

# Academic Mobility: a non-Machiavellian means to global citizenship

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## Abstract:

*Although Mobility is a trendy and an important keyword in education matters, it has been a knowledge tool since the beginning of times, namely the Classical Antiquity, when students were moving from place to place following the masters.*

*Over the time, different types of academic mobility can be found and this tool has been taken both by the education and business sector as almost a compulsory process since the world has gone global.*

*Mobility is, of course, not an end but a means. And as far as academic mobility is concerned it is above all a means to get knowledge, being it theoretical or practical. But why does it still make sense to move from one place to another to get knowledge if never as before we have heaps of information and experiences available around us, either through personal contacts, in books, journals, newspapers or online?*

*With this paper we intend to discuss the purpose of international mobility in the global world of the 21st century as a means to the development of world citizens able to live, work and learn in different and unfamiliar contexts.*

*Based on our own experience as International Coordinator in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) over the last 8 years, on the latest research on academic mobility and still on studies on employability we will show how and why academic mobility can develop skills either in students or in other academic staff that are hardly possible to build in a classroom, or in a non-mobile academic or professional experience and that are highly valued by employers and society in general.*

**Keywords:** academic mobility, employability, global citizenship.

## Biography

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## 1. Introduction

Mobility has been defined by different authors in different ways over time. However, in our approach in this paper, we will take into account UNESCO definition:

*Academic Mobility' implies a period of study, teaching and/or research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence ('the home country'). This period is of limited duration, and it is envisaged that the student or staff member return to his or her home country upon completion of the designated period. The term 'academic mobility' is not intended to cover migration from one country to another. Academic mobility may be achieved within exchange programmes set up for this purpose, or individually ('free movers'). Academic mobility also implies virtual mobility.*

This definition is based on Article 15. "Sharing knowledge and know-how across borders and continents of the World Declaration Higher Education for the twenty-first century: Vision and Action" (UNESCO 1998). In this declaration, issued in 1998, academic mobility should be promoted as a "means to advance knowledge and knowledge-sharing in order to bring about and promote solidarity as a main element of the global knowledge society of tomorrow (...). It should also lift the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas in higher education and through large-scale co-operative action involving, *inter alia*, the establishment of an educational credit transfer scheme" without forgetting "the needs of the least developed countries and of the small states with few higher education institutions or none at all"(UNESCO 1998).

According to this declaration, signed by 17 States, education in tertiary education should above all be based on strong cooperation principles as solidarity, partnership, multiculturalism, multilingualism, brain gain and on the need of instruments for the recognition of studies, including certification of the skills and competencies in order to make it easier for students to exchange courses and to go on mobility.

15 years after this "Declaration of Intent", internationalization in the world's higher education sector has developed enormously, in different ways and there has been several attempts to fulfill some of the intentions of this UNESCO document.

As far as global citizenship is concerned, there is no final or legal definition and the concept is used by diverse institutions in different ways, but we believe that it is definitely a mindset that comprises "ways of thinking and living within multiple cross-cutting communities—cities, regions, states, nations, and International collectives..." (Schattle 2007, 9). This means that a global citizen is aware of his role at the global scale, respects and values diversity and has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially.

## **2. Academic mobility in the European Context**

In the European context, the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a good example of it, having as one of its main tools the Bologna Declaration, issued one year after.

The Bologna Declaration has created the new European system of study programs meant to stimulate development of mobility and international cooperation in higher education, both intra Europe and internationally. For the first type of mobility, a common credit system is referred to "as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility" and as far as international mobility is concerned, increase the attractiveness of Europe as an academic destiny and promote the European system of higher education worldwide.

Recognizing that society was more dependent on talent than ever before, the avoidance of any obstacles to mobility and the circulation of talent and brains in a knowledge-based economy has been put in the foreground in these two documents,

together with the construction of a European identity. And this would also be highlighted in the coming Lisbon Strategy, in 2000i.

Official conferences of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009), Budapest (2010) and Bucharest (2012) were organized to extend and detail the Bologna Agenda, since member states were unable to fully resolve difficulties and obstacles, namely faced by people wanting to study or conduct research in the EU. In fact, in London Communiqué 2007 (BFUG 2007), it was stated that “mobility of staff, students and graduates is one of the core elements of the Bologna Process, creating opportunities for personal growth, developing international cooperation between individuals and institutions, enhancing the quality of higher education and research, and giving substance to the European dimension”. However, the Working Group indicated that there was scarce relevant data, that no data gave a full picture, that there was no common and appropriate definition of mobility for statistical purposes, and that there was no data covering all Bologna countries and no comparable and reliable data on genuine student mobility. Moreover, it suggested that a wide definition of mobility should be used within the Bologna Process, covering all forms and durations of mobility within higher education in a global perspective. Student mobility thus referred to a “study period in a country other than that of prior permanent residence or prior education (completed or ongoing) for a period of study or a full degree” and it did not include foreign work. Thus, short-term mobility (e.g. ERASMUS) was not taken into consideration in OCDE or even in Eurostat statistics and some migration flows were being assessed as mobility flows, just to mention a few constraints of the statistics.

Therefore, in this communiqué, BFUG recognized the need to improve the availability of data on both mobility and the social dimension across all the countries participating in the Bologna Process. The European Commission was asked to give indicators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries. Therefore, based on Eurostat and Eurostudent statistical data, the European Commission elaborated a report in 2009 - *The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe: Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility* - (European Commission 2009), to be analyzed in the next meeting (Leuven).

This report was nevertheless almost based on the same data and criteria, and concludes, amongst other things, that:

- The percentage of students enrolled in higher education abroad in Europe is still quite low (2% of students with EU-27 citizenship were studying abroad in Europe in 2006), but this outbound mobility rate is increasing continuously, both in the EU-27 and in the Bologna Area (+5 % annually on average between 2000 and 2006).
- Inbound mobility rates in Europe on the whole stood at 7 %, with around half of these students being non-citizens from within the Bologna Area.
- Despite a continuous increase of foreign students enrolled in the EU-27 at ISCED level 5A and 6 the proportion of them coming from the Bologna Area has dropped.
- financial resources, along with linguistic barriers, constitute the main obstacles to mobility and the data show that studying abroad still depends on socioeconomic background. (European Commission 2009).

In this report, Eurostat and Eurostudent confirmed that important improvements are currently being made as regards data collection on mobility. The criterion of prior education (i.e. considering as mobile a student enrolled in a country different from the one of previous level of ...education) (...) should be preferably used (instead that of citizenship) but “few countries have so far collected this information.”

The Leuven Communiqué 2009, nevertheless, keeps on recognizing mobility as one priority and sets more ambitious goals:

“... mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. We call upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad.”

The Budapest Declaration 2010 only recognizes that mobility has not been fully and equally implemented in all member states and, therefore, the “2010-2012 Work Plan” includes mobility as one priority, and the main actions were to “define the indicators used for measuring and monitoring mobility and the social dimension in conjunction with the data collection” and to “consider how balanced mobility could be achieved within the EHEA”(BFUG 2012a).

Probably to meet some of these targets, European University Association (EUA), one of the members of BFUG’s Mobility Work Group, developed MAUNIMO project (Colucci et al. 2012): a tool that allowed the “Mapping University Mobility of Staff and Students” (MAUNIMO).

This European study has deeply researched on the gap between policies and practices in three main target groups - *(a) student mobility, (b) early stage researcher mobility and (c) staff mobility* – and shows that more than a decade after the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, most of the published results remained limited to descriptive statistics, the drivers and barriers of student mobility keep focusing on intercultural contacts, language acquisition and adaptation processes, and are nationally framed, making it difficult to have reliable common indicators.

Below, we can find some of the main drivers, obstacles and outcomes of mobility collected in the surveyed Higher Education Institutions:

	<i>Drivers</i>	<i>Obstacles</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<i>Students</i>	Personal fulfilment • European citizenship • Intercultural competence	Lack of motivation Perceived pressure of time Lack of information and counselling Perceptions of quality Xenophobia Disability	Personal fulfilment • European citizenship • Intercultural competence
	Academic achievement • inability to cross binary boundaries • domestic quota • lack of specialist provision • consortium network • mobile service provider • reinforcing virtual mobility	Recognition problems • prior learning • transferred credit • qualification • joint degrees • academic calendars • prolongation of degree	Academic achievement • progression • employment • international alumni • dual qualification
	Value for money	Financial constraints • socioeconomic status • cost • lack of portability • adverse exchange rates • domestic commitments • work placement insurance • interfacing of EU and national funding and reporting systems	
	Career advancement • employer sponsorship • job opportunities • alumni benefits	Adverse labour market • protectionism • work permit	Enhanced employability
	Language competence	Language competence	Language competence
	Family connections	Migration policies • visa/residence permit restrictions	
<i>Early stage researchers</i>	Career advancement Lack of specialist opportunity at home Better salary, funding and status abroad	Contractual insecurity • pension rights • social security • adverse pay and taxation	Career advancement
	Better infrastructure and support abroad	Family mobility	
	Better PhD and post-doctoral programmes abroad	Better conditions at home	
	Language competence	Language competence	Language competence
		Migration policies • visa regulations • work permits	
		Posts abroad not advertised	
<i>Staff</i>	Career advancement	Lack of information Lack of incentive	Career advancement
	Collaborative research	Contractual insecurity • pension rights • social security • adverse pay and taxation	Collaborative research
	Curriculum development	Family mobility	Curriculum development
	Language competence	Language competence	Language competence
	Family connections	Migration policies • visa regulations • work permits	
<i>Higher education institutions</i>	Strategic vision Competition/collaboration Inward: • demographic decline • revenue generation • consortium membership • research collaboration • qualified labour Outward: • consortium commitment • curriculum development • research collaboration Funding programmes Performance indicators	Administrative burden Inadequate infrastructure: • strategic plan • investment • recognition expertise • counselling and support • project management • language provision Replacement labour costs Fear of losing good students and staff Collective agreements	Alumni network International profile Quality enhancement Human capital Student experience Benchmarking Development activities

**Table 1.** *Drivers, obstacles and outcomes of mobility*

In MAUNIMO, 2012 (Colucci et al. 2012)

Nevertheless, this project puts forward that much has changed since 2010: the “concept of ‘genuine mobility’ (which defines the country of origin as the foreign country of permanent residence or as the foreign country of prior education) has been widely accepted. There is also consensus to the effect that mobility should be defined in such a way as to exclude migration, but to encompass the full HE internationalisation agenda and not merely short-term exchange programmes. [...] The term ‘learning mobility’ is gaining ground. Target setting in the Bologna Process will be supported by appropriate data collection and interpretation.”(Colucci et al. 2012).

Another European study, produced for the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), of the European Commission, in approximately the same time frame (2009-2011) – “Mobility developments in European higher education”(E. U. Teichler et al. 2011) comes to very similar conclusions, namely that there are no clear concept frameworks for mobility in all EU members, in order to collect objective data, and that some needs are to be dealt with, in order to make better information available, namely the need for: more regularly collected data on “real mobility” (prior residence or education at a global level); regularly collected data on temporary mobility and Europe wide (in and outside of scholarship programs); data differentiated by academic level (Bachelor/Master) (E. U. Teichler et al. 2011).

In Bucharest Communiqué 2012, some of these alerts can be slightly noticed, namely on the terminology used for mobility (learning mobility), the scope of action (internationalization) and the need for common indicators. BFUG reinforced in this Communiqué that “Learning mobility is essential to ensure the quality of higher education, enhance students’ employability and expand cross-border collaboration within the EHEA and beyond” and that “sufficient financial support to students is essential in ensuring equal access and mobility opportunities” (BFUG 2012c). Moreover, a “new” strategy was added (*Mobility for Better Learning*, 2012), including its mobility target, as an integral part of our efforts to promote an element of internationalization in all of higher education.

In this document and also in the 2012-2015 Work Plan, mobility is directly linked to higher institutions’ process of internationalization and to the need of a wider range of assessment indicators: short period mobility (3 months/ 15 ECTS), internationalization at home activities, e.g., “more targeted data collection and referencing against common indicators, particularly on employability, the social dimension, lifelong learning, internationalization, portability of grants/loans, and student and staff mobility”(BFUG 2012b).

While we wait for the BFUG communiqué 2015, and without making reference to the many studies, projects, criticisms and overall research on this subject, we can summarize this brief review by saying that the European policy defined since ERASMUS creation (1987) and reinforced by The Bologna Declaration was to work towards a free circulating EAHE, where mobile students (intra- and non-European) could take full advantage of Europe and promote a new generation of students who may be building a new mobile and more talented, skilled and attractive Europe, therefore also increasing social and economic development.

As briefly mentioned, many drawbacks and constrains avoid the full implementation of this goal, notwithstanding the many studies, working groups (namely BFUG) and policies published. But, definitely, academic mobility or the more up to date concept “learning mobility” is a priority to Europe 2020, as a pool of talent that can contribute to Europe’s growth and competitiveness and many efforts are carried out both to motivate European and non-European potential mobile students and talent into the EAHE, namely with the new “Erasmus for all” or new directives of the European Parliament and European Council to destroy obstacles to the admission of non-European students and researchers, previewed till 2016ii.

### 3. Mobility in 21st century: mobile in a global World

“One of the most visible aspects of globalization is student mobility”

(In Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution, 2009)

Transnational mobility of students and academics is a growing phenomenon all over the world as a source for knowledge creation and brain circulation.

According to this report, in 2007 more than 2.5 million students were studying outside their home countries and estimates predicted the rise to 7 million international students by 2020. The flow of international students has been a reflection of national and institutional strategies but also the decisions of individual students worldwide.

This report also states that the mobility of international students can be analyzed in two main trends: the one within the European Union, as part of its various programs to encourage student mobility, that we referred to before, and the one consisting of students from Asia entering the major academic systems of North America, Western Europe, and Australia. However, the classical flows South-North and East-West, tend to change as BRICS countries and other traditional sending countries (like Malaysia or Singapore, just to mention a few) are also becoming more attractive in the international tertiary education sector.

Deeply linked to the internationalization pressure of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide, mobility commonly stresses the role of HEIs as social engineering for a neoliberal knowledge economy.

Universities have become once again *universitas* informed by the universals of a lingua franca and by the mobility of academics, students and ideas which, on the one hand, are open to the world and, on the other, can use this brain circulation to compete in a global scale. Nevertheless, while higher education is increasingly affected by global trends, it remains essentially a national phenomenon and most institutions still function within national boundaries and serve local, regional and national interests (Altbach et al. 2009).

Mobility trend has certainly created a range of new opportunities in a globalized higher education environment, which of course are not equally accessible and benefit the wealthiest or otherwise socially privileged students (Altbach et al. 2009), even as far as financed mobility is concerned, as, for instance, the one promoted by ERASMUS (European Commission 2009).

On the other hand, it is possible, if not ethically and fairly managed and monitored, that academic mobility can create more brain drain than brain gain to less economically healthy countries and promote a new pattern of migration: Talent Mobility: mobile students become migrant workers. But we will come back to this in section 3.2.

#### 3.1 Globality: the new definition of space and time in a transnational and transcultural environment

Being mobile is more and more a condition than a physical process. In fact, after so many years dealing with globalization (for the best and for the worse) globality has already made mobility a condition of being global: either more or less virtually.

According to Byron (2008: 14)

*“particularly with the digital revolution in the mid 1990s and the proliferation of the eponymous “mobile” as well as the increasing globalization of the*

*world, mobility has progressively become dissociated from physical mobility, from the notion of domicile and territory, broadening its domain to include not just people and capital, but also social practices, objects, information, signs, ideas. As a result, mobility is now interpreted as a fashionable concept, even a myth, evoking above all fluidity, continuity, and seamlessness”*

In this sense, physical mobility is too restricted to convey everything the world offers today and mobility has become “a whole way of life in itself”, more important than territoriality (Urry, 2000, *apud* Byron, 2008: 14). It refers to different modes of move and especially to modes of access (to information, news, the world). It is no longer where and when, but how to be connected to the world. In this sense, the world seems to be moving with the individuals, in real time.

Digital mobility is, therefore, an option to physical mobility, allowing the access to information in different spaces and times. The most recent example of this, in distance education are probably the Corsera or MOOCs (massive open online courses) allowing any student from any part of the world to enroll for free (most of the times) in Top Universities’ courses.

However, infomobility and being mobile in a world where Information and Communication Tools have destroyed time and space barriers and created a transreality (Quian 2013) or, to some, a more flatter world (Friedmann, 2005) also deals with obstacles, raises difficulties and is not accessible for all. Being mobile in a high-tech world is very much dependent on access to cutting edge technology, on the one hand, and on an individual experience, even if in a social environment (like social networks, or virtual classroom), on the other hand. Digital education certainly allows the access to knowledge, contents, information, people even, but hinders interpersonal interaction – e.g, kinetics, proxemics, haptics, vocalics and chronemics – i.e, interaction with personal space, with cultural factors, amongst other personal experiences and interpersonal skills.

### **3.2 The Talent Mobility in the Business World**

Globalization has eliminated frontiers and in the case of Europe helped the crossing of borders and changed forever the concept of social (and we would also say individual) geography: the rest of the world is out there; we can pretend not to see it, but we cannot avoid it.

As all changes in life and in society, this spatial shift and exposure to the ‘other’ has created both opportunities and threats in a broader mobile world where diversity in cultures and languages is one of the first and most visible signs. Local societies have merged, even if not intentionally, with bigger societies (regional, national, European, international), and the interrelations amongst them demand new competences and skills from the most local citizen.

Moreover, the political, social and economic events over the last decades deeply transformed the local markets and the business world and if we agree that there are no longer isolated events we could state that, to a certain extent, every business is international or global (Cateora, 2007). Also, if globality means that “going global is no longer a choice” (Sirkin, 2008), this means that any business has to cross borders to survive.

Doing business abroad demands an internationalization strategy that cannot be other than focused on the customer. In fact, together with the motto “think globally, act locally”, large-scale business soon learned that you can buy in any language but you

can't sell well in your own, and this is now even truer with e-commerce, as a study carried out by Common Sense Advisory has shown recently.

Being global also means investment and increase of expense. Different geography, different people, different organization styles and, all in all, different culture, demands a plan and optimization of resources and networks and having the right human capital (talent) to face aggressive competition and the market needs.

On the other hand, demographic changes in the near future, in developed and developing countries will create a shortage trend of labor in the former and a surplus trend of labor in the latter, i.e an unbalance in labor offer. Employability will surely be linked to Talent mobility from highly skilled personal, who also need to have intercultural and language knowledge to adapt to a new cultural and language environment. "Talent mobility is an important way to increase the employability of the workforce through improving access to better educational systems or training providers" (World Economic Forum 2010).

One action to promote talent mobility is student mobility:

*"Students' mobility should be encouraged as a first step in talent mobility. Recognition of cultural diversity, greater international exposure and increased adaptability are some of the many important benefits students gain when receiving education in more than one country.[...]. Student mobility significantly enhances cultural diversity and facilitates intercultural understanding. It allows the younger generation to learn, in practice, values such as tolerance. Even very short-term mobility for primary and secondary students such as exchange programmes between schools should be encouraged to multiply contacts by children with diverse environments."* (World Economic Forum 2010)

Nevertheless, mobility is not only a means to attract talent in the beginning of careers of employees but should be an action promoted internally in companies to enhance talent over time:

*"Design and promote talent mobility programmes inside the company. Companies should develop mobility programmes for their employees and encourage them to embrace a global mindset. These programmes will also ensure cross-fertilization and give companies a chance to build a global workforce across their network of offices and facilities. Mobility programmes can include several formats such as cross-office staffing, temporary secondment, temporary transfer to other offices and rotational programmes. International assignments are essential for the skills development of high-potential employees."* (World Economic Forum 2010)

In globality, no company or business will be able to cope with constant change and speed development without high-skilled human resources with a global mindset, who are familiar with different spaces, times and cultures and always prepared to learn from exposure to different and distant environments. The "life long learning" concept is also a must in business where constant training is needed and careers are open opportunities.

Human capital is no doubt the key to success and Talent Mobility is an important new aspect of talent management that has changed the behavior of employees towards mobility (World Economic Forum 2010).

#### **4. Final Considerations: academic mobility and employability**

Being mobile is no longer a condition for phones or other technological gadgets... It is

a human condition: either regionally, nationally or transnationally, change and constant training require a broader geography in current and future job market.

Both academia and business seem to agree that the easiest way to be prepared to multicultural environments and constant change is exposure to different and international environments, so that diversity is considered an advantage more than a problem. Academic mobility is a tool that can certainly enhance tolerance towards other cultures and develop generic and soft skills that the market demands, that academia seems not always to be able to provide, especially in short education cycles. Moreover, mobile students and employees normally create a network, that can be of support at the beginning of the mobility but that can be a valious large-scale network after the mobility period, either to find partners, solve problems or find opportunities and solutions.

Although fair and “for all” mobility seems not yet completely possible, as it depends on opportunities that not all are able to take, all students should find ways of being exposed to international environments, either abroad or taking part at internationalization at home activities and interact with mobile citizens in order to enhance talent, intercultural skills and acquire a global citizenship that allows them to have a choice of where and when to work and feel at ease in diverse environments.

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i See Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 march 2000. URL:

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ii See "New rules to attract non-EU students, Researchers" in University World News. 22 April 2013. URL:  
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iii These flows can be viewed at Global Flow of Tertiary-level Students, available at UNESCO Website. URL: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/EDUCATION/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx> (accessed on 22.2.13)

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