Mobility and migration: freedom and threat?

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I must confess that I have a strange feeling that I will address the respected audience in a manner that is somewhat unusual for an academic conference. I hope that this will not be a barrier to our communication. The main theme of our conference is very broad and my wish is to even more expand its focus. We live in a time when this is necessary; at a time when we need to face specialized and often narrow research perspectives with infinitely wide horizons and confusing problems posed by the current time. Above all, I am grateful to the organizers for the opportunity I have – the second in recent years. I will try to take best advantage of it. As you can see, I want to discuss two key concepts which are very popular among many of today's researchers. I would like to talk about how the semantics of these two concepts – mobility and migration – has changed in the recent period and how this change may affect our understandings of the role that higher education should play.

Mobility as freedom

The word "mobility" has been for many years one of the key words in the debates on higher education; it is quite closely related to the second keyword – "migration". In general, we believe that *mobility is about freedom*: no obstacle to our life journey, no obstacle for new experience and for new opportunities. The best metaphor for *immobility* – that is, the opposite concept to mobility – is *prison* (but it could also be refugee camp). So much about our world in general terms. In the narrower sphere of higher education, over the past decades we have understood mobility increasingly as a *value*. Everything should be done to improve and enhance the mobility of students and staff. In Europe – with the Bologna process in particular – mobility has become the central axis around which all the key higher education policy ideas circulate today. Today, in 2016, Europeans perhaps have some big problems with Europe and European integration, but European mobility remains highly appreciated and undisputed value. Even in the global context, free mobility is one of the main policy ideas: very clearly, for example, this is noticeable in the competition of higher education institutions and national systems to attract as many foreign students and academic staff as possible. Therefore, *academic mobility* is directly linked to *academic migration* – and both concepts are linked to broader population trends and changes.

On a global level, we encounter huge population changes such as we may ever knew in theory but not experienced in practice. On the one hand, the population in developed world is aging and shrinking; on the other hand, high population growth is characteristic for the developing countries. On the one hand, the developed countries promote mobility and encourage immigration; on the other hand, migration is becoming a source of panic fears. All this has been particularly strongly present in the so-called "migration crisis" over the last twelve months, especially in Europe.

All of this has a major impact on higher education: both on higher education practices as well as on higher education policy. Academic mobility and academic migration are centuries-old features of academic life. In the past, there was no specific discussion about this: academic mobility and migration were taken as "natural phenomena". Of course, we can't ignore that the academic migration in the past encapsulate very small groups of people, virtually only those who could be classified as "elite" or "privileged". It appears that qualitative changes in the understanding of these concepts appeared with the rise of mass higher education a few decades ago. Academic migration, which was once a fairly peripheral issue, became *mass academic migration*, and this shift has brought problems of massive proportions. Today we are not talking about individuals, but about millions of mobile students, foreign students, overseas students, migrant students etc. and increasingly also about academic staff.

Mass higher education vs. population gaps: empty halls?

On the one hand, migration has been favoured because it is an injection of a highly skilled workforce for the growing markets in highly developed countries; on the other hand, this brought a danger of brain drain for less developed countries. Mass academic migration has recently started to drive the academic industry, which in the past did not happen and was not even conceivable. Without the influx of students from abroad, lecture rooms and halls could remain empty; some universities could be faced with a possibility of being closed and some of the staff would be left without opportunities for academic promotion. Moreover, with mass academic migration more and more new challenges have opened up: recognition of qualifications, quality of teaching and learning, academic integration (e.g., linguistic, cultural, etc.), cost of living, employment, immigration policy and visas, etc.

Migration as a "looking for better life"

The whole world has in recent years – and particularly recent months – been faced with a new dimension of migration: The issue of *security* has come to the fore and has overshadowed other challenges. Mobility and migration are not only desirable phenomena promoted by specific policies. When governments can no longer cope with migratory flows, we start to talk about migration as a humanitarian problem. Unfortunately, we have repeatedly seen this in recent decades in various parts of the world.

However, these problems are not stopping existing migration trends; on the contrary, global migration – both academic and general – is still growing: it brings the promise of a "better life", "better future". Free mobility and migration are therefore associated with one of the deepest human characteristics: with hope and with the construction of various utopias.

Migration as a humanitarian problem

Migration as a threat and fear

But it seems that this time we have to do with a much more serious situation: migration has begun to represent a *danger* and a *threat.* This shift brings change in human understanding of the world around us, it brings different behaviour and transforms our value systems. Last but not least, it requires a change in current policies. In my eyes, changes in *the symbolic context is very important*: The issue of security challenges the established meaning structures. Is academic mobility truly a positive value? Is it necessary, for safety reasons, to give up some traditional academic values? These changes have a significant impact on the practice of higher education institutions as well as on existing policies.

Migration and the world in which we live

So let first briefly look at what the recent "migration crisis" has brought into the world in which we live. This insight will be illustrated with a few examples, first from my country, which is today presented as "the most southeast point of the free mobility Schengen area", and then from some other European countries.

Slovenian army began to build wire fence to guide migrants at the Slovenian-Croatian border. (*Nova 24 TV*, 17 November 2015)

Last fall, the first time after the fall of the Berlin Wall, new walls have emerged in Europe. One of them was built on the Slovenian-Croatian border; it was nonexistent before 1991 but now it is the external Schengen border. Cutting wire, 157 km long, has been stretched through the idyllic forests and meadows and the river banks, which have so far attracted tourists and nature lovers.

Wire has not only prevented carefree wandering in nature, but has also become a deadly trap for wildlife. The reactions of citizens were different: some greeted the wire for security, others strongly opposed to it. But the wire was only one of the issues about which the public has strongly polarized over the last year. Last fall and winter, a huge flow of refugees ran through Slovenia, mainly from the Middle East, as well as from Afghanistan and some African countries.

Yesterday, a hunter from the Hunting Association 'Sinji vrh' killed with a mercy shot the sixth animal that become entangled in the wire at Kolpa [border] river. (*Žurnal24.si*, 25 December 2015)

Part of the recent protest against the establishment of a refugee center in the former Baumax building in the city of Kranj consisted of a White Guard [i.e. WW 2 quisling] iconography. (*Delo*, 23 February 2016)

Food and emergency accommodation had to be provided for them, but in many cases the local, almost by rule rural communities protested and resisted governmental plans for the establishment of refugee shelters. Two confronted slogans have been heard more and more loudly: "*Refugees Not Welcome*" and "*Refugees Welcome*", like in many other European countries. My country faced a "migration crisis" already two decades ago, at the beginning of the Balkan wars in the 1990s, but the then refugees were accepted

rather warmly and with a human care. Even then many refugees were Muslims. What has changed in twenty years? Why are they now so often "not welcome"?

In educational community, but also among the general public, a governmental attempt to install a small group of unaccompanied refugee minors in one of the boarding schools in a small city in Northwest Slovenia caused most fuss in February. In the past, boarding schools were established in many cities to facilitate access to upper secondary education for young people from rural regions. However, better transport infrastructure and dwindling generation have caused that today boarding schools in Slovenia are fairly empty. Therefore, the management of boarding schools would gladly welcome new residents.

Among the proposals to solve the refugee problem in Slovenia there is also a proposal to accommodate minors without parents or guardians in the premises of the boarding school in the city of Kranj. However, parents are against. (*Žurnal24.si*, 23 February 2016)

However, this led to upset protests: parents threatened with a withdrawal of their teenagers, and even teachers from the local grammar school stood up against the so-called "Islamic threat" in their district. This protest has activated, on the other side, the greater part of the educational community in the country: many schools and teacher unions were protesting against the obvious homophobia. Refugee minors are now accommodated in boarding schools in other cities, where they were received courteously.

In recent months similar stories come more or less from all European countries – also from those which are not on the main refugee route. Recently, special media attention was given to some sort of the road theatre occurred in the centre of Prague. I quote from *The Telegraph* (23/08/2016): "A Czech anti-Islam group sparked panic in the heart of Prague when they staged a mock Isil invasion featuring a black flag, a camel and men dressed in military uniforms firing imitation weapons. Security

A Czech anti-Islam group sparked panic in the heart of Prague when they staged a mock Isil invasion featuring a black flag, a camel and men dressed in military uniforms firing imitation weapons. (*The Telegraph*, 23 August 2016)

camera footage released by the owner of a near-by restaurant showed panicked people falling over each other and scrambling over tables as they fled from what they thought was a terrorist attack."

Flüchtlingsheim statt Rundreise für chinesischen Tourist

Eigentlich wollte der Tourist aus China am Stuttgarter Flughafen einen Diebstahl melden. Doch er erwischt das falsche Formular. Auf seiner Europa-Reise stoppt er deshalb in einer ungewöhnlichen Unterkunft.

08.08.2016, von CHRISTOPH STRAUCH

Among many similar news one more is worth mentioning (this time referring *Frankfurter Algemeine*, 8 August): A Chinese tourist wanted to report the theft of his money at the airport in Stuttgart. As the man only spoke Mandarin and arrived with refugees from other countries he was given the form to apply for asylum instead of the form for reporting the theft. Hence he was brought to a refugee camp. In the procedure his passport and visa were taken by the administrators. He did spend two weeks in the refugee camp.

At first glance, at least the last story look ridiculous. However, these stories are not funny; these stories are horrible. These stories tell that our societies have changed quite fundamentally. Half a century ago freedom meant freedom from barriers and walls. Quarter a century ago these walls and barriers were demolished in the name of freedom, freedom of movement, of thought and communication. Now, paradoxically, it appears that freedom is provided – or

"All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. And therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words '*Ich bin ~~ein~~ Berliner*'." (President Kennedy, 1963)

better: protected – by cutting wire and walls. The walls of the "Fortress Europe" – or perhaps the new walls of the EU Members States that are increasingly concerned with their own little gardens and forget the "common good"?

Brexit: What are the 'four freedoms' of the European Union?

IMMIGRATION and the freedom of movement defined the EU referendum campaign. But what are the EU's 'four freedoms'?

By ALICE FOSTER
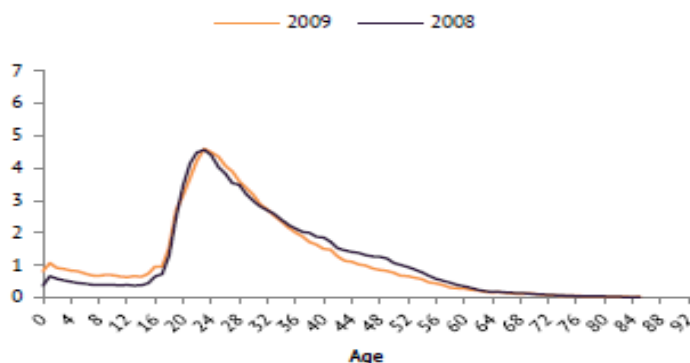PUBLISHED: 15:33, Thu, Jun 30, 2016 | UPDATED: 15:40, Thu, Jun 30, 2016

We must confess that Europe of today does not look exactly an example of a united and well-connected entity. The enthusiasm of European integration from the end of the 1980s and the 1990s has disappeared; old walls are forgotten and new walls are being built - both in cement and in minds. What has changed in twenty years? This is a difficult question and we leave it to another conference and other speakers. However, it includes a sub-question that here and now we cannot avoid: Does all this bring any significant effects on higher education?

Migrants and (higher) education: Responses and existing practices

It is true that we do not meet the refugee and migrant flows for the first time, but it is probably also true that these flows are now significantly different than in the past. In one of its recent publications, the OECD openly asked: "*Is this humanitarian migration crisis different?*" There the many indications that the answer is positive. First, there is – at least in the eyes of Europe – a change in extend and intensity of these flows. These flows are *mass flows* in the full sense of the word.

The current humanitarian crisis is unprecedented with an appalling and unacceptable human cost. The number of refugees is unparalleled in recent times. The diversity of nationalities, motives for migration and individual profiles also creates a huge challenge for asylum systems and welcoming communities in main European destination countries. Moreover, given the complexity of its main driving forces, there is unfortunately little hope that the situation will improve significantly in the near future.

This issue of **Migration Policy Debates** looks at the most recent developments in the humanitarian migration crisis and what makes this crisis different from previous ones.

Is this humanitarian migration crisis different?

- Europe will record in 2015 an unprecedented number of asylum seekers and refugees with up to one million asylum applications; an estimated 350 000 to 450 000 people could be granted refugee or similar status, more than in any previous European refugee crisis since World War II.
- In recent months the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan routes have gained importance with relatively large numbers of people starting to leave or transit via Turkey. The Central Mediterranean route, which leads to Italy, also continued to be heavily used. According to the latest available estimates more than 330 000 persons have arrived by sea in Europe since January this year, including about 210 000 landings in Greece and 120 000 in Italy.

A recent report on *Youth and Migration* (2014) states that 232 million international migrants worldwide were identified in 2013 out of whom about one-eighth (28.2 million) are migrants between 15 and 24 years of age – that is young people for whom one would expect to be enrolled in upper secondary and higher education. If we add those less than 15 years of age, it is not difficult to conclude that *today's migrants are mostly children and young people*. The problem of migration is therefore not just a problem of the national security and department of internal affairs, to some extent even social affairs and public health; it is also quite a *problem of education*. There are many reasons why education remains

Source: The Global Migration Group, UNICEF 2014

in the background and on the margins of the popular migration debate. One of them is the language and script and everything that is often captured by the word "different culture" or "different religion". The problem is even worse, because in populist discourses – which are many in Europe of today – this *difference* is very quickly mythicised and expressed in words such as "fundamentalism", "terrorism", "Isil" and the like.

For these and other reasons, the work of all those educators at various levels of the educational system, which are trying today to respond to the challenges of the time, is extremely difficult. The problem of migrants' education is approached in the context of existing legislation and existing policies. The question is whether this is sufficient: existing policies have been developed to address different population in different situation than

migrants and refugees. Reform of the system and creation of new policies is definitely not an easy task – neither in professional nor in political terms – and therefore efforts of individual institutions and educators who are trying to solve problems in new and original ways are all the more important.

World class higher education for refugees?

There are some systemic tools, developed over the last two decades, at disposal; as a rule they are offered by human rights convention, international documents and the commitments undertaken by signatory States, such as the obligation to provide basic education for all children. On the other hand, practices which have evolved from the past strategic emphasis on the internationalization 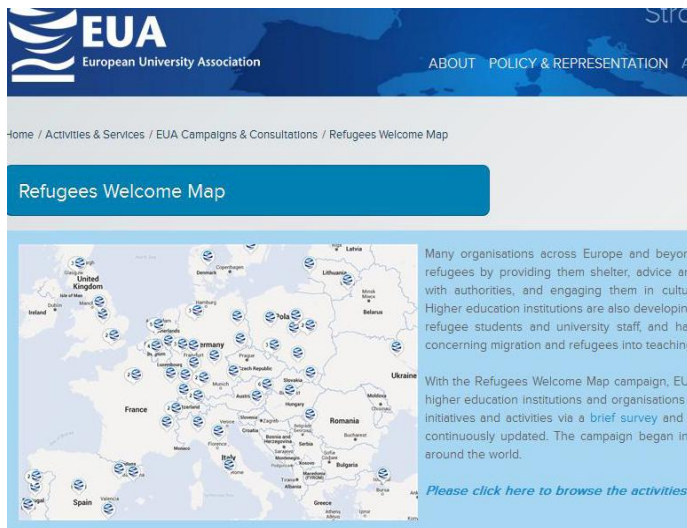of education, are also helpful. If we compare today's universities and schools with those from two or three decades, then the differences are obvious and enormous: today they are much more qualified to work with diverse populations from different educational systems and cultural contexts. But is this sufficient to cope with new and different problem of today's migrants? For which purpose did we build tools for mobility and internationalization? Do these tools meet new challenges *now*? Are we really able to provide "world class higher education for refugees"?

Usually, *formal access to educational institutions* is the first big problem. Here, an important legal principle was provided by the *Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications* (1997). This international legal document contains a section entitled "*Recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation*", which, inter alia, bounds signatory States "to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education [...] *even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence*."

Section VII –
Recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation

Article VII

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

Lisbon Recognition Convention, 1997

When it comes to refugees, such cases are a rule rather than an exception. Today, higher education institutions make use of this tool but both institutions and migrants still face major problems.

A good overview of the current situation at European universities – and also a great encouragement for further initiatives – was recently offered online by the European University Association with the so-called *Refugees Welcome Map*. The interactive map shows how different universities in different countries are developing initiatives tailored to refugee students and university staff and have included subjects concerning migration and refugees into teaching and research. With this project, the EUA aims to showcase and document the commitment of higher education institutions and organisations in supporting refugees. The campaign began in Europe but they stress that it is open to institutions and organisations around the world.

What kind of data can be found at this interactive map? As we can see on this slide (here I take the opportunity to promote my own university), initiatives can be supported at the national or institutional level, but also on both at the same time. Initiatives primarily familiarize candidates with opportunities to *access*, as it is the case with all foreign candidates, but also with specific problems concerning migrant and refugee candidates like *recognition* of studies and prior learning, *preparatory courses* (including learning local language), *integration measures* and *financial support*.

Another similar project was launched by the European Commission: a survey was conducted to collect a wide range of initiatives taken by higher education actors. The objective was two-fold: to have a better picture of the initiatives already taken by higher education actors in this area and of the challenges they may have encountered, as well as to continue adapting the *Erasmus+* programme to the current situation through a bottom-up approach and asking the higher education sector for their input. This initiative focuses on

three main areas: Access to higher education and awareness in society; second, meeting basic needs and easing social integration; and third, recognition of skills, access to higher education and the integration of researchers.

Both at the institutional and national level a lot has been done. Let me summarize a few highlights from many recent reports coming from various parts of the world: In Germany, three out of four universities are participating in a programme that enrols refugees and more than 100 million € has been allocated to the programme over four years. In the UK, various colleges have stepped up to offer scholarships and assistance to asylum seekers; some universities have set aside substantial budgets and are working with international aid groups. The EU recently announced 400 scholarships for Syrian refugees; in addition, it supports and funds initiatives to improve the recognition of qualifications held by refugees. Japan will be accepting 150 refugees and will be treating them as exchange students. In the US, 60 colleges have joined a coalition to provide resources to Syrian refugee students; one hundred and fifty

Syrians have been awarded scholarships through the initiative. In Canada, dozens of institutions are teaming up with World University Service of Canada to not just provide students with an education, but also to resettle entire families. Etc.

Migrants and (higher) education: Challenges, opportunities and policy issues

Compared with the horrible news about refugees fleeing from violence and killings, these reports are really welcomed. New practices that are observed in the higher education arena, offer important incentives and can significantly help to solve the so-called "crisis situation". But the approaches, marked by solidarity and humanism, are not the only practice in the work with refugees. We know well that the slogan "*Refugees Welcome*" is faced on the streets of European cities with the slogan "*Refugees Not Welcome*". This problem can't be addressed here; instead, in conclusion, I would like to highlight an issue for which it seems to me, that it may be the key to future activities in this field.

First, the so called "migration crisis" is just another opportunity to seriously reconsider not only the European idea but also the idea of European Higher Education Area. In the last year we were faced with open questions and challenges that require systemic responses. European Higher Education Area requires today a strategic rethinking of what it means *internationalization in higher education*; even more, it is necessary to rethink the so-called "external dimension of the Bologna Process", i.e. international cooperation in policy development and reform of higher education. These issues cannot be reduced to technical issues; they also need to be protected against populist discourses that are spread across today's Europe and the entire world.

Almost twenty years ago when the Bologna Declaration was drafted, the idea of a European Higher Education Area was by no means restricted to technical issues. It was a vision of something new; a vision which also confronted with a broader – not only higher education – problems of the time. Already in its third paragraph, the Declaration reflected on the broad flow of refugees, who then ran from the Western Balkans to the rest of Europe. It acknowledged "the importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies". I'm afraid that in the past two decades, this aspect has been disappearing and that the current policy sees the full potential of higher education only in categories like "employability" and "cooperation with the industry".

A page from the history

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the [post-conflict] situation in South East Europe.

Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999

European integration 2000 vs. European integration 2016

Of course, here we meet with all the problems of Europe today, but we have already said, that we can't deal with all this complexity. We can say only that only worse alternatives exist opposite to the idea of Europe. Therefore, efforts should be made to prevent that the further development of the European Higher Education Area would contribute to weaker alternatives.

As we have seen in the case of Brexit, higher education institutions – both those from the UK and from other countries – are well aware of the far-reaching strategic significance of the EHEA. They are also aware of the various dimensions of international cooperation worldwide. The past months proved that the academic space is much different from those spaces, where fear of the Other and homophobia take place. The so-called "migration crisis" is therefore also a kind of the test of inner strength of the academic space. First and foremost, its main task is to provide quality education and life opportunity to all candidates with a migrant background. However, we must not forget the so-called second and third mission of higher education: research and work with communities, which can also importantly contribute to solving many dilemmas related to migrants.

I am sure that our conference will also make at least a modest contribution in this direction.

https://www.dcu.ie/herc/her.shtml