:00 Coffee break & networking

11:30 Talk C6: Quality assurance II: study and institutional accreditation

Sandra Marcos Ortega, Quality Programmes Technician, ACSUCYL

12:15 Workshop W3: What makes recognition a difficult task?

Prof. Joseph Armand, University of Lille

Prof. Altair Soria, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul 14:00 L u n c h time & networking

15:30 Workshops W3 (parallel sessions)

16:30 Plenary session: discussion & conclusions of W3

Social programme: visit to Segovia Campus

09:15 Departure from Plaza de la Universidad

11:00 Arrival in Segovia. Welcome by the Vice-Rector, Prof. Agustín García, and visit to the Campus

12:30 Guided tour of Segovia

14:00   Free time for lunch

17:00 Departure from Segovia

Venue: Edificio Rector Tejerina

09:30   Workshop W4: Good practices in academic recognition

Prof. Lilliane Santos, University of Lille Prof. Fernando Remião, University of Porto Prof. João Pedro Pêgo, University of Porto

11:00 Coffee break & networking

11:30 Presentations of workshop results

14:00 Wrap-up and closing session

2. Final report of Work Package 4

INDEX

I - INTRODUCTION

The *academic mobility of students and professors* is recognized as an essential component in the processes of internationalization of Higher Education (HE). Mobility enriches the academic training of the people who participate in this experience, as it allows the incorporation of a global and international vision in university training and contents and shapes graduates predisposed for their insertion and performance in a global labour market, with skills to adapt to different situations and professional challenges.

Academic mobility produces significant benefits for those Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that promote it, both for their students and for their teaching and administrative staff. In fact, it facilitates cooperation between university institutions, mutual recognition of the quality of their educational offerings, the internationalization of their curricula and academic flexibility in their practices.

Student mobility is one of the most notable trends in the process of internationalization of Higher Education. Experience shows, moreover, that it is a basic and principal strategy in actions aimed at facilitating cooperation in Higher Education in those regions that promote it as a tool for fostering regional integration processes.

In general, Student Mobility Programmes encourage students regularly enrolled in degrees at a given university to take part of their studies, for at least one academic period (semester or academic year), at a university in a country other than their country of residence, subject to a guarantee from the home university that full academic recognition will be granted for the studies taken at the host university, as a concrete and equivalent advance in the curriculum of their own degree programme.

Experience has shown that for a student mobility programme to be successful, it must be based on the following premises: trust between the participating universities, transparency of information from the institutions, reciprocity in the exchanges and, finally, *flexibility* in the processes, especially in the academic recognition of the studies carried out by the students[1]. Thus, academic recognition is an unavoidable pillar in the international mobility of tertiary students.

The *mobility of professors*, researchers and administrative staff is another important action to promote the internationalization of HEIs. The exchange and

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[1] https://rieoei.org/historico/documentos/rie35a07.htm

mobility of academics should be aimed at promoting mutual strengthening, synergic work, as well as the joint and homogeneous growth of institutions. But fundamentally it should contribute to the internationalization of the curriculum as a pillar of the integral internationalization of HEIs.

Latin America and the *Caribbean* are at a lower level in terms of the development of international mobility in comparison with other regions of the world[2], but the efforts made by HEIs to promote mobility are noteworthy and demonstrable, in spite of a generally unfavourable context. The region does not have a supranational organization that includes all countries in common policies, among them those related to Higher Education. Thus, there is no region-wide initiative to promote academic mobility, as there is in the European Union (EU).

In addition, many governments in Latin American countries do not promote mobility as they do not encourage links with other Latin American countries and do not allocate financial resources for HE. There are few examples of joint government programmes and, in all cases, they cover only a few countries and not the whole region.

Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that there are numerous initiatives and platforms for student mobility operating in the region, especially promoted by different networks and councils of HEIs, such as the Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo [Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group] (AUGM), the Unión de Universidades de América Latina y Caribe [Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean] (UDUAL), the Consejo de Rectores para la Integración de la Subregión Centro Oeste de Sudamérica [Council of Rectors for the Integration of the Central-West Subregion of South America] (CRISCOS), the Programa de Intercambio Académico Latinoamericano [Latin American Academic Exchange Programme] (PILA), among others. Finally, it should be recognized that there are countries that are lagging behind in terms of student mobility, mainly due to socio-economic disadvantages and lack of public policies.

It should be noted that practically all of the student mobility programmes in the Latin American region include the recognition of studies as mandatory, with the consequent commitment of the universities.

Although practically all student mobility programmes provide for the recognition of studies, and the universities are committed to carrying out this

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[2] IESALC-UNESCO (2019). Mobility in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and opportunities of a renewed Convention for the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas.

recognition with adequate speed, experience shows that on many occasions serious specific problems are detected that have to do with "non-compliance" with recognition, with delays in validations and in some cases with unsystematic application of the tools available in the HEIs.

The slowness in sending the documents between the universities involved, the excessive bureaucracy in the administrative actions of recognition, the lack of knowledge of the study programme by the administrative staff, among others, are quite frequent situations in the development of mobilities.

These situations create insecurity for the student, and in some cases "bad press" for the HEIs, which, together with the financial problems mentioned above, are reasons why many students do not decide to move. In summary, it is generally accepted that most Latin American universities have very weak capacities to guarantee good management of international academic mobility, especially in terms of formal recognition of the activities developed in this context.

II - THE REC-MAT PROJECT

The *main objective* of the Rec-Mat (Recognition Matters) project is to contribute, facilitate and promote the exchange of students between Europe and Latin America, reducing barriers in mobility related to academic recognition and enabling HEIs to implement fairer and more equitable processes.

Five European partners (Universidade do Porto, Universidad de Valladolid, Université de Lille, Universiteit Gent and SGroup European Universities Network) and five Latin American institutions (Universidade Estadual Paulista Julio de Mesquita Filho, Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Universidad Nacional del Sur and Universidad Nacional del Litoral) develop the project with different roles and responsibilities.

With its development, the aim is to consolidate and give structure to the action of academic recognition in Latin American universities, raising awareness among professors, programme coordinators and directors and the authorities of the institutions so that the academic community as a whole values mobility as a contribution to the quality of higher education. It also aims to spread good practices in recognition, beyond the existing differences in the educational systems of the different countries.

Within this framework, one of the components of the REC-MAT Project is the so-called Working Package (WP4), which activities are led by the Universidad Nacional del Litoral (UNL) and the Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP); and which also counts on the participation of the Universidade do Porto, the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and the Universidade Nacional do Sul (UNS) in its development.

WP 4 analyses and maps the situation of the recognition of academic activities taking as a sample, from the universe of European and Latin American universities, the HEIs of both regions that participate in this project. In order to enlarge the sample of Latin American universities to a more representative number, the National Universities of Quilmes (UNQ), Cuyo (UNCu) and Northwestern Buenos Aires (UNNOBA) are also included.

Although it is not an objective of the Rec-Mat project, but understanding that this is an aspect that also requires attention and improvement, the current

regulatory frameworks that regulate the recognition of activities carried out by students in the framework of international academic mobility and also by professors were investigated.

The view thus expanded intends to make evident that the advances and profound transformations in the Academy - such as those required by the formal recognition of international experiences - demand not only time and political decision, but also need consensus on their benefits on the part of the academic community, that is: of professors, students, and fundamentally of their leaders.

In this sense, WP4 organized open activities that allowed the dissemination of results and facilitated awareness of the relevance of recognition as a key element for the advancement and consolidation of the processes of internationalization of Higher Education, seeking to influence the entire academic community but especially its leaders and management dedicated to this task.

This preliminary report presents, on the one hand, the identification and analysis of the processes of academic recognition of the activities carried out by the students who do mobility; and on the other hand, the instruments that the Universities use for the recognition of the internationalization activities of the professors and academics are presented. Finally, and for both cases, general suggestions are made.

III - COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC RECOGNITION OF STUDENT MOBILITY AT UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE AND SOUTH AMERICA

III - 1. Methodology used and results obtained

For the development of this analysis, a survey was elaborated and applied to the Argentinean and Brazilian Universities mentioned above (UNL, UNQ, UNNOBA, UNS, UNCu, UFRGS, UNESP and UFRJ).

It should be taken into account that the mobility of students can be classified according to their purposes: a) for the recognition of partial studies and b) to obtain diplomas for complete studies. In both cases, the procedures for registration and academic recognition differ substantially, and in this case we only worked with information referring to point a).

The consultations and a summary of the main responses are presented below:

- Regarding the existence of rules for the organization and regulation of student mobility

Practically all the universities have regulations in this regard, in the form of Mobility Regulations, approved institutionally by Boards of Directors or similar, which are applicable to all the faculties of the institutions. In particular, UNCu has a regulation for each faculty.

- Regarding the administrative procedure for the recognition of studies

The administrative procedures for the recognition of studies for students who do mobility vary according to each University and, in turn, with each faculty. In most universities the procedure is initiated at the International Relations Office (IRO).

- Regarding the actors involved in the recognition of studies

Most universities have a figure who acts as a link between the student and the host university, in roles such as Academic Coordinator, Career Direc-

tor (Degree), Academic ChairCommission for the Career, Academic Secretary, or Departmental Board. All universities have an International Relations Office (IRO or similar).

- Regarding the documents required to apply for recognition of studies

All the universities surveyed officially use the Study Contract, also called Academic Recognition Commitment. This document is prepared in agreement between the student and the academic point of reference of the faculty/institute, to be subsequently endorsed by the dean or main authority of the faculty/institute and by the authority of the IRO of the University.

The Study Contract or Academic Recognition Commitment is complemented by a form generally called Amendment to the Study Contract, which allows changes to be made once the student joins the Host University.

- Regarding the criteria that are considered for the recognition of studies

Academic recognition in student mobility, according to experience and normal practice in different regions and universities, can be carried out in different ways (e.g. by subject-by-subject recognition; by recognition by credits or teaching hours; by recognition by equivalence tables drawn up between the universities carrying out the exchange; or by complete semester block).

In the case of the Universities surveyed, the normal criterion for recognition is to consider and compare the minimum content and the workload of the subjects to be taken at the Host University with those to be taken at the Home University.

- Regarding the percentage of students who make an amendment to their Study Contract upon arrival at the Host University

UNCu, UNL and UNNOBA consider that a percentage between 30 and 70% of their students make an amendment to the Study Contract upon arrival at the host university, UNQ indicates that less than 30% and UNS 50%. There is no information available for Brazilian Universities.

- Regarding the compulsory nature of the recognition of studies

In most of the Universities, the credits of the subjects taken abroad must be recognized. Only in one University, the Study Contract allows the student to indicate that he/she does not intend to obtain recognition for the academic activities taken at the Host University.

- Regarding the success rate of the recognition of studies

Significantly diverse responses were obtained. While UNCu does not indicate a value, UNQ indicates that more than 91% of the recognition is done successfully. The UNL indicates that 60% of the subjects are recognized, UNNOBA does not indicate a percentage, but considers that it is an acceptable percentage. For its part, the UNS indicates that 70% of the subjects achieve recognition.[3]

In the case of UFRGS, the success rate of recognition depends on the academic area in question. It is higher in the area of Humanities and lower in the areas of Law and Health. In the case of UFRJ, the success rate of recognition does not depend on the academic area, but on the institute where the student is located. There are academic units in which the academic coordinators are more skilled in bureaucratic procedures and this is reflected in the success of recognition.

- Regarding the percentage of recognized compulsory subjects

Except for UNL, which indicates that 50% of the recognized subjects belong to the core group (compulsory) of the degree courses, the rest of the universities do not have data to answer this question.

- Regarding whether recognized courses are added to the student's academic record

All universities include the courses (compulsory, elective, optional) taken during the exchange in the student's academic history. In the cases of UFRGS and UFRJ the recognition is not compulsory.

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[3] The subjects can be from the compulsory group or from the optional or elective group. The classification depends on the system that each university has.

The situation is different among the universities surveyed. At UNCu, UN-NOBA and UNQ the grades obtained by the student are not included in the academic record (the subjects are recognized under the "equivalence" modality). Consequently, they do not count towards the student's overall grade average. At UNL it depends on each faculty/institute, and at UNS they do count towards the student's average.

In the cases of UNESP and UFRJ they are not counted and in the case of UFRGS there is no information in this regard.

An important factor in the efficiency of the credit recognition process is the length of the period of time that elapses between the student's return from mobility and the moment when the recognition actually materialises on their academic transcript. This time is often a major obstacle in the way in which the student reintegrates into his/her career or degree. The result among the Universities surveyed varies, ranging from 45 days to more than 6 months.

III - 2. Comparison with results from Europe

There is an important precedent carried out in the framework of the ERASMUS programme of the European Union. This is the **PRIME Project (Problems of Recognition in Making Erasmus)**, a research project that addressed the challenges related to credit recognition procedures for exchange students.

PRIME was conducted in 2009 and 2010 based on surveys that showed that full recognition was not yet a reality https://www.esn.org/prime.

The results of the Project can be summarized as follows:

Provision of information: 41% of students receive information about mobility before the exchange.

Study Contract: 73% of Erasmus students manage to complete the Study Contract (or Learning Agreement) before departure. 73% of the students

claim to modify the Study Contract (or Learning Agreement) once they arrive at the Host University.

ECTS: 43% of HEIs consider ECTS credits in accordance with the student workload.

Recognition of studies: 73% of students receive full recognition of the credits successfully obtained abroad and previously included in the Learning Agreement;

24% of the students receive only partial recognition for certain subjects and 3% do not get any of their credits recognised at all. Finally, 22% of students had to repeat at least some of their courses and/or exams upon return.

It is necessary to note the clear difference between the context of higher education in Europe and in South America based on their respective histories and levels of development. Although it cannot be affirmed that in Europe there is a common system of Higher Education, in fact there are common mechanisms and the ECTS system was designed to facilitate the recognition of degrees and academic studies. In South America, on the other hand, national education systems coexist with significant differences, and without any tools for articulation and comparability between them.

From the comparison between the results of the European Universities and those of WP4 of the REC-MAT Project, it can be preliminarily concluded that, although the recognition of studies is considered compulsory, this is not always done in a satisfactory way for the interests of the students and clearly reflecting the contribution of international experience in their training.

III - 3. Conclusions

Although most of the universities have rules for the treatment and regulation of student mobility and a figure that acts as a link between the student and the host university, the universities surveyed show: a) diversity of procedures and forms of recognition of studies, b) very slow recognition processes in several of them, and even c) non-compliance in the commitment to recognition.

Some of the main aspects that hinder academic recognition in the mobility process are listed below:

Curriculum obsolescence

In general, most curricular designs are updates of projects which origins can be traced, in some cases, to the 19th century and, therefore, in correspondence with the paradigms of education of that time. They were conceived and organized on the basis of the knowledge that a graduate should acquire rather than the competencies that he/she should attain.

This criterion leads directly to the belief that the recognition of academic activities carried out by a student in another higher education institution should be based on the direct correspondence of content between the subjects of different curricula. As the intended symmetry between contents of subjects of different curricula is quite difficult to attain and to quantify, the recognition processes become very arduous, if not unattainable. Thus arises the need for **flexibility** in the comparison of curricula and in the recognition of studies, with the premise of privileging competencies and skills over rigid and structured training.

Difficulties in defining common measurement and comparison criteria for the recognition of studies

The different ways of establishing the workload or academic credits in the curricular designs in Latin American universities is one of the main problems when it comes to the recognition of international activities, generating a slow and sometimes incomplete process. In Europe, there is a unique credit system recognized by all countries, called ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), which allows for the comparison of studies in the Higher Education systems of the countries, which have important differences in terms of curricular design, course workloads, etc. The ECTS system promotes that learning outcomes are the basis for recognition, not the number of credits for a given course.

In the case of Latin America, there is no formally accepted common system for weighting the academic activities carried out by students (except for hours in the classroom). Nor is there a criterion for recognizing those activities that are carried out within the framework of international student mobility. It is worth highlighting two valuable precedents that, if applied and/or extended to the entire region, could allow the comparison of studies in a comprehensive manner and with full regional scope:

- **CLAR (Latin American Reference Credit)**, elaborated in the framework of the Tuning Latin America project (project financed by the European Commission), which promotes the implementation of a Latin American system of academic credit, similar in its essence to the ECTS.

- **The National System of Academic Recognition of Higher Education of the Argentine Republic (SNRA)**, which defines a unit of measurement called RTF (Recognition of Training Path), also compatible with the ECTS system of Europe. This proposal could be extended to other Latin American countries in order to achieve an integrated system.

Diversity in grading systems among universities and university systems in different countries

Although all grading systems serve the same purpose, there are important differences in the design and implementation used by higher education systems in different countries. This causes practices and cultures in the application of grading systems to be misunderstood between countries, and then the respective scales to be misinterpreted. This situation causes disadvantages for students in the accreditation of the courses they complete in the framework of international mobility. However, it should be noted that in Latin America there is an interesting number of mobility programmes organized by university networks that have drawn up tables of equivalence of qualifications (e.g. http://grupomontevideo.org/escala/images/Anexo_3-_Tabla_de_equivalencias.pdf), which greatly simplifies the way of calculating the qualification to be transferred at the time of recognition.

Another aspect to take into account is that, as there are different grading systems, the universities should clarify in the certificates of subjects completed by the student the grading system of their own, in order to collaborate with the host university in the calculation of the corresponding conversion. This situation is solved, in the case of the European universities, with the accompanying "diploma supplement" that explains the grading system used with its equivalents in other systems around the world.

Bureaucracy in the administration of academic recognition in institutions.

The recognition of courses completed abroad involves a complex process which requires the cooperation of the students and the institutions involved

(home and host universities) before, during and after the mobility. However, bureaucratic procedures are still a problem in almost all HEIs. The procedure for the recognition of learning paths is often complex and students are often not adequately informed about it prior to their mobility. The procedure, in general, requires a lot of documentation and administrative steps, which makes it take a long time. Sometimes the recognition analysis process is carried out upon the student's return, a situation that openly clashes with the regulations of the mobility programmes. Delays occur at both the home and host universities, which are generally attributable to poor communication. In many cases, the documents arrive at the home university several months after the end of the semester.

Finally, although the recognition of studies is generally considered compulsory in student mobility, this is not always done in a way that is satisfactory for the interests of the students and clearly reflects the contribution of the international experience in their training.

Lack of transparency of information needed for student mobility

In general, the provision of timely and complete information to students about the subjects they will be able to take at the host university translates into a better recognition of their studies upon returning from the mobility period. The lack of clear information offered by the host university about the study plans, content of the subjects, number of credits or weekly workload, pedagogical modality and timetable, becomes an obstacle - often insurmountable - to be able to draw up a study contract that is really feasible for the student. Currently, the Universities publish this information on their webpages, although it is not always complete and clearly ordered. In addition, the Academic Coordinators of both the home and host universities have little dialogue among themselves and with the student to remedy this deficiency.

In conclusion, for many students, information about the courses or subjects to be taken at the host university is difficult to obtain and the responsible staff cannot provide accurate information. Students have to find the information on their own, without help from the institutions involved. The lack of transparency of information then becomes a major stumbling block to achieving full recognition of studies.

III- 4. Recommendations

Although it is globally defined and accepted that the international academic mobility of students is the action by which a university student achieves a significant progress in his/her career or study programme in a foreign university and is then recognized by his/her home university, there is no universally accepted way of accreditation and/or recognition of the academic activities developed abroad.

In Europe, the majority of international student mobilities take place within the framework of the Erasmus programme, which is part of the European Union's strategies to achieve a European higher education system with a common regulatory framework that regulates and defines the procedures for the recognition of academic activities (including an official academic credit transfer system, ECTS). In addition, for the rest of the mobilities outside Erasmus, European universities also apply the ECTS User Guide (e.g. in the use of the learning agreement, in the mention of the mobility in the diploma supplement, etc.). With regard to Latin America, as explained above, there is no political will strongly oriented towards the creation of Latin American system for

Higher Education and for the time being presents itself as a universe of very diverse national and/or regional systems that, for some time now, have been attempting to coordinate in order to foster internationalization and cooperation in Higher Education, and, within this framework, to facilitate international academic mobility. This action has not made significant progress so far, so the promotion and implementation of academic mobility remains in an environment of great diversity as far as academic recognition is concerned.

Each university, country or region establishes its own internationalisation policies, including student mobility, and organises itself according to its traditions, visions and capabilities. The development of student mobility takes place through participation in networks, programmes or simply through the signing of specific bilateral agreements. This generates an enormous multiplicity of criteria and procedures depending on the mobilities that take place in one or another framework.

Thus, taking into account the diversity of higher education institutions existing in Latin America and the Caribbean, each one with its institutional objectives, organizational schemes, operating logics and internal procedures, it is not possible, within the framework of the REC-MAT Project, to establish recom-

mendations and/or suggestions for each particular case.

It has therefore been decided to propose a series of general recommendations for a better administration of student mobility and the associated academic recognition. These recommendations are intended to serve as a basis for the analyses that may be carried out in each University in order to improve and/or update the rules and procedures that regulate the aforementioned activity. The recommendations are as follows:

Each University must define official rules governing mobility and academic recognition.

HEIs must define clear norms and procedures that promote, regulate and facilitate student mobility in order to safeguard the efforts made by students and ensure rapid and effective academic recognition. Ultimately, it should be understood that recognition is not only a benefit and a result of the work done by the student but also by the institutions involved. Such regulations or regulatory frameworks should include the systems for the selection of candidates, the pre- and post-mobility management schemes and procedures, and finally the procedures for making the academic recognition effective. On the other hand, these regulations should also enshrine and define rights and responsibilities of students in mobility.

In order to update the regulations and permanently improve the quality of the recognition, it is suggested the establishment of a follow-up and monitoring strategy where the feedback of the system is promoted taking into account the voice of the students after their mobility and the opinion of the professors.

Each University must designate institutional and academic managers specifically in charge of managing student mobility and the corresponding recognition.

In order to achieve efficient management of student mobility, two different roles or functions should be defined within its management scheme: the one responsible for administrative management and the one responsible for academic management. It is advisable that this last role be assumed by a professor of the degree programme, if possible with administrative responsibilities, for example: being the director of the degree programme, which would allow him/her to have a clear and comprehensive vision of the curriculum of the programme or degree in question.

Those responsible for the mobility management process must have sufficient functions and authority — suitably institutionalised — to enable them to resolve recognition procedures and, at the same time, to be valid interlocutors for the partner institutions in the international academic mobility programmes and agreements.

Those institutionally responsible should ensure compliance with those commitments that guarantee the logistical and institutional conditions for mobility to take place, for example: support for immigration procedures, accommodation and maintenance if agreed upon, granting of scholarships in due time and form, providing clear and timely information, among others.

On the other hand, the academic coordinators must guarantee that the development of the activities carried out during the mobility reaches the expected quality levels and that they are recognized according to the Study Contracts signed in due time.

Both areas of responsibility must ensure that the agreed academic recognition is given promptly and in full.

It is suggested that, if they consider it unsatisfactory, students should be able to appeal the recognition granted by their university to the activities carried out in the framework of international mobility, to a figure specifically designated for this purpose and through a simple and accessible procedure (a sort of university ombudsman).

Each University should promote information transparency through clear and complete academic information.

It is recommended that universities generate and provide clear information on the curricula and teaching and course syllabi, explaining the workloads of the different subjects and the institution's own criteria for measuring these loads, whether clock hours, class hours, academic credits, etc. It is also useful to provide information on the correlativity systems or modes of advancement in the different careers to prevent international students from proposing study contracts that are difficult or impossible to develop.

It is also suggested that keeping the information updated on the University's website is one of the easiest ways to present complete and timely information.

Each University must promote and facilitate prior dialogue between the administrative and academic coordinators of the home and host universities and the student.

This communication, together with clear and precise information, significantly facilitates the elaboration of the Study Contract, and subsequently the compliance with the same. This issue is key in the Latin American case where teaching is based on the learning of contents (and on this depends the progress in the careers) and not the acquisition of competences as in the European case.

Both in the case of bilateral student mobility agreements between universities and for mobilities carried out in the framework of multilateral programmes, it is suggested that before signing the agreements, both parties interact in order to know the course offer of each one, and thus be able to evaluate whether or not it will be possible to ensure recognition. Mutual understanding and collaboration between the heads of the institutions involved in a process of international student mobility should be aimed at guaranteeing the quality of the experience and the recognition of the activities carried out.

Each University must streamline the processes for the registration and validation of the recognition of studies.

It is recommended that the administrative procedures related to the recognition of studies be simplified in order to reduce the time between the end of the student's mobility, the recognition of the academic activities carried out and the definitive accreditation in his/her personal file. The computerization of procedures with electronic signatures and validation of procedures is often a great help in streamlining academic bureaucracies.

This recommendation applies both to "outgoing" students (on their return, the recognition should be a quick administrative process so that their reintegration into their studies at their home university is carried out without delays or obstacles) and to "incoming" students (the certification of studies that the university should send to the home university should be done in a short period of time, so that the student is reintegrated into their institution without delays).

The use of applications and the digitalization of procedures is useful not only for students but also for universities to generate valuable information for decision-making regarding their internationalization policies, especially in terms of academic mobility.

Each University must define a scheme that allows the comparison of its grading system with those of its partner Universities.

The recognition must include the transfer of the qualification that the student obtained when passing the courses or activities carried out in the framework of their mobility, for which the institutions must generate a specific regulation and guarantee the publicity of this information.

Including grades in the recognition is of great relevance to most students, but especially to those whose grades or grade average would allow them to access benefits such as scholarships or financial aid to further their studies or even future employment.

Academic recognition procedures must necessarily be based on three concepts that in some way represent the basic postulates or foundations of student mobility with recognition of studies, namely: trust between institutions, transparency of information and the necessary flexibility in the comparison of studies.

The Ministries of Education and the Boards of the Universities of the countries should promote schemes and mechanisms that facilitate the comparability of the curricula of the university careers of the different universities with peers in other countries.

Unlike in the European Union, in Latin America there is no credit system such as ECTS, and there are a large number of curricular systems that do not allow an easy comparison of courses/subjects between Universities that carry out student exchanges.

 The absence of comparability schemes between the systems of different countries is undoubtedly a major problem for recognition, which is exacerbated by the lack of dialogue between national systems of Higher Education. Promoting common guidelines, such as a common regional system of academic credits, would greatly facilitate academic recognition.

In the case of Argentina, there is the possibility that the National System of Academic Recognition (SNRA) will become the national scheme for a better international comparison of studies.

In Brazil, on the other hand, there are no government initiatives that regulate or govern the recognition of studies in student mobility.

IV – THE RECOGNITION OF DEGREES AND DIPLOMAS OBTAINED ABROAD IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA

Brazil

In 2016, the Brazilian Ministry of Education established and made available the procedures related to the general guidelines for the processing of applications related to the two processes of Revalidation and Recognition. The **Carolina Bori platform** was created, a computerized system for the management and control of the processes of Revalidation and Recognition of foreign diplomas in Brazil. This platform brings together public and private HEIs that, by adhesion, provide the necessary information for applicants (graduates) to request the revalidation or recognition of their foreign diplomas. The platform facilitates the management and control of the flow of the revalidation and/or recognition processes, in addition to offering greater interactivity between the interested parties.

Through the platform, the universities provide the applicant with information on the required documentation, the courses and programmes offered, the capacity for simultaneous attendance and the fees for the provision of services. In this way, the applicant can choose the institution where he/she will apply for the revalidation of a diploma for undergraduate degrees and/or the recognition of a master's or doctoral degree *stricto sensu*. The process of revalidation/recognition of higher education diplomas obtained abroad must be admitted at any time by the institution of revalidation/recognition and concluded within a maximum period of up to 180 (one hundred and eighty) days.

The change will result in benefits for applicants, such as easier monitoring and a faster process, as all documentation is processed digitally. Both the applicant and the members of the evaluation committee will receive the entire process digitally.

Argentina

The procedure for the recognition of a university degree in Argentina obtained by a person abroad is carried out through two different instances: through the Validation procedure or through the Revalidation procedure.

The **validation of university degrees** of foreign citizens belonging to countries with which Argentina has an agreement of recognition of studies is done with a simple procedure, as the procedure has been digitized. Professionals from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Peru, Ukraine, Venezuela and Syria who wish to validate their foreign university degrees must start the process through the platform tramitesadistancia.gob.ar. There are two types of validations: the one needed to continue postgraduate studies in health specialties and the one for professional practice. The validations requested for the continuation of graduate studies in health are provisional and are granted only for the purpose of hospital medical practices. On the other hand, validations for professional practice are definitive and, depending on the bilateral agreement with each country, their processing may be direct or indirect. In the latter case, a committee of experts evaluates the curriculum, similar to the academic obligations of an Argentinean public university.

In the case of those countries with which Argentina does not have an agreement for the recognition of studies, the procedure of **revalidation of the degree** is applied, which is understood as the certification of equivalence between a professional degree or an academic degree, obtained in foreign universities. This equivalence is made with the respective professional degree granted by an Argentine University. The procedure is carried out by the person before a national university in Argentina. Therefore, you must initially identify which Argentine university offers the curriculum and obtain a degree similar to the one you wish to revalidate. As a general requirement, you must be legally domiciled in the country and sometimes, it is required to be in the same province where the university is located, which has the option to perform the revalidation. The universities, in general, request the same documentation, which must be in Spanish, and if it is a translation, it must have the endorsement of an authorized public translator. Some universities require that the applicant who is not Spanish-speaking must take and pass a Spanish language course.

V - IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF INSTRUMENTS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF INTERNATIONALISATION ACTIVITIES OF PROFESSORS / ACADEMICS

V – 1. Methodology and Results

In order to carry out this analysis, the universities participating in the Rec-Mat project and four other national universities in Argentina were consulted. The consultation was aimed at finding out how and where international academic activities are recorded and accredited, and then, how they are weighted and how they influence the advancement or promotion of the teaching career. Although the level of precision of the responses received was not as expected, and the information collected from European and Brazilian universities was insufficient, a synthesis of the results obtained for Argentina is presented below. Then, and for the same reason, we present a series of recommendations limited to this country:

- Regarding whether the University has a regulation for the recognition of internationalization activities of professors/academics

In general, universities do not have their own regulations for the recognition of the internationalization activities of professors.

- Regarding the administrative procedure followed by the University for the recognition of internationalization activities of professors/academics

In Argentina there is, since 2005, the Integrated Management and Evaluation System (SIGEVA)[4] used by all university professors/researchers to accredit their academic activities.

Subsequently, in 2011, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation of the Nation launched the CVar, as a national unified and standardized registry of the curricular data of the scientific and technological personnel of Argentina[5].

In 2012, the "Incentive Projects Report" module was tested, which allows integrating the information that researchers and professors have already up-

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4 SIGEVA is a system developed in 2005 by the Informatics Department of the Management of Organization and Systems of CONICET.
5 CVar is compatible with SIGEVA data.

loaded in the different SIGEVA and CVar systems used for submission to the Incentive Programme.

The CVar is an adaptation of the SIGEVA, with the difference that the SIGEVA, in addition to storing information like the CVar, allows functions of evaluation of scientific activity.

- Regarding which professors' internationalization activities are recognized

The information requested in the SIGEVA and CVar systems is as follows:

Personal data: identification, residential address, work address

Education: Academic training, further education

Positions: Teaching, R&D positions, institutional management positions, other positions

Background: S-T funding, HR training, extension, evaluation, fellowships, other S&T activities.

Scientific production: Articles published in journals, books, parts of books, papers in published and unpublished C-T events; theses, other C-T productions

Technological production: with intellectual property title, C-T services, technical reports.

Artistic Production: Musical-sound; visual, audiovisual, theatrical, dramatic, poetic or essay literary genre, script, others.

Other background: participation in C-T events, awards, memberships, etc.

In the previous items, international activities are implicitly considered, for example, in publications in foreign journals, participation in international events, as well as in the direction and/or evaluation of graduate theses in foreign universities, etc.

- *Regarding the benefits of being in the SIGEVA or CVar System*

For professors of the Argentine Universities that are registered in SIGE-VA, the system allows professors/researches to participate in the Incentive Programme, which means an additional economic remuneration to their salary. Although not all professors are registered in SIGEVA, since the collection of the incentive requires certain requirements that not all professors meet.

In general, professors who participate in the Teaching Incentive Programme for Research apply. To belong to this system, the professor must give classes (in one annual or two four-monthly subjects) on a semi-exclusive basis with 20 hours per week in front of students and must be involved in a research project accredited by the system.

The system categorizes professors in levels, according to their CV, from category 1 to category 5, where 1 is the highest category in research.

Taking a university as an example, the UNL currently has 1733 categorized professors, belonging to the Incentive Programme, of which 175 are Category 1; 166 are in Category 2; 463 are in Category 3; 381 are in Category 4; and 548 are in Category 5.

In the case of Brazil, the Lattes platform can be considered in some ways the equivalent of SIGEVA. The platform allows the integration of databases of curricula, research groups and institutions in a single information system. The Directory of Research Groups in Brazil is an inventory of active groups in the country. The human resources that constitute the groups, the lines of research and the sectors of activity involved, the specialties of knowledge, the scientific, technological and artistic production and the patterns of interaction with the productive sector are part of the information contained in the Directory. The groups are located in higher education institutions, research institutes, etc. The individual information of the group participants is extracted from their Lattes curriculum.

The platform has become an instrument for measuring and evaluating academic and research performance. It is an open and consistent system that measures the activities that make up academic life.

Currently in Brazil, the Lattes platform is the only public tool to include international activities of professors and researchers. In the context of Brazilian universities, teaching evaluations take into account international activ-

ities related to research and not to teaching. The international mobility of professors is not yet institutionally recognized.

V – 2. Conclusions

Although in Argentina there is the Integrated Management and Evaluation System (SIGEVA), which is used by all university professors/researchers to accredit their academic activities, it can be said that there is no regulation or at least a common criterion to carry out in a unified way the recognition of the activities of professors abroad.

In other words, the tool that is available does not cover all the internationalisation activities that professors can carry out.

In this way, international activities are implicit or subsumed in the teaching, research and extension or transfer activities carried out by the professor.

Among these activities, publications in high-impact scientific journals is the most recognized as an international activity. However, in many cases, the lack of training in foreign languages, particularly English, restricts some professors from publishing in these journals.

This is more accentuated in certain subjects, since there is a disparity in the possibility of publishing depending on the different subjects (medical sciences have more opportunities to publish, while engineering, especially the more specific ones, have fewer possibilities).

Among the options provided by the systems to declare teaching and/or extension activities, they do not open the possibility of stating which are international and which are not.

In Argentina, in addition to the categorization as a professor/researcher in order to receive an incentive for research work, there is another evaluation of the academic activities of professors known as the "teaching career", which is accessed through a public tender and can then be revalidated through a closed evaluation. In no case do activities of an international nature that can be accredited have any specific weighting.

The minimum score for a researcher to be considered category 1 is 1200 points.

That score is composed as follows:

Academic training (maximum 200 points)

Teaching (maximum 200 points)

Teaching activity and production (maximum 250 points)

Accredited scientific or artistic research or technological development (maximum 200 points)

Activity and production in scientific research or technological development (maximum 300 points)

Artistic production (maximum 300 points)

Transfer (maximum 300 points)

Training and management of human resources for research, technological development and artistic creation (maximum 360 points)

Management (maximum 150 points)

As can be seen, the main activities considered are those related to teaching and research.

V - 3. Recommendations

In this document, a diagnosis is made in order to know the degree of measurement of internationalization activities in the evaluation processes of teaching activity and the consequent recognition, to then make a series of recommendations on the subject aimed at universities and evaluation and control agencies, in order to contribute to the recognition of international academic activities of professors and thus stimulate the interest of professors and institutional valuation of efforts aimed at the internationalization of Higher Education.

Although it is understood that internationalization is transversal to the substantive dimensions of the University (teaching, research, extension), it is considered necessary to improve the degree of recognition of the international activities carried out by professors.

These recommendations are intended to serve as a basis for the analyses that can be developed in each university, in order to improve and/or update their policies and strategies, as well as the norms and procedures for the consideration and evaluation of the internationalization of university teaching activities. The recommendations are oriented in two convergent directions: first, they propose that the procedures and mechanisms that allow the accreditation of the academic activities of professors and researchers incorporate the necessary spaces where to declare, denounce or register those academic activities of international nature and second, that the forms and procedures that weigh and give merit for the development and promotion in the teaching career include and value international activities.

Recommendations for each University

Each University should take into account the international activities of its teaching staff, some of which are listed below, for the ranking and hierarchy of its teaching staff:

• Consider postgraduate degrees (Master's or Doctorate) obtained by professors in foreign universities.

• Consider the professor's participation in joint projects with foreign institutions (ERASMUS projects, for example).

• Consider work missions (internships, services to third parties, etc.) carried out by professors in foreign universities.

• Consider the reception and accompaniment of foreign professors during their stay at the University (as part of teaching mobility programmes, such as AUGM Scale, PILA, ERASMUS, etc.).

• Consider the representation of the University in activities related to internationalization.

• Consider the professor's participation in the organization of international events.

• Consider welcoming students into their classes (adapting study material, presenting case studies, etc.).

• Consider the tutoring of foreign students

• Consider, in the case of ordinary Competitions, the Internationalization activities that the professor carries out and that, in the case of Latin American Universities, are not taken into account.

• Consider the activities of internationalization of the curriculum that the professor carries out in his/her teaching practice.

Recommendations for National Accreditation Institutions

Higher Education plays a fundamental role in the development of the societies of the countries, and in this framework, the responsibility and the task carried out by university professors is key to its development. This implies the commitment to be updated with their knowledge and skills, to adapt to meet the challenges presented by an increasingly globalized world. In this context, it is important that the institutions that make up Higher Education systems support the internationalization of their teaching staff.

Therefore, the institutions in charge of the accreditation of academic activities, which manage the SIGEVA and CVar systems, must consider and value the internationalization activities that professors develop.

It is recommended that in the design of SIGEVA and CVar, and/or the different evaluation systems, spaces be defined in which professors can complete information on their international activities, some of which are mentioned in this report.

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General criteria for academic recognition in ECTS credits for student participation in university cultural, sporting, student representation, solidarity and cooperation activities.

https://www.esic.edu/pdf/normativa_neconocimiento_de_creditos.pdf http://sigeva.unl.edu.ar/

http://cvar.sicytar.mincyt.gob.ar/auth/index.jsp. https://www.unl.edu.ar/investigacion/programa-de-incentivos-para-docentes- investigadores/

https://www.unl.edu.ar/investigacion/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/02/427_nuevo- manual-de-procedimientos-reso-1.pdf

VII – ANNEXES: TAILORED MADE PROPOSALS

UFRGS

Each University should define official rules that regulate academic mobility and recognition

In the case of the UFRGS, since the end of the 1990s, there have been norms and regulations that regulate mobility and recognition ("Leave" and "Work Plan"), in UFRGS terminology). However, it has been a few years since the need to clarify the duration of the "Leave" was identified. The current regulations (resolution 11/2013) provide for two possible types of leave, each lasting one semester, extendable for a further semester: leave to complement studies (without a study plan), and leave to pursue studies (with a formalised teaching plan). One of the proposals for improvement would be to provide for a single type of leave of absence, with a study plan, which duration could be flexible from the initial request to last from 1 to 3 semesters.

Each University should streamline the processes for the registration and co-validation of the recognition of studies

The delay in the process of academic recognition, at UFRGS, is mainly due to the absence of a computerised mechanism to manage mobility. In the current way, the request process for leave and revalidation of activities is electronic, but it has not been integrated into the student's academic life management system (SISGRAD), which slows it down. The recommendation, already made since 2011, is to integrate the systems to streamline the procedure.

Each University should take into account for the scheduling and ranking of its teaching staff, the international activities that the teaching staff carry out

The UFRGS already applies most of the suggested recommendations. A specific point where it can improve is:

- in the internal valuation of professors who tutor foreign students in mobility at the University.

- in the internal valuation of the classes taught in a foreign language, particularly at postgraduate level.

UFRJ

Actions resulting from the work done within the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) regarding the Erasmus+ Rec-Mat Project, aiming at an improvement in the standard of recognition of studies in exchange periods.

The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro is part of the consortium of universities participating in the Erasmus+ Rec-Mat Project, which aims to improve the recognition and use of studies undertaken by undergraduate students during exchange periods at European universities. The project is coordinated by the University of Porto and includes a series of Work Packages aimed at generating products and tools to be disseminated among the partner universities, in order to facilitate that the project objectives are achieved more easily. One of these, number 4, is aimed at pointing out proposals that specifically improve the administrative procedures for the utilization to be carried out.

Regarding the important aspects for the WP mentioned we must inform that:

Official rules governing mobility and recognition

UFRJ has more than one official rule that regulates mobility, basically students who have completed at least 30% of the total credits required to complete the course and have not reached a total of more than 80% of credits completed are eligible for international mobility. The rules for the utilization of the contents studied in current exchange periods at UFRJ are quite simple, and apply not only to those studied during international exchange periods, but also to those studied during internal student mobility in Brazil, as well as to the utilization of subjects studied in other universities (national and foreign) in periods prior to the student's admission to the courses at our university. Currently, the utilization depends on the academic coordinators of the courses, who analyse the documentation issued by the partner universities, find similarities in workload and content, and validate the recognition and insertion of the subjects in the students' transcripts. The only restrictions are determined by the regulations of the Ministry of Education, which require a minimum of 75% coincidence of course load and coincidence of content in the description of the syllabus, with no concern for the similarity of pedagogical objectives and skills to be obtained by students.

Responsible for the academic management of mobilities and for the processes of validation and recognition of courses taken in exchange

Most of the Academic Coordinators at our university do not have an exact understanding of the differences and similarities between the credit system used by UFRJ to structure its courses and the ECTS system adopted by its partners in Europe after the Bologna agreement. This misunderstanding is the result of the greatest difficulty in terms of taking advantage of the studies of our exchange students, since the divergence of effective teaching hours in the classroom is understood as an impediment to meeting the rule of 75% equivalence. Since the ECTS system computes a small number of hours of effective teaching in the classroom, adding to the total number of hours computed for each subject all the hours spent by the student to understand the contents and develop skills, and focusing its pedagogical effort so that the student achieves the specified training objectives, the differences between this pedagogic philosophy and the credit system (based on class attendance to obtain the effective workload determined and assessment of understanding of content pre-defined in the syllabus) interferes with understanding of the similarities between the two qualifications offered and the correct pairing of subjects to formulate equivalences and the due use of studies undertaken.

At the moment we are making efforts to disseminate among the academic coordinators at UFRJ the information regarding the problem described, broadening the understanding of the ECTS system, aiming for these professors to have a better understanding of things and making it possible to improve the current use of the subjects studied by the exchange students. The development of subject pairing grids that enable quick recognition is one of the points being worked on, and should evolve greatly after the intended perception change. Once these tools have been developed, the study planning processes of future exchange students will be able to be carried out with an accurate assessment of their performance upon their return from their periods of study.

At present there is an effort of the General Superintendence of International Relations to build in conjunction with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies a draft resolution to be submitted to the Undergraduate Education Council so that such actions are regulated in Council resolutions that will serve as procedural parameters for the use of exchange studies.

When the project began, most of the academic units at UFRJ did not have formalized Internationalization Coordinators among their staff. For two years

now, we have persisted in advising directors to appoint a professor for the position, with the aim of forming a network of Academic Coordinators who guide students and professors in internationalization procedures, including mobility planning and the consequent recognition and use of studies by students.

Improve the mechanisms for transparency of information

The website of the General Superintendence of International Relations is in the process of being redesigned, since the analysis of the current one has made it evident that the low degree of intuitiveness makes it difficult to access information. In the reformulation is planned the creation of an area for foreign students, in which the largest volume of information will be detailed and the connection with the information already existing in our system will be offered in a friendly way and designed with the best parameters of user experience.

Improve data recording and enable the entry of information into student academic records

The current system of enrolment in subjects at UFRJ (SIGA - Integrated System of Academic Management) already allows the entry of all data related to the exchanges in the students' transcripts, since there are spaces for notes that are not usually filled and can be used for this purpose. This possibility was noted by the professor who participated in the training carried out by professionals from Ghent University. For this resource to be exploited and enable the full entry of data on the subjects studied during exchange periods, it is only necessary to establish standardized procedures for course coordinators and academic secretariat staff in order to guide how to perform this type of annotation, which will be encouraged through the production of a document in the format of a primer to guide all staff in administrative functions, and soon standardized through a resolution to be approved by the Teaching and Graduation Council of UFRJ.

Facilitate early dialogue between administrative and academic officers

Prior to the Rec-Mat project there were already well-established exchange relations between some academic units of UFRJ and UPorto, actions that generated some grids for the use of subjects in certain areas of knowledge with good functioning for the full use of studies. It is our intention at the present moment to establish grids in the courses of Journalism, Chemical Engineering, Biopro-

cess Engineering and Pedagogy that allow the fast processing of processes of utilization of studies in interchange in these courses in function of the Rec-Mat project. For such we have already started the establishment of direct relations between the Academic Coordinators of the courses of both universities, so that these grids can be built in a solid and definitive way. The production of such a resource will facilitate the formulation of similar grids with the other European universities involved in the project. Based on the grids established with one of the partners, the intention is to establish standards for the use of studies that can be applied to all the other universities in the countries where these partners are located.

Allow the equivalence of degrees in the recognition of courses taken in exchange between partner universities

Regarding the entry of the degrees obtained and the calculation of their equivalence between the different scoring systems of the partner universities, it is worth informing that at UFRJ, the existing norm determines that any equivalence obtained by the student, in whatever modality, has its inclusion in the student's official transcript made with an entry without a degree. In place of the degree obtained, the letter "T" is inserted (indicating transferred content), the credits obtained by the student in these processes count towards the completion of the course and obtaining the final degree, but do not interfere in the calculation of the student's performance coefficient (general average). It is possible that the grades obtained by the student are informed in his/her final transcript, through the solution presented for the entry of information regarding the subjects taken in exchange periods, but the use of these scores for the calculation of the student's performance coefficient depends on the approval of an alteration in the norms that establish this calculation by the Undergraduate Education Council of UFRJ.

UNESP

The Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (Paulista State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho – Unesp) is a partner of the Erasmus+ Rec Mat Project, coordinated by the University of Porto.

The project includes a work line (WP4) that aims to generate proposals to improve the recognition of internationalisation actions carried out by students and teacher-researchers from the participating universities.

To this end, an assessment of the current state of academic recognition in a group of universities in Brazil and Argentina was carried out, and based on this information, a document was prepared that includes a series of general recommendations on the improvement of regulations and procedures in academic recognition in international student mobility, as well as in the formal recognition of the value of internationalisation for teachers at the institutional level.

After analysis of the recommendations made within the REC-MAT by the External Relations Advisory of Unesp team, we sought ways to facilitate and de-burocratize academic recognition in the Institution.

The Assessoria de Relações Externas (External Relations Office), was established in 1993 and since then has been working in the area of international cooperation, promoting cultural and scientific exchange with foreign institutions. Aiming to structure and regulate the exchange of undergraduate students were elaborated in recent years the institutional resolutions of academic mobility. Some considerations about these documents are presented below.

Official rules governing mobility and recognition:

Unesp has six resolutions that ensure the recognition of academic activities developed in Foreign Institutions in the Academic Mobility Programme.

The first resolution was created in 2010 and has already undergone some adjustments and changes in 2011 and 2014. With the development of the Rec Mat project and the analyses developed by WP 4 we verified the need to carry out a new analysis of our Exchange resolution. Thus, the resolution is again under analysis so that new improvements can be introduced.

Among the points on which we are working are the maximum period in which the student can stay an exchange. This period was changed from 3 to 4 semesters, seeking to enable the student to carry out a period of exchange, research, and internship.

The procedure for the Study Contract to be used to assure the complete substitution of the curricular components foreseen at Unesp for the period that the student is in exchange was improved. If the contract is approved and the student passes the components, they will be automatically used (after proof). If the Course Council considers that the Study Contract cannot be used to completely substitute the curricular components of the semester, these can be eval-

uated individually and prior to the exchange, to be used as compulsory or optional subjects.

With these changes we want to avoid that the student has losses in having to take subjects at Unesp to compensate what was not validated.

We indicate that the Course Councils should consider, in the approval of the Study Contracts, the equivalence of competences and skills to be acquired by the students, when comparing Unesp and exchange subjects, as well as the similarity of the total workload of the period that the student should take at Unesp and the exchange period, regardless of the individual workloads of the subjects. It was explained that there should not be a comparison between subjects and their contents. The analysis should be focused on skills and competences.

An Academic Tutor, who is a teacher on the course, will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the activities foreseen in the Learning Agreement and approving any changes.

Facilitate early dialogue between administrative and academic officers:

In March 2021 we started an initiative to bring the External Relations Office closer to the Local Internationalisation Committees and Undergraduate and Graduate Course Coordinators. With monthly meetings we seek to address issues related and of interest to the academic community. Among the topics addressed so far are:

• Priorities for the internationalisation of the university

• BRaVE programme and Virtual Mobility

• Presentation of the PLIU – Unesp´s English Language Programme: internationalisation, training, and transversality

• Courses offered in other languages at Unesp

• Internationalisation of Graduation: Functionalities and facilities offered by the System of Mobility and Integration into SISGRAD

• Internationalization of Graduate Studies: Features and facilities offered by the Internationalization System of Graduate Studies and Intelligence

System PrInt

• "How to deepen Unesp' s internationalisation actions?"

Improving the mechanisms for transparency of information:

Due to the great interest of our students and former students in doing an exchange or post-graduation course abroad we saw the need to elaborate a document where we explain in detail the grading system used at Unesp, as well as the acronyms and information that appear in our students' transcripts. We have also included information on the equivalence of Unesp credits to ECTS.

The 'Unesp Grading System' was elaborated by the Assessoria de Relações Externas (External Relations Office) in partnership with the Pró-Reitoria de Graduação (Dean of Undergraduate Studies) and is in the final stages of approval to be published on our website in English and Spanish.

UNL

The Universidad Nacional del Litoral (UNL) participates in the Rec-Mat Project (Recognition-Matters), coordinated by the University of Porto. The project includes a line of work (WP4) aimed at generating proposals to improve the recognition of internationalisation actions carried out by students and teachers/researchers in the Argentinean and Brazilian universities participating in the project. To this end, an assessment of the current situation of academic recognition in a group of universities in Brazil and Argentina, among which are the institutions participating in REC-MAT, has been carried out, and on the basis of this information a document was drawn up which includes a series of general recommendations for improving the regulations and procedures for academic recognition in the international mobility of students, as well as the formal recognition of the value of internationalisation for teaching staff at the institutional level.

The recommendations elaborated in the framework of REC-MAT have been analysed and evaluated by UNL's internationalisation management staff and compared with the official rules and procedures of the Institution. As a result of this analysis, the present report has been prepared with the aim of improving the conditions for academic recognition at the institution.

The UNL has been developing systematic internationalisation activities since the mid-1990s, when it defined a specific policy and created an ad-hoc administrative structure. Thus, for more than 20 years, numerous students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff have been involved in countless academic programmes and activities of an international nature, as a result of which the UNL has become a national and regional reference in institutional internationalisation policies.

ACADEMIC RECOGNITION IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

International student mobility is a priority line of action for the UNL. In fact, since 1999 it has developed a profuse action of exchanges with higher education institutions in the rest of the world. Thus, student mobility has been growing year by year, always bearing in mind the basic concept of recognition of the studies that UNL students carry out abroad.

Early in 1999, the UNL approved the creation of PROINMES (International Student Mobility Programme), through which more than 3000 students of the Institution have spent a period of study abroad, most of them with financial aid provided by the UNL itself. The mobilities are framed in institutional agreements, either by bilateral agreements with HEIs from other countries, or by the participation of the Institution in International Programmes (ERASMUS Programmes of the EU, ARFITEC Programme -Argentina-France Technology-, Iberoamerica Scholarship Programme of Santander Universities, MARCA Mercosur Programme, OEI's Academic Exchange and Mobility Programme -PIMA-, IAESTE Programme), or through university network programmes (AUGM's "Student Scale" Programme, UDUAL's PAME Academic Student Mobility Programme, JIMA Programme -Mexico-Argentina-, MACA Programme -Colombia-Argentina-).

As mentioned above, the UNL carries out this internationalization action in a systematic, institutional, and organized manner. It is regulated by the following regulations of the Institution, approved by its highest governing body:

- Regulations of the International Student Mobility Programme (PROINMES). Approved in 1999, it defines the objective and generates a general regulation to facilitate student mobility, accelerating the recognition of credits, degrees, studies, and diplomas, from the perspective of mutual trust between institutions under the concept of quality equivalences.

- Regulation of academic-administrative procedures linked to the management of PROINMES (SC Res. n° 125/2015). It renews and completes the specific regulations for student mobility. Among other things, it imposes the principle that the academic activities carried out during the mobility period "represent a significant advance in the student's academic training", explains the actions to be taken after the exchange period, including the recognition of the subjects or curricular activities approved by the student at the host university, and defines the mandatory recognition of those academic activities included in the Learning Agreement, according to the administrative procedures in force in the respective Academic Unit (a copy of the Resolution is attached).

- Management system for exchange students (GEA). The UNL has developed a student mobility management portal for both "incoming" and "outgoing" students. In the case of the GEA for UNL's own students, the system includes the global management that a student must carry out, from registration as an applicant for mobility places to the management of recognition in their Academic Unit.

The following is a summary of the general recommendations on good practice in academic recognition in student mobility presented in the WP4 Report of the Rec-mat project, and the level of development and compliance at UNL:

REC-MAT RECOMMENDATIONS	SITUATION IN THE UNS
Each university must define official rules governing mobility and recognition.	UNL has clear and comprehensive regulations on the subject.
Each university should designate institutional and academic authorities specifically in charge of responsible for managing student mobility and for carrying out the corresponding recognition.	UNL has a very comprehensive management structure, with a general responsible for student mobility, a specific office with an adequate number of experienced staff, administrative mobility delegates in each faculty and academic mobility coordinators in each degree programme.

Each university should promote greater information transparency.	The UNL offers clear and complete information on its academic offer, the contents of the courses, the conditions to be fulfilled by foreign and home students in order to access mobility, etc. The information is summarised in the GEA System.
Each university should promote and facilitate prior dialogue between the administrative and academic coordinators of the sending and host universities and the student himself/herself.	This recommendation is not fully implemented. In spite of the training efforts aimed at degree/title coordinators at the university, the prior dialogue is not fully implemented, mainly because there are no reciprocal efforts at the partner university.
Each university should streamline the processes for student registration and monitoring (so that they are less bureaucratic).	The UNL uses the GEA system, operational for several years, which provides adequate IT support in the management of student mobility by facilitating the registration and monitoring of activities.
Each university must define a system that allows comparison of its grading system with those of its partner universities.	Comparative tables of grading systems exist in university network programmes (PILA, AUGM), but not in bilateral agreements. UNL does not have its own criteria for the conversion of qualifications

Based on the recommendations set out in the REC-MAT project, and the comparison with the standards and practices developed by UNL and set out above, the following action plan is proposed to improve academic recognition actions and the quality of student mobility in the institution:

- Consolidate the figure of student tutoring, for pre and during mobility. Although the UNL Mentoring Club exists, its organization is informal, so a specific regulation will be developed to organize the activities and at the same time allow the issuing of a specific certification to the participating students.

- The UNL is currently in the process of updating the curricula of most of its degree courses. Within this framework of reforms, it has been decided to develop actions aimed at incorporating the international dimension in the new curricula, so that exchange experiences are visibly expressed as a "transversal training path" developed outside the institutional environment (national or foreign). In addition, the possibility of registering these experiences in the institution's IT/administrative systems will be enabled (see UNL report/proposal for WP5).

- There is a project for a common elective course for all foreign exchange students, which has already been approved by the Higher Council of the UNL. Its implementation has been delayed due to the COVID19 pandemic, and it is expected to start in 2022.

- The UNL offers a course in Spanish as a Foreign Language, aimed at exchange students who do not have Spanish as their mother tongue. Since its creation, this course has been taught in classroom mode. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, it has been implemented virtually, with the additional benefit of allowing students to take it before they travel to Santa Fe for their period of study.

On the other hand, the Report of WP4 of the Rec-mat Project makes a recommendation no longer referring to a particular institution, but at the level of the university system of the countries, which is the following:

"The Ministries of Education and the Councils of Universities should promote systems that facilitate the comparison of the curricula of university degrees among the different universities and national systems of Higher Education". In this regard, it is important to note that the Argentine Republic has implemented the National Academic Recognition System (SNRA), which covers the entire National University System. This regulation is fully applicable to academic recognition in international student mobility, as it defines a system for measuring curricula in credits, called RTF (Recognition of Training Paths), which, for example, are equivalent to the ECTS credits applied in Europe.

RECOGNITION OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION ACTIVITIES OF TEACHERS/ACADEMICS

In principle, it is recognised that a deficient aspect of the international policies developed by the UNL has been the lack of recognition of the efforts made by teachers and researchers to promote them.

This institutional policy deficit, recognised by UNL authorities when developing the Strategic Plan for Institutional Development 201|0-2019, was particularly evident when the institution participated in the REC-MAT project.

Thus, with the aim of recognising the internationalisation actions carried out by teachers and researchers, the UNL has issued a specific regulation, by resolution of the Higher Council of the UNL No. 232 of 2020 (copy attached), which defines the figure of INTERNATIONAL TEACHER of the UNL, providing, in addition, its registration in the management systems of human resources of the Institution. In this way, the recognition of the international activities carried out by teachers and researchers is promoted, both in their promotion, their professional development and in the competitions in which they participate.

Resolution n° 232 must be accompanied by a specific regulation, to be issued by the Rector of the UNL. These regulations are currently being drafted, taking as main reference the recommendations of the REC-MAT project, which are summarised below:

- Consider postgraduate degrees (Masters or Doctorates) obtained by teachers in foreign universities.

- Consider the teacher's participation in joint projects with foreign institutions (e.g. ERASMUS projects).

- Consider work missions (internships, services to third parties, etc.) carried out by teachers in foreign universities.

- Consider the reception and accompaniment of foreign lecturers during their stay at the University (as part of teaching mobility programmes, such as AUGM Scale, PILA, ERASMUS, etc.).

- Consider representation of the University in activities related to internationalisation.

- Consider the teacher's participation in the organisation of international events.

- Consider the reception of students in your classes (adaptation of study material, presentation of case studies, etc.).

- Consider Tutoring of foreign students

- Consider the activities of internationalisation of the curriculum that the teacher carries out in his/her teaching practice, especially those carried out within the framework of official actions promoted by the university itself.

Consider the activities of internationalisation of the curriculum that the teacher carries out in his/her teaching practice, especially those carried out within the framework of official actions promoted by the university itself.

- Admission tender and promotion in the teaching career.

- Admission tender and categorisation in the career of teacher-researcher

UNS

The Universidad Nacional del Sur (UNS) participates in the Rec-Mat Project (Recognition-Matters), coordinated by the University of Porto. One of the work packages of the project (WP4) aims to generate proposals to improve the recognition of internationalization actions carried out by students and teachers of Brazilian and Argentinean universities that are members of Rec-Mat. For this purpose, the current situation of academic recognition in a group of universities in Brazil and Argentina, among which are the institutions participating in REC-MAT, has been evaluated. On this basis, a document was drawn up detailing a series of general recommendations to improve the regulations and procedures for the academic recognition of activities carried out by students during their international mobility, as well as the formal recognition by the university of the value of internationalization activities for teachers.

The recommendations elaborated in the framework of REC-MAT have been analysed and evaluated by the internationalization management staff of the UNS and by teachers participating in the REC-MAT project, comparing them with the official rules and procedures of the Institution. As a result of this analysis, this report has been prepared with the aim of improving the conditions of academic recognition at the institution.

The UNS develops systematic internationalisation actions in 2007, the year in which the Undersecretariat for Internationalisation was created. This office has coordinated exchange actions and international academic activities involving students, teachers, researchers, and non-teaching staff.

ACADEMIC RECOGNITION IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

Internationalisation is one of the pillars of the UNS Strategic Plan. This internationalisation includes exchange activities for students, teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as internationalisation activities at home. In the specific case of student mobility, since the creation of the Under-Secretariat for Internationalisation, numerous student exchanges have been coordinated with partner universities abroad, activities that have been gradually increasing until 2019. Recognition of the academic work done by students has always been an important point.

Each year two calls for applications are made under the title MUNDO UNS, in which interested students can apply for a period of study abroad in the framework of programmes in which the UNS participates, such as ERASMUS Programmes of the EU, ARFITEC Programme -Argentina-France-Technology-, MARCA Mercosur Programme, IAESTE Programme, I. DEAR -Engineers - Germany-Argentina-, or through university network programmes, such as AUGM's "Escala Estudiantil" programme, the PILA exchange programme with Mexico and Colombia, and numerous bilateral programmes with universities in Europe and America. Students receive financial support for these programmes, some provided by the UNS itself and others by the partner universities.

The UNS carries out these actions in an institutional and organized manner, regulated by regulations issued by its highest governing body. These are the main regulations:

• Selection mechanism for international mobility of undergraduate students. CSU Resolution 555/14. Approved in 2014, it establishes the application mechanism and how to assess the background of undergraduate students interested in participating in an international exchange.

• Recognition of subject equivalences. Resolution CSU 370/13. Establishes the procedures to be followed for the recognition of subjects taken in

foreign institutions as equivalent to UNS subjects. It also establishes the form of the study contract.

• Methodology for the conversion of grades. Resolution CSU 727/15. Establishes an objective way of converting grades obtained in a foreign institution to those corresponding to the UNS.

The following is a summary of the general recommendations on good practice in academic recognition in student mobility presented in the WP4 Report of the REC-MAT project, and the level of development and compliance at UNS:

REC-MAT RECOMMENDATIONS	SITUATION IN THE UNS
Each university must define official rules governing mobility and recognition.	La UNS posee una normativa clara y completa sobre el tema.
Each university should designate specific institutional and academic authorities in charge of managing student mobility and the corresponding recognition.	UNS has an established management structure, with an office responsible for student mobility, and an academic management office in which academic recognition mechanisms have been implemented.
Each university should promote greater transparency of information	The UNS offers complete information on its academic offer, course contents, conditions to be fulfilled by foreign students and by its own students in order to access mobility. The information can be found on the university's website and is also promoted through social networks.
Each university should promote and facilitate prior dialogue between the administrative and academic coordinators of the home and host universities and the student.	This recommendation is met in most exchanges and is the input for the study contracts that students sign prior to their exchanges.

Each university should streamline the processes for student registration and monitoring (so that they are less bureaucratic).	At UNS, these processes are still carried out in an artisanal manner, with little IT support. This needs to be improved.
Each university must define a system that allows comparison of its grading system with those of its partner universities.	UNS has a method of grade conversion established by regulation.

Based on the recommendations set out in the REC-MAT project, and the comparison with the standards and practices developed by the UNS, the following action plan is proposed to improve academic recognition actions and the quality of student mobility in the Institution:

• With the increase in exchanges, it is necessary to obtain IT support for the management and monitoring of exchanges, in the form of a management programme. It is proposed to acquire or generate internally a software for this purpose.

• The UNS offers two subjects of Spanish as a Foreign Language, levels A2 and B1, aimed at exchange students whose mother tongue is not Spanish, and a subject of Argentine Culture. Since its creation, these subjects have been taught in classroom mode. Because of the COVID19 pandemic, they have been implemented in distance mode, with the additional benefit of allowing students to take them before they travel to Bahía Blanca for their period of study. It is proposed to retain at least one of these courses in distance learning format.

On the other hand, the WP4 Report of the Rec-mat Project makes a recommendation referring to the level of the university system of the countries, which is the following:

"The Ministries of Education and the Councils of Universities should promote systems that facilitate the comparison of the curricula of university degrees among the different universities and national systems of Higher Education". In this regard, it is important to note that the Argentine Republic has

implemented the National Academic Recognition System (SNRA), which covers the entire National University System. This regulation is fully applicable to academic recognition in international student mobility, as it defines a system for measuring curricula in credits, called RTF (Recognition of Training Paths), which, for example, are equivalent to the ECTS credits applied in Europe.

RECOGNITION OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION ACTIVITIES OF TEACHERS/ACADEMICS

In principle, it is recognised that a deficient aspect of the international policies developed by the UNS has been the lack of recognition of the effort that teachers and researchers have made in promoting them. Usually, the activities that teachers themselves have carried out abroad are recognised, such as postgraduate degrees obtained in foreign universities, internships, research projects with international counterparts, but it is less usual to recognise their activities in promoting internationalisation, or internationalisation at home. This deficit needs to be addressed.

3. Guidelines for Academic Recognition of Studies

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About the project

The Capacity Building action in the field of higher education of the Erasmus+ Programme aims to support transnational cooperation projects between Programme and Non-EU partner country Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These projects aim to support the modernisation, accessibility and internationalisation of higher education in partner countries and contribute to cooperation between the EU and eligible partner countries.

In this context, the main goal of the Recognition Matters - Rec-Mat project is to contribute **to facilitate and promote student mobility between Latin America (LA) and Europe, reducing the barriers to student mobility related to the academic recognition process**. The consortium has been working towards enabling Latin American Higher Education Institutions to implement fairer and more transparent processes.

The Rec-Mat project intends to:

1. Raise awareness among academic staff in Latin America about the importance of ensuring full academic recognition by:

    a. Eliminating existing prejudices regarding internationalisation;

    b. Eliminating resistance and barriers to full post-mobility recognition and exchanging good practices regarding credit/ unit transfer and fair grade conversion (see glossary below);

    c. Highlighting the benefits of full academic recognition through a peer-to--peer approach;

2. Equip and provide information to Latin American academic and IT staff on concrete ways to promote the implementation of a full recognition process.

3. Contribute to simplify the harmonisation of academic recognition processes among Latin American institutions.

Glossary

Some terms are not equivalent in all countries in Latin America and Europe. Thus, to avoid misunderstandings, the definition of specific words and terms used in the text are listed below, in alphabetical order:

Content of disciplines: Summary of the topics addressed by the disciplines (also described as courses).

Course: In these guidelines, course means discipline or class that should be attended. Each country has its own system of credits, ECTS or units.

Credit: In Brazil, credits mean hours of classes during the week of the course. It does not consider student workload as in ECTS. In Argentina, course credits hours are also used for recognition.

ECTS: European Credit Transfer System, a tool of the European Higher Education Area for making studies and courses more transparent. It helps students to move between countries and to have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognised. ECTS credits represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload.

HEI: Higher Education Institution (organisations providing higher, postsecondary, tertiary and third-level education, such as universities, polytechnics, and institutes of technology.

Learning agreement: Detailed plan of the activities (courses, research, or training) desired for the student mobility. This plan should be signed by responsible authorities of both home and host institutions.

Learning outcomes: The knowledge or skills that students should acquire by the end of their graduation. It helps students understand why that knowledge and those skills will be useful to them. In Brazil learning outcomes are compatible with the definitions of competencies/skills/attitudes, described in the "Lei de Diretrizes e Bases" and the CNE-2001 report, which include these definitions in the curriculum ("Competências/habilidades/atitudes").

Transcript of records: A certificate that contains all the disciplines and corresponding grading performed by the student.

Unit: in Argentina, a unit is a particular subset of contents within a course.

Workload: An estimation of the time the individual needs to complete her/his learning activity to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Perceptions from different countries

It is important to highlight that there are significant differences in how European and Latin American students approach international mobility. In Latin American culture, lengthening the study time due to an international mobility is not perceived as a major obstacle, a vastly different perspective from that of European students, for whom it is important to graduate in the expected period of time.

WP5 - Implementation of pilot mobility cases by Working Groups

Context

The "**pilot mobility cases**" were core activities of the Rec-Mat project, as they attempted to test and provide academic coordinators with evidence for the advantages of ensuring full academic recognition, as well as possible ways to achieve it.

The consortium selected Latin American students from 5 broad study areas (Education; Health and Welfare; Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction; Natural Sciences and Social Sciences), who were already nominated to undertake a mobility period in one of the EU Rec-Mat partner institutions. Each of these cases was monitored by a specific Working Group, which was comprised of four people[1] :

• the course coordinator at the home Latin American HEI,

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[1] Whenever possible, also an international officer at the Host European HEI has integrated the Working Group.

• the course coordinator at the host European HEI,

• an international officer at the home Latin American HEI,

• the professor from the corresponding broad field of study who had participated in the training organised by the project in Valladolid (December 2018).

The professor who had participated in the training monitored the entire process, explaining concepts and procedures that (s)he learnt from this experience, bringing new approaches to the process. All training participants acted as **multiplying agents** within their institution.

It is important to highlight the **peer-to-peer approach**, which is one of this project's assets. The international officer also played a crucial role as liaison between the project's activities and the **internal institutional policies/regulations**.

The experiences of Rec-Mat partners showed that a lack of trust in students' mobility and partner universities might be the result of a fragile process which cannot clearly and unquestionably guarantee that:

• The courses chosen by the students in the host institutions are relevant for their studies at home;

• The marks or credits gained by the students abroad reflect the exact quality of the student's work;

• The students have obtained at the host institution the learning outcomes required by the home institution.

In this context, to further develop academic mobility (exchanges of students and professors), it is imperative to modify attitudes and politically reinforce the importance of international experiences in teaching and learning. Additionally, to build trust at the institutional level, it is necessary to improve and consolidate administrative processes, creating greater fairness and transparency.

Finally, it is also important to build knowledge of the teaching system (grade scales, hours of classes and the respective credits) of partner Institutions, boost

partnerships, reinforce trust and smooth student mobility processes.

The goal of the Working Groups was to monitor the entire mobility process from the preparation stage (Learning Agreement) to the post-mobility stage (transcript of records issued by the Host HEI and recognition process at the home HEI), always basing its activity on these guidelines.

Preamble

These guidelines aimed to be a reference document for the Working Groups that were set up to follow the pilot mobility cases. We also believe these guidelines will be a useful tool for any person or institution that intends to improve their academic recognition process and/or wants to delve into the subject.

The guidelines are designed to be descriptive, with all the necessary steps and elements to ensure the academic success of the mobility, from the beginning of the selection process until the academic recognition process is concluded. This process starts at the stage of the student's application and ends with the process of grade conversion, once the student's mobility period is over.

Full academic recognition is essential for student mobility, as it allows the period of study abroad to replace a period of study at the home institution, although the content of the study programme may be different, provided it is duly agreed in advance between the parties involved (student, home and host HEIs). The mobility period abroad shall not lead to a delay in graduation, a condition that is valuable mainly for European students. It is desirable that mobility should be counted towards the student's degree without any additional work by the student or assessment of the student.

The core principle in the academic recognition process is that the study plan abroad does not need to be the same as the study plan at home, but **complementary** to it. To fully take advantage of the different offerings, recognition should consider the **whole sum of learning activities** rather than a one-to-one recognition of course units. In this context, recognition should focus on the **learning outcomes** more than on the specific subjects.

It is particularly relevant to inform and update professors and programme directors about the student mobility processes, and to modify and explain the teaching-learning practices in force at the host HEI, as well as the grading system used during mobility preparation. Revalidation of the activities means credits transfer from host institution to home institution curriculum and constitute fair grade conversion/transparency.

It is important to highlight that the grading and credit/ECTS systems could be completely different scales, so the conversion of grade and credits transfer should be done carefully. Knowledge and a mutual understanding of the partners' systems are pivotal for fairness and transparency of the academic recognition process.

Students undertaking mobility abroad should return with quality experience, singular and complementary to that offered by their home degree. To allow a successful and rewarding experience, students must benefit from **fair grade conversion/transparency** and **credits transfer**, so that mobility does not delay the student's graduation. It is also important to avoid any negative impact on their academic performance or employability (an important issue mainly for the European system).

Mobility process and its timing

The figure below represents, in general terms, the expected sequence and necessary timing for student mobility. Note that the academic recognition process does not only occur at the end of mobility. The careful choice of courses to be included in the learning agreement is already part of the recognition process. From this stage on, all steps are important for the success of academic recognition.
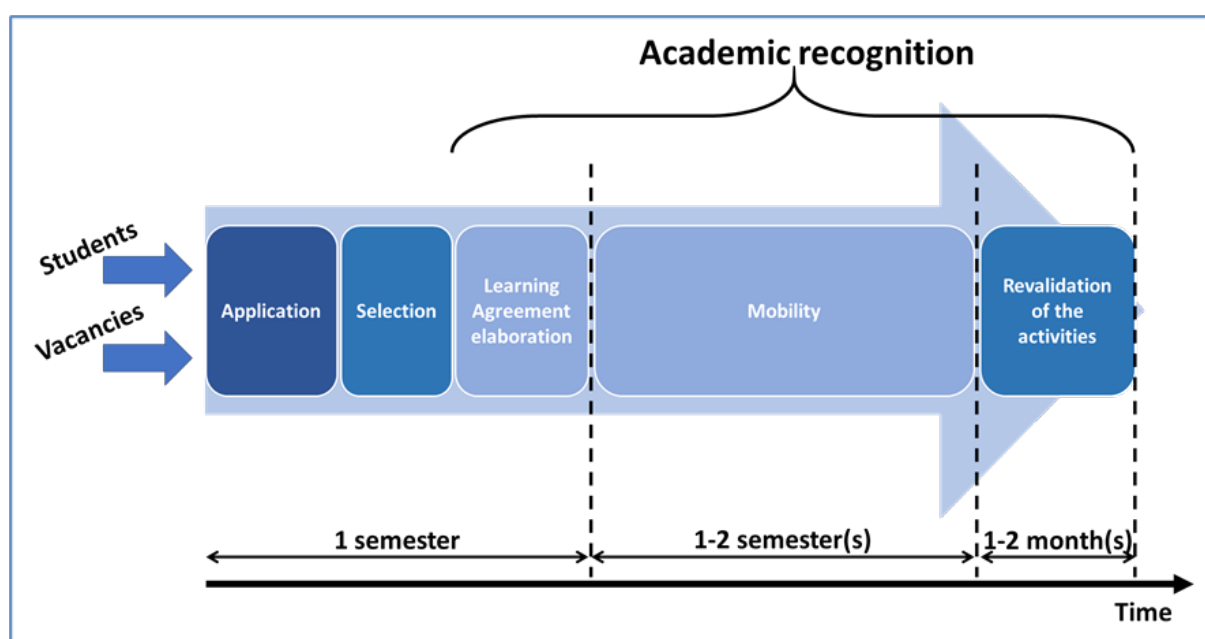

Figure 1: The mobility process and its timing

Key actors involved in academic recognition

To guarantee full academic recognition for the mobility, there are key actors in each of the HEIs involved. The academic recognition process requires teamwork: the work of one actor cannot be successful without that of the others. The following roles are listed to better understand the the general responsibilities of each person involved. Note that different figures in each institution could play the necessary roles. Thus, **it is essential to know the structure and the actors at the partner institution**. These guidelines take into account only the teaching staff, as described below. However, it is extremely important to highlight the **substan-**

tial contribution of the technical staff (from the international office or from the academic units, as faculties and departments). In many institutions, the work of the technical staff is seminal to the whole process.

The role of different actors in the process (generally):

Institutional Coordinator

• Represents the university (e.g., signs documents as general agreements)

• Manages scholarships (ERASMUS+, Santander, etc.), including funding management

• Harmonises procedures among all faculties (time framework, eligibility, etc.)

• Allocates the mobility flows

Academic Coordinator(s)

• Represents the faculty (e.g., signs documents as learning agreements)

• Harmonises procedures within the faculty

• Allocates the mobility flows (it depends on the HEIs)

• Maintains direct contact with the students (during the preparation, implementation and post-mobility phases).

• Prepares the learning agreements with students, ensuring complementarity of the training.

• Responsible for academic recognition

Scientific Coordinator(s)

• Represents the BSc/MSc/PhD program.

• Could be the director of the programme (cycle of studies) or someone representing him/her.

• Person responsible for students' mobility.

• Maintains direct contact with the students (during the preparation, implementation and post-mobility phases).

• Prepares the learning agreements with students, ensuring complementarity of the training.

• Allocates the mobility flows (in some institutions it is the responsibility of the scientific coordinator).

• Responsible for academic recognition

See Appendix 1 for further details on the structure and different actors at each Rec-Mat partner Each institution has its own structure.

The step-by-step process of academic recognition

1. Academic recognition commitment

Study plan/Learning agreement

The first step of the process consists of finding **a correspondence complementarity between the contents**, matching the disciplines/course units at the home institution with the ones offered at the host institution. The Learning Agreement sets out the programme of studies to be followed abroad and commits the three parties: **the student, the home** institution and **the host institutions** before the start of the exchange. This document guarantees the student will acquire essential competencies and makes sure (s)he receives recognition for the activities successfully completed abroad before the beginning of the mobility.

It must establish the educational components that will be replaced in the student's degree upon successful completion of the study programme abroad.

How to complete the Learning Agreement

The student completes the application form (typically online) and has the option to fill in a draft of the Learning Agreement together with other application documents (academic record, CV, personal documents).

Prior to filling in the application data, the student must articulate the study plan and respective workload with the home-institution coordinator responsible for his/her mobility. The school calendar and faculty of the host HEI should be consulted to facilitate the process.

The subjects to be taken should be carefully chosen by the student from the course catalogue, made available by the host HEI/faculty. The course catalogue should have detailed information on each subject individually (objectives, programme/contents, learning outcomes, bibliography, language of instruction, evaluation). This choice of subjects is done together with the professor responsible for the mobility and/or the director of the course.

Once the student is selected (during the preparation of mobility phase), the student must define and agree on the Study Plan to be carried out, and a Learning Agreement will be drawn up, which will be signed by the student and the above-mentioned coordinators, both from the home and host Institutions. This is a recognition plan that correlates the subjects completed abroad with the subjects that will be recognized upon their return.

It is important that the student find a study plan compatible with his/her course. For this, all key actors should consider that no two study plans are alike, and that all parties should be flexible in this phase. It is strongly recommended that the educational components to replace or complement the curriculum should be discussed between the coordinators and should be included in the learning agreement.

Academic recognition commitment

In discussing the Learning Agreement in advance, both the student and the home institution commit to academic recognition. . If the student successfully concludes the disciplines/ curricular units abroad, the corresponding credits

will be recognised in his/her academic record at the home institution. If only part of the course units is successfully concluded, the recognition of credits should be proportional to the total.

When necessary, coordinators may and should intervene, to ensure that the commitment is fully respected. Faculty is not obliged to recognise course units that were not previously agreed upon and established in this document or included in a formal request for change/amendment of the Learning Agreement, duly signed by all parties involved. This practice will be at the discretion of each HEI and must be coherent with the internal procedures in force.

2. Workload equivalence

The differences between national systems can lead to problems with the recognition of educational qualifications from other countries. A greater **transparency and comprehension** of the partner system will simplify the recognition of studies done abroad.

Even if it is possible to **find equivalent credit/units** between two different Institutions, it is essential to match the workload of those credits/units. For this reason, the second step must happen almost in parallel with the first one.

At this stage, an analysis of the workload required to achieve the expected outcomes of the chosen disciplines/curricular units should be done. The workload may differ from one higher-educational system to another. It is crucial to acknowledge that the workload can refer to the amount of time a student needs to complete the learning activities (such as self-study, seminars, projects, or exams) necessary to achieve the course outcomes. It is also important to realise that the hours/credits per semester or per academic year may be fixed or variable. . All these aspects need to be contemplated in the analysis performed.

3. Establishment of deadlines for changes/amendments

This step happens when both the content and the workload of the course units' equivalence is found and the application is formally accepted by the home institution.

It is possible that later, namely after arrival at the host institution, the study plan may need to be revised . Despite all proposed subjects being previously agreed upon by the responsible coordinators , this situation happens quite often, due to schedule overlap, closed courses, lack of vacancies, etc. It is essential to consider these new details and make all needed adjustments as soon as possible.

At this stage, deadlines for changes/amendments to the Learning Agreement should be defined (within a period of 1 to 3 months) with a new document stating the amendment. This document should be signed and agreed upon and its provisions respected by all parties.

During the pilot mobility cases it was observed that students felt supported by the Working Groups, reducing the difficulties that often occur upon encountering the setbacks described above (overlap of schedules, lack of vacancies, etc.). This further reinforces the importance of careful monitoring by the coordinators of both institutions.

4. The Transcript of Records

The Transcript of Records (ToR) is a certificate issued by each EU host institution upon completion of the study plan. This document certifies all attendance records and studies performed, listing all courses taken alongside the corresponding ECTS credits, the national or local credits (if applicable), the grades obtained (according to the national scale) and the ECTS grades awarded.

This document, which is a prerequisite of the ECTS rules conveyed by the European Commission, is part of the mobility application for European HEIs, since it includes the course units completed by the student.

The EU HEI ToR contains:

- The course unit code (the code the host institution gives to a specific academic course)

- The title of the courses the student has attended at the host institution

- The duration of the course (if one semester or two)

- The local grade

- The ECTS credits the student has earned by passing the exam

Because Latin American HEIs do not use the ECTS system, the transcript of records should include an explanation of the credit and grading systems used. Normally, the ToR is filled out once the student has passed all the exams included in the Learning Agreement.

Document delivery to sending organization

After returning to his/her home country, the student should deliver the documents attesting to the completion of his/her mobility period (certificate of study period) to the home institution. After the grading period has finished, the host institution will mail or email the ToR (see above) to the student and the home HEI. The students should also commit to delivering this document to the responsible person at the home institution, and to starting the last phase of the recognition process.

5. Credit Revalidation

The committee responsible for the credit revalidation of the mobility at the home institution should analyse and take into consideration the documents delivered by the host HEI and by the student. Once again, familiarity with the grading system of the host HEI is strongly recommended, in order to conclude the process of recognition in a fair and timely manner. HEI 2 is an informative table containing all data about the grading system of Rec-mat's partner institutions.

It is important to emphasise that **this table should not be used** comparatively, sincefair grade conversion is not a simplistic comparative analysis of various grading systems. Each institution has its own perception of grading and can use different criteria depending on the situation (e.g., bilateral partnership or multilateral partnership, or simply do not use grade conversion after the mobility).

Differences between the LA and European schedule systems for credit/unit transfer:

The ECTS (European Credit Transfer System)

The ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) is an instrument whose purpose is to create transparency, establish conditions of approximation between HEIs and increase the students' options for their period of study abroad.

The ECTS credits represent, in the form of a value between 1 and 60, the workload (in hours) required to complete a course unit, a semester or a full academic year. Each course unit is assigned a number, depending on required workload, which includes classes, practical work, seminars, individual work and exams or other forms of assessment.

- 1 ECTS = 25 to 30 hours of workload.

To obtain full recognition at their home institution, students must complete the same workload abroad as they would during that same period at their home institutions. Or they must complete the credits necessary to ensure the agreed-d-upon correspondence.

The value of the study plans must be taken into consideration whenever an equivalent discipline is sought at the host institution.

Each academic year of any study plan at an EU HEI corresponds to a total of 60 ECTS credits:

- 60 ECTS credits represent the total of 1 year of studies

- 30 ECTS credits are, as a general rule, equivalent to 1 semester

Brazilian credit system

In Brazil, the national curricular directives define, for each graduate course, the minimum and maximum class hours. Thus, the time spent inside classes is used to consider the quantity of semester hours. It does not consider the student's workload outside classes. This is the major difference from the ECTS system. Moreover, each accredited HEI can choose how to distribute the overall number of class hours among disciplines and semesters. For this reason, the awarding of credits can change from university to university and even within a given university.

On average, credit for any discipline is calculated by the class hours per week. Generally, there are differences between theoretical and practical classes, where 2 hours of practical classes correspond to 1 hour of theoretical classes. Practical classes include laboratory work, problem solving, and field work. In general, the minimum number of credits is 6 per semester and the maximum is 32. One credit represents 15 semester hours of theoretical classes in or 30 hours of practical hours, which comprises approximately 400 hours of classes.

Argentinean system

Courses have a defined duration measured in hours spent in class. Most courses include theoretical and practical classes. Practical classes include laboratory work, problem solving sessions, and field work. The time students will need to invest in home study, report elaboration and other activities performed outside the classroom is not taken into account, a big difference from the ECTS system. A full semester consists of approximately 400 hours of theoretical and practical classes. An internal recognition system was implemented which was voluntarily signed by most of the HEIs in Argentine. This system includes classes, practical work, seminars, and individual work, with similarities to ECTS credits.

Conclusions from the experience of the Working Groups:

The established WGs were important to ensuring a frequent and useful communication between partners (students and coordinators). Students welcomed being monitored by faculty, as it made them feel supported by their university. In general, continual follow-up was not a recurrent practice before the project. It was observed that without this follow-up, late changes in the learning agreements, in general, occurred with no previous agreement between the involved parties (student, home and host HEIs), which could create an obstacle for full academic recognition.

Another possible barrier is the grade conversion because there are different perceptions about grading systems in each institution. For example, in some Brazilian institutions there is no grade conversion after student mobility, only the transfer of credit/hours is considered and registered in the student's curriculum. For EU and Argentinean institutions, grade conversion is always carried out and registered in the student's records. In this way, the Rec-Mat project triggered internal discussions at UFRJ, for example, where the importance of grade conversion and their recording in the student's transcript is currently being discussed. Transparency of information and official registration of the data highlights the student's success abroad, emphasising the skills acquired during mobility.

The Rec-Mat project brought to light important structural differences in each country, mainly in grading and credit/ECTS systems. The knowledge acquired throughout the project highlights the importance of understanding the partner's system. In addition, participants reported a need to standardise academic recognition processes within each institution, since different faculties at the same university could have different ways of achieving academic recognition (some more than others). Therefore, it is strongly suggested that HEIs interested in full academic recognition should equip their academic and administrative staff by disseminating the activities presented here. Through further internal discussion, HEIs can create regulations that will promote the standardisation desired for facilitating full recognition of the international student mobility.

The Rec-Mat project produced a MOOC for successful academic recognition. MOOC is a massive open online course (MOOC) for delivering online learning content for a huge number of people interested in its content. In this MOOC, important concepts for academic recognition not elaborated in this guide were explained, or instance, the description of partner countries' pedagogical methods. Student-centred learning and learning outcomes are characteristic features of the EU HEIs. In contrast, LA HEIs emphasise a teacher-centred learning, and the concept of learning outcomes is not the same.

The online address of the Rec-Mat MOOC can be found in the following site: https://academia.up.pt/lms/theme/academia/pages/courseinfo.php?id=282

APPENDIX 1: Table presenting the roles of the different actors at each HEI

Country	HEI	Institutional Coordinator	Academic Coordinator(s)	Scientific Coordinator(s)
ARG	UNL	• Leads International Office and internationalisation process on behalf of the Rector. • Manages international scholarships and grants • Harmonises internationalisation procedures among all faculties. • Responsible for bilateral agreements and international networks participation.	**At the central level:** • Interacts with his/her peers at partner universities. • Supports the academic coordinators at each academic unit. • Is in direct contact with the students (incoming and outgoing). **At the faculty level:** • Responsible for signing Learning Agreement and for guaranteeing academic recognition after the mobility • Supports students throughout the mobility process.	This role does not formally exist at UNL; if for any reason a scientific coordinator is nominated, (s)he interacts with the Academic Coordinator to support the students or scholars. • Prepares the learning or working agreements with students or scholars. • Contacts directly with the students or scholars.
	UNS	Internationalisation or Academic Secretary	Faculty member, usually the Academic Department Director or Academic Secretary	Faculty member, usually the Academic Department Director or Academic Secretary

BEL	UGent	**At the central level:** • Represents the International Relations Office. • Manages scholarships. • Harmonises procedures among all faculties. • Responsible for bilateral agreements. **At the faculty level:** • Supports the academic coordinators. • Is in direct contact with the students.	Faculty member responsible for signing learning agreement and for guaranteeing academic recognition after the mobility	Faculty member responsible for the so-called Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee(s) has the authority to award exemptions, personalised learning tracks, elective course units and contracts to obtain credits
BRA	UFRJ	**Director of the International Relations Office (Represents the university)** • Manages all incoming and outgoing mobility at graduate level. • Harmonises procedures among all faculties. • Allocates the mobility flows for the whole university. **The International Office staff:** • Is in direct contact with the students.	**Faculty member, usually the coordinator for the undergraduate course** • Harmonises procedures within the faculty. • Allocates the mobility flows. • Person responsible for students' mobility. • Is in direct contact with the students. • Responsible for signing Learning Agreement and for guaranteeing academic recognition after the mobility.	**Faculty member that represents the BSc/MSc/PhD program, usually coordinator of graduate program or of international affairs.** • Is in direct contact with the students. • Responsible for signing Learning Agreement and for guaranteeing academic recognition after the mobility.

	UNESP	**The International Office:** • Represents the university (Associate Provost for international affairs). • Manages all incoming and outgoing mobility at graduate level. • Organise internal calls to select students for exchange, with or without scholarship. • Assist faculty with international projects and cooperation agreements. • Allocates the mobility flows. • Is in direct contact with the students. • Coordinate the local international offices in the 34 campuses of UNESP.	**Faculty member, usually the coordinator of the undergraduate program** • Responsible for signing the Learning Agreement and for guaranteeing academic recognition after the mobility. • Assist students in preparing the Learning Agreement.	**Faculty member, usually the coordinator of the graduate program** • Responsible for signing the learning or research agreement. • Assists students during the research.
	UFRGS	There is no figure responsible for 100% of the mobility. The Dean of International Office oversees most of the Erasmus mobility. Graduate student mobility depends on the Vice-President of Graduate Studies. Some mobility programs are managed directly at the Academic level (e.g., Brafitec with France).	**Coordinator of the undergraduate course:** • Responsible for establishing and signing the learning agreement, in direct connection with the student • In charge for the recognition process • At graduate level, the mobility is not credit-oriented. The coordinator of the graduate programs is responsible for the work plan.	• At undergraduate level, a given faculty member helps the students understand the host curriculum, and mediates the contacts with corresponding partner at host HEI. • At graduate level, the Ph.D. adviser helps the student build the work plan.

ESP	UVa	Director of the International Relations Office:	Coordinator of International Relations at each faculty or centre	Academic responsible for bilateral exchanges
		• Responsible for the central management of all the international activities of the UVa	• Responsible at an institutional level for all the bilateral exchanges in their faculty • Responsible for the smooth running of the exchange activities in the faculties • Coordinates international activities and promotes new exchanges and the university's participation in international projects. • Undertakes tasks to support exchange students, such as: • Signing the Learning Agreement drafted by the academic and the student • Transcription of students' marks • Dealing with academic recognition issues	• Responsible for one or more bilateral exchanges, with the following tasks: • Proposing, together with the foreign university, the comparative list of equivalent subjects, prior to the mobility call for applications • Designing and updating the opportunities for mobility, including the academic and language requirements (to be used for the call for applications) • Designing or updating the comparative list of equivalent subjects • Sending the list of selected students to the foreign universities • Providing selected students with the necessary documentation for their registration, accommodation, and language courses at the host university • Completing the Learning Agreement together with the student and proposing the necessary changes of subjects • Transferring the marks obtained by the student into the Spanish qualification system.

		At the Institutional level:	At the faculty level:	Faculty member/ graduate-school member that represents the PhD program (co-tutorial PhD for instance)
FRA	**ULille**	**At the Institutional level:** The direction of international mobilities • Represents the University of Lille in the implementation of mobilities within the framework of European and international exchange programmes. • Manages scholarships. • Harmonises procedures among all the faculties. • Is responsible for bilateral/multilateral agreements.	**At the faculty level:** An academic staff member appointed by each faculty (a kind of local academic coordinator) • Is responsible for signing the Learning Agreement and guarantees (on behalf of his/her faculty) the academic recognition after the mobility. • Is in direct contact with the incoming/outgoing students. • Is the academic link with the partner universities on the pedagogical aspects of student mobilities.	**Faculty member/ graduate-school member that represents the PhD program (co-tutorial PhD for instance)** • Is in direct contact with the students. • Responsible for scientific work • Is in direct contact with the scientists in the partner university.
POR	**UPorto**	Represents the university (The legal representative is the Rector who delegates the institutional coordination of mobilities. The delegation usually involves a rectorate team member for internationalisation (political) and the International Office (executive) • Harmonises procedures among all faculties. • Allocates the mobility flows – for funding/ management of scholarships. • Is in direct contacts with the students.	**Represents the faculty (usually a teacher who is nominated, by the Dean of the Faculty, as "Local Academic Coordinator")** •Harmonises procedures within the faculty. • Ranks the applicants in the system and allocates them to the academic positions available. • Person responsible for students' mobility • Prepares the Learning Agreements with students. • Is in direct contacts with the students.	In some faculties this position does not exist; if a scientific coordinator is nominated, (s)he supports the "general" academic coordinator of that faculty. • Prepares the learning agreements with students • Is in direct contact with the students.

APPENDIX 2: Informative table presenting the grade system of each institution

			Latin América					Europe			
			AR	AR	BR	BR	BR	BE	ES	FR	PT
			UNL	UNS	UNESP	UFRGS	UFRJ	Ughent	Uva	ULIlle	Uporto
			0-10	0-10	0-10	A - D	0-10	0-20	0-10	0-20	0-20
Grading system		Excellent	10	10	10	A	10-9	19-20	9,0 - 10: Sobresaliente	16-20	18-20
		Very Good	9	8-9	9		9-8	16-18	8,0 - 8,9: Notable	14-15	16-17
		Good	8	5-6-7	8	B	8-7	13-15	7,0 - 7,9: Notable	12-13	14-15
		Satisfactory	7	-	7	C	7-6	11-12	6,0 - 6,9: Aprobado	11-12	10-13
		Sufficient	6	4	6		6-5	10	5,0 - 5,9: Aprobado	10-11	
		Passing grade	6	4	5/6/7 depending on the program	C	5	10	5	10	10
		Fail	**less than 6**	**less than 4**	**less than the passing grade of the program**	**D**	**less than 5**	**less than 10**	**less than 5**	**Less than 10**	**less than 10**
Credits system	Usual number of credits per semester		30 RTF	-	24-40	variable 20-28 except Med	15-20 – nocturnal period 21-28 – full period	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS	30 ECTS
	Usual number of credits per year		60 RTF	-	48-80	variable 40-58 except Med	30-40 nocturnal period per year 42-56 full period per year	60 ECTS	60 ECTS	60 ECTS	60 ECTS
Higher Education system	Course Duration in months	Undergraduate	60 months	60 months	4 ou 5 years/average - 40/50 months	48-72 months	48/60/72 months	36 months	48 / 60 / 72 months	36 months	36 months
		Master	48 months	24 months	24 months	24 months	24 months	12 / 24 / 36 months	12 / 18 / 24 months	24 months	24 months
		Doctorate	72 months	60 months	48 months	48 months	48 months	48 months	36 - 60 months	36 months	36 months
	Academic Calendar	1st semester	March-July	March-June	February to June	March-July	March-July	23/09/2019 (AY2019-2020)	09/11/2019 - 07/02/2020	September to January	September to February
		2nd semester	August-December	August-November	August to December	August-december/january	August-December	10/02/2020 (AY2019-2020)	10/02/2020 - 31/07/2020	Mid January to May	February to July

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