

Serial number 0339
Title Im(mobility) Stories of Greek PhD graduates: 'should I stay or should I go?'
Session Unraveling academic mobility: fresh frameworks of thought (Tzanakou)
Submitter Prof. Charikleia Tzanakou

Im(mobility) Stories of Greek PhD graduates: 'should I stay or should I go'?

Outline

Mobility has been romanticized in policy and academic discourse as a positive force (Robertson, 2010) and is often investigated as a resource for career development and progression of individuals or as contributing to economic growth and advancement (brain gain and circulation) (Fahey and Kenway, 2010). The individual benefits of mobility are expected to be manifold for professional and personal development including improved language skills and intercultural competencies (Murphy-Lejeune 2001; Crossman and Clarke 2010; Messelink, Van Maele, and Spencer-Oatey 2015), among others. Nevertheless, studies show that international academic mobility might be problematic for individuals and beyond. Studies have challenged the transferability of foreign qualifications and the subsequent transnational capital across national borders especially for degree mobile students (Wiers-Jenssen 2003; 2011; Brooks, Waters, and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Tzanakou and Behle, 2017). At the same time, international academic mobility does not seem to escape the production and reproduction of inequalities in higher education (see for more special issue by Bilecen and van Mol, 2017).

Academic immobility has been investigated in relation to academic inbreeding and its effects on scientific productivity and knowledge circulation (Horta, 2013; Yudkevich et al 2015). Academic inbreeding is considered when a university employs PhD graduates who were trained in the same university. This university practice has been linked to academic stagnation and low scholarly productivity (Horta, 2013; Inanc and Turner, 2011). Recently a comparative study on academic inbreeding in different countries also provided a positive aspect of this phenomenon in terms of retention of best talent and capacity building in small or less developed higher education systems (Yudkevich et al 2015).

Studies have focused on academic mobility of exchange and degree mobile students in relation to their undergraduate degree (Wiers-Jenssen 2011; Brooks, Waters, and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). There is relatively little information on (im)mobility for a PhD degree while experiences of Greek PhD candidates in Greek and UK universities have remained underexplored. This paper thus focuses on the lived experiences and individual accounts of those experiencing academic mobility as part of their academic professional journeys, to explore not only how this affects their careers, perceptions, identities and networks but also which structural issues it raises (e.g. institutional, national, supranational) beyond the individual. Through the lived experiences of Greek PhD graduates from two different higher education systems, this paper will contribute to the body of knowledge on '*how an individual's story can illuminate bigger issues and also how fresh frameworks of thought can shed further light on individual stories*' (Fahey and Kenway, 2010, p.565). Experiences of (im)mobility make structural issues become apparent such as the academic inbreeding in Greek

universities and the availability of European funding in specific disciplinary domains affecting mobility decisions in relation to academic studies and early career formation.

Methodology

This paper reports on a study of early career paths of Greek scientists and engineers who have pursued a PhD in UK and Greek universities. A mixed methods approach is employed, including an online survey (N=240 responses) and 26 follow up interviews with Greek PhD graduates. A comparative analysis was undertaken regarding the employment situation between groups based on the country of current employment and country of doctoral education. Furthermore, a thematic analysis was used to understand the opportunities and outcomes of mobilities and immobilities for the PhD and the early career path of the individuals. Through the individual stories, themes on academic inbreeding and European funding have emerged.

Findings

This paper demonstrates that academic mobility might not be as advantageous as expected disrupting the discourse which romanticises mobility as a positive force (Robertson, 2010). Mobility for a PhD can have adverse effects on the career development of highly qualified individuals while immobility can be advantageous for early academic careers in the Greek context. For example, foreign educated graduates (with a PhD from the UK) – compared to domestically educated (completing a PhD in Greece) – were less likely to get integrated in the Greek academic labour market in their early career paths. Gender, social class, disciplinary backgrounds and career stage are important considerations in understanding (im)mobility for study and career in this context. Concerns about underutilisation in the Greek labour market, and risks of an exodus of highly skilled are raised (Labrianidis, 2014) at a time of profound economic crisis.

Individual immobility accounts demonstrate the academic inbreeding in Greek universities where early career researchers are ‘naturally progressed’ into continuous fixed term posts which often lead slowly to more permanent positions. Lack of meritocracy and the significance of networks in securing academic employment are highlighted.

Furthermore, the growing availability of external funding, especially European funding, has created ‘favourable conditions’ not only for pursuing a PhD in Greek academia but also for considering to remain in the country after the degree. European funding programmes have enabled immobile individuals to build up contacts and networks (transnational social capital) through short term mobility for international project collaboration (e.g. project meetings and research visits). The immobile PhD graduates seem to have normalised the adversity and inherent weaknesses and limitations of the Greek system in terms of individual career progression and advancement.

References:

Auriol, L., M. Misu and R. A. Freeman (2013), “Careers of Doctorate Holders: Analysis of Labour Market and Mobility Indicators”, OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers, OECD Publishing.

Bilecen, B., & Van Mol, C. (2017). Introduction: international academic mobility and inequalities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (8): 1241-1255

Brooks, R., J. Waters, and H. Pimlott-Wilson. 2012. “International Education and the Employability of UK Students.” *British Educational Research Journal* 38 (2): 281–298.

Crossman, J. E., and M. Clarke. 2010. “International Experience and Graduate Employability: Stakeholder Perceptions on the Connection.” *Higher Education* 59 (5): 599–613.

Fahey, J. and Kenway, J. (2010) ‘Introduction. International academic mobility: problematic and possible paradigms’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31(5), pp. 563–575.

Horta, H. (2013). Deepening our understanding of academic inbreeding effects on research information exchange and scientific output: new insights for academic based research. *Higher Education*, 65(4), 487-510.

Inanc, O., & Tuncer, O. (2011). The effect of academic inbreeding on scientific effectiveness. *Scientometrics*, 88(3), 885-898.

Labrianidis, L. (2014). Investing in leaving: The Greek case of international migration of professionals. *Mobilities*, 9(2), 314-335.

Messelink, H. E., J. Van Maele, and H. Spencer-Oatey. 2015. “Intercultural Competencies: What Students in Study and Placement Mobility Should Be Learning.” *Intercultural Education* 26 (1): 62–72.

Murphy-Lejeune, E. 2001. *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe. The New Strangers. Routledge Studies in Anthropology*. London: Routledge.

Robertson, S. L. (2010). Critical response to special section: International academic mobility. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 31(5), 641-647.

Tzanakou, C., & Behle, H. (2017). The intra-European transferability of graduates’ skills gained in the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8), 1379-1397.

Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2003). “Norwegian Students Abroad: Experiences of Students from a Linguistically and Geographically Peripheral European Country.” *Studies in Higher Education* 28 (4): 391–411.

Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2011). “Background and Employability of Mobile vs. Non-Mobile Students.” *Tertiary Education and Management* 17 (2): 79–100.

Yudkevich, M., Altbach, P., & Rumbley, L. E. (2015). *Academic inbreeding and mobility in higher education: Global perspectives*. Springer.