

# Occupational Medicine Professor's Participation in Erasmus+: Academic Staff Exchange Programme

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## ABSTRACT

*Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. The intention of this work is to present the Croatian Occupational Medicine professor's experience, who as a lecturer participated at three foreign institutes through Erasmus+ Programme: in Umea, Sweden in 2014, Bologna, Italy in 2015, Vienna, Austria in 2017. Already in 2009 the professor delivered five lectures at the Institute of Occupational medicine in Trieste, Italy, which was equivalent to future activities in Erasmus+ Programme. The paper gives benefit assessment of such participations on the basis of personal experience as well as the institute comparisons, for both the guest lecturer and for the host. The lectures were performed and confirmations from host institutions were issued. However, on this level of cooperation it is expected something more, for example establishing the basis of future cooperation with visited universities, reciprocal professors' visits to our University, as well as opening doors for students, collaboration on projects and patient exchange and their treatment. This paper discusses what of all is achieved at a particular institute.*

**Key words:** Academic staff exchange, Erasmus+ Programme, Occupational medicine.

## Introduction

Occupational medicine is a preventive branch of medicine that is internationally recognised in all developed EU countries with the broad spectrum of its influence<sup>1</sup>. One of the most important goals of OM is assessment of working capacity and incapacity, contemporary or permanent. In comparison to General Practice in the assessment of temporary working incapacity, Occupational Medicine (OM) showed a significant superiority<sup>2</sup>. OM participates in numerous interdisciplinary areas such as conducting court expertise, in both national and international cases<sup>3</sup>.

One of the very important tasks of OM is educational. OM plays part in educational processes of students at undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels.

To stay upgraded, OM has to follow new scientific streams. That can be achieved not only by reading new literature but also by visiting advanced OM centers in foreign countries.

Thus our OM joined Erasmus+ Programme at the very beginning, in 2014. We visited three EU OM institutes with a purpose to deliver lectures to students of medicine.

Erasmus+ is the EU programme (2014–2020) that supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe with a budget of 14.7 billion of Euros<sup>4</sup>. Its regulative is under-signed in December 2013<sup>5</sup>.

The intention of this paper is to present through personal experience the purpose of Erasmus+ Staff Exchange activities by comparing the three visited Institutes, in Umea, Sweden, in Bologna, Italy, in Vienna, Austria, along with previously visited Institute in Trieste, Italy in 2009 (where the lectures were offered in the similar way as later through Erasmus+ Programme). This could help future candidates to choose the most compatible hosts for them.

## Methods

It was used the symple method of comparing the experience of visiting the four OM Institutes, three OM institutes (in Umea, Bologna and Vienna) within the Erasmus+ Programme and in 2009 at the OM Institute of Trieste, where the lectures were delivered along the same principles but out of the mentioned EU programme that did not exist at the time.

**Results**

The results demonstrated the basic benefits from successfully delivered lectures at all four Institutes.

The resulting cooperation level derived from these visits is presented in Table 1.

Visits to all Institutes can be evaluated as beneficial, although the visit to the Institute in Umea, Sweden can be evaluated as conditionally beneficial due to their lack of interest for any type of future collaboration.

Visit to the Institute in Trieste, the first visit still out of Erasmus+ program generated very good results. Good relations resulted in reciprocal visits of professors who delivered lectures to our medical students in Rijeka, Croatia.

Professors from Umea, Sweden, (although promised) never returned visits nor delivered lectures or demonstrated the will for any type of scientific cooperation.

As the colleagues from Bologna, Italy, are concerned, with them a very good cooperation has existed for more than 20 years, and this Institute receives our students and doctors for specialization and lecturing.

The last visited Institute in Vienna, Austria, promises cooperation between OM and Physical and Rehabilitation medicine. Colleagues from Vienna have interest in our hydrotherapy possibilities and monitoring working capacity after these treatments.

**Discussion**

*Visit to the Occupational Medicine Institute in Trieste*

In the year 2009 the OMs from the University of Rijeka and Trieste came to an agreement that 10 hours of lectures (5x2 hrs) are to be delivered in Trieste by visiting professor from Rijeka. The Erasmus+ lectures were all delivered in one week, whilst the lectures in Trieste were delivered on the completely pro bono basis and had been performed over the period of five weeks, each week for two hours at the end of work day. This was possible due to the geographical vicinity of our Universities (one hour by car).

The lectures were organized in Aula magna, at the Department of Pathology, by our Trieste colleagues, director of OM Institute and his deputy. They were attended by

students, specialists of OM, professors from Trieste and Venice and regions Veneto and Friuli – Venezia Giulia. It was truly spectacular response of Italian colleagues.

For the delivered lectures professor from Rijeka, Croatia, received the Silver medal from Italian Society of Occupational Medicine Specialists.

Professors from Trieste delivered several lectures to our medical students in Rijeka, Croatia and they were all very attended.

Very good relations with the colleagues from Trieste continue still nowadays through professional advices, reviews for scientific papers etc.

*Visit to OM Institute in Umea, Sweden*

The lectures in Umea at famous OM Institute were held in 2014. The Institute astonishes with its enormous space and equipment, from library that contains all major scientific journals from all over the world as well as books and other issues, situated on several levels with elevators, to rooms for researchers and halls for lectures. The Institute has an annual budget worth millions of dollars paid by the Swedish government. The conditions for researchers and students are fantastic, from gym halls supplied daily with new sand directly from Baltic, well equipped lecturers’ rooms for small groups of students to luxury halls for students to rest, study and have their free activities.

All areas are bright and spacious, connected with glassed corridors so during the cold winter days it is not necessary to go in outdoors.

Although reciprocal visits for lectures were promised, they had never been realized, nor the mutual research we had mentioned during the stay in Umea.

There are probably several reasons for that. Rijeka and Umea are geographically very far away. It is necessary to change three flights, Zagreb – Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt am Main – Stockholm, Stockholm – Umea, with the great chance for lost personal luggage. Furthermore, Swedish colleagues have on their disposal enormous budget for their researches, whilst we in Croatia cannot achieve such levels due to lack of finances. For that reason we are not compatible and probably not interesting enough to attempt joint projects and research. For example, to examine the influence of music on human body during exer-

**TABLE 1**  
THE NAMES OF VISITED UNIVERSITIES AND COMPARISON DUE TO ACHIEVED BENEFITS.

University	Erasmus+	Similar activities before Erasmus+	It's worth it	Conditionally worthy
Trieste, Italy		X	X	
Umea, Sweden	X			X
Bologna, Italy	X		X	
Vienna, Austria	X		X	

cises they have employed several musicians who research its influence due to type of music; to examine neural effects of music they have special laboratory with employed neurologists – that all only for scientific purposes.

Although they are rare, there are papers that describe Erasmus and Erasmus+ experiences and one paper in particular discusses exactly the socio – economic barriers between the host and the guest – participant<sup>6</sup>. It seems that such barriers between developed and less to medium developed countries still exists.

That in no way means that a visit to such an institute is not recommended. It can be characterized as conditionally worthy. There are many beneficial and advanced things to see, experiences to gather, but future cooperation is not achieved. Our conditions in Croatia are such that there are no enough funds to reach the level of the Swedish Institute.

### *Visit to the OM Institute in Bologna, Italia*

At the University Bologna were delivered 10 hours of lectures in 2015, at the »Scuola di Specializzazione di Medicina del Lavoro Università degli studi di Bologna«.

Bologna is a beautiful historical town in central Italy, with advanced OM. In the centre of Bologna there is monument to Bernardo Ramazzini, who is considered to be the founder of modern OM in 1700. The connection and very good relationships between OM of Rijeka and Bologna have existed more then 20 years. The good relationships continued nowadays so the Erasmus+ Programme visiting lectures in 2015 were easily agreed and delivered.

Colleagues in Bologna have ongoing projects with OM from the USA, so they are not interested for that type of cooperation, but they do receive our students and doctors on OM specialization.

The Italian and Croatian people share certain part of their mentality and customs and it seems that relationships are easier to establish then with the Swedes.

Croatia joined EU in 2013. One of the tasks of Erasmus task strengthening the EU' s identity<sup>7</sup>. That is not especially needed for Croatian people. Croatians according to the sense of belonging, according to their culture, history, education, tourism, maritime tradition, science, sport and medicine are part of Europe since ancient times.

According to one study that published its results, Erasmus does not improve students' knowledge because it is joined by mostly lower level students<sup>8</sup>. However, with time, positive experiences are exchanged and the number of students and staff who engage in Erasmus programs are on constant increase. It is not possible to say that the professors who participate in the above mentioned programs are of lower level. To the contrary, there is a great amount of effort, personal funds and forgoing even once the scholarship to a visiting scholar is granted. Grants are not sufficient for all the expenses abroad and personal vacation days are often necessary to use. Unfortunately, the health centers managers are also not very interested and have no understanding for such activities of their academic employees.

Real enthusiasts cannot be stopped to achieve their noble goals towards establishing new friendships, European communities and spreading scientific achievements.

### *Visit to the OM Institute in Vienna, Austria*

Five lectures, two hours a day were delivered at OM in Vienna, in »Allgemeine Krankenhaus Wienn« that is part of Vienna University (Figure 1).

It is interesting that in Vienna OM is joined with Physical and Rehabilitation medicine in one single department.

They promised to return the visit and deliver lectures to our students. Due to climatic and geographical advantages of our Adriatic Sea, they are particularly interested in hydrotherapy healing of their patients.

Here exists a great possibility for future long – term cooperation, but in that process it is necessary to include



Fig. 1. Lectures for students and professors at Universität Klinik Wien.

the Health Center management due to need of finding ways as how to finance such international health treatments.

Stay in Vienna, in the capital city of the Middle European culture and history leaves indelible memories particularly so as we are already invited to engage in Vienna and Linz as active participants.

The Institute with his friendly staff is surely to be recommended to potential future participants.

## Conclusion

Participation in Erasmus+ Programme is surely of great benefit for both, the hosts and the guests. The results may not appear immediately, but speaking on the long – term basis, the possibility for collaboration is slow-

ly being open to students, professors, and other staff. The guests learn and notice something new that can be used in their homeland. The hosts receive always some new information that can be used to improve their practice. In order to have a possibility of a serious future cooperation, when selecting an Institute it is necessary to keep in mind the geographical position – distance and the level of development – compatibility.

## Conflict of interests

In this paper there is no conflict of interests.

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## SUDJELOVANJE PROFESORA MEDICINE RADA U SKLOPU PROGRAMA ERASMUS +: PROGRAM RAZMJENE AKADEMSKOG OSOBLJA

### SAŽETAK

*Erasmus+ je Europski program koji podržava edukaciju, trening, mladost i sport u Europi. Cilj ovog rada je prikazati iskustvo profesora medicine rada koji je kao predavač učestvovao na tri strana instituta kroz Erasmus+ program: u Umei, Švedskoj 2014., Bologni, Italiji 2015., Beču, Austriji 2017. Još 2009. profesor je održao pet lekcija na Institutu Medicine rada u Trstu, Italiji, što je bio ekvivalent budućim aktivnostima u Erasmus+ programu. Rad daje ocjenu koristi takovih participacija za domaćina i za gosta, na osnovu vlastitih iskustava i usporedbi instituta. Lekcije su održane i potvrde za obavljeno su od domaćina izdane. Međutim, na toj razini suradnje očekuje se nešto više, npr. uspostavljanje osnove za buduću suradnju sa posjećenim univerzitetima, recipročne posjete profesora na naš Univerzitet, kao i otvaranje vratiju za studente, suradnja na projektima i razmjene pacijenata i njihovo liječenje. Članak diskutira što je postignuto na svakom od pojedinih instituta.*