

221

New (im)mobility tactics of Russian researchers after the 24th of February

Lidia Yatluk, Iuliia Khukalenko

Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract

Research on academic mobility is usually understood as a positive process of knowledge exchange and cultural enrichment. However, it usually ignores the body of knowledge on academics in exile, which shows the opposite side of the coin: researchers become marginalized in new countries (civil death) or in new institutions as refugees. The study contributes to the understanding of the connection between two versions of mobility in researchers' experience, using 20 interviews with Russian researchers made in May 2022 to examine what types and how mobility tactics are constructed in the current situation. Four tactics were identified: immobility on all levels, professional exile, hidden mobility, and postponed mobility. Unexpectedly, discipline or proximity to the repressed do not have much of an impact: the main reasons for lower mobility are high university regulations and working in a regional university. More research activities lead to postponed mobility, more teaching – to hidden mobility.

Full paper

Russian academics met 24th of February with panic. Many people left in the first week for countries available for rapid departure, fearing mobilization, confiscation of personal funds for military needs, and a new "Iron Curtain". None of this happened. The updated legislation on foreign agents has so far only touched the academic community. However, mobility became difficult: foreign

states and institutions along with the Russian authorities, are tearing up partnership programs.

In the research literature, we encounter two loosely overlapping bodies of literature on researcher mobility. The first is devoted to academic mobility as a means of sharing knowledge, fostering healthy competition in academic institutions, and increasing the connectedness of the academic community (Jöns, 2007; Teichler, 2015; Dvir and Yemini, 2017, Greek and Jonsmoen, 2021). The other body of research focuses on academia in exile as a forced displacement of researchers, which rather leads to a change in research themes and grief teaching (Agnew, V., Konuk, K., Newman, J.O., 2020) or marginalization in the new institution (Özdemir, 2021).

Russian researchers find themselves in an unusual situation in relation to these two scenarios: they have reduced opportunities to participate in the open international mobility market, and at the same time there is no critical situation forcing them to leave immediately as refugees. It allows us to see from empirical data what mobility tactics exist at the intersection of the two situations of researcher mobility. Therefore, my research question is what mobility tactics researchers choose and why.

In addition to the literature on academic mobility, I used the concept of moral order as an understanding of the vices and virtues of the local culture (Harré, 1983). It includes beliefs, expectations, declarations of appropriate and inappropriate practices, and acceptance of too obvious to notice situations (Shotter, 1994).

To answer this question, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with researchers from 20 different universities and research organizations. These included organizations in Moscow (MSU, MPI, HSE, MIPT, STU-MADI), St. Petersburg (SPbU, ITMO, LETI, EU SPb), and regional universities in the Republic of Buryatia, Chuvashia, Khabarovsk, Smolensk, Ulyanovsk, Tumen, and Moscow Region. Smaller organizations were not named because of informants' requests. Informants hold positions as researchers and teachers and did not combine them with middle and senior management positions. In order to increase the sense of safety for the informant, most interviews were conducted via Zoom. At the beginning of the conversation, participants were notified of the purpose of the

research and ways of representation.

The most unusual result was the absence of any difference in practices, plans, and perceptions between disciplines. Compared to foreign research in regular situations (Ylijoki, 2000), the views cannot be grouped and did not even show some similar disciplinary patterns.

Four main tactics could be identified: immobility, professional exile, hidden mobility, and postpone mobility.

Immobility includes avoidance of mobility at all levels: from intracity mobility for the purpose of classes to international mobility. This position is caused by a desire to minimize personal and students' activity in the public space, taking a wait-and-see approach to the situation, and an orientation to the value of continuing the educational process.

Professional exile is actively seeking a different position and career change in order to avoid government pressure and getting into morally ambivalent situations. This position arises in a situation of high bureaucratic regulation of university activities or low involvement in teaching combined with applied research expertise.

Hidden mobility is the most interesting form. This is immigration to another country with no prospect of returning in the near future, but it is accompanied by work within a Russian organization. Researchers continue doing projects, and teaching via videoconferencing and are barely integrated into the academic community in the new country. This situation arises in universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg with weak regulations or high informal connections with the department

Finally, postponed mobility is the minimization of current mobility at all levels in order to prepare for and implement immigration out of the country. This tactic occurs in Moscow and St. Petersburg with specialists who are more involved in research than in teaching.

Thus, the main reasons for refusing mobility or for decreasing participation in various forms are working at regional organizations and highly regulated universities. The higher share of research work provokes tactics of postponed mobility and professional exile. The

higher share of teaching can lead both to immobility and hidden mobility. The tactic of hidden mobility seems to be the most interesting and needs further investigation.

References

Agnew, V., Konuk, K., Newman, J.O. (2020) *Refugee Routes. Telling, Looking, Protesting, Redressing*. Transcript.

Dvir, Y., Yemini, M. (2017) Mobility as a continuum: European commission mobility policies for schools and higher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(2), 198-210.

Greek, M., Jonsmoen, K.M. (2021) Transnational academic mobility in universities: the impact on a departmental and an interpersonal level. *Higher Education*, 81, 591-606.

Harré, R. (1983b). *Personal Being*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Jöns, H. (2007) Transnational mobility and the spaces of knowledge production: a comparison of global patterns, motivations and collaborations in different academic fields. *Social Geography*, 2, 97-114.

Özdemir, S. S. (2021) Pity the Exiled: Turkish Academics in Exile, the Problem of Compassion in Politics and the Promise of Dis-exile. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34, (1), 936-952.

Shotter, J. (1994). *Conversational Realities*. London: Sage Publications.

Teichler, U. (2015). Academic Mobility and Migration: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *European Review*, 23(S1), S6-S37.

Ylijoki, O.-H. (2000) Disciplinary cultures and the moral order of studying – A case-study of four Finnish university departments. *Higher Education*, 39, 339-362.