

JOINT DEGREES IN GEOGRAPHY HIGHER EDUCATION: POTENTIALITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract

In this text we stress the importance of joint degrees in Geography and go over some forms of organisation and problems that these programmes present in higher education institutions. Joint degrees are a very interesting example of higher education co-operation, with numerous advantages for both participants and society as a whole. They play a fundamental role in constructing a Europe of cultures and knowledge based on an understanding and respect for difference. Joint degrees can facilitate the implementation of the Bologna Process and help carry out the Lisbon Agenda by promoting knowledge, improving student mobility, and enhancing the competitiveness of universities.

We discuss the advantages of joint degrees in general, and those of geography in particular, analyse the most common programme models and consider problems raised by the implementation of joint programmes and, finally, conclude with some suggestions

Keywords: Joint degrees, co-operation, competitiveness, mobility, Bologna Process

1. INTRODUCTION

In this text we stress the importance of joint degrees in Geography and go over some forms of organisation and problems that these programmes present in higher education institutions.

By 'joint degree' we mean a degree awarded after a study programme that has been jointly agreed on by a group of higher education institutions, and which allows students to stay for a period of time in a different university. The main goal of this type of programme is to give students the opportunity to further their education in a

number of institutions, with the added benefit of interactive learning and teaching with students and teachers from different backgrounds. On this account, joint degrees represent a new life-enriching experience and a level of skill acquisition that is hardly achieved without mobility. The concept is chiefly made up of the following points:

- The programme is offered by a network, a specific group of institutions dedicated to its implementation, which has approved its form of organisation.
- After the programme has been

successfully completed, the student will either obtain a degree from the network, or a national degree. The former is the ideal future solution. Meanwhile, universities have been handing out joint unofficial 'certificates' or 'diplomas'.

- Students from each network institution must spend part of their study period at another institution.

- Participation in joint sessions or commissions also requires teacher mobility. Teacher co-operation generally includes organisational aspects and host student supervision, besides teaching.

- All universities have responsibilities towards the programme, be it in receiving host students (courses, fieldwork activities), sending teachers abroad, or belonging to admission, discussion and evaluation commissions. Certain tasks may rotate between universities from one year to the next.

- The programme should be linked to at least one research project that has been developed by all or most of the staff engaged in the teaching programme.

These criteria are not far from those used by A. Rauhvargers (2002: 29) in his pioneering and remarkable study. We have only excluded the question of acknowledging study periods and exams - and their length - held at the partners' institution(s). We believe that recognition should obviously be ascertained, but it is not a relevant dimension for defining the concept. Moreover, Rauhvargers trusts that students stay at the participating institution for comparable lengths of time, a criterion we are wary of.

We have, however, chosen to add as criterion the programme's link to a research project. Although this point is not obligatory for the definition, it is nevertheless very convenient for the success of the programme. Our experience has shown that joint programmes imply extra work for teachers, which has to be compensated. Teaching abroad or doing collective research is quite a suitable way of

doing so. Another motivation for applicants is the students' possible engagement in research.

Articulating the joint programme with a research project constitutes a synergetic move of potential high interest. Students easily acquire new skills and work methods once they are a part of a research environment. Teachers also stand to gain from combining teaching and research, and from sharing experiences with students from various origins. Thus the programmes may help promote better education and proper knowledge in a given field.

We are taking into account 2nd cycle programmes (Master's and PhD's), including the writing of a thesis or dissertation. We may divide these programmes into 2 periods: one for regular courses and another for writing. This last period will normally be spent in the student's home country; therefore the impact of mobility falls chiefly on seminar attendance, approximately 1 academic year of 3 or 4 terms. Ideally courses should span 2 or 3 locations in such a way that all students would have to spend at least one third of their course of study outside their home institution. We shall return to this question later on. As for PhD students, who are allowed more time for their dissertation, thesis research may also be done abroad.

Although joint degrees may engage universities from either a single or different countries, we have reflected more specifically on the outcomes of international (UE) networks. Yet the bulk of our discussion on joint degrees concerns, with minor shifts, national and international networks.

Joint degrees are a very interesting example of higher education co-operation, with numerous advantages for both participants and society as a whole. They play a fundamental role in constructing a Europe of cultures and knowledge based on an understanding and respect for difference. Joint degrees can facilitate the implementation of the Bologna Process and help carry out the Lisbon Agenda by

promoting knowledge, improving student mobility, and enhancing the competitiveness of universities.

We began this section by discussing the advantages of joint degrees in general, and those of geography in particular. The second part will deal with organisational programme models. In the third part we shall briefly consider problems raised by the implementation of joint programmes and, finally, conclude with some suggestions.

2. RELEVANCE OF MOBILITY AND JOINT DEGREES

The supplying of joint programmes by university networks is one way of promoting mobility - not an individual mobility of students who choose to pursue their education in different schools, but one within a coherent and integrated framework. This is also a means of tackling the rising level of competition between universities and departments, and is very alluring to students from third and overseas countries. The international position of the higher education system will be thus enlarged, and rendered more competitive.

Joint programmes naturally receive a positive mention in the documents guiding higher education reform in Europe - stemming from the Bologna Process - since they can contribute towards the achievement of most of the desired goals, and may come to play an important role in the application of this reform. They might also provide important contributions towards the development of the Lisbon Agenda.

Rauhvargers (2002), while stressing the institutional point of view, underlines the fact that joint degrees can help achieve the following Bologna Process goals: (i) joint quality assurance; (ii) degree recognition across the European Higher Education Area; (iii) system convergence and transparency; (iv) student, teacher and researcher mobility; (v) European graduate employability; (vi) the European dimension; (vii) the attractiveness of European

education. We regard the question of meeting the Bologna goals under a slightly different perspective. The Sorbonne Declaration has already emphasised "the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a key way to promote citizens mobility and employability". In the Bologna Declaration we find the objective of "increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of Higher Education". This raises two fundamental and interconnected dimensions of European integration, called forth by Bologna: boosting mobility and competitiveness. This last point is directly related to the Lisbon Agenda. In March 2000 the EU heads of state and governments agreed to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010", which is at the heart of the Lisbon Agenda.

From these documents we are able to sense a concern, on the one hand, for mobility and employability, and on the other, for a highly competitive and knowledge-driven economy. These intentions seem to suit and challenge universities and other higher education institutions. A knowledge-driven economy requires a very high level of quality for education, a strong and continuous relation between corporations and schools, and a high degree of innovation. Let us discuss the potential that joint programmes harbour within this framework.

Above all, due to their very nature, joint degrees contribute towards the mobility of students, teachers and researchers. Participating in a joint programme brings several benefits in terms of scientific/academic as well as personal/social outcomes. Students become acquainted with different teaching methods, and what is more have the opportunity to contact specialists working in their fields of interest and share living experiences in a different environment, both in physical and social terms. For teachers, to take part in a joint programme is an opportunity to share experiences with colleagues from different

backgrounds, discuss diverse forms of organisation, compare different practices, and update their teaching methods. It is also a chance to work with others on research projects provided research and teaching go together; at the very least, it opens space for future projects, since people are already acquainted and have worked together. As we shall see, this link between teaching and research is a well appreciated effect of joint activities.

Indeed, joint programmes offer a number of advantages, such as: (i) developing a coherent scheme of mobility for university students; (ii) establishing thresholds for programmes teaching new subjects, often of interdisciplinary content, thus making better use of scarce resources; (iii) improving joint quality assurance; (iv) responding to competitive new challenges, rendering European education more attractive and improving graduate employability; (v) contributing towards an acknowledgement of otherness (peoples and environments) in Europe. It is hereby clear that joint programmes strongly contribute towards expanding knowledge and qualifying human resources, improving quality in higher education, reinforcing the ties between teaching and research on the one hand, and between these, societal needs, and the requests of the labour market on the other. By bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds who come to share teaching and learning methods in different environments, joint degrees can help raise the level of learning, and what is more, boost European cohesion and citizenship. In terms of growth in personal value, the contact between different teaching methods, lifestyles and cultures, as well as the practice of foreign languages is worth stressing.

2.1. New Teaching and Research Subjects

European universities should be ready to play a decisive role in achieving the goals set for 2010, strengthen their research function, and consolidate the European dimension of their work. To meet these

challenges, the EUA 2003 set up an AGENDA for European Universities, where we can find explicit references to "stepping up targeted networking between institutions at European level as well as joint programme development at all levels as a means of *offering a wide range of study programmes and reaching critical mass in research.*" [own italics].

Joint programmes can mean an opportunity to develop programmes on narrow or novel subjects that have few candidates and researchers. A single institution located in one place has no chance of offering the programme, but a network, by bringing together experts and students from different places, does. Funding problems and pressure to present efficient results, along with a fall in the number of students, makes it hard for a single department /university to offer programmes on 'marginal subjects' or very specialized topics. Combining the strong points of single institutions allows them to set up specialized programmes featuring high quality teachers and infrastructures, as a reaction to competitiveness and the fall in student numbers.

In the Recommendations on joint degrees made at the Berlin Conference of European Higher Education Ministers, September 19th 2003, we also find a concern for the critical mass of certain subjects. "Ministers may wish to work with universities to identify specialist fields in which the European need and benefit is particularly strong, but where only a small number of people will participate in each country".

Knowledge has evolved towards greater specialisation. Most scholars work at the margin of traditional scientific fields, at times having more contact with colleagues from other fields than with those from their own field. Geographical reality, however, is increasingly complex and multi-dimensional - understanding it from a single point of view is hard or even unsatisfactory. Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary work is therefore necessary for building an understanding of our world - at least that is

the case for several social and natural sciences. This is another valid reason for implementing joint degrees: they set research and learning within a diversified and multiple-background approach.

The tendency joint programmes show for interdisciplinary approaches is corroborated by a EUA 2004 study. The additional effort these programmes require is justified by "the advance of knowledge and training of students in an issue that is not adequately addressed in one national context or from the perspective of a single institution". Another important trend this study unravelled was that these programmes serve a particular professional need, that is, they represent an articulation with the job market. Job market trends and employability require either very specialized people (extensive knowledge in very narrow fields) or generalists (people able to work on a subject covering different fields). We feel that joint degrees are able to offer both sorts of training, even though in Geography the latter is most probably best targeted for joint degrees.

2.2. Improving quality through research-teaching relationships

Constructing a Europe of Knowledge, one of the Lisbon Agenda goals, follows the lines of a broad ICT implementation, an increase in education (number of school years completed, life-long learning), and an improvement in the quality of schools, especially in higher education institutions. Joint degrees may move towards this goal by bringing teaching and research together, as well as requiring intensive ICT use as a privileged tool for study and communication. In fact, joint degrees should make intensive use of new information techniques, namely the internet, so as to overcome the constraints of distance.

It is worth mentioning that the spread of joint programmes helps lay down international benchmarks, since the recognition of programmes will require that involved institutions develop international

accreditation and evaluation procedures. This also furthers quality in education.

Reichert and Tauch (2005) have shown that the recent restructuring curricula and its challenges have left teachers with "less time than before to devote to their research activities". The authors consider this is a matter of great concern "in view of the growing awareness at the European level of the need to enhance the attractiveness of research careers and underline the importance of linking the higher education and research agendas". The significance of the rapport between teaching and research as a condition for improving quality is also to be found in the "European Agenda for Europe's Universities", 2003, which states that "demonstrating and further maintaining the integral link between teaching and research while accepting increased differentiation of mission in response to societal needs, (...) delivering excellence at all geographical levels and improving quality of all universities across the continent".

2.3. Response to competitive new challenges

"The European and global education market is becoming more competitive... students are less and less restricted to what their national system is prepared to offer" (Adam, 2001: 44). The diversified offer and release from spatial proximity that new technologies accord students (now turned into consumers) enables them to receive an education abroad, far from their home-country.

One major consequence of increased mobility is the rise in competition between universities and the consequent shifts in rank attained by each university and department (Barata-Salgueiro, 2005). We shall possibly observe a relative standardization of the first cycle (of widespread offer) - although certain schools can already qualitatively differentiate themselves -, and a more limited and competitive offer as we move up to higher degrees. The best and most coveted

diplomas are offered by a small number of universities - the most central and attractive ones, whose quality is ranked higher. Receiving more candidates, they can demand higher tuition fees - and earning more, they can offer better human and material resources. They will also help propel its city to a better position within the system of cities.

Small and peripheral countries such as Portugal meet more difficulties, as do, as we have already explained, highly specialized subjects.

Within this competitive framework, universities and courses have to develop pro-active strategies, benchmarking practices, and strategically bets between the courses, learning experiences, and teacher profiles offered in order to attract students and reinforce prestige and quality. Joint programmes are effective tools for increasing competitiveness. Stronger networks are able to attract more students, even from outside Europe - and for a small, eventually marginal department (even if it does have highly qualified staff), belonging to a network is a question of survival. Besides that, joint teaching can be a way of maximizing resources since each department is not required to have specialists for every single programme subject, and may specialize in two or three fields.

Since courses take place in at least two countries, graduate employability may increase in home countries as well as abroad. The EUA (2004: 12) also underlines how these students can enjoy better employment prospects, leaving "no doubt that such learning experiences change lives, broaden intellectual horizons and offer new professional perspectives".

2.4. European cohesion and citizenship

Another awaited outcome of joint programmes in Europe is an increase in inter-cultural awareness, along with a more cohesive European identity and culture of responsible citizenship. EUA (2004: 12) also states that "working with students and

professors in multi-cultural environments enhances experiences of European culture and extends pan-European social and technological knowledge" and the EUA's Agenda refers the possible development of a specific European approach, which calls for, on top of other aspects, "valuing diversity as a strength and developing a new "European model" which draws maximum benefit from these differences".

A European approach should stress three dimensions which are particularly relevant for Geography-participated networks:

- Diversity, focusing especially on landscape and culture as sources of richness.
- Cultural heritage as a source of knowledge, identity and cohesion requiring acknowledgement, preservation and enhancement. A deeper knowledge of cross-border institutions and practices makes adaptation and convergence easier.
- A set of fundamental values that make the European tradition, and the need to practise and expand them.

A joint programme also introduces the possibility of adopting a multi-contextual perspective - an asset when subjects are approached from a perspective of European collaboration.

2.5. Personal gain/ enrichment

Libraries, classrooms, school facilities and services such as dormitories, cafeterias, internet facilities, and so on vary from one university to the next. The cultural offer which cities provide has many differences too. Because of age groups, students can share similar interests and tastes, but they also present differences from country to country: from work schedules to food and beverage habits, from social relations to economic independence (or not) earned through paid work, the contact and knowledge gained from a different country/region and people of varying routines and values, as well as the chance to practise a foreign language. To live and

work abroad with colleagues of different styles is a mind-opening process that increases the awareness of difference. Students get acquainted with new social behaviours, new methods of teaching, and an array of different cultural supplies in the form of university courses, conferences, surveys, and so on. The contact with different teaching and research methods also helps situate and justly evaluate what is being done at home, since that can be compared and appreciated in relative terms. Like the students, staff that goes abroad also benefits in personal and social terms. This is especially true if the stay includes fieldwork and visits, or practical work in facilities not available at their home university.

3. WHY JOINT DEGREES IN GEOGRAPHY?

Joint degrees may assume a number of formats that are closely linked to their goals, evolution and development. In terms of geographical scale, we may come across joint degrees that bring together educational institutions from the same country or region of different but complementary levels of expertise, or transnational programmes, which gather institutions from different countries. They can either belong to the same field or combine different fields of study in a multidisciplinary approach. Keeping our analysis within the bounds of Geography, and taking programme formats into account, we can frequently encounter the following goals:

- To offer a multinational high quality programme for the 2nd or 3rd cycles (Master's and PhD's) in Geography, or a multi-subject programme rooted on geographical space, as is the case of urbanism, urban and regional planning and development - fields of study naturally privileged by geographers, but where architects, engineers, economists or sociologists also play an important role.

- To ensure that research, teaching and learning are all linked. This can be achieved by means of a research project developed by the network of universities (departments) alongside the programme, where students collaborate in several tasks, such as fieldwork activities, surveys, data analyses, discussion of results, and so on).

- To develop a research project within the network that sustains the main subject courses. It is important to consider different spatial contexts, since what is true in a certain place is not true in another. At the same time, the same type of response may have different consequences in two different places, and one must be aware of that.

- To promote an innovative, collaborative and creative programme for learning and teaching geography that strengthens the European dimension, a realm that has increasingly acquired relevance with the enlargement of the European Union and its cultural, social, and economic richness.

- To increase inter-cultural awareness within a European framework whilst fostering the concept of European identity and a culture of responsible citizenship. A European focus should encompass the previously mentioned dimensions.

A number of reasons can stand to justify the promotion of joint degrees in Geography. Above all, we must point out that they forward an opportunity to develop Geography and to exchange views with other fields of knowledge, as is the case of multidisciplinary networks. The main reasons can be divided into three main groups: scientific, pedagogical and politico-institutional.

3.1. Scientific Reasons

Our societies face many problems, and Geography is able to provide answers taking distinct features of different places into account. These features proceed from economic, social and political conditions,

spatial context, and theoretical variations, and are necessarily built in accordance to the local researchers' training and practice. Joint degrees enable us to understand the power that context has in creating diversity, as well as helping us arrive at localised answers to problems. We should therefore turn them into a strategic axis for geographical thought. Doreen Massey's (1991) research clearly shows that "a 'local' sense of place is no longer constituted within narrowly bounded neighbourhoods but involves extensive networks of social relations that extend far across space through the porous boundaries of 'community', linking places at a variety of scales from the neighbourhood to the nation (and beyond)" (Jackson, 2000). The challenge arises from understanding a place in light of others, and as a result of global forces which are localised and transformed in this process of localisation.

Geography or Geographies? Which is to be favoured? The *grand récit, the metatheories or the 'located narratives'*? For several authors, especially those who identify themselves with the post-modern discourse, why we study geography springs from the possibility of "finding out why something we know 'for sure,' here, is wrong there, and why something that works for someone else, where they are, won't necessarily work for us, here" (Gersmehl, 2005: viii). The cultural turn which could be felt in Geography after the 1990's seems to agree with this kind of reasoning. It is necessary to give voice and visibility to minorities and peripheries and to introduce relativism into the monolithic discourse of the centre, spun of abstraction or of use only within the context of hegemonic networks.

Joint programmes, notably when the network includes institutions from areas bearing distinct cultural characteristics, enable us to counterbalance the centre's colonisation of the periphery and voice alternative geographical discourses, which in turn enrich the centre's thought.

3.2. Pedagogical Reasons

On an educational level, our present crisis refers to an absence of fail-proof reference points, and some doubts about the most accurate methods and methodologies for the acquisition of skills necessary for living in society and which can encourage integration in the labour market. The behavioural paradigm has been critically undermined, at least by a vanguard of scholars and pedagogues, but both cognitive and ecologic-contextual paradigms have not yet pushed through since they are still theoretically poor. A thorough analysis of the educational system would swiftly bring us to the conclusion that schooling, in most cases, is rooted in predominantly behavioural models, however a small number of cognitive or ecological approaches have arisen, even though still thinly elaborated. These are normally confined to research seminars or fieldwork.

In this context of crisis, with a paradigmatic absence of reference points on the one hand and a diversity of education and teaching methods on the other, joint programmes present a highly pedagogical potential. Above all, when they take place in a context of collaboration between institutions of significant cultural and linguistic differences, they can favour certain instrumental, interpersonal and systemic competences, essential in terms of lifelong learning and international graduate employability. We can mention, for instance (i) the ability to work in an international context; (ii) the acquisition of another language; or (iii) an appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism.

Joint programmes are also highly significant due the nature of the experiences students live, in contexts different from those they are used to. If the previously exposed conditions are met, students encounter different teaching/learning methodologies and cultures of learning, as well as different social and cultural environments. Local case-studies and

different perspectives of the studied problems are also relevant points. According to Ausubel (1968), we learn by adding new information to that previously acquired, and its meaningfulness depends on the quality of experiences. As high quality programmes, joint programmes may make the difference in constructing a European space of geographical education. Another kind of advantage joint programmes have to offer comes from the diverse types of fieldwork learners and teachers can experience together. From fieldwork we can acquire and develop many skills and competences, like teamwork, sociability, decision making, responsibility, independence, stamina, the ability to adapt to new situations - all of which are essential for a number of jobs and, consequently, for boosting student employability.

The 'outside' environment is the geographers' laboratory; it is where, from direct experience, we can investigate people, places, patterns and processes, environmental interactions. International environments naturally offer more opportunities for diverse kinds of fieldwork, especially if we want to use this geographical resource to test hypotheses and assess theories or models.

Finally, joint actions encourage innovative approaches to analysis and problem solving. They render sharing materials, ideas and experiences possible, which the development of geographical knowledge and, of course, of localised responses to problems of territorial nature. Because different, these responses may aid in furthering hypotheses and explanations.

3.3. Political and Institutional Reasons

Within the political and institutional arenas there are four main areas where joint programmes can play an important role: (i) in implementing the Bologna Process and constructing the European Higher Education Area; (ii) in developing the European dimension of education; (iii) in raising the profile and status of learning and teaching

geography; and (iv) in the optimisation of resources, aiming at increasing quality in education. Most importantly, on account of their nature and as has been shown, joint programmes naturally contribute to the achievement of the Bologna Process goals.

The second domain of intervention refers to strengthening the European dimension of education. Geography has a special position, between the physical and the social worlds, which allows it to play a key role in the construction of a European educational space and in deepening the European dimension. Firstly, geographical education encourages the understanding and respect of peoples, cultures, civilisations, values and life styles, including those of the home country. Secondly, geographical education has a special aptitude for developing personal and social competences, namely framing daily life into spatial dimensions and helping to understand questions at an international level.

Finally, joint programmes can help raise the status of what it is to learn and teach geography, especially by increasing our field's visibility and opening new opportunities for collaboration. If the joint programme is multidisciplinary (as are, for example, urbanism, regional planning, natural hazards, risks and environmental impacts, exclusion and marginality), it helps other specialists and professionals better understand geography and the geographers' contribution to the subjects of study. In this manner, collaboration enhances the acknowledgement and diffusion of geography in other academic fields.

In Geography programmes, the main results proceed from developing and deepening research and knowledge, and fine tuning terminologies and methods both in research and teaching. The knowledge and experiences shared are also good starting points for new research projects.

The afore mentioned institutional benefits pertaining to making good use of joint degree resources, assembling critical mass

for specific programmes' subjects, and responding to institutional Bologna goals are also valid for geography.

4. JOINT PROGRAMME MODELS

We can regard mobility and models of mobility as capable of sustaining varying degrees of integration: from an erratic mover collecting credits here and there to a full time student enrolled in a programme requiring study periods in other institutions besides his/her home institution. We take 'integrated programmes' as joint programmes intentionally designed to include features like the ones discussed at the beginning. Notwithstanding, a joint programme may sustain different degrees and powers of mobility.

4.1. European Experiments

Socrates Programme has, to a large extent, financed graduate student mobility. But we have not considered this type of mobility as it is not framed by joint programmes.

In response to the Prague Communiqué of the Ministers of Higher Education (2001), the EUA launched a project to examine the potential contribution attainable by joint Master's programmes for the European Higher Education Area (EUA, 2004). The project focuses on 11 networks, which currently offer a European joint Master's programme, and were selected in 2002 out of 57 applications. Most of the programmes have a multidisciplinary character, they differ in number of universities involved (4 to 36), study period (the most frequent being 1 year of study, often followed by a 6 months writing period), and mobility model. We can, however, classify them into 3 main groups:

4.1.1. Low Integration. High mobility Freedom: Under this model students are merely obliged to attain part of their credits from another university within the network. The best example is the *Water and Coastal Management* programme, featuring 36

universities, one year of studies (60 ECTS), plus six months (30 ECTS) of research at home. Thirty per cent of the first year credits must be completed abroad.

4.1.2. Intermediate situation: The programmes have two distinct study periods: one in which the core subjects are completed at home universities or at most of them, and a second more specialized period in which the offers varies between universities according to staff specialisation. Students thus have to move to the university offering the most appealing specialisation. They are not required to do so if the preferred specialisation is offered at their home university.

In two of these programmes there is an intensive 10-day study programme ('IP', 5 ECTS) which can be taken at the beginning of the programme (the *International Humanitarian Action* programme), or at the middle, between the two study periods (the *Euroculture* programme) when participants can gather.

Most of these programmes require a dissertation. One of these also includes an internship at a specialized institution (the *International Humanitarian Action* programme).

4.1.3. Further integration. Participants move together: We can additionally characterise two subgroups:

(i) each three month period is spent at an university, the last period is spent at home writing the dissertation. Normally the departments in these networks present specific scientific profiles, that is, they offer courses within the range of their own field, working within an interdisciplinary programme. Two such examples are the *European Urban Culture* (the only surveyed that included Geography), and *Economics of International Trade and European Integration* programmes.

(ii) the first part of the programme (consisting of one or two periods of different length) is offered by two or three

universities, whereas the second (one term) is offered by a larger number of universities, each having its specific specialisation. This last period, in the *Law and Economics* programme, requires two courses plus dissertation. This is the only programme where the writing of the dissertation is not done at home.

Tauch (2009) presentation shows that Joint Programmes grow slowly across Europe but we don't have evidence that the previous classification has changed significantly.

4.2. The European and Latin American experience: The Alfa Programme

This special programme was launched by the European Commission in March 1994 to promote collaboration between European and Latin America universities (*Amérique Latine et Formation Academique*). The main goals are (i) to promote co-operation between European and Latin American higher education institutions in order to overcome uneven development through Latin American scientific, academic and technological enhancement; (ii) to promote co-operation through universities' networks in order to develop jointly academic activities and the mobility of postgraduates and students.

An overview of the first phase (1994-99) is presented in Table 1. Within 846 projects have been approved, 80% of which co-ordinated by European institutions.

Table 1
Programme Alfa (1994-99): Applications

Issues	Value
Networks	1434
Institutions	1215
Participants	24585
Projects	2918

Source: European Commission, 2002

The vast majority of resources were allotted to projects for the mobility of postgraduates and students. Research received only 10% of available funds. Four Latin countries (Spain, France, Italy and Portugal) headed 471 projects, that is, 55%. We co-ordinated a thematic five university network focused on restructuring urban areas in the context of globalisation (REURB). The first year of the project included drafting an exchange programme and a research project proposal. The two year joint postgraduate programme included three parts: regular theoretical courses, a practical training period in a planning agency, and supervised individual research. Host universities were Paris I and Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil). Most theoretical courses were already active in the host universities, but teachers from the network moved to collaborate in theoretical courses of specialised subjects.

Ten postgraduate students moved from their universities to host universities in a different country, which, for nine of them, meant crossing the Atlantic - four from USP (University of São Paulo), and two from the University of Buenos Aires to Paris I. At the same time three students from Europe (two Portuguese and one French) and one from Latin America (Buenos Aires) went to the University of São Paulo. Moves abroad began in November 1997.

Four professors taught at a different university. Professors from the network strengthened their relationships and some of them began working on research projects together.

In terms of publications and texts produced, the results largely exceeded the expectations. The Project launched a publication to support some theoretical courses (Barata-Salgueiro 1998), two volumes of REURB members' texts were published in France, and grant-holders worked hard on their theses and produced papers that have either been or might be published.

Major positive points include:

- The flexible structure of the Project enabled it to deal with unexpected situations such as the grant-holders' arrival in Latin America at the end of the academic year, or the students' will to shorten their stay abroad, without having prevented the accomplishment of the main objectives.

- The bonds between network members allowed to extend the collaboration till after the programme had ended, both in the teaching (visiting professors) and research areas.

- Student mobility, with all its implications in terms of mind-opening life experiences; probably the most important, albeit immensurable, outcome of any academic geographical mobility.

- Grant-holders presented an impressive production of high quality papers, much higher than we had expected when the Project started, for their final work.

4.2.1. The Portuguese case: In Portugal there is an established joint programme in Urban and Regional Planning, the first in the country to offer a post graduation. It is worth mentioning that until 1970 the 1st university level was, on average, 5 years long. The master on Urban and Regional Planning was created within a network, as early as the first half of the 1970's, by a Professor of the Lisbon University of Engineering, which assembled the Faculty of Architects, Faculty of Agriculture and Landscaping and the Faculty of Economy and Business Administration. At its early days, teachers from schools enrolled in the programme came to the Faculty of Engineering to teach, but later on part of the classes were taught at the staff's schools, so the students had to move. One professor from the Geography department was invited to teach a course in the programme, and several geographers regularly supervise and evaluate final dissertations. Co-ordination rotates between the participating Faculties. The programme was restructured in 2002-03 but it didn't last very long after that.

5. PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH JOINT PROGRAMMES

Some authors alert us to certain dangers and difficulties we may encounter in the development of joint programmes, and some good practice reports start coming out recently, like the Joiman network's project initiated in 2008. The main dangers refer to uneven competition and to new imperialism. Firstly, transnational programmes might mean unfair competition for national providers and this can lead to a loss of students, condemning the institutions to further marginalisation. There is no doubt that falling barriers increases competition and requires challenged institutions to reposition themselves, as afore mentioned. It depends on the programmes' subject and types of offer. Joint programmes should complement national offers and not duplicate them.

Furthermore, unevenness may be associated, for instance, to language. Since English is plainly regarded as the international language, the possibility of studying in an English environment is for most students already an asset in terms of language acquisition, on top of further scientific gains. For students coming from other countries, even from outside Europe, language can either be an advantage or a difficulty. Network partners have to decide what is the most suitable language (or languages) for the courses, in function of their target students. In our Alfa project, for instance, courses were taught in the host universities' language. Students coming from both Brazil and Argentina undertook a Programme-paid course in French at home. But it was insufficient, and they had to attend more language courses after having arrived.

Secondly, Shepherd et al (2000) stress the dangers of the new imperialism that is associated to networks which are dominated by economically wealthier English-speaking countries, and point out some difficulties for the programmes which stem from cultural

differences. We certainly feel a difference between students proceeding from different BA's. If this gathers different points of view, it also brings in some problems - types of discourse, attitude, and methodological approaches. With students from varying cultural backgrounds, things can be even more difficult.

The Alfa Programme helped us better understand differences between Universities, staff members, and the behaviour of students when it comes to mobility. In general, European universities were accustomed to exchange programmes, and so contacts were much easier than with Latin American ones. The fact that South American postgraduates were older and that in some countries, such as Brazil, represented a social elite accounts for certain peculiar attitudes - quite different from those of our home students - susceptible of causing problems when exposed to a different environment.

The development of joint programmes presents problems which have, to a large extent, already been pointed out in texts dealing with the internationalization of education (see, for instance, Reeve et al. (2000), Chalmers et al. (2004)). They refer to (i) accreditation and quality assurance; (ii) the institutional legal ability to award joint degrees, and recognition; (iii) tuition fees, funding and living conditions; (iv) programme duration and information; (v) co-ordination.

5.1. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

The Bologna Process has unleashed a wave of international transparency for higher educational systems and degrees, making them clearer and more comparable. The choice will be made easier when the information provided includes an assessment of quality. Moreover, involvement is required in order to ensure recognition and accreditation of joint degrees and quality assurance between departments. It is therefore urgent to develop international co-operation by elaborating criteria for programme

accreditation and having independent agencies assess course quality. In the case of regulated professions (not the case of Geography), professional institutions should participate in these discussions. Some steps have already been done in this direction by the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (2004).

5.2. Awarding and Recognition of Joint Degrees

EUA, 2004 also stresses the institutional issues of degree awarding and tuition fees. Both require inter-institutional agreements. Indeed, there is a general recognition of an absence of legislation for institutional awarding of joint degrees, be they in the same country or not. Up to now, national institutions have awarded degrees with some mention or complement referring to its joint character. They are thus considered foreign degrees, and are in need of recognition. This may considerably reduce the desired positive effect regarding joint programme employability. The Alfa experiment did not advance on this point since, as with the Socrates programme, students only received recognition for credits they had attained abroad.

5.3. Funding

No one disputes the fact that joint degrees are expensive. They require extra funding to support teacher and student mobility, as well as the rise in administrative and management costs. While the former mobility should be supported by the network, students may have to pay for part of the extra cost, anticipating the expected additional revenues they are to receive from having taken part in the programme.

Apart from tuition fees, mobility costs mainly incur from travelling, living, insurance and health care expenses. Tuition fees vary between universities, within and between countries. Our example deals with public universities bearing low or no tuition fees at all. Students enrolled in the

Programme did pay which was normal in their home institutions. Host institutions committed themselves not to receive payment from students. Yet the Alfa programme had to pay for students' insurance, including medical care of similar coverage to the national students'.

Insurance and health care can be expensive and varies greatly from country to country. In the EU there is an agreement under which people are granted access to the national health care systems of other EU members, although some universities require additional health insurance.

Living expenses are considerably different depending on whether the university provides affordable facilities. Student accommodation, cafeterias and campus-like environments offer lower living expenses than the outside market.

It is important to notice that second and third cycle students are older than BA ones, and need more privacy. We should encourage universities to invest in diversified types of student accommodation. Agreements on tuition fees, and access to social benefits such as accommodation, restaurants, health care and insurance had to be taken into account in the Alfa project, especially because the situation substantially varies between countries. In Brazil we had more difficulties because the students arrived at the end of the academic year. Accommodation conditions were also a problem.

One way to overcome the extra costs would be to increase the number of scholarships. Joint programmes could have sponsors. This would be easier in regulated or more professional-oriented programmes.

5.4. Programme Duration and Information

In the case of our experience with the Alfa Programme, most students had never heard of Alfa and were afraid to apply, especially because the programme was weightier than those at home. They were also suspicious of the living conditions.

Signing the contract also raised some problems since the grant was advertised during the examinations period, when students had already made plans for the coming year.

Students also felt that the duration of the programme - two years - was too long. Most students would prefer to study abroad for no more than 3 to 10 months. This was even more perceptible in countries where most postgraduate students are employed.

5.5. Co-ordination

The Alfa project has required a great deal of effort from the co-ordinating staff because universities had different backgrounds in dealing in international exchange, and the students had very different profiles. But the major problems arose from not having initially established definite rules for the Programme. This produced a great sense of instability and an overload of work and responsibilities for the co-ordinators. The Project did not cover co-ordination trip expenses, yet they became absolutely indispensable to explain the rules of the Programme, meet University representatives, and so on.

Our experience and the research we have done show that most experiences depend on individual persons with leadership skills who are linked to a network of relations, or established research groups that profit from the possibilities that special programmes advance (Socrates, Alfa, Erasmus-Mundus). Sheperd et al (2000: 293) also raise the issue of leadership. They evaluate the positive and negative features of a single leader, and a shared co-ordination. In both cases they defend a kind of rotation system between the partners' institutions or countries (with either one director or several co-directors) and major policy decisions made collectively, "with a great deal of reliance on e-mail communications, at least two meetings a year with all persons present".

We think it is important to stimulate the development of joint degrees with

additional institutional support, besides securing the agreements required to render co-operation smoother.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude we would just like to stress some major issues that might be useful in the context of joint degree proposals.

Joint degrees can provide an excellent contribution for building the EHEA, since they ensure a better use of human resources and present several benefits in terms of furthering knowledge, learning and teaching, acquiring competences and skills, and using ICT technologies. The visibility and strength of Geography increases by its taking part in either multidisciplinary programmes of strong spatial component, or in Geography-oriented programmes.

The study of the reality of the host regions must have a pre-eminent place in the programme, and encourage approaches of intercultural and contextual understanding. Visits to several organisations and institutions, training experience, fieldwork, the processing of information (statistical and other) are simply some examples of the type of activities we envisage to accomplish this objective. The focus on local subjects must complement the general theoretical and methodological components, which is indispensable in a programme aiming for high standards and quality.

In terms of model we encourage one of the following two alternatives:

(i) all students move together. They undertake part of the programme in one university, part in another, and yet another part in a third or a fourth university. The network decides what subjects are to be taught at each university, and professors from all universities participate in evaluating procedures and marks. This model is well suited for multidisciplinary programmes or small networks.

(ii) students undertake part of the programme at their home institution and another part in one or two other universities.

During part of the programme all students and most teachers meet in one university to develop an intensive programme - around 2 weeks, we would say. This period is for comparative discussions of cases studies, contrasting theoretical or methodological approaches, doing fieldwork or analysing and discussing within context certain features of the host country, city or region. An advanced form of this model combines a more general part spent at home universities or at a small number of universities with a (second) period of specialisation in which students choose the institution that offers the field they are most interested in.

The network should be committed to joint thematic research, preferably formalised in research project(s) within a field of study and related to some of the taught subjects. Thus students participate in research activities and the programme also promotes knowledge.

This is also a good way to motivate the engagement of professors and of rising funds. University teachers do not like to perform administrative tasks, and besides, joint programmes are heavy. To enhance the potentialities of joint programmes, more room should be given to staff relations and research projects. It is also important and rewarding to develop a research project that ties into the teaching programme, or a seminar that could bring together everyone in the network to discuss academic questions and administrative problems.

Personal relations and leadership are key points for building joint programmes. Therefore leadership and co-ordination should deserve special attention in order to guarantee the success and sustainability of the project.

It is necessary to separate administrative tasks, such as application procedures, mobility grants, tuition agreements, accommodation, and insurance and health care, from real academic functions. Only the latter are to be in the hands of teaching staff. They include selecting and supervising students, as well as preparing courses and other training activities. Specialised

university offices have to respond efficiently to the first group of tasks.

The success and sustainability of joint degrees depend heavily on institutional agreements and funding. Everyone agrees on the need for universities and other higher institutions to continue the process of recognising degrees, streamlining bureaucracy, and increasing collaboration. Recognition implies collaboration in accreditation and evaluation procedures, the rules and standards of which must be discussed. Joint degrees require extra funding to pay for research, staff and student mobility, and extra administrative costs. They therefore require a high level of institutional commitment in terms of funding, and raising funds from higher education institutions. A significant problem that we have detected and deserves recommendation pertains to the requirement of accommodating graduates and teachers for relatively short periods.

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