



SELF-PERCEIVED EU INFORMEDNESS AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MOBILITY AND INTERCULTURAL CONTACT

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*Between November 2024 and January 2025, 141 university students from the University of Slavonski Brod (Croatia) and the Faculty of Organisational Studies "Eduka" (Belgrade, Serbia) participated in a study examining how young people's self-perceived informedness about the European Union (EU) relates to their attitudes toward EU membership. Using a questionnaire with validated scales of self-perceived EU knowledge and attitudes towards the EU, the research explored links between self-perceived informedness and mobility-oriented perceptions which included travel behaviour, social interaction, and intercultural openness within the EU. Non-parametric analyses (Wilcoxon *W* and Kendall's tau *b* tests) showed that higher self-perceived EU-related knowledge was significantly associated with more positive and mobility-oriented attitudes. Croatian students evaluated EU membership more favourably than Serbian students, while both groups reported similar levels of self-assessed knowledge. The findings underline the importance of informedness in shaping*

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youth perceptions of European integration and mobility, highlighting similarities and contrasts between EU member and candidate countries in education, economy, and tourism.

Keywords: *European Union; youth attitudes; self-perceived informedness; intercultural mobility; South-East Europe*

1. Introduction

European integration has evolved beyond a primarily political and economic project into a broader social, cultural, and educational framework shaping the everyday aspirations and identities of young people across Europe. Younger generations increasingly perceive Europe as a shared social and educational space rather than solely a political structure. They perceive the EU as strongly associated with opportunities for mobility, education, intercultural exchange, and employability. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play an important role in this process because they contribute to the development of civic awareness and students' understanding of European integration and participation within contemporary European societies (Damiani et al., 2022, 2; Schulz et al., 2025, 176). At the same time, young people's attitudes toward the EU are shaped by institutional realities as well as by broader socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts that differ considerably across European regions.

These dynamics are particularly visible in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia), where perceptions of the EU remain complex and often ambivalent. Young people living in these areas frequently associate the EU with tangible opportunities such as employment, mobility, educational exchange, and improved living standards. At the same time, they also express frustration related to slow accession processes, distrust in political institutions, and concerns about national identity and sovereignty (Aichholzer et al., 2021, 294; Damjanovski et al., 2020, 340; Kitanova, 2019, 820; UNDP, 2021, 23–25).

Pro-EU attitudes generally refer to favourable perceptions of European integration and support for EU membership, often associated with expectations of mobility, educational opportunities, economic advancement, and intercultural openness. Anti-EU attitudes, in contrast,

reflect negative perceptions of EU institutions, integration policies, or perceived external influence on national sovereignty. Euroscepticism represents a broader and more nuanced phenomenon that includes varying degrees of criticism or opposition toward the EU as a political and institutional project. Previous research suggests that youth attitudes toward the EU should therefore not be understood as uniformly pro-European or anti-European, but rather as conditional and context-dependent orientations shaped by perceived benefits, institutional trust, political discourse, and socio-economic expectations. Finding of several research suggest that Euroscepticism among young people in the Western Balkans is frequently linked to economic concerns, identity-related factors, political narratives, and distrust in domestic and supranational institutions (Damjanovski et al., 2020, 340; Lauterbach & De Vries, 2020, 168).

2. Theoretical background

Findings of many studies also suggest that support for the EU among young people is often pragmatic rather than ideological. Research conducted in the Western Balkans consistently shows that youth commonly associate the EU with opportunities for travel, study abroad, employment, intercultural contact, and participation in broader European educational and labour frameworks (Alpan & Hoti, 2024, 3; FES, 2019; Fišer, 2024, 787–789; Fišer, 2025, 178–180; Fišer & Pongračić, 2026, 9–10). Mobility opportunities, such as those connected to Erasmus+ and other exchange programmes, have been repeatedly identified as important predictors of stronger European identification and more positive attitudes toward intercultural interaction (Jugert et al., 2019, 436; Mazzoni et al., 2018, 326; Mitchell, 2015, 332–333). Such experiences contribute to so-called ‘experience-based Europeaness’ in which European identity develops through practical engagement with mobility and shared educational experiences rather than through abstract political identification alone.

Research on youth travel behaviour in Croatia and Serbia similarly indicates that young people are strongly motivated by opportunities for exploration, socialisation, cultural learning, and new experiences (Todorović & Jovičić, 2016, 281; Vukadin et al., 2022, 328–331). Stud-

ies show that travel among young people is closely connected to aspirations for intercultural interaction and personal development, with many students perceiving mobility as both an educational and social resource. Previous findings further suggest that intercultural openness and mobility aspirations are influenced by broader social and educational contexts, including access to information, institutional support, and exposure to EU-related opportunities (Ross et al., 2017, 145).

One factor that may significantly shape these attitudes is informedness about the EU. Previous research conceptualises EU informedness not merely as factual knowledge about institutions or policies, but also as a broader cognitive and educational resource that influences how individuals interpret opportunities for participation, mobility, and belonging within Europe (Damiani et al., 2022, 7; Schulz et al., 2025, 176). Studies conducted within the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study framework indicate that students who report greater exposure to EU-related topics during their education tend to demonstrate more positive attitudes toward European cooperation and greater openness toward intercultural participation (Damiani et al., 2022, 7). In this sense, informedness may contribute not only to political understanding but also to the development of positive orientations toward intercultural contact and social connectedness within Europe.

Findings of some previous studies from South-East Europe also indicate that young people often possess only partial or fragmented knowledge about the EU, despite expressing generally favourable attitudes toward European integration (Jovičić-Vuković et al., 2022; Pisarović et al., 2021; Turk et al., 2015). Access to EU-related information appears unevenly distributed and influenced by educational systems, media discourse, and broader socio-political conditions. In countries where EU integration is politically contested or framed ambivalently, young people may simultaneously recognise the practical advantages of EU membership while remaining uncertain about institutional structures or democratic processes.

These contextual differences are particularly relevant when comparing Croatia and Serbia. Croatia is an EU member state where students are provided with more direct exposure to EU institutions through mobility programmes and European educational policies. Serbia is a candidate country whose accession process has been characterised by

political fluctuation and uneven trust in European institutions (Damjanovski et al., 2020, 327). Such differences may influence how students perceive the EU and the extent to which they associate it with mobility, intercultural openness, and future opportunities. Comparative analysis between Croatian and Serbian students therefore offers a useful framework for examining how differing political and institutional contexts shape youth informedness and attitudes toward the EU.

Although previous studies have explored youth Euroscepticism, European identity, mobility aspirations, and civic participation in the Western Balkans, fewer studies have specifically examined the relationship between young people's self-perceived informedness about the EU and their attitudes toward intercultural contact and mobility-oriented perceptions within a comparative EU-member versus candidate-country context. Existing research has largely focused either on political attitudes or on educational mobility separately, while the interconnections between informedness and perceptions of mobility opportunities remain comparatively underexplored.

Building on previous research on youth attitudes toward the EU, intercultural openness, and mobility aspirations, the present study examines how self-perceived informedness about the EU relates to students' attitudes toward intercultural contact, travel opportunities, and friendship opportunities among university students in Croatia and Serbia. More specifically, the study aims to explore whether higher levels of self-perceived informedness about the EU correspond with more positive and mobility-oriented attitudes toward European integration and whether these relationships differ between students from an EU member state and a candidate country.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research aim, research questions, and hypotheses

The main aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between university students' self-perceived informedness about the EU and their attitudes toward intercultural contact, mobility, and friendship opportunities within the EU context among students from Croatia and Serbia. The research specifically sought to explore whether higher

levels of EU-related informedness correspond with more positive and mobility-oriented perceptions of European integration and whether these patterns differ between students from an EU member state and a candidate country.

Building on previous research on youth attitudes toward the EU, mobility aspirations, and intercultural openness (Damjanovski et al., 2020, 340; Fišer, 2024, 787–789; Fišer & Pongračić, 2026, 9–10; Jugert et al., 2019, 436; UNDP, 2021, 23–25), the study addressed the following research questions:

- Do Croatian and Serbian university students differ in their self-perceived informedness about the EU and in their attitudes toward EU membership, mobility, and intercultural contact?
- How is self-perceived informedness about the EU related to attitudes toward intercultural openness, travelling, and friendship opportunities within the EU?
- Does greater self-perceived informedness about specific dimensions of the EU (institutions, economy, and geography) correspond with more positive and mobility-oriented attitudes toward European integration?

Based on previous findings suggesting that self-perceived informedness about supranational institutions may contribute to more favourable attitudes toward mobility, intercultural exchange, and European integration (Damiani et al., 2022, 7; Fišer, 2024, 787–789; Verežan et al., 2025, 121), the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Students with higher levels of self-perceived informedness about the EU will report more positive attitudes toward intercultural contact, travelling, and friendship opportunities within the EU.

H2. Greater self-perceived knowledge of specific EU dimensions (such as institutions, economy, and geography) will positively correlate with attitudes emphasising intercultural openness and mobility-oriented perceptions.

H3. Croatian students, as citizens of an EU member state, will report more positive attitudes toward EU membership than Serbian students, whereas no substantial differences are expected regarding self-perceived EU-related informedness.

3.2. Participants and sampling procedure

The study was conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 and included 141 university students: 69 students from the University of Slavonski Brod in Croatia and 72 students from the Faculty of Organisational Studies ‘Eduka’ in Belgrade, Serbia. Participants were enrolled in different non-English-major study programmes of psychology, primary school teaching, early childhood care and education, economics, management, business, and security studies. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the International TESOL Union in November 2024 (Approval Nr 0011).

A convenience sampling approach was used since participants were recruited from higher education institutions in which the researchers were directly involved in teaching and research activities. The sample was not intended to be nationally representative. It was designed to provide exploratory insight into relationships between self-perceived EU informedness and mobility-oriented attitudes among students from two neighbouring socio-political contexts characterised by different relationships toward EU integration.

Participants (Table 1) ranged in age from 19 to 62 years, with the majority born between 2005 and 2006 (36.9%) and between 2002 and 2004 (34.0%). The sample was predominantly female (81.6%), which reflects the gender structure of the selected study programmes. Most respondents lived in urban areas (75.9%) and had completed vocational secondary education (61.7%). Approximately half of the participants assessed their family financial status as average (52.5%), while 35.5% described it as better than average.

Given the convenience nature of the sample, the relatively modest sample size, and the predominance of female participants, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and should not be generalised to broader student populations in Croatia or Serbia.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	N	%
Institution	University of Slavonski Brod (Croatia)	69	48.9
	Faculty of Organisational Studies “Eduka” (Belgrade, Serbia)	72	51.1
Study programme	Psychology	50	35.5
	Class teaching	36	25.5
	Economics	33	23.4
	Management and business	8	5.7
	Business excellence	7	5.0
	Security studies	7	5.0
Year of study	1st year undergraduate	93	66.0
	3rd year undergraduate	27	19.1
	1st year master’s	21	14.9
Age group (by birth year)	2005–2006 (19–20 years)	52	36.9
	2002–2004 (21–23 years)	48	34.0
	≤ 2001 (24+ years)	41	29.1
Gender	Female	115	81.6
	Male	24	17.0
	Did not want to answer	2	1.4
Type of secondary school	Vocational	87	61.7
	Gymnasium	54	38.3
Overall secondary grade	2 (satisfactory)	4	2.8
	3 (good)	20	14.2
	4 (very good)	84	59.6
	5 (excellent)	33	23.4
Area of living	Urban	107	75.9
	Rural	34	24.1
Family financial status	Better than average	50	35.5
	Average	74	52.5
	Worse than average	3	2.1
	Did not want to answer	14	9.9

3.3. Instrument

The study employed a structured quantitative questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic items and two previously validated scales assessing EU-related self-perceived informedness and attitudes toward the EU. The questionnaire was initially developed during the preparatory phase of a broader Erasmus+ research initiative conducted by members of the scientific research group GLOB-E.

The first instrument, the StavEU Scale (Jovičić-Vuković et al., 2022), consisted of 12 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The StavEU Scale measures participants’ attitudes toward multiple dimensions of EU membership: economic development, mobility opportunities, cultural exchange, employment and education opportunities, travelling, national identity, and perceptions of sovereignty and economic dependence. The second instrument, the InfoEU Scale (Jovičić-Vuković et al., 2022), consisted of five Likert-type items. This scale assesses participants’ self-perceived knowledge of different aspects of the EU, including its institutions, economy, geography, and political structure.

Both scales had previously been applied in Croatian and Serbian educational contexts, supporting their construct validity and contextual appropriateness for the present study. In the current sample, both instruments demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .858 for the StavEU Scale and .864 for the InfoEU Scale, indicating satisfactory reliability for assessing EU-related attitudinal and cognitive dimensions (Table 2).

Only the findings derived from the StavEU and InfoEU Scales are discussed in the present paper.

Table 2. Reliability of scales

Scale	Cronbach’s alpha	N of items
InfoEU	.864	5
StavEU	.858	12

3.4. Data collection procedure

The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms to ensure standardised and accessible data collection across both research sites. Data collection was conducted during regular university classes with prior institutional approval. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Prior to participation, all respondents were informed orally and in writing about the aims of the research, procedures of data collection, anonymity protection, and the voluntary nature of participation. Completion of the questionnaire was considered to constitute informed consent.

3.5. Data analysis

All responses were exported and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23). Descriptive statistical analyses were first conducted in order to examine the central tendencies and distributional characteristics of the analysed variables. Because the analysed variables were derived from Likert-type ordinal responses, and because the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated statistically significant deviations from normality ($p < .05$), non-parametric statistical procedures were employed. This decision was made to ensure closer alignment between the empirical distribution of the data and the assumptions underlying the selected statistical techniques. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare differences between Croatian and Serbian students without assuming normal distribution of responses. This procedure enabled comparison of rank distributions between two independent groups while reducing sensitivity to violations of parametric assumptions. Associations between self-perceived EU informedness and attitude-related variables were examined using Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient. Kendall's tau_b was selected because it is appropriate for ordinal-level data and allows for the identification of monotonic relationships while appropriately handling tied ranks.

The analyses focused not only on statistical significance but also on the conceptual consistency and interpretative coherence of the observed relationships. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively modest sample size, findings were interpreted cautiously. Particular attention was given to broader patterns across related variables rather than isolated statistically significant coefficients.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive findings on EU informedness and attitudes toward the EU

The first part of the analysis examined participants’ overall self-perceived informedness about the EU and their attitudes toward EU membership using descriptive statistical indicators derived from the InfoEU and StavEU scales.

Analysis of the InfoEU Scale (Table 3) showed that participants’ self-reported informedness about the EU averaged $M = 2.92$ ($SD = 0.83$), with responses ranging from 1 to 5. The median value of 3.00 indicates that the central tendency was positioned near the midpoint of the scale, suggesting a moderate level of perceived EU-related informedness among respondents. The distribution demonstrated slight negative skewness (-0.11), indicating that a somewhat larger number of participants assessed their informedness above the arithmetic mean. Kurtosis (-0.33) suggested a relatively even distribution of responses across the scale.

Table 3. Participants’ answers to InfoEU scale’s particles

InfoEU		
N	Valid	141
	Missing	0
Mean		2.9234
Median		3.0000
Std. Deviation		.82796
Skewness		-.107
Kurtosis		-.326
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

The StavEU Scale (Table 4) produced a slightly higher overall mean score ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.75$), with responses also spanning the full range between 1 and 5. The median score of 3.25 suggests generally positive attitudes toward EU membership and its perceived implications. The observed negative skewness (-0.31) indicates that partici-

pants somewhat more frequently selected favourable responses toward the EU. Kurtosis (.49) showed a distribution slightly more concentrated around the central values.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the StavEU Scale

StavEU		
N	Valid	141
	Missing	0
Mean		3.1915
Median		3.2500
Std. Deviation		.74747
Skewness		-.313
Kurtosis		.492
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

These descriptive findings indicate that participants demonstrated moderate levels of self-perceived informedness about the EU alongside moderately positive attitudes toward EU membership and its mobility related dimensions.

4.2. Differences between Croatian and Serbian students

To address the first research question, differences between Croatian and Serbian students regarding self-percieved EU informedness and attitudes toward EU membership were examined using the Mann-Whitney U test.

The analyses revealed no statistically significant differences between Croatian and Serbian students in overall self-perceived informedness about the EU, suggesting that participants from both countries assessed their levels of EU-related knowledge similarly. However, statistically significant differences were identified regarding attitudes toward EU membership (Table 5). Croatian students expressed more favourable attitudes toward the EU and its perceived benefits than Serbian students. Also, Croatian participants more frequently associated EU membership with positive outcomes related to travelling opportunities, intercultural contact, and broader social mobility within Europe.

Although these differences reached statistical significance, they should be interpreted cautiously due to the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively modest sample size. Nevertheless, the findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 3, according to which Croatian students, as citizens of an EU member state, were expected to report more positive attitudes toward EU membership than Serbian students, while no substantial differences were anticipated regarding self-perceived EU informedness.

Table 5. Mann–Whitney U comparisons between Croatian and Serbian students on InfoEU and StavEU scales

Scale	Country	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	z	p
InfoEU	CRO	69	66.11	4561.5	2146,5	-1.396	.163
	SRB	72	75.69	5449.5			
	Total	141					
StavEU	CRO	69	82.18	5670.5	1712.5	-3.185	.001**
	SRB	72	60.28	4340.5			
	Total	141					

**p < .01

4.3. Associations between self-percieved informedness and intercultural and mobility-oriented attitudes

The second part of the analysis examined associations between participants’ self-perceived informedness about the EU and their attitudes toward intercultural contact, travelling, and friendship opportunities within the EU context. Kendall’s tau_b correlation coefficients were calculated in order to assess the strength and direction of ordinal associations between informedness-related and attitudinal variables.

As shown in Table 6, a positive and statistically significant correlation ($\tau_b = .27, p < .01$) was identified between participants’ overall self-perceived informedness about the EU and the perception that ‘a positive side of joining the EU is getting to know other cultures, religions, and nations.’ Self-perceived informedness about the EU also positively correlated ($\tau_b = .22, p < .01$) with the belief that EU

membership provides ‘better opportunities for travelling and making friends.’ Although weak to moderate, these associations indicate that participants who perceived themselves as more informed about the EU also tended to express more favourable attitudes toward intercultural exchange and mobility-related opportunities.

Table 6. Correlations between general EU informedness and intercultural and mobility-oriented attitudes

		How well informed are you about what the EU is on the scale 1-5?	
Kendall's tau_b	Positive side of joining the EU is getting to know other cultures, religions and nations	Correlation Coefficient	.270**
		P	.000
		N	141
	Positive side of joining the EU is better opportunities for travelling and making friends	Correlation Coefficient	.221**
		P	.002
		N	141

**p < .01 *p < .05

Further analyses focused on specific dimensions of self-perceived informedness. As presented in Table 7, participants who reported greater self-perceived informedness about EU institutions and governmental structures were also more likely to perceive EU membership as beneficial for intercultural learning and interaction ($\tau_b = .22, p < .01$).

Table 7. Correlations between self-perceived informedness about the EU government and positive attitudes toward intercultural contact

		How well informed are you about the EU government (bodies, institutions, legislative division) on the scale 1-5?	
Kendall's tau_b	Positive side of joining the EU is getting to know other cultures, religions and nations	Correlation Coefficient	.221**
		P	.002
		N	141

**p < 0,01

A similar pattern was identified regarding self-perceived informedness about the EU economy. As shown in Table 8, knowledge of EU economic structures demonstrated a weaker but still statistically significant positive association with attitudes emphasising intercultural openness ($\tau_b = .14$, $p < .05$).

Table 8. Correlations between self-perceived informedness about the EU economy and positive attitudes toward intercultural contact

		How well informed are you about the EU economy on the scale of 1-5?	
Kendall's tau_b	Positive side of joining the EU is getting to know other cultures, religions and nations	Correlation Coefficient	.142*
		P	.043
		N	141

*p < .05

Self-perceived informedness about EU geography was positively associated with both intercultural and mobility-oriented attitudes (Table 9). Participants who considered themselves more informed about EU geography more frequently agreed that EU membership facilitates get-

ting to know other cultures, religions, and nations ($\tau_b = .15$, $p < .05$), as well as travelling and meeting new people ($\tau_b = .25$, $p < .01$).

Table 9. Correlations between self-perceived informedness about the geography and positive attitudes toward intercultural contact

		How well informed are you about the EU geography on the scale 1-5?	
Kendall's τ_b	Positive side of joining the EU is getting to know other cultures, religions and nations	Correlation coefficient	.149*
		P	.033
		N	141
	Positive side of joining the EU is better opportunities for travelling and meeting friends	Correlation Coefficient	.254**
		P	.000
		N	141

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

5. Discussion

5.1. Informedness and intercultural openness

The findings of this study indicate that higher levels of self-perceived informedness about the EU are associated with more positive attitudes toward intercultural contact, travelling, and friendship opportunities within the European context. Participants who considered themselves better informed about the EU were more likely to perceive EU membership as beneficial for getting to know other cultures, religions, and nations, as well as for facilitating travel and social interaction. These findings provide support for the first research question and Hypothesis 1. The observed relationships are consistent with previous studies suggesting that informedness and educational exposure may contribute to more favourable orientations toward European cooperation and intercultural openness (Damiani et al., 2022, 7; Jugert et al., 2019, 436; Verežan et al., 2025, 121). Although the correlations identi-

fied in the present study were mostly weak to moderate in magnitude, their consistency across several variables suggests that informedness may function as an important contextual and cognitive resource shaping how young people interpret the social and cultural dimensions of European integration.

The findings also align with research emphasising that younger generations frequently perceive the EU less as an abstract political structure and more as a practical framework associated with mobility, communication, education, and intercultural experiences (Ross et al., 2017, 145; Fišer, 2024, 787–789). Participants who perceived themselves as more informed about the EU also appeared more open toward forms of interaction commonly associated with contemporary European mobility, including travelling, meeting new people, and exposure to different cultural environments.

At the same time, the moderate overall levels of self-perceived informedness identified in this study suggest that many students may possess only partial or fragmented understanding of EU-related structures and processes. This finding is consistent with previous regional research indicating that young people often demonstrate generally favourable attitudes toward the EU despite relatively limited or uneven levels of factual knowledge (Jovičić-Vuković et al., 2022; Pisarović et al., 2021). The present results therefore suggest that informedness may contribute to positive intercultural and mobility-oriented attitudes even when such informedness is primarily self-assessed rather than objectively measured.

5.2. Specific dimensions of informedness and mobility-oriented attitudes

The findings further demonstrate that specific dimensions of informedness about the EU, particularly knowledge related to institutions, economy, and geography, were positively associated with attitudes emphasising intercultural openness and mobility-oriented perceptions. These results provide support for Hypothesis 2 and indicate that different forms of EU-related informedness may contribute to young people's perceptions of Europe as a space of cultural exchange and social connectedness.

Self-perceived informedness about EU institutions and governmental structures showed one of the strongest associations with positive intercultural attitudes. Participants who reported greater familiarity with EU institutions were more likely to perceive EU membership as beneficial for intercultural learning and interaction. One possible explanation is that institutional informedness may strengthen perceptions of the EU as an organised and cooperative political space facilitating interaction across national boundaries. Similarly, self-perceived informedness about EU geography was associated with more positive perceptions of travelling and meeting people within Europe. This pattern appears consistent with previous studies on youth mobility and travel behaviour showing that young people frequently connect Europe with opportunities for exploration, intercultural learning, and social experience (Todorović & Jovičić, 2016, 281; Vukadin et al., 2022, 328–331). Familiarity with the geographical and cultural diversity of Europe may therefore contribute to perceiving mobility and intercultural interaction as more accessible and meaningful. Noteworthy, these findings do not suggest causal relationships between informedness and attitudes, but rather indicate the presence of stable associations between self-perceived EU-related knowledge and more positive mobility-oriented orientations among the analysed participants.

5.3. Croatian–Serbian differences in attitudes toward the EU

The comparative analyses revealed that Croatian students expressed more favourable attitudes toward EU membership than Serbian students, while no substantial differences were identified regarding self-perceived informedness about the EU. These findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 3 and are generally consistent with previous research examining youth perceptions of European integration in the Western Balkans (Damjanovski et al., 2020, 327–340; UNDP, 2021, 23–25).

One possible explanation for these differences lies in the distinct political and institutional contexts of Croatia and Serbia. Croatia, as an EU member state, provides students with more direct exposure to EU institutions, mobility programmes, educational initiatives, and public discourse surrounding European citizenship and participation. Serbia,

in contrast, remains in a prolonged and politically complex accession process characterised by more ambivalent public narratives regarding the EU and European integration. The findings may therefore reflect differences not necessarily in informational access itself, but in the broader experiential and institutional contexts through which young people encounter the EU in everyday life. Croatian students may perceive EU membership more positively because they are more directly exposed to practical benefits associated with mobility. At the same time, the absence of significant differences in self-perceived informedness suggests that students in both countries may access similar informational resources through digital media, higher education, and transnational communication channels.

5.4. Limitations of the study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research relied on a convenience sample of university students from two higher education institutions, which limits the generalisability of the findings to broader youth populations in Croatia and Serbia. The sample was also predominantly female, reflecting the gender structure of the selected study programmes.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-report measures. Consequently, the InfoEU Scale assessed participants' self-perceived informedness about the EU rather than objectively verified factual knowledge. Differences may therefore exist between participants' perceived and actual levels of EU-related understanding.

Third, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow causal conclusions regarding the relationship between self-perceived informedness and attitudes toward intercultural openness and mobility. The identified associations should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal patterns.

Future research could expand the comparative framework to additional countries in the Western Balkans and combine self-assessment measures with objective knowledge indicators and qualitative approaches in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth perceptions of the EU.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study support previous arguments suggesting that informational and experiential dimensions of European integration may be interconnected among younger generations. Participants who perceived themselves as more informed about the EU also tended to express more positive attitudes toward mobility, intercultural interaction, and social connectedness within Europe. The results additionally suggest that many young people approach the EU primarily through pragmatic rather than strongly ideological frameworks. Mobility opportunities, travelling, friendship formation, and intercultural exchange appeared more central to participants' attitudes than abstract political considerations. This pattern is consistent with previous regional studies portraying youth support for European integration as strongly connected to perceived educational, social, and mobility-related opportunities (Fišer, 2024, 787–789; FES, 2019).

From an educational perspective, the findings indicate that strengthening EU-related literacy and intercultural educational initiatives within higher education may contribute to greater openness toward intercultural communication and mobility opportunities. Educational activities focusing on European institutions, mobility programmes, and intercultural exchange could therefore play an important role in shaping more informed and socially engaged orientations toward Europe among university students.

Longitudinal studies examining how (self-perceived) informedness, mobility experiences, and intercultural attitudes develop over time could further contribute to understanding the relationship between educational exposure, European integration, and youth identity formation in contemporary Europe.

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SAMOPROCIJENJENA INFORMIRANOST O EU I STAVOVI STUDENATA PREMA MOBILNOSTI I INTERKULTURALNOM KONTAKTU

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Između studenoga 2024. i siječnja 2025. godine, 141 student sa Sveučilišta u Slavonskom Brodu (Hrvatska) i Fakulteta organizacijskih studija »Eduka« (Beograd, Srbija) sudjelovao je u istraživanju koje je ispitalo povezanost između samoprocijenjene informiranosti mladih o Europskoj uniji (EU) i njihovih stavova prema članstvu u EU. Primjenom upitnika s validiranim skalama samoprocijenjenog znanja o EU i stavova prema EU, istraživanje je analiziralo povezanost između samoprocijenjene informiranosti i percepcija usmjerenih na mobilnost, uključujući putna ponašanja, socijalnu interakciju i interkulturalnu otvorenost unutar EU. Neparametrijske analize (Wilcoxonov W test i Kendalllov τ_b koeficijent korelacije) pokazale su da je viša razina samoprocijenjenog znanja povezanog s EU statistički značajno povezana s pozitivnijim i mobilnosti sklonijim stavovima. Hrvatski studenti procijenili su članstvo u EU povoljnije od srpskih studenata, dok su obje skupine iskazale slične razine samoprocijenjenog znanja. Rezultati naglašavaju važnost informiranosti u oblikovanju percepcija mladih o europskoj integraciji i mobilnosti te ukazuju na sličnosti i razlike između zemalja članica EU i zemalja kandidatkinja u području obrazovanja, gospodarstva i turizma.

Ključne riječi: *Europska unija; stavovi mladih; samoprocijenjena informiranost; interkulturalna mobilnost; Jugoistočna Europa*