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STUDY MOBILITY OF THE FORMER TRANSCARPATIAN STUDENTS OF BALASSI INSTITUTE (HUNGARY)

Abstract. The aim of the research is to explore the reasons and the academic mobility for study purposes of the Transcarpathian students graduating from the university preparatory training of the Balassi Institute (Budapest), their life path after the university years, their position in the labour market and their establishment. The Balassi Preparatory Institute occupies a special place among educational institutions of Hungary. It is not entirely a higher education institution, yet it is seen as part of higher education. The mission of the preparatory course of the Balassi Institute is to catch up with the Transcarpathian students to the standard of higher education in Hungary.

Particular emphasis were placed on examining the proportion of students who have returned to their home country and the proportion they have stayed in Hungary or possibly settled in other foreign countries. The research was carried out by quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative study was conducted for exploratory purposes in the form of a focus group interview. The method of comprehensive research is a questionnaire survey belonging to the group of quantitative research. The questionnaire asks about the socio-economic background of the students to be examined, their study careers in secondary school, preparatory institutes and higher education, mobility for study purpose. The empirical study is also related to this: what integration and study factors played a role in the final settlement decision. This article covers the educational policy steps that envisaged the further education of the Hungarian graduates of Transcarpathia in their homeland.

Empirical research results have shown that the institution became a part of the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon. The expectations that the preparatory course contributes to the reproduction of the Transcarpathian elite and the increase the number of
Transcarpathian Hungarian intellectuals with a diploma have been met to a small extent. It is proved by the fact that only 16.8% of the former students returned to their homeland.

**Keywords:** Balassi Institute, study mobility, Transcarpathian students, Hungary, professional career.

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**НАВЧАЛЬНА МОБІЛЬНІСТЬ КОЛИШНІХ ЗАКАРПАТСЬКИХ СТУДЕНТІВ ІНСТИТУТУ БАЛАШШІ (УГОРЩИНА)**

Анотація. Метою дослідження є розкрити причини освітньої мобільності закарпатських студентів, що навчалися на підготовчих курсах в Інституті Балашші (Будапешт), їхні життєвий шлях після завершення університету, працевлаштування, вибір постійного місця проживання. Інститут Балашші посідає унікальне місце у мережі вищих навчальних закладів Угорщини. Він не є вищим навчальним закладом у класичному розумінні, проте є частиною системи вищої освіти. Першочергова мета Інституту – залучити закарпатських студентів до такого навчання, яке б підтягнуло їх до системи вимог, що функціонує в Угорщині.

Окрему увагу приділено тому, яка частина студентів повернулася до рідного краю, яка залишилася в Угорщині, а яка виїхала далі за кордон. Дослідження мають квантитативний та квалітативний характер. Квалітативний аналіз відбувався з метою отримання інформації і проводився методом інтерв’ю з фокус-групою. Методом комплексного дослідження є анкетне опитування, що належить до групи квантитативних досліджень. Анкета вивчає соціально-економічний фон студентів-респондентів, освітня кар’єра в школі, на підготовчих курсах і виші, мобільність із метою навчання. Емпіричне дослідження пов’язане з описом, які інтеграційні та освітні фактори зіграли роль в остаточному виборі місця постійного проживання. У роботі, зокрема, приділено увагу тим крокам в освітній політиці, які зумовили подальше навчання закарпатських угорських випускників на батьківщині.

У результаті емпіричного дослідження було доведено, що заклад став частиною явища, названого «brain drain» («відтоку мізків»). Сформовані нею
очікування, які передбачали, що підготовчі курsci сприятимуть відродженню закарпатської еліти та збільшенню кількості закарпатських угорських інтелектуалів з дипломом про вищу освіту реалізувалися тільки незначною мірою. Свідченням цього є те, що всього 16,8% респондентів повернулися додому.

Ключові слова: Інститут Балаши, навчальна мобільність, закарпатські студенти, Угорщина, професійна кар’єра.

**Formulation of the problem.** Study mobility within Europe differs from other forms of mobility in that it is organized at supranational level in the European Union. As the EU is a supranational political entity, the process of European integration blurs the distinction between international and domestic migration [1]. The student mobility of Transcarpathian Hungarians abroad differs from the European pattern. Immigrants must learn the language and culture of the destination country, and find a place in the social and economic structure of the country [2]. Due to their common historical past, ethnic identity and linguistic identity, the migration of the Hungarian across the border to Hungary occupies an intermediate place between domestic and international migration [3].

Due to the deterioration of the economic environment, more and more young people from Transcarpathia are choosing Hungary as the destination of their study mobility [4; 5]. The university preparatory training of the Balassi Institute plays a key role in the further education of Transcarpathian students in Budapest. In the case of those crossing the border, this special target institution can be considered as a kind of breakthrough point for further education in higher education.

The institution occupies a special place among Hungarian educational institutions. The institute is not entirely a higher education institution, yet it is seen as part of higher education. Its primary goal is to provide foreign students with an education that allows them to catch up with the Hungarian system of requirements, to stand up with their fellow students there, and to pass a successful entrance examination to the higher education institutions of their choice [6].

Currently, the Balassi Institute is preparing for a successful advanced level graduation. In addition, special emphasis is placed on achieving educational goals. This educational institution deals with the catching-up of foreign students, so adaptation to environmental change and adaptation to the new social environment can be mentioned as important educational goals. Recently, the number of young people in Transcarpathia leaving their homeland has increased significantly. While after dissolution of the Soviet Union and Ukraine gained its independence, in Transcarpathia mainly the local Hungarians took part in the preparatory training, today it can be said that the institution may have a significant number of Ukrainian-speaking students [7].
Analysis of Recent Research and Publications: The related literature highlights that the number of study mobilities has increased significantly in recent decades. One of the main reasons for this is the introduction of the Bologna system. I. Hrubos [8] examines the goals of the Bologna process is the regular movement of students and lecturers. K. Gürüz [9] investigates the so-called Bologna Declaration, which calls for the use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), aiming at promoting the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff in Europe.

D. Kolisnyk studies international student mobility as a factor of the European integration of Ukrainian youth [10]. An important segment of study mobility is to lay the foundations for future international labour market mobility by coordinating training systems. C. Van Mol [11] discusses the phenomenon of international student migration as a specific form of migration. However, the placement of student migration processes in the category of international student migration does not reflect the diversity of this phenomenon.

R. King and A.M. Findlay [12] examines the mobile student’s human capital, stating that studying abroad can be a worthwhile investment, as they are more competitive in the labour market of the sending country after returning home.

Purpose of the Article: The goal of the research is to examine the former Transcarpathian students admitted to the preparatory course of the Balassi Institute (formerly known as the International Preparatory Institute) that opened its doors to Transcarpathian students in the autumn of 1991. Learning in the Hungary was an excellent opportunity for them because Hungarian universities are well known for their high quality of education. For the Hungarians of Transcarpathia further education in the Hungary was attractive because they speak the language of instruction of the Balassi Institute. This article aims to explore the reasons and the academic mobility for study purposes of the Transcarpathian students graduating from the university preparatory training of the Balassi Institute (Budapest), their life path after the university years, their position in the labour market and their establishment.

Presentation of the main material. The Balassi Preparatory Institute in Budapest occupies a special place among educational institutions of Hungary [6]. The target group of our research is the former Transcarpathian students of the university preparatory training of the Balassi Institute. Due to the small number of students, we aimed for a complete query. The target group was reached thanks to the snowball method. Although the sample cannot be considered representative, at the same time – as a significant part of the target population, about 60%, was achieved – the obtained results can be generalized to the larger part of the studied group. The given data were processed using SPSS statistical package using correlation data analysis.
The research is quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative study was conducted for exploratory purposes in the form of a focus group interview [13]. The focus group interview was conducted among both those settling in Hungary and those returning to Transcarpathia. The questions used here were aimed at exploring mobility decisions and institution choice motivations, and we mapped out what student life was like in the target institution. The results obtained during the focus group interviews served as a guideline for the development of quantitative research.

The method of comprehensive research is a questionnaire survey belonging to the group of quantitative research. The questionnaire asks about the socio-economic background of the students to be examined, their study careers in secondary school, preparatory institutes and higher education, mobility for study purposes, academic performance and post-graduate careers.

The empirical results clearly show that the vast majority of former Transcarpathian students involved in the university preparatory training of the Balassi Institute utilise their knowledge in Hungary. The institute has been training Hungarian students living out of Hungary since 1990. In terms of student numbers, data have been provided to us from 1993 to the present [14]. Between 1993 and 2019, a total of 669 students from Transcarpathia took part in the training as shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of enrolled students of university preparatory course of Balassi Institute
The research reveals that the foreign Hungarian youngsters’ further training in higher education institutions can be considered as a migration step, creating the conditions for permanent settlement in the country of destination. This statement based on data is in contradiction with the objectives laid down in the aid policy of Hungary. Only 16.8% of former students returned to their homeland, while 7.4% settled abroad permanently. In the latter case, the further education opportunity in Hungary served as a temporary migration stage.

Examining the dimension of sociodemographic status, it can be concluded that former students returning to Transcarpathia have lower educated parents than their counterparts living in Hungary or foreign countries. Former students settling in Hungary and foreign countries have highly educated parents. Bourdieu [15] capital theory prevails, which points out that greater cultural capital leads to more ambitious plans. Since we have not found any significant differences in terms of the financial situation between former students returning to Transcarpathia and those living in Hungary or other countries.

The return of skilled labour force will significantly improve the sending country’s productivity and global competitiveness, as the direct transfer of knowledge and skills and the indirect benefits of returnees’ professional and trade contacts abroad can have a positive impact on the growth and development of the domestic economy [16]. Students who return to their home country after completing their studies are most useful to the sending country [9].

On the other side of the balance sheet, we can mention mobile students for whom there are no labour market conditions that would correspond to the level of knowledge and degree obtained abroad. However, this applies primarily to the law, engineering and medical disciplines. This realizes the phenomenon of «brain waste» [17].

The dimension of study career and effectiveness were examined from several perspectives. The most characteristic of those living in Hungary is that they intended to acquire marketable knowledge valid when deciding on study mobility and finding a job in the mainland labour market. Their plans have not changed after university graduation. Our results suggest that the choice of major significantly influences the decision on a permanent settlement. For a well-educated young person, employment with a degree obtained in Hungary may encounter various obstacles in Transcarpathia, such as its rural environment. It is particularly true for the prestige majors. In a big city, the former students are much more likely to find a position according to their qualifications. The majority of people living in Hungary found a job according to their profession. Among returnees, the proportion of graduates employing in their profession is lower, and 70% of foreigners do not work according to their qualifications, and the proportion of those living on casual jobs is also high.

The dimensions of social integration were examined by the existence of various strong and weakly bound relationships as for the permanent settlement.
Former students choosing Hungary as their place of residence have the most connections, both weak and strong. Presumably, they began to acquire these connections during their further education. This result supports Coleman’s [17] social capital theory, according to which school processes play a decisive role in forming social relationships. Former students returning to their homeland have a much smaller proportion of strong connections. After their return, they mainly formed professional relationships. However, they also maintain professional and certain personal relationships with colleagues in Hungary. This phenomenon suggests developing a so-called ‘floating lifestyle’ in which graduates returning home maintain their mainland relations, ready to relocate to Hungary if necessary.

**Fig. 2. Permanent settlement of the Transcarpathian students graduated from the university preparatory course of Balassi Institute**

The expectations that the preparatory course contributes to the reproduction of the Transcarpathian elite and the increase the number of graduates in the region have been met to a small extent. It is proved by the fact that only 16.8% of the former students returned to their homeland as presented in Fig. 2. In the light of the statistical results, it can be clearly stated that in the examined period, the institution promoted the individual career building of Transcarpathian students much more than increasing the number of graduates returning home with a degree. The institution became a part of the ‘brain drain’ phenomenon. Our research proved that those who chose legal, medical and technical professions were employed in the labour market of Hungary.
Conclusions. Based on our results, it can be concluded that the university preparatory course of the Balassi Institute successfully carried out its mission of catching up with the Transcarpathian graduates to the standard of higher education in Hungary. It is mainly because the qualified teachers of the institution with a long history have the appropriate expertise and pedagogical competence. The majority of Transcarpathian students were able to begin vocational training without language preparation. Knowledge of the education language was a serious situational advantage compared to non-Hungarian-speaking international students.

As the examined institution prepares for higher education studies in Hungary, returning home was not a realistic expectation for certain majors. Our research highlights that the support policy could fulfil its original goal to increase the number of Transcarpathian Hungarian intellectuals with a degree. As for Hungarian elite training in the homeland, the establishment of prestige majors in Hungarian or partly in Hungarian should be considered in Transcarpathia. However, this would face significant obstacles due to professional background and state licensing difficulties. A more workable solution would be to set up a preparatory institute in Transcarpathia, which would provide adequate Ukrainian language knowledge and professional training for local Hungarian graduates.

As concluded from analysis, the proportion of those who successfully meet the entry requirements for higher education in Ukraine could be increased, even concerning prestigious majors. A vocational college could be set up for students admitted to prestigious majors (medicine, law, engineering) in Ukrainian-language higher education institutions to learn the technical language. With expertise and proper knowledge of the Ukrainian language, more Hungarian graduates from Transcarpathia would take up a job in their homeland, as their qualifications would meet the expectations of the Ukrainian labour market.

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