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INTERNATIONAL PATHFINDERS: THE BIOGRAPHICAL DIMENTIONS OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

International Pathfinders is a systematic study of the biographical significance of educational mobility within a European context. It builds upon autobiographical narrative material gathered through the EuroIdentities project. The study aims to combine the elements of social theory and the most recent research in the area of internationalisation of higher education with biographical material in order to understand and push the academic debate even further. This article employs a three-stage sequence of educational mobility – leaving home, the experience itself, and the return – as a core structure for discussing and presenting the cases. Within that framework, issues such as influence of cultural and symbolic capitals and specific characteristics of the educational structures of opportunities are explored. Biographical consequences of educational mobility take the form of an international frame of reference, allowing international students to navigate in complex international relations, and can be considered the source of social status both in an international and a national context.

Key words: educational mobility, international framework of reference, autobiographical narrative research, internationalisation of higher education.

1. GLOBALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS STUDENTS

In the 21st century, the importance of higher education has become a somewhat unquestioned mantra of modern society. Increasing demands for highly qualified workers and professionals reflect a focus on highly specialized and technology-

-orientated areas within the economy, and the growing importance of research and development units adds to those demands. Consequently, higher education systems are adjusting to global trends by entering into a competitive market in order to demonstrate the quality of the professionals they qualify. Within that context the definition of a 'good' university degree becomes wider: it no longer consist merely of solid knowledge about a given subject but must also contain abilities such as proficiency in languages, competencies of working within an international environment, team-working, good organisational and management skills.

The global economy means that higher education institutions find themselves in worldwide competition with each other. Where funding is following individual students, universities aim to attract not only home students but also international students. On the other side of the equation, international students themselves are following global trends, searching for academic opportunities, international degrees and language courses. It is commonly assumed that international experience will provide them with a head start for future employment opportunities and a chance for a bright career. Within that global economy context, international trends within higher education seem a natural way of market differentiation in a capitalist-driven educational market.

It can be argued that knowledge and therefore 'knowledge-based institutions' have always transcended national borders. In medieval times, most of the students were at some point encouraged to spend some time in an academic institution other than their native one; the greatest scientific achievements were shared with international colleagues and fuelled the industrial development all over the world (Delanty, 2001). However, while knowledge can be transferred internationally, universities and other higher education institutions across the globe have, for the past centuries, been enclosed within their own national and, more importantly, linguistic 'bubbles'.

This dual – national and international – character of universities makes it possible for them to exist and operate within both contexts (Delanty, 2001, Varghese, 2008). Universities combine innovative ideas with academic research as well as young, ambitious individuals. This is one of the reasons why higher education institutions are often associated with upward social mobility as well as with revolutionary social movements. Within that context, individual students experience, learn and make their very first important life choices.

While educational experiences offer an insight into the international state of affairs, every individual student is anchored in their national and local socio--economic context. Individual aspirations, ambitions as well as future employability

are influenced by national economic supply-and-demand mechanisms, which reflect both national and global trends. The aim of this paper is to explore the biographical dimensions of the internationalisation of higher education by relating them to the concept of an international framework of reference. The paper focuses on international mobility as a part of the educational path and distinguishes three stages of educational mobility – leaving home, the mobility experience and the return.

2. THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Within this simplistic model of globalisation in higher education, two major terminological issues should be addressed. The available literature concerning cross-border student mobility shows a clear conceptual distinction between globalisation and internationalisation. Globalisation of higher education relates to the organisational aspect of higher education as an institution. It emphasises changes at global scale, which influence the structure of universities, programmes and degrees. Globalisation trends address the complex issues of global competition and market-steering (Teichler, 2004, 2006; Valimaa & Hoffman, 2007; Varghese, 2008), which play a major role in attracting international students. Internationalisation, on the other hand, is 'signalling that border-crossing activities grow whereby national contexts continue to play a significant role for higher education' (Rivza & Teichler, 2007:62). While globalisation is usually discussed in the context of diminishing national boundaries, internationalisation focuses on cross-border activity and the relations between international and national contexts. Within the relevant scope of research, internationalisation reflects the current state of affairs concerning student mobility more accurately.

In the European context, which is at the centre of this paper, the internationalisation of higher education can be considered a quite specific case. This is due to educational mobility programmes provided by the European Union as well as the historical tradition of bilateral cross-country student exchanges. Teichler (2004, 2007) uses the term 'Europeisation' in order to highlight specific regional processes, which differ from the rest of the world in terms of socio-economic and cultural background as well as in terms of sheer numbers. According to ongoing research of the International Centre of Higher Education Research in Kassel, since the start of the ERASMUS programme in the 1980's the number of international students had reached 2.5 million by 2004 and the proportion of international students within the overall student community is approximately 2%. Yet the exact

numbers as well as details about underlying causes and consequences of student mobility are relatively unexplored.

Both at European and global level, student mobility – and indeed the entire educational system – can seem relatively easy to research. Students and international academics are easily accessible and generally eager to participate in academic inquiries. Survey data on ERASMUS and international students are gathered by most academic institutions, with some additionally questioning their former students after some time. Especially the employment trajectory has attracted interest amongst social researchers. However, there is no coherent set of data that would support a precise estimation of the correct number of the educationally mobile population, and the research tools used by centres of national statistics as well as by individual academics and research projects across Europe vary significantly. Methodological problems start at the level of operationally defining what 'educational mobility', 'student mobility' and 'foreign student' actually refer to, up to the level of national statistics that struggle to capture 'mobile targets' within their own population.

When considering universities as part of the system by tracking national and international policy changes, quantitative indicators of students' mobility and the amount of international collaborative research projects shed light on the scope of internationalisation in higher education. At the same time, this quantitative logic of research is not a sensitive enough tool to research the individual impact of international education. The mechanisms and logic behind decisions to become an international student, the structure of opportunities and resources available for students and the consequences for an individual as well as for their family and community require more qualitative considerations. In the era of global mass-media, where the story of one individual can influence hundreds or even thousands of others, it is possible to assume that every international student carries with them the potential for social change. New values, lifestyles, and consumer tastes, but also new individual philosophies regarding the purpose of family, work, belonging and citizenship, are shaping a new social reality. This reality forms and influences a new way of life, and social researchers can gain access to it by using a narrative, biographical approach.

3. METHODS AND DATA

Biographical research is based on two main assumptions. Firstly, a single life story represents the fragile balance between an individual's life with his or her everyday practices, choices and plans as well as his or her social environment. The macro-structures of society impinge on the lives of individuals, influence and

shape them; however, being anchored in their micro-reality, individual people have the power to negotiate and challenge them. Biographical research focuses on information captured by narratives which disclose the interaction between those two elements. Secondly, the way life stories are told, the way in which narrators choose to tell about themselves in relation to the outside world, provides researchers with valuable insights into their cognitive and emotional structures. Those reflect the way in which individuals navigate within a complex historical and socio-cultural context, their structures of relevance and meaning-making. In order to investigate both elements of a biography – what is said and how it is said – the research process requires a flexible, multidisciplinary analytical framework.

For the purpose of this paper the autobiographical narrative method of Fritz Schütze is used. This particular approach is rooted in the multidisciplinary traditions of the Chicago School, pragmatism, sociolinguistics, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and the French tradition of phenomenology (Apitzsch, 2007). The method of biographical interview consists of two main parts. First, the undisturbed flow of narration, which is a response to the request to tell one's life story, is awoken, and then the question part builds on those biographical experiences in search for details and clarifications. The open structure of the interview itself assures that the structure of narration reflects the individual's inner world and sense of their biography, neither of which are influenced by direct or indirect questions or suggestions. The analytical part of the method requires a detailed transcript and thorough step-by-step procedures, such as a sequential structural description, analytical abstraction, contrastive comparison of the cases and development of a theoretical model (Schütze, 2008). The method is time-consuming and the number of cases is limited; however, the tools and software used within Grounded Theory-based research can be used in order to speed up the process of data analysis.

The main strength of the biographical method lies in its interest not in a simple recapturing of events from the past, but in the structure of how a life story is told. This approach helps to capture events and social phenomena from a bottom-up perspective, which is the main advantage over the standard, quantitative top--down approach. It explores causality, how things came to be, but also anchors them in the time-space, socio-cultural matrix (Kohli, 2005). At the same time, due to theoretical sampling procedures and relatively small numbers of cases, findings cannot easily be generalized to the wider public. As a result, in order to give readers an overview of the relatively wide scope of available data, this paper presents the findings of biographical research in the ongoing discussion with other studies which can be considered representative due to their use of more quantitative methods.

The findings presented in this paper come from the autobiographical, narrative material collected within the EuroIdentities project (FP 7 Collaborative Project), which deals with the possible emergence of European identity in a transnational context. Within the complex design of the project, biographical material of the educationally mobile group has some distinct patterns and characteristics. The sample consists of 30 autobiographical interviews, with respondents belonging to the age group between 20–35 years and coming from seven European countries which include: Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Estonia and Bulgaria.

4. EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY AND ITS PLACE IN THE BIOGRAPHY

Social sciences tend to perceive educational mobility as an individual object of study. It is considered in quantitative terms as a cross-border flow of people naturally following the centre-periphery pattern, as short- or long-term, group or individual, within ERASMUS or outside of it, a bilateral or international experience. But little consideration is given to the fact that education is a process taking the shape of a biographical trajectory (Riemann, Schütze, 1995). Education is an important part of biography, starting very early in life and accompanying the individual until adulthood, in the case of academics even throughout the entire life. The concept of educational trajectory, in the sense presented by Strauss (1995), is important because it takes place in an institutionally organised environment. Opportunity structures as well as patterns of responsibilities and success are embedded in the school everyday life and have an impact on how individuals make sense of their educational as well as social experiences. Within that educational trajectory, educational mobility is only one element of an entire chain of events which are structurally and emotionally connected.

In the autobiographical narrative material three stages of international experience can be distinguished within the educational trajectory – before, during and after international mobility. All three of them are subjects of individual research concentrated on social class, national education systems, international quality assurance, gender and age balance as well as employability. Biographical research, however, requires seeing all of them as linked into the complex matrix of individual and social elements. Within that process of social becoming international students attach biographical meanings to their international experience and build a biographical framework of reference. Within that framework individuals

establish a new value system, life plans and goals as well as a new understanding of the world around.

5. LEAVING HOME – STAGE ONE OF EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY

In the first stage, narrators often directly address their motivations and ambitions, but also indicate (often within the structure of the narration) the cultural, social and economic backgrounds. At that stage of the research, academic investigation often focuses on issues such as social class or symbolic and cultural capital. It is commonly assumed that the primary recipients of international higher education are people who can simply afford it and/or those who can find a way around financial restrictions. In that context the overall growth of financial status in European societies as well as the emergence of new opportunity structures, such as the ERASMUS scheme and bilateral exchange programmes, are assumed to have caused an increase in the number of international students. However, according to Rivza and Teichler (2007) this number remains on the constant level of 2% of the overall student population, indicating that other than strictly economic elements are playing a more important role in the educational mobility decision-making.

Although financial resources help to open up opportunities for educational mobility, they do not guarantee them. Instead, in terms of motivators for educational mobility, the notion of social and cultural capital of students seems more relevant. Within the EuroIdentities project the majority of students were encouraged from an early age to challenge themselves and were supported in setting goals. Their closest environment supported school education as well as additional skills such as private language lessons and artistic, creative interests. The motive of family support appears to be very strong in the educationally mobile group, especially when contrasted with other groups addressed by the EuroIdentities project, such as transnational workers or farmers.

I can only remember a nice childhood. It was really nice, I had really nice experiences. I had a good time at school. OK, I can remember, let's say -ehm- on the different educational perspectives we had, I was going to a German school and that means we had everything in German. And we had one lesson in Romanian language and that was kind of a very high literature lesson (Daniela 28 – Romania – ERASMUS/ International Degree)
[When talking about private English lessons] My English, yeah, I have been learning English for many, many years. My parents have always , from the beginning, said to me: English is a basic thing, you have to know languages. (Majka 26 – Poland – ERASMUS/ International Degree).

My parents were really good about -ehm- sending us to the different things like music lessons and things like that. So I learned to play the piano and violin. I mean I started that in primary school but continued on when I was in grammar school – there was like orchestra and choir and tons of different stuff and I really enjoyed that. (Lisa 28 – Northern Ireland – Language Degree)

Where social and cultural investments as well as family support are creating a conducive environment and where intellectual effort is rewarded and encouraged, social and cultural capital is accumulated, thus developing a set of individual predispositions that could be channelled within the educational trajectory. This can take on various forms, the most obvious being a continuation of education to the higher levels, the other being a search for new, more diverse experiences as well as academic and cultural challenges. Educational mobility writes itself into both trends. In the majority of cases of the educationally mobile, mobility is available at the level of higher education and is commonly considered a personal and academic challenge. However, accumulation of cultural and social capital does not cause educational mobility – as in the case of financial resources, it only facilitates it.

The other important element encouraging educational mobility comes not from the individual's cultural capital but from the external context indicating to the individual possible ways of using it in practice. Whilst cultural and social capital can be seen as a collection of energy for future biographical action, no less important are the elements that show the direction in which the possible biographical plan can be pursued. In that respect, all narratives of the educationally mobile feature the figure of the significant other. Be it following the dreams of parents, standing in competition with siblings or having an inspiring and influential teacher, within the different biographical settings the biographical plan for educational mobility begins to form. This example helps illustrate that point:

It was a big dream of my Dad's, to study in a foreign country. ... to go abroad. And he said that he almost did // he had an opportunity to go to Sweden but he never did // he has never been a member of the Communist Party, and they told him that if he did not sign himself up to the party he would not go ... And I know that for him it was quite a painful experience, he did not sign up, he did not go and deep down in his heart he always wanted, to so when I did get into this ERASMUS programme my Dad was all crazy for me. (Majka 26 – Poland – ERASMUS / International Degree)

This simple mechanism of accumulating the relevant social and cultural means, such as languages and cultural competences, as well as finding the right direction to channel it in the shape of a biographical action scheme may not seem very new. The fact that most educationally mobile individuals who gave an autobiographic interview chose to tell their story in a way which follows the

same pattern raises an interesting question, however. Narrators, whose stories were researched within this particular study differ with regards to gender, subject of study, nationality and languages; yet they chose to tell and structure their story in a fairly similar fashion, which would indicate some cultural pattern of understanding what educational mobility is, how it can be achieved and what role it plays in an individual's overall biography. This cultural and social pattern is referred to by Anselm Strauss (1995) as biographical 'framework of reference'.

Within the framework of reference used by the educationally mobile, yet another significant element can be found activating the international part of trajectory. Assuming that Rivza and Teichler's (2007) research reflects the overall socio-economic background of students across Europe, the 2% threshold illustrates the point that having the financial opportunities as well as internationally orientated forms of capital and role models is not enough to understand what motivates individuals to take part in international mobility. It also works against the thesis of Findley et al. (2006) that international mobility can be seen as one more way in which the middle-class system and its values reproduce themselves. The fact is that throughout Europe opportunities for international education are often ignored by young people and places for ERASMUS programmes at universities all over Europe remain unused.

Biographical research with the educationally mobile indicates that the activation of the mobility trajectory is linked to access to a specific biographical framework of reference. This framework sets the social patterns of success in the professional career – having an interesting, international job, as well as an individual life, having access to an international network of friends. It places added value on to the international aspect of being a student, which is reinforced by the discourse of globalisation in almost every aspect of everyday life and becomes a source of status. Being an international student carries the message to the world that an individual life can also be global, can be cosmopolitan. Finding and reproducing this framework depends on the structure of opportunities, social and cultural capital as well as on more qualitative biographical factors, such as involvement of significant 'others' – teachers, friends and mentors – but tapping into the framework is an expression of individual aims and ambitions.

6. BEING AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT – STAGE TWO
OF EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY

Within biographical research settings, educational mobility can be seen as an opportunity structure varying according to duration, destination and institutional patterns. There is a significant 'quality' difference between simple, already organised ERASMUS exchanges, institutionally organised language degrees and international degrees. Those different patterns of educational mobility reflect different levels of cultural and social capital accumulated by the individual as well as differences in economic status. They build on a range of varying pull-and-push factors such as proficiency in a foreign language, personal confidence and family ties, which, depending on the circumstances can aid or hinder the activation and realisation of an internationally orientated biographical plan (Davis et al., 2009). Based on all these factors as well as the scope of available research a simple typology of educational mobility experience can be created.

7. ERASMUS

ERASMUS students usually have the lowest level of foreign language proficiency and are rarely able to advance in terms of their academic knowledge. For them ERASMUS is mostly a cultural experience, a chance to enjoy their first adult independence.

> *You know Holland means weed, you know I have never before thought of trying it, but if you are already there, so I said to myself – OK I am here and everyone else – so if I want to party I should party right. Yeah – it really was that time – you could really meet people, get to know how other people see things in life. Besides – for me it was terribly stressful, going abroad, how am I going to handle that, the studies; I was sitting 3 to 5 hours // during the first month I was sitting and reading this one article ... but I managed, I can say it out loud here ... which I think was one of my greatest achievements. (Majka 26 – Poland – ERASMUS / International Degree)*

From that perspective ERASMUS is the adventure of a lifetime. The duration of the experience – between 3 and 10 months – offers the chance to get to know a new place, build a network of friends and gain confidence in dealing with unknown circumstances, which is reflected in almost all ERASMUS stories as a positive and character-building experience, which could easily be associated with the rite of passage.

> *[One year in Holland] was something extremely important, it really changed my behaviour about the world in an impressive way. I was very much a child despite being twenty one*

years old ... and I had an awakening – my family was no longer around me, my beloved ones were all far away. The world there was – ehm- welcoming, but was anyway still a world which was not mine ... which you have to understand. (Igor 25 – Italy – International Degree)

At the same time the intensity of the experience is limited. Students tend to cluster in their own international, often English-speaking groups, which reduces interactions with native students and limits exposure to the native language (where different from English). With those limitations in mind, ERASMUS can be marked as a relatively shallow experience within a life story. If not enforced by further international education its biographical consequences open some new perspectives for individuals, yet their impact on the overall biography is rather limited. This is especially visible when discussing other forms of educational mobility such as language degrees and international degrees.

8. LANGUAGE DEGREE

A language degree is the most natural way of exposure to an international education. Where language proficiency is an aim of the studies, a semester or year abroad is a formal requirement. Language programmes generally facilitate exchanges with countries where this language is spoken and provide students with opportunities to acquire more practical linguistic aspects.

Because I studied German I got to come abroad. I think if I had just studied something like history I would never have come abroad ... I suppose the year abroad, at least that makes you confident enough that you can live in a foreign country. ... I think it's easier – once you – yeah once you've really done it – when you have to do it cause you are forced to. (Joanna 24 – UK – Language Degree)

At the same time, from a biographical point of view, language degrees build sentiments and attachments to one particular country or language-culture for the entire life. Those young adults attempting to make a living out of languages exist between two different, linguistically distinct contexts. They build and multiply their cultural capital in order to be able to provide highly specialised services and translate between two or more social and cultural contexts. They are taking the role of interpreters not only of the language but also the culture, and that becomes the base for their bilateral, multilateral life action scheme.

Language degree students tend to be more academically orientated than ERASMUS students, and their commitment towards an international framework of reference is much stronger. This is due to the fact that proficiency in a language,

which is expected from the beginning of the degree, needs to be realised early on and requires an active effort. If persistent and ambitious enough, language students can make their international aspirations to travel, meet new people and cultures and to understand others their life's goal. Their professional status is rooted in international expertise which, from a biographical perspective, becomes the main structural element of their personal as well as professional life.

9. INTERNATIONAL DEGREE

Out of all three types of educational mobility, undertaking an entire degree abroad is probably the most challenging, due to financial restraints, cultural differences and difficulties in organising it. The preliminary conditions require very high foreign language proficiency as well as confidence in the new cultural context. According to Murphy-Lejeune (2001), this pattern of educational mobility carries some elements of elite migration, whereby the most privileged individuals get the chance to study abroad. Whilst this is undeniably true, it is also important to realise that other international programmes, including ERASMUS, often turn out to be an introduction for an international degree.

Within the biography, an international degree takes on a special role; it is not an adventure as ERASMUS is, it is also not the role of cultural and linguistic interpreter between two cultures. An international degree entails deciding to put oneself outside of one's national and cultural context for a significant amount of time in order to acquire professional skills that cannot be learned in the individual's national educational system or are at a higher level than available in their country of origin. This puts the individual into the position of contextual discontinuity (Archer, 2007), where living beyond the national context serves to fragment one's biographical continuity, with different life episodes and lines being spread into a wide geographical context. An international degree provides an individual not only with practical and professional skills but also the cultural competences of working in a multinational environment and language proficiency at an academic level in at least two languages (the native and degree language). In many respects this is one of the most specialised orientations towards global trends of mobility and multiculturalism.

These three mobility patterns build on and reshape individual biographies and reflect a specific level of attachment to and involvement in an 'international framework of reference'. All three patterns are underpinned by different goals and meant to lead to different outcomes. ERASMUS exchange programmes

were set up in order to widen Europeans' cultural horizons, whereas international degrees are aiming to educate national and international elites. Within that mosaic of elements, language programmes are meant to prepare a certain group of individuals towards bridging cultural and national differences between the countries. All of them, however, aim to open students' cultural and emotional perspectives towards a different, global view and challenge their understanding of the world and people around them. Within that process, individuals re-build their biography – new aspirations, priorities as well as new values are taken on board. They reflect a new understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic relations, a new international framework of reference that can be traced within individual biographies by the sudden change of one's world view and bold, unexpected life choices.

The three types of mobility discussed above also introduce a particular hierarchy within the international student group themselves. The international framework of reference delivers not only a new set of goals and perspectives but can also be used in order to evaluate and differentiate status within the international student group. For people outside of the international mobility, every international educational experience carries similar values, whereas within the educationally mobile group the status is often connected with the type of degree.

> *Compared to ERASMUS students who came to Trento at the same time ... after almost a year of our stay and it turned out that -mmh- that in my opinion they were still acting like tourists. I mean they were going to Venice for carnival, they were going somewhere to Bologna, as a tourist all the time, in this international group they couldn't manage to learn the language, they didn't learn Italian, actually for them it was -mmh- never-ending fun. (Magda 24 – Poland – Voluntary Service Abroad)*

It is within this particular international framework of reference that some of the ERASMUS students decide to continue their international educational experience on international courses. When the structure of educational opportunity opens and they are able to gain a sense of the inner hierarchy within international education they are able to risk their already settled life and follow the patterns which are difficult to understand for many people from their local environment. In biographical terms they risk contextual discontinuity when removing themselves from the social, cultural as well as economic context and pursuing goals and values that do not belong to their natural environment. Consequently, they cease to belong to the place they have always called home.

10. RETURNS – STAGE THREE OF EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY

What adds flavour to the international educational experience, however, is the element of a possible return. International students' experiences of 'contextual discontinuity' – of existing beyond the national system for some time, depending on the duration of the programme – make it difficult to come back. This moment of return can be particularly difficult because students often do not realise the extent to which they have changed themselves. The first culture shock involves the realisation that in terms of opinions, world-view, life-style and values they are in a different place than their home environment, the second is the frustration when they realise that their experience cannot be simply told and explained to others without similar educational experiences.

> *I think that's where – one of the points when the relationship between me and my mum went a bit out of sync. ... Because /ehm/ I'd got, she felt I think a bit offended, you know, that I had ... that I loved this other - life so much that it was like an insult to /ehm/ the life I'd had at home. And maybe I didn't – at that point – get my message across so diplomatically. That like now in hindsight I think I do appreciate life at home – but I think that was a starting point of a few years when I /ehm/ didn't really like home that much and that ... was a problem for her and it was a problem for me as well. (Pauline 31 – Northern Ireland – ERASMUS / International Degree)*

This out-of-sync experience is a source of great biographical frustration. It is expressed within the biography as the difficulty to re-assimilate and a lack of understanding from peers and family but also academic staff and future employers. A new, international perspective on the issues surrounding the educationally mobile does not fit in easily with the settled world-view of the native environment. Both academic and employment structures are not prepared to accept and use innovative, internationally driven individuals. According to Schomburg and Teichler (2006), available statistics on employability of ERASMUS students suggest that a higher percentage of international students seek employment at international level; however, the system is already too saturated to take them in. Where this is the case, international students can employ two different strategies. They can either put their international aspirations aside and try to rediscover the place they used to belong to, which shines through in some interviewees' expressions of unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. Alternatively, they can actively face the difficulties and try to find an economic, social or cultural niche which would take advantage of their newly acquired ambitions.

> *I decided to start a family and the only thing that perhaps I would change is the place where I live, which is the only thing which makes me suffer. If I didn't have any family ties I'd go abroad – outside Italy, really abroad, I would go away. But if I hadn't had this*

link and if I hadn't met my husband I wouldn't have tied myself down. I'd have left – gone abroad and I'd have worked ... because my life's dream is – is to work for an airline. (Maria 28 – Italy - ERASMUS)

/Ehm/ I'm struggling a little bit, I like both. I have travelled a lot in my life, I like doing it, I like being mobile, I like the changes, as you see my career path is very torn, very discontinued, a little bit here and a little bit there. After a year, I get bored quickly with different things. And this influences my life, not only personally but also professionally. -Ehm- I had this idea that I could fill some market niche on the Polish market [about building the travel company for international tourists to Poland]. (Kostek 30 – Poland – International Degree)

11. PERSONAL LIFE

A brief moment of international education at a crucial time in a young adult's life widens the perception of young Europeans of new 'paths' of life, through which the individual – instead of following common patterns of success within given gender roles, family history and national class patterns – can independently search and follow their own biographical path. Just to illustrate the point:

After the ERASMUS project I came back only for the summer ... ((10 sec)) OK, being gay was one of the reasons that I wanted to live in England. The fact is that I was really OK in London, but naturally when I decided to stay in England I wasn't out to anyone – not with my friends or with my family ... the problem is that ... it took time for me – to accept the fact of being gay and to want other people to know ... it has never been a thing I thought I would have talked about with my family. (Marco 33 – Italy – ERASMUS)

International mobility is also relevant in terms of relationships and settling into family life. An interesting element of biographical research on the educationally mobile is cross-cultural intimate relationships, especially those which have lasted beyond the educational episode. From a biographical point of view being in an international relationship keeps international patterns going within the biography. It prompts the individual to operate within an international framework in their everyday life and also introduces other members of the closest family to an international life-style.

[About living in Denmark] and my younger sister, Silvia, lives there ... she met Kai's [husband] best friend Olaf /ehm/ four years ago. ... It was so funny, we didn't try to match anything but they got together. But that's one of the good things, that at least I have my sister there. (Pauline 31 – Northern Ireland – ERASMUS/International Degree)

12. INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AS STATUS

The third stage of the educational trajectory, which is about returning, does not necessarily symbolise the end of an international experience. Having tapped into the international framework of reference, individual students use it in order to reshape their individual life plan within the given external circumstances. Changes include a different career path as well as family life but also involve reproducing new elements of international status. Within biographies of educationally mobile people new thematic elements are expressed and emphasized. Those elements are simple ways of expressing a sense of belonging to an 'international community' and are code for mutual recognition of belonging to this particular group.

The first element of international status within the biography can be associated with the privileged status of being mobile. The history of mobility as well as one's openness towards future international possibilities regarding the career as well as personal life is the statement of belonging to the cosmopolitan, global or international community. This usually quite naive confidence of being able to deal with the outside world in any place and not being afraid of international challenges is often verified by real life situations.

> N: [After finishing her degree at Cambridge] I could have gone anywhere. I feel no nostalgia, I have no attachment to Bulgaria ... coming to Bulgaria was one of the options.
> I: Neither a better one, nor worse.
> N: It could have been in the United States. It could have been in //just anywhere (Reni 40 – Bulgaria – International Degree)

Along with increasing confidence through the mobility experience, with regards to status a second element of the international framework of reference is the issue of re-defining the symbolic framework of belonging. Whilst national and local identities remain constant and international experiences add some international elements of appreciating other cultures and peoples in the case of ERASMUS students, at the more advanced stages of biographical internationalisation the ties with national and local communities become blurred and replaced by international status. This can take the form of abstract identities of being a citizen of the world, cosmopolitan, European; it can also steer the focus back to the individual by defining one's self in terms of profession, social function or individual achievements.

> Well I think I would say I am rather a citizen of the world. I, you know, I have a Polish passport, but I couldn't, not that I wouldn't mind, but I couldn't represent Poland because I haven't lived there for so many years. ...I can't represent the culture anymore because

I have lived in Germany, I have lived in the US and UK and I'm already influenced by those, so I am rather a mix than belonging to a particular nationality. Couldn't say I belong to one of them. (Gosia 25 – Poland/Germany – International Degree)

The third element of an international framework of reference would involve the association with others who belong to the same category of international individuals and face the same challenges. Within the individual biography these associations are often addressed by referring to a network of international friendships. This is particularly interesting when considering that friends from all over the world rarely have a chance to be part of a person's everyday life, yet they are present in all educationally mobile interviews as one of the most positive aspects of international mobility. Those are people who, whilst not around, share a common international framework of reference, which brings them together.

Our wedding was amazing because it was – like, the one time in my life when everyone was in the same room, you know, that was – I looked down and I could see the French ones there, the Dublin ones there, the ones from home, the ones from Denmark, the ones from Ireland. There were 11 nationalities in a room. And that was so nice ... like that day it just felt like – you know – you pick up those wee gems of people from everywhere you've gone. (Pauline 31 – Northern Ireland – ERASMUS /International Degree)

13. CONCLUSION

The internationalisation of education is associated with the economic processes of globalisation. It focuses on cross-border student mobility. Within this paper the specific case of European student mobility was discussed based on the biographical material gathered by the EuroIdentities project. Within the available scope of research concerning student mobility, quantitative methods are dominant; however, for the purpose of this paper a qualitative biographical research method was employed in order to understand the bottom-up processes of educational mobility. The use of this particular method allowed exploring in detail the mechanisms of student mobility as well as their place and consequences within the overall biography of individuals.

From a biographical perspective educational mobility is seen as part of a larger educational trajectory. It builds on the social and cultural capital which individuals acquire within their family and school setting. Their social as well as cultural capital – in particular their foreign language proficiency – can then be used in the international educational experience. The type of educational mobility is strongly associated with the form and strength of the individual's social and cultural capital. This paper focussed on three different forms of educational

mobility: ERASMUS exchange, language degrees and international degrees. Those were discussed with regards to the quality of international experience as well as personal and social consequences.

The paper introduced the term of international framework of references, which is an analytic tool attempting to holistically understand the biographical importance and impact of educational mobility. The international framework of reference becomes an important social pattern of an individual as well as social orientation within an international context. It consists of the patterns of both individual and social success, a sense of hierarchy within the international student community as well as elements of social status. The international framework of reference helps individuals to navigate within complex global social realities, but at the same time it puts them 'out of sync' with their local context. This becomes an important biographical experience bringing the global economic, cultural, political and social forces directly into individuals' lives and their environment.

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MIĘDZYNARODOWI TROPICIELE: BIOGRAFICZNE WYMIARY UMIĘDZYNARODOWIENIA EDUKACJI UNIWERSYTECKIEJ

(Streszczenie)

Artykuł ten jest szkicem biograficznych wymiarów internacjonalizacji kształcenia na poziomie wyższym w kontekście europejskim. Materiały autobiograficzne wykorzystane w artykule pochodzą ze zbioru projektu 'EuroIdentities'. Szkic ma na celu systematyczną analizę materiału empirycznego w świetle istniejących teorii socjologicznych i najnowszych badań. Artykuł rozpatruje mobilność edukacyjną z punku widzenia jej sekwencyjnych stadiów – wyjazd, pobyt i powrót – co daje możliwość systematyzacji i prezentacji materiału biograficznego. W ramach tego trzy-stopniowego procesu szkic rozpatruje kwestie kapitałów kulturowego i symbolicznego oraz zróżnicowanej możliwości realizacji planów działania z punktu widzenia trzech odmian jej instytucjonalnego uwzorowania. Biograficzne konsekwencje mobilności edukacyjnej są rozpatrywane w ramach obecności 'międzynarodowego układu odniesienia', który pomaga studentom zorientować się w skomplikowanej międzynarodowej rzeczywistości i może być rozpatrywany jako źródło statusu społecznego na poziomie zarówno narodowym jak i międzynarodowym.

Słowa kluczowe: mobilność edukacyjna, międzynarodowy schemat odniesienia, badania autobiograficzne, internacjonalizacja szkolnictwa wyższego