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EXAMINING THE ASPECTS OF INSTITUTION CHOICE IN CONNECTION WITH THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *International student mobility is increasing and transforming the image of higher education institutions. This study examines the factors that motivate international students in choosing a destination country. The aspects of the institution selection were examined using a non-parametric test, factor analysis and principal component analysis based on a sample of 270 people. Relying on the results of the research conducted in Hungary, the paper examines the factors influencing the selection of the destination country and further research examining the elements effecting the selection of the final host institution. Based on these results, the study disputes that economic and social impulses within the country of origin serve to "push" students abroad. However, the decision of which destination country to choose depends on several "pull" factors. The study features the usefulness of the quality of human environment, geographic proximity, tuition and living costs, scholarship opportunities, job opportunities after graduation, and the reputation of the destination country or institution, as well as the impact of linguistic proximity on student flow. The present empirical research reveals the close relationships between some pull factors, such as favourable geographical location, institutional support, the quality of the human environment, the expected balanced work environment after graduation, and the country of origin of international students. The results of the factor analysis confirm the underlying structure of the learning variables used in this research and provide empirical support for its application in future studies of international students' higher education study experiences.*

Key words: *International student mobility, international student decision-making process, push-pull theory, non-parametric test.*

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1. Introduction

In the latest decades, there has been a powerful model change in the global higher education market, one of the benefits of which is the spreading internationalization of universities. The internationalization of universities is an extremely complex process. International student mobility is often considered in the literature as a so-called east-to-west (Stewart, 2020) or south-to-north movement, and the emergence of new educational participants in the global higher education supply market has started to change long-standing academic understandings of mobility. Intra-regional mobility within Asia has also expanded tremendously and students from Western countries are now attending popular Asian universities (Ahmad et al., 2016; Lee, 2017; Rámháp et al., 2017; Batmunkh & Popp, 2021).

In line with international trends and in response to changes in the Hungarian higher education market, Hungarian higher education institutions are more and more recognizing the value of the presence of international students. Due to the constantly decreasing governmental support, the introduction of fee-paying courses, and the Hungarian demographic tide, universities are forced to boost the number of international students participating in the fee-paying diploma program in the intensified domestic and international higher education competition because of all these factors (Janik & Tóth-Naár, 2021; Vinogradov et al., 2015; Pupp & Filep, 2021). Expenditure fees paid by international students represent a serious increase in revenue for universities, but also the international environment created by foreign students and the foreign language available to Hungarian students.

The international positioning of the institution is also strengthened – due to the growing global appeal of the university – which has a positive effect on other areas of the internationalization process, as well as on the enrolment of Hungarian students.

According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2021), more than 6.1 million international students were enrolled in higher education institutions worldwide in 2019, which is more than double the total in 2007. The number of international students increased by an average of 5.5% annually between 1998 and 2019. This number is expected to increase by another 2.3 million by 2030 (Choudaha & Van Rest, 2018). However, this prediction was also true before the explosion of COVID-19 epidemic, which posed huge threats to international higher education. This global pandemic has made the forthcoming international student mobility uncertain, causing major separations due to university closures, travel regulations, visa freezes, and health and safety concerns over distance education (Brammer & Clark, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge shock on higher education, as the outbreak has pushed institutions to urgently convert to online education. The situation required an immediate response from policymakers and higher education institutions to protect the stability of schooling, which resulted in a shocking shift in the experiences of both instructors and students. It is not yet known to what extent the pandemic has involved the higher education system and international student flows in the 2020/21 academic year. While in some countries the number of students appears to be increasing, in others the number of students enrolled is decreasing (OECD, 2021).

In 2020, universities worldwide were locked to contain the escalation of COVID-19 pandemic, which is estimated to have affected more than 3.9 million international and foreign students studying in OECD countries. The closures have affected the quality of curriculum delivery, continuity of learning, and students' feelings about the value of their degree and whether the destination country can support their health and everyday safety (OECD, 2021).

As soon as we were able to leave the impact of covid behind us, we were faced with another global change: the Russian-Ukrainian war. More than 5 million people have fled the Ukraine since the start of the war on 24 February 2022, with an estimated half of the refugees being children (UNESCO, 2022). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) now estimates that some 8.3 million refugees are leaving the Ukraine, and the agency is asking for more financial backing for them and host countries (Treisman, 2022). All charitable disasters are also educational disasters. Above schooling, education provides a safety net that is even more important for populations affected by political/economic crises, especially children. An unprecedented factor in the crisis was the European Union's initial ruling to activate the temporary protection system, which helped millions of people fleeing the war in the Ukraine to enjoy harmonized rights. Several countries have declared their support for Ukrainian students to connect their universities (e.g., Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, and Romania). In France and Hungary, remarkable initiatives have been taken to settle the situation of non-Ukrainian international students who fled the Ukraine. Hungary offers all international students the opportunity to carry on their studies at Hungarian universities, disregarding nationality (Chumak, 2022; Kőmíves et al., 2019; Garai-Fodor et al., 2021). These global changes, together with the Russian-Ukrainian war, may have serious consequences for push-pull factors and overall international student mobility in the years to come.

Identifying the factors that affect students' choice of institution when studying abroad remains a research gap. Taking a push-pull factor approach and elements of decision-making models as the framework, this study fills this research gap on factors influencing the choice of higher education institutions in Hungary.

The goal of the study is to analyse the university choice aspects and motivations of international students attending Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (formerly Szent István University) in the 2020/2021 academic year. By reason of the changed higher education merchandise environment, the statistic number of students studying abroad has continuously boosted in the higher education markets of the world in recent decades.

The remaining part of the study is presented as follows: First, we present the theoretical framework, which covers an overview of earlier studies, dealing with the push-pull theory, analysing the elements influencing international students, and defining research goals, and developing hypotheses. Secondly, the methodological section includes the setting, sample and procedure, instrument, and statistical test. Thirdly, results are presented, including factor analysis and push-pull modelling. Fourthly, the discussion goes to trial. Finally, conclusion and limitations are provided and approach for institutions to captivate and hold international students are suggested.

2. Theoretical background

In the latest decades, there has been an expanding number of international studies examining the special field of internationalization of universities and the various aspects of international enrolment. As their presence determines institutional policies, academic programs, curriculum, research and faculty collaborations, and student experience, foreign students are one of the most essential drivers of internationalization (Chen, 2007). In the changed international higher education environment, theories and concepts proven in business have become the subject of research by higher education marketing researchers (Hemsley-Brown &

Oplatka, 2006). Comprehensive knowledge of university students' university choice motivations and decision-making mechanisms is essential for the implementation of effective international enrolment marketing. We come across several theoretical and practical studies on the university decision-making mechanisms of international students.

2.1. Push-pull theory

The growing number of economic migrants is placing increasing emphasis on the push-pull model of international student mobility, where students are forced to study overseas by unfavourable circumstances in their home country or, conversely, are attracted to another destination country by certain advantages (e.g., prestige of the degree, research opportunities) (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Of course, push and pull forces can act simultaneously. However, the disadvantage of the model is that it does not take into consideration the personal characteristics or socio-economic environment of each student (Li & Bray, 2007).

Researchers most often model students' decision-making mechanisms with a combination of push-pull factors (Mazzarol et al., 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Chen, 2007; Lam et al., 2011). The pull factors come from the host country, while the push factors come from the sending country, and these are what make students decide to study abroad (Figure 1). These are the characteristics that make the country attractive to the student. According to the classification by Becker & Kolster (2012), pushing factors can be personal and environmental ones. Personal factors include personality traits, preferences, and motivations. Among the environmental impacts, we can mention the national characteristics. The pull factors include the degree of the economic development gap between the home and the host country, in addition to the intensity of cultural and economic relations between the two countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Vrontis et al. (2007) analysed the decision-making procedure of students in developing countries to form a five-step model, according to which the student is influenced by the following factors: its characteristics. The model considers the role of parents, friends, and continuing education counsellors to be crucial in decision-making procedures. In the Chinese higher education market, for example, decision-makers are parents, which is why enrolment marketing communication needs to focus on parents (Lee & Morrish, 2012).

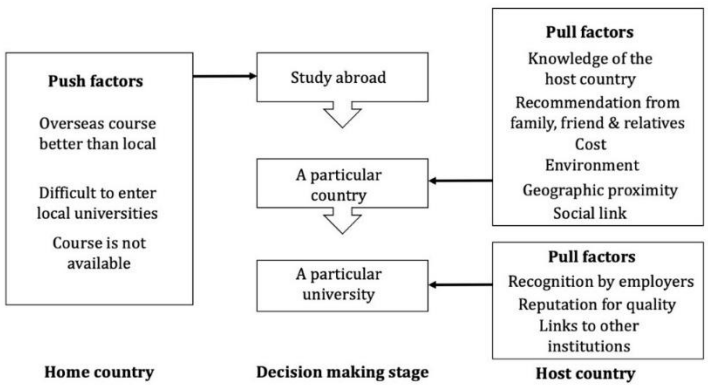

Figure 1. Push-pull model (source: Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002)

2.2. Decision-making models

While status-attainment models describe a mechanism that examines the figures of the student's decision throughout his or her life (Vrontis et al., 2007), economic models assume that students rationally decide which higher education institution to choose. Researchers can use the two models together: the sociological attitude of institutional choice suggested by status-attainment models combined with the decision-making perspective offered by economic models (Hossler et al., 1989). Students are extremely critical and thorough in selecting the higher education institution to which they apply. In an increasingly competitive environment, universities need to build the distinguishing features they need to benefit an ambitious power in the international higher education market. Branding and reputation, which symbolize high quality, are the two defining attributes that are essential for attracting international students (Lam et al., 2011).

According to the Jackson model (Jackson, 1982), there are three stages in the student's decision-making process. The first stage is the preference step, where academic achievement shows the strongest correlation with students' learning ambitions, according to Jackson. The student's social environment and family background influence these aspirations. In the second stage, the student excludes certain institutions from the list of possible target institutions.

Hanson and Litten's (Litten, 1982) model adds the most to the literature on institutional choice. As with other models, the first stage of this three-stage model recommends that a student first chooses to attend postsecondary education. In the second stage, the student examines the institutions and compiles a list of candidates. The procedure of applying and enrolling in a higher education institution is the last stage. Another research model approaches student decision-making not in terms of push-pull factors, but in terms of steps that build on each other in purchase decisions (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Lee & Morrish, 2012; Rudd et al., 2012). Cubillo et al. (2006), on the other hand, interprets foreign student decision-making as a much more complex procedure, which includes individual senses, the influence of the country's image, the image of the city, the image of the institution and the assessment of the offered training program. Wilkins & Huisman (2011) again classify the decision-making models of student choice differently. The structural model approaches university selection from an institutional, cultural, and economic point of view. The economic model assumes that students are rational and choose universities on a cost-advantage basis. Among the advantages of studying abroad is the gain of competencies and knowledge that will be of unique benefit to the student in their forthcoming work (Mpinganjira, 2009). Just as Fishbein & Ajzen (2009), human behaviour is guided by three types of considerations: beliefs about the possible consequences of behaviour (behavioural beliefs), beliefs about the normative expectations of others (normative beliefs). Quintal (2010) examined students' university selection criteria built on the theory of planned behaviour. He emphasized that the student group is a very heterogeneous segment that is greatly influenced by the culture from which the students come. Park (2009) illustrates students' choice of university with the 2-D model, which includes the Driving Force factor and the Directional Factor, in contrast to the models presented so far. Summarizing the presented literature, it can be concluded that the numerous models and approaches support the fact that in international enrolment marketing, it is extremely important to have a comprehensive knowledge of students' university selection criteria and decision-making mechanisms.

The theoretical framework of the study is to examine global student motivation using push-pull theory. International student flows are most studied in the literature

using push-pull theory. Pull factors refer to the stimulating and attractive factors present in the destination country, while the push factors affect to the mostly bad factors present in the home country.

The literature review approved that foreign education is not the similar reality for everyone and that the higher education market is not homogeneous. In analysing topics related to student satisfaction, previous studies have highlighted that satisfaction positively shapes the behavioural intentions of international students - the word-of-mouth (WOM) effect of proposing their present higher education institution and host country. The importance of the third actor in the institutional choice process should not be neglected. Students' choice of institution is often influenced by parents, relatives and friends, educational agents, and the quality of the human environment. The literature review has yielded divergent results in assessing gender differences.

2.3. Research Hypothesis

Regardless of the reputation of the push-pull theory (Li & Bray, 2007), this framework has been disapproved for overestimating external powers influencing student choice and not considering individual elements. Students may respond differently to push and pull factors based on their personal and sociological background, such as individual preferences and characteristics, gender, motivations and aspirations, and socioeconomic status. they choose an institution for their studies abroad (Wilkins et al., 2012).

The study aims to implement three research hypotheses.

H1 There is a positive correlation between institutional support and the lower cost of getting a degree in Hungary.

One of the most important issues in the internationalization of higher education is how smoothly the transfer of information can take place in a multicultural environment. For the Anglo-Saxon universities, which are at the forefront of internationalization, this cannot be questioned, as the language of training is English from the outset. Great care must be taken in the cultivation and transfer of science to use the foreign language properly in countries where English is not the official language. Students also pay special attention to this, as the English language skills of Hungarian university lecturers are a determining factor in their selection. Specific characteristics of the university include the external presence of the institution, the availability of academic programmes, the quality of education (ranking), the level of difficulty of the admission criteria, and/or the characteristics of the academic programme offerings of interest (Wintre et al., 2015). In several studies (Lee, 2013; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014; Hernández López, 2020), it was concluded that transparent and detailed information regarding the full cost of studying (including tuition fees and living or social costs) is essential for making a final decision to participate in an international mobility program and for assessing how supportive the study environment is. In the host country, financial constraints may have psychological consequences for students. Stress and apprehension can adversely affect their intellectual capacities and their ability to concentrate on academic tasks (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014), as well as their overall perception of the studies (Menzies et al., 2015).

H2 Pull factors such as the choice of geographical location, the costs involved and the importance of obtaining a degree, as well as the supportive human environment

during and after the university years, depending on the home/origin country of the international student.

In the existing literature, Wintre et al. (2015), financial reasons were identified by all answers related to financial matters (e.g. competitive expenditure fees than in other countries or at universities in the same country), but eliminating references to university scholarships. A comparatively low cost of higher education, as well as relatively low living expenses and tuition fees, are attractive features for students seeking to study abroad (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). In the same article, it was argued that motivational factors related to the location of the university (country or city). According to Bacci & Bertaccini (2021), the location of each university is associated with a so-called Quality of Life (QoL) index, which includes the following main areas: quality of life, environment and health services, population and society, business and work, public order, and leisure. Future career/life prospects include motivational elements related to the way of life, living position, travel, and better future job circumstances in the host country (Wintre et al., 2015).

H3 The institution choice is influenced by the students' gender, age, family status, and the parents' higher education.

According to Yue & Lu (2022), it has been verified in the literature that the intention of individuals to study abroad varies according to gender, age, and parental education. Although the gender gap in studying abroad, with women more expected to study abroad than men is widely recognized, there is no general agreement on the characteristics in intentions of men and women to study abroad. Even if a few studies (e.g. Lindsay, 2014) claim that there are no significant differences in intentions to study abroad, most studies (e.g. Salisbury et al., 2010; Hurst, 2019; Van Mol, 2022) agreed that women are more motivated than men to study abroad, due to “a long-standing historical form of gender capital that equates women's upward mobility and class reproduction with leaving home” (Hurst, 2019). In addition, most senior students are more reluctant to study abroad than younger students (Pope et al., 2014; Oláh et al., 2021), as they have more family ties (e.g. spouse and children) and social bonds (e.g. full-time employment). Studying overseas can be a challenging outcome for them, as they may have to hang up their ongoing job and leave home for short or long periods. Because of these dilemmas, Kim & Goldstein (2005) found that senior students have lower intentions to study abroad than younger students. In addition, the educational level of the parents largely determines the students' intention to their choice of institution and study abroad (Miller, 2008; Pope et al., 2014). In most cases, parents with higher education are more likely to encourage their children to continue their studies and can provide more useful suggestions for choosing institutions and courses (Salisbury et al., 2010). However, students with well-educated parents tend to attend better secondary schools and come from higher-income families that encourage them to study abroad and can support their enrolment (Jabeen & Rafiuddin, 2015; Kim & Lawrence, 2021).

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Setting

The study was based on Hungarian international students. 13.5% of students enrolled in Hungary in the autumn of 2019 are international (Janik & Naárné Tóth, 2021). The study was conducted at 17 universities in Hungary: eight in Budapest, and another nine in the countryside.

The present study has a so-called retrospective character: to be able to react to questions about institutional choice in a credible way, students need to remember the past in some respects.

3.2. Sample and procedure

To collect quantitative data the study used a simple random sampling method. The data collection took place in the fall semester of 2020, between October and December. A total of 270 completed and usable questionnaires were collected.

In our sample (Table 1), there were 47% female and 53% male respondents who were at the age of 19-21 (3.2%), 22-25 (43.1%), 26-30 (40.3%) 31-35 (11.3%), and 36 or older (2.1%). A large spectrum of majors was shown: technical science (18.4%), natural science (17.7%), agriculture (14.1%), informatics (14.1%), economics (10.2%), humanities (9.9%), social science (8.8%), art science (2.5%), law (1.4%), medical and health science (2.1%), animal science (0.7%). On average, 45.9% of our participants' parents had a higher education degree. 51.5% of respondents came from Asian countries, 26.3% from Africa, 12.2% from America, and 10.0% from Europe.

Table 1. Sociodemographic features (n=270)

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	male	53.0
	female	47.0
Age	19-21	3.2
	22-25	43.1
	26-30	40.3
	31-35	11.3
	above 35	2.1
Family status	single	73.8
	married or living in a relationship	25.1
	divorced or widow/widower	1.1
Majors	technical science	18.4
	natural science	17.7
	agriculture	14.1
	informatics	14.1
	economics	10.2
	humanities	9.9
	social science	8.8
	art science	2.5
	law	1.4
	medical and health science	2.1
	animal science	0.7

3.3. Instrument

A twenty-seven-part questionnaire has been prepared asking respondents about their demographics, questions related to their studies, their living conditions in Hungary, their experiences during their studies, and their post-graduation aspirations. Except for a few sections, a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (6) was used to rank respondents' answers.

To provide adequate reliability and validity, the psychometric properties of the instrument were assessed before finalization. For each scale, the correlations between the items have been analysed, and then performed an exploratory factor analysis in cases where the correlation coefficient was > 0.30 (Briggs & Cheek, 1986), using varimax rotation. Factors were regarded as meaningful if their eigenvalue was > 1 (Kaiser, 1974). Items had to have a factor loading of at least 0.50 to maintain the final means (Walker & Fraser, 2005; Van Dyne et al., 1994). The internal reliability of meaningful factors was estimated using Cronbach's α. Items with an internal reliability coefficient of 0.70 or greater that loaded on a single factor were summed to form a single scale score (Santos, 1999; Cappelleri et al., 2014). The construct validity of the scales was then assessed, checking whether the scales correlated in the expected directions.

Table 2 shows mean and standard deviation values for the items and constructs, as well as item leadings and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the constructs.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of items and internal reliability of the constructs based on the results of Exploratory factor analysis (n=270)

Construct (Factor)/Items	Mean	SD	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Institutional support in Hungary	***4.79***	***1.05***		***0.759***
The scientific and practical knowledge of Hungarian university lecturers.	4.59	1.36	0.731	
Master's degrees issued by Hungarian universities are valid in all EU member states.	4.95	1.31	0.727	
The financial support of Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship was essential for me.	5.24	1.32	0.669	
The English language skills of professors in Hungarian universities.	4.31	1.55	0.606	
Lower cost of getting a degree	***3.83***	***1.23***		***0.653***
Hungary is a cheap country to live.	4.11	1.34	0.850	
In Hungary it is easy to finish a master's degree.	3.34	1.49	0.732	
The average price of higher education services in Hungary.	3.66	1.67	0.643	
Advantageous geographical location	***4.80***	***1.18***		***0.778***
It is important for me to be able to travel within the Schengen area.	4.65	1.48	0.852	
I can easily travel from Hungary to other EU member states.	4.93	1.12	0.809	
It was important for me to study in an EU member country.	4.60	1.54	0.691	

Positive country image	***3.76***	***1.20***		***0.727***
I think Hungarian people are helpful.	4.16	1.54	0.815	
I only wanted to study in Hungary and nowhere else.	2.52	1.65	0.738	
In my opinion, the scientific standard of Hungarian universities is high.	4.31	1.18	0.700	
Quality of the human environment	***3.96***	***1.71***		***0.819***
Administrative staff members at the university.	4.88	1.63	0.896	
Service employees in shops, markets, restaurants, pubs, clubs etc.	4.02	1.72	0.761	
Student hostel or flat rental availability.	4.13	1.76	0.700	
Academic staff members at the university.	4.76	1.60	0.870	
Network and culture	***4.75***	***1.32***		***0.880***
It is important for me to build friendly relationships with Hungarian people.	4.57	1.50	0.928	
It is important for me to explore Hungarian cultural heritage.	4.61	1.44	0.898	
With an extensive network of relationships, I can become more successful after graduation.	4.94	1.36	0.833	

To test the normality of the sample the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical test was used. Analyses showed that all variables included in the study were not normally distributed, as all p-values were less than 0.05. Therefore, we used alternative, non-parametric statistical tests for further data analysis (Bozorgmehr et al., 2010; Yue & Lu, 2022). Mann-Whitney U-tests were performed to conclude whether there were important divergences in responses to the scales by gender, marital status, age, and continent.

4. Results

Since most of the significant differences were in comparison with the continents, a more illustrative figure has been drawn.

4.1. Institutional support in Hungary

It is a positive result that there is a moderately strong correlation (r=0.482) between the *lower cost of getting a degree* and *institutional support in Hungary (Table 3)*. For whom *institutional support in Hungary* is important (including the scientific and practical knowledge of Hungarian university lecturers, master's degrees issued by Hungarian universities are valid in all EU member states, the financial support of Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, the English language skills of professors in Hungarian universities.), it is also an important aspect of *lower cost of getting a degree*, such as the fact that Hungary is a cheap country to live, in Hungary it is easy to finish a master's degree, and the average price of higher education services in Hungary. For a student for whom *institutional support in Hungary* is less important, the other factors are not so important.

Table 3. Bivariate correlations between variables.

	Institutional support in Hungary	Advantageous geographical location	Lower cost of getting a degree	Positive country image	Quality of the human environment	Network and culture
Institutional support in Hungary	1.000	0.286**	0.482**	0.443**	0.217**	0.377**
Advantageous geographical location		1.000	0.426**	0.114	0.068	0.297**
Lower cost of getting a degree			1.000	0.336**	0.226**	0.367**
Positive country image				1.000	0.251**	0.315**
Quality of the human environment					1.000	0.274**
Network and culture						1.000

**p < 0.01

4.2. Lower cost of getting a degree

In our studies, it was found that the *lower cost of getting a degree* factor is more important for students from America than for Africa and Asia (Figure 2). The prices of services related to their higher education institution are therefore less important for those coming from Europe than for those coming from America. In this study, America mostly refers to South American countries.

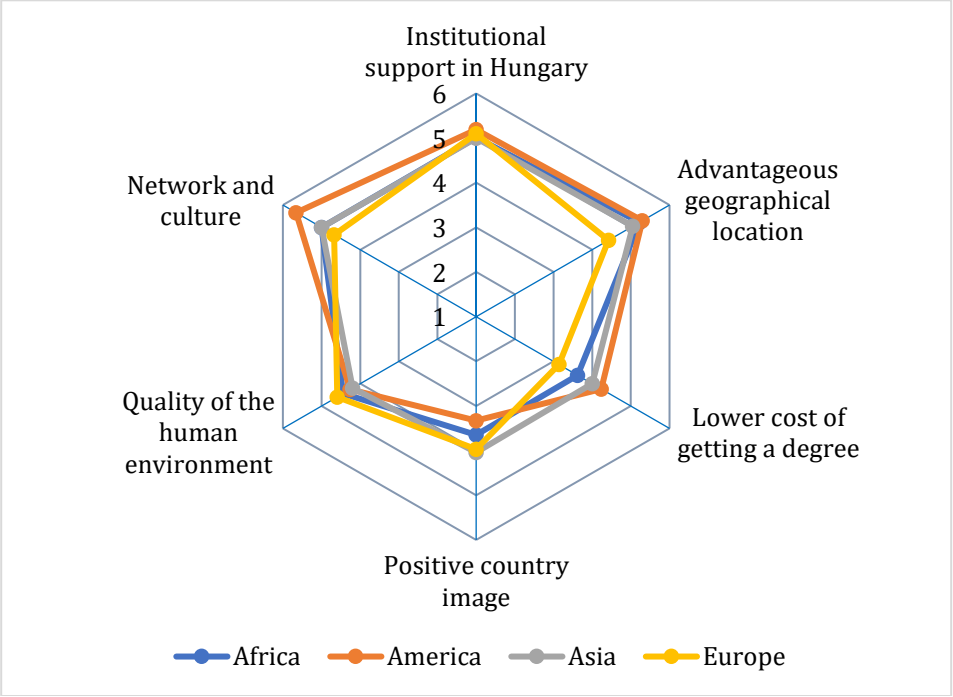

Figure 2. Comparison of the continents of sending countries based on the dimensions examined

4.3. Advantageous geographical location

Table 4 shows that the importance of the *advantageous geographical location* dimension is lower among the youngest and higher among those aged 26-30. The 26-30-year-olds are more likely to travel within the EU, as the figures suggest. The analysis shows that the *advantageous geographical location*, that is, the possibility to move within the European Union, is less important for those coming from Europe.

Table 4. Results of the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric tests (n=270)

Construct (Factor)/Items	Gender*	Family status**	Age**	Continent**
Institutional support in Hungary	Z=-0.408, p=0.684	H=0.099, p=0.952	H=5.391, p=0.068	H=1.138, p=0.768
Lower cost of getting a degree	Z=-1.046, p=0.296	H=1.520, p=0.468	H=4.665, p=0.097	H=8.552, p=0.036
Advantageous geographical location	Z=-0.016, p=0.987	H=0.647, p=0.724	H=8.127, p=0.017	H=9.161, p=0.027
Positive country image	Z=-1.735, p=0.083	H=1.330, p=0.514	H=1.096, p=0.578	H=4.056, p=0.255
Quality of the human environment	Z=-0.658, p=0.510	H=0.076, p=0.963	H=7.305, p=0.026	H=1.880, p=0.598

Construct (Factor)/Items	Gender*	Family status**	Age**	Continent**
Network and culture	Z=-1.069, p=0.285	H=0.797, p=0.671	H=4.447, p=0.108	H=3.276, p=0.351

*Mann-Whitney test, test statistic: Z, **Kruskal-Wallis test, test statistic: H.

4.4. Positive country image

There is a weak correlation between the *positive country image* and the *advantageous geographical location*, which means that for those who do not care about the positive country image, the helpfulness of Hungarian people and the quality of the academic level, the less important it is to study within the European Union or travel easily to any EU country. The results show that for students whose parents have a higher education degree, a positive assessment of the target country is more important.

4.5. Quality of human environment

Table 3 shows a weak, one-way relationship (r=0.217) emerges between institutional support in Hungary and the quality of human environment, so whoever does not care about institutional support in Hungary factor does not care about the quality of human environment (dormitory, academic and administrative staff members). Calculations show that the quality of human environment factor is more important for students over the age of 30 than for students under the age of 30 (Table 3).

4.6. Network and culture

Those from Europe have a higher score compared to those from Asia with a supporting human environment factor. So, it is more important for European students to study with students who accept their culture, while at the same time preserving their cultural values or even finding a shop where they can find special foods to suit their diet (Figure 2).

Overall, the above socio-demographic characteristics do not influence institutional choice considerations.

4.7. Other results

It can be shown almost significantly that positive integration is more important for men, so it is important for them to successfully integrate into Hungarian society, and it was less common for men to have language difficulties both during and outside their university studies.

It is less important for students from Asia to have a balanced and inspiring work environment in their workplace after graduation, while for those from the European continent, the most important thing is that their work is interesting and provides an opportunity to develop their competencies besides work balance and pleasant work environment.

The most important thing for those coming from Africa is to be able to work for a reliable and recognized company after graduation, where teamwork, corporate reputation, and a credible performance appraisal system are important.

5. Discussion

Many previous studies have used a push-pull framework as a tool to figure out the decision process of international students (McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Bodycott, 2009; Cheng et al., 2013; Zheng, 2014). Among the factors that influence study abroad, the applicant's immediate environment, and the opinions, and support of their family and friends, are important. For some students, the family already means spouse and children. In addition, their language skills, and demographic characteristics, which may have a different impact on their intentions and opportunities in different cultures, can have a significant influence on their decision, as can the awareness and information available to them about study opportunities (Bartha & Gubik, 2018; Bilal et al., 2022). According to Beine et al. (2014), the presence of compatriots in the university or college has an absolute shock on the choice of institution, as they assume that they will have a better network in the host institution, which will help them to solve problems and transfer experiences. According to Kéri (2019), this phenomenon, also known as word-of-mouth (WOM), should be followed closely by higher education institutions, as the choice of an institution by the recruiting students can be greatly influenced by the opinions of current or former students at the university. However, according to Tóth & Kiss (2017), some of the attractive and repulsive elements pressuring the choice of institution can be influenced only indirectly or not at all by the higher education institution. However, an attractive factor may be, for example, an available scholarship in the target country that can ensure the future livelihood of the student. Another attractive factor is if a host country remains affordable for the admission student in terms of living costs in addition to moderate tuition fees (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014; Apostu et al., 2022).

The evolution of the destination institution, and specifically the evolution of the higher education system, can also be a positive incentive for institution choice, but influencing this requires a considerable expenditure by universities. Development programmes co-financed by the European Union also provide funding for institutions' infrastructure and human capital development concepts (Vasa et al., 2014; Dissanayake et al., 2022; Priatmoko et al., 2023).

A synthesis of the literature shows that one of the most extensively applied student models is the push-pull theory. The integrated research model desires to conceptualise the most important influencing factors used by international students in Hungarian higher education: factors motivating them to study abroad (push factors), elements affecting the choice of the study destination country, and the choice of destination institution (pull factors). Over the development of the research model, three research objectives were established for the study. These research objectives were then based on empirical testing.

The paper aims to determine the key pull factors behind international students' intention to study abroad based on the theoretical framework of decision models.

One of the contributions of this study is that there is a moderately strong correlation between the lower cost of getting a degree and institutional support in Hungary (H1). Moreover, this study also empirically revealed that the advantageous geographical location is less important for students from Europe than for students from Asia, Africa, and America, but it is more important for international students from America to have a low cost of living in the country and low prices for higher education services. It is less important for students from Asia to have a balanced and inspiring work environment in their workplace after graduation, while for those from the European continent, the most important thing is that their work is

interesting and provides an opportunity to develop their competencies besides work balance and pleasant work environment. The most important thing for those coming from Africa is to be able to work for a reliable and recognized company after graduation, where teamwork, corporate reputation, and a credible performance appraisal system are important (H2). Another contribution of the study is that it empirically approved that when analysing pull factors, it is important to examine the correlations with students' country of origin in terms of gender, family status, and age (H3).

6. Conclusions and limitations

The completion of this study has highlighted many opportunities for further quantitative or even qualitative research among international students in Hungary. Further research could be part of a sample covering more institutions, the whole country. At the same time, qualitative research using interviews or combined institution choice models would provide even greater insights into the push-pull elements of international students. Inbound exchange programmes and other short-term programmes in Hungary, researchers on international student flows/education, and have many research opportunities as Hungary holds out to captivate students from all over the world.

One limitation of the study is that the survey population is restricted to international master's students, while other types of students are excluded to keep the sample typologically uniform. In addition, our study did not investigate whether there are statistical differences by push factors, as these variables are proxies for complex behavioural and sociocultural dimensions. Further research is needed to investigate push factors and implement them in questionnaires. Other limitations include that the survey is self-completed and not a validated instrument.

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