



ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

Analysis of the Mobility Flows within the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programme at Sapienza University of Rome

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Article first published online

February 2021

HOW TO CITE

D'Ambrosio, G., Latini, E. (2021). Analysis of the Mobility Flows within the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programme at Sapienza University of Rome, Italian Journal of Sociology of Education, 13(1), 49-69

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Abstract: According to the last Erasmus+ Annual Report (2019a), the official document about data and statistics on mobility edited by the European Commission, almost 10 million people enjoyed the Erasmus programme during the last three decades. This number is also composed by all the students that, starting from year 2015, have taken advantage of the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) that is a specific programme which aims to promote international mobility of European students and staff to and from non-EU partner countries. On this basis, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze data about ICM programme at Sapienza University of Rome, the largest University in Europe. Data will be analyzed in a longitudinal view and will consider both demographic variables (i.e., gender, age of the student at the beginning of the experience abroad, home university) and academic career's variables (i.e., exams' marks and the credits obtained).

Keywords: primary data, incoming, outgoing, students, exchange

Foreword

In recent decades, the internationalization of the higher education institutions, seen as the process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the objective function and provision of higher education (Knight, 2004), has exponentially grown. It is a process that is closely related to the more general dynamics of the globalization that has changed several aspects of the social life (political, economic, cultural): indeed, as stated by Roland Robertson (1992, p. 8), globalization «refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. [...] Its main empirical focus is in line with the increasing acceleration in both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century».

At institutional level, globalization also changed the educational structure and all the teaching practices have been transformed according to the new flows/networks (Spring, 2009) and the opportunities for new learning (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). As far as the higher education is concerned, the internalization can be seen as a key strategy in responding to the influence of globalization adopted by the universities across the world and, generally, it refers to the integration of an intercultural dimension into the tripartite tasks concerning the teaching activities, the research and the third mission (Maringe, 2010). Therefore, from this point of view, the mobility contributes not only to the further intensification of globalization but also to a major attractiveness of the university educational products (Maringe, 2010).

Given this premise, the aim of this paper is to analyze the mobility flows at Sapienza University of Rome during the last five years. Even though the analysis will focus on only one specific university, this study gives the opportunity to explore, through a case study perspective, this fundamental aspect related to the university life, that it was not the main target of the sociological attention also due to the difficulties in collecting administrative data. In this direction, this definite research on Sapienza University of Rome, that has been chosen because it is the largest university in Europe, «will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible [...]. The case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural settings, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case. Therefore, the case study is more a strategy than a method» (Punch, 2005, p. 144).

The research will take into consideration data about a specific mobility programme that is the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM). This new programme allows students and academics to have an exchange period abroad and to share best practices among partner institutions.

International mobility: an overview on its strengths

The promotion of mobility among academic staff and students is one of the main objective of the Bologna Process, a mechanism that has been defined by the European Commission aimed to promote intergovernmental cooperation between the European countries in the field of the higher education (OECD, 2009; Teichler, 2012). In the words of Peter Scott (2012, p. 13), «promoting mobility among students and staff was among the earliest European initiatives in higher education – and is still among the most visible. By establishing more compatible course patterns and encouraging greater transparency the Bologna process has played a key role in promoting mobility. Although still unbalanced student mobility has steadily increased».

However, the strength of the mobility is not only institutional because it aims to increase the international dimension and the attractiveness of the organizations involved (Streitwieser, 2014; Gao, 2019); indeed, the mobility process also changes the life of the people who benefit of it, impacting also the individual level (Friesenhahn et al., 2013; Devlin et al., 2017). In this respect, several studies have shown how intercultural exchanges contribute to: *a*) individual growth and in helping students acquiring skills in order to improve their professional development and *b*) deepen their understanding of other cultures (Chessa, 2010; Cattaneo, Malighetti, Meoli & Paleari, 2016; Teichler, 2017).

As far as the first aspect is concerned, as underlined by Cocorullo and Pisacane (2017), the mobility process promotes the experiences which can open the job market to the students. Nowadays, the job market, indeed, seeks for international experiences and, if needed, the possibility for students to move to another country where the job offers are more attractive. In this respect, the last *Erasmus Impact Study* (2019b) which aim is to explore how the mobility process enhance students' quality of life and career prospects during and after their course abroad, finds that taking part in the Erasmus+ Programme facilitates the graduates' employability and transversal skills¹: in fact, as the Report underlines, only 2% of Erasmus graduates were unemployed more than 12 months after graduation while 4% of

¹ In this regard, some empirical works have been carried out. By way of example and for further details, see King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Bracht et al., 2006; Parey & Waldinger, 2011.

non-mobile graduates were. So, Erasmus students are more likely to find their first job easily and to enhance it (three out of four Erasmus+ graduates consider their experience abroad as beneficial for finding their first job); then, two-thirds of employers think that international experience is a key asset for job candidates and leads to greater professional responsibility (nine in ten Erasmus+ graduates also report that they use their acquired skills and experiences in their current work); finally, with regard to the staff, it can acquire new competences for their professional development, improve their language skills, learn about new working methods and share best practices.

On the other hand, with regard to the personal enhancement, the mobility process constitutes a model of learning and growth opportunities (the so-called life-wide learning in the words of Sofia Corradi) and it can be viewed as the higher education part of Lifelong Learning Program² which core values (learning, exploring and serving) are connected with the benefits for the mind (Chiţiba, 2012). In this sense, the mobility process, in the same way as the Lifelong Learning, contributes to: *a*) help fully developing natural abilities; *b*) create a curious, hungry mind; *c*) increase wisdom; *d*) make the world a better place; *e*) help people to adapt to social changes; *f*) help people in finding the meaning in own lives; *g*) keep persons involved as active contributors to society; *h*) help making new friends and establish valuable relationships; *i*) lead to an enriching life of self-fulfillment (Nordstrom, 2006). Therefore, as the Lifelong Learning, also the mobility, thanks to all the informal learning (that is the experiential knowledge resulting by daily life activities related to work, family or leisure) which has been produced, can be described as «a prime venue where individuals are confronted with and have to learn to act upon new principles of conducting oneself. It is furthermore a prime venue of generating knowledge within and about individuals» (Tuschling & Engemann, 2006, p. 452). Thus, the real encounter with the culture and the mentality of the host country (*immersion*), the involvement in working out solutions to problems and challenges arising out of experiences of disjuncture encountered in the process (*responsabilisation*), the recognition of issues and tasks that are relevant for the subject (*relativation*) and the engagement in a constant process of reflection on experiences (*perspectivation*) became the four interconnected conditions of the general model of learning processes in mobility projects (Kristensen, 2004; 2015).

² As specified by the *European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning* of the European Commission (2002), the «Lifelong Learning is an overarching strategy of European co-operation in education and training policies and for the individual. The Lifelong Learning approach is an essential policy strategy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion, employment and for individual fulfillment» (p. 4).

So, giving this theoretical premise, the next paragraph will focus on the description of this programme and on its increase analyzed in a certain context, that is to say Sapienza University of Rome.

Mobility programmes at Sapienza University of Rome: an overview

Going into the statistic aspects, an important increase of the mobility process in higher education institutions, started from the Nineties', has been recorded in all the European countries (Chessa, 2010; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Dima, 2014; Cocorullo & Pisacane, 2017). As far as Italy is concerned, in 2018 (year of the last available data), 76.847 participants in 1.055 Italian projects benefited from mobility in higher education³, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of €147.83 million (European Commission, 2018). Going into more detail, the number of incoming students and trainees is increased by 45.8% from academic year 2010/2011 to academic year 2017/2018 while the number of outgoing students and trainees is increased by 75.6%⁴. Detecting these data at the European level, we can observe that Italy ranks the fifth position (after Spain, Germany, France and United Kingdom) in terms of inbound flows while it is the fourth nation per number of students who decide to have a mobility period abroad, after Spain, Germany and France (Cocorullo & Pisacane, 2017).

In this respect and exploring the mobility flows of Sapienza University of Rome, that constitutes the core of this research, we observe that it ranks among the top three Italian sending institutions together with Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna and the University of Padua. Sapienza, that is the oldest University in Rome, was founded in 1303 by Pope Boniface VIII under the name of “*Studium Urbis*”. Then, it was completed at the beginning of the 19th century. Nowadays (data are updated to 2018), it is composed by 11 faculties, 59 departments, 20 research centers, 2 schools (in advanced studies and aerospace engineering) with a total of 3.411 academics and 112.557 students enrolled. As regards to the international dimension of this University, the international students enrolled in a full course are 8.338 while the incoming exchange students are 1.255 (on the other side of the coin, the outgoing students are almost the double). Such a large number of

³ Suffice it to say that, at national level, in the last academic year (2017/2018) the outgoing students and trainees to partner countries were 306 while the incoming students and trainees from partner countries were 1.241.

⁴ For the last academic year 2017/2018, the National Agency funded more than 30.000 Italian students mobilities within the Erasmus+ Programme. According to the number of the participants in the last year, an increase of +40% of the Italian outgoing students can be estimated.

students is due to the wide choice of mobility experiences offered by Sapienza:

- Erasmus+ Programme countries (E+ UE), for study and traineeship;
- double degree agreements;
- bilateral agreement for student exchange with non-EU universities⁵;
- Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility.

All these programs, as underlined before, offer the opportunity to do a mobility period abroad for students, to host visiting lecturer and administrative staff for professional training but, among them, the last-mentioned is the newest one. The Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility is part of the Erasmus Key Action 1 which, as specified by EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, supports mobility in the education, training and youth sectors and aims to bring long lasting benefits to the participants and the organizations involved, as well as on the policy systems in which such activities are framed. Therefore, this programme has been chosen as the focus of this research because it is one of the programmes funded by the European Commission within this specific Key Action (named KA107) which is able to offer students and academic staff a mobility period in non-EU countries.

The International Credit Mobility programme: what it is and how it is spreading among Sapienza University of Rome population

As stated in the last *Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility. Handbook for Participating Organisations* (2020), in 2015 Erasmus+ opened to all individuals (whether they are students or staff) the possibility to spend part of their academic path in another higher education institutions (HEI) from all over the world and not only from Europe. To this purpose, the International Credit Mobility programme (ICM for short) provide to all European HEIs the opportunity to set up mobility inter-institutional agreements with partners around the world in order to support both student mobility (for studies and for traineeship) and staff mobility (for teaching and for training) in any subject area or academic discipline.

The project is funded by the European Commission and in order to access these funds it is necessary to apply every year for a call for the KA107 activity (<http://www.erasmusplus.it/webform2020/>). While doing the application you can list the countries and institutions which you want to create a partnership with and then request funds for the mobilities. The request for funds

⁵ Erasmus+ and bilateral agreements are 1.764 in total, including 622 partner universities.

can be accepted in whole or only partially or even totally rejected. In most cases, applications are only partially accepted.

After receiving the communication from the National Agency which informs about which and how many funds have been allocated to the institution, it is possible to proceed in opening a call for partner institutions; the partner universities will then select teachers and/or students who wish to spend a mobility period in Sapienza. Then, these candidates will be registered in a database where they can upload all the documents they deem appropriate for an academic assessment on the basis of which the academic staff will evaluate the candidates and the selected ones will be able to take advantage of the mobility period thanks to the Erasmus + ICM scholarship.

Overall, in addition to the general strengths of the mobility experience before mentioned, ICM, promoting participants' engagement in the intercultural dimension, can be viewed as a scientific method which consists in the rejection of prejudices in favor of building a peace education (Corradi, 2015). Furthermore, ICM wants to promote equity and inclusion by facilitating access to participants with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers (i.e., disability and other health problems, economic obstacles, immigrants or refugees, geographical obstacles, people facing discrimination linked to different social issues, educational difficulties): «to meet this objective in international credit mobility, it is essential to count with projects that take inclusion into account since their conception» (European Commission, 2020, p. 9).

Methodology and outcomes of the research

As specified before, the goal of this work is to analyze the ICM's trends at Sapienza University of Rome. More in detail, the collected data, which source is represented by the Erasmus+ database platform that is used to manage the programme (known as Mobility Tool), concern the last three projects: 2015-2017, 2016-2018 and 2017-2019. First of all, it is necessary to say that, due to the received funding, the number of the students and academic staff that did a mobility period abroad during the last year has significantly decreased: indeed, the total number goes to 130 people in 2015-2017 to only 22 in 2017-2019 (162 in 2016-2018). This can be explained because, as previously said, due to the uncertainty of the funds that Sapienza receive within the ICM programme both for students and for academic/staff mobilities, it is impossible to make a comparison with other mobility programmes at Sapienza which instead benefit of the same amount of fundings every year. Moreover, for the same reason, it is difficult to compare these statistics with other countries' universities, even in case these latter data would be available and accessible to public.

Nevertheless, it is however possible to highlight the relevant results within the Sapienza context, especially with regard to certain socio-demographic variables (i.e., gender, age), mobility variables (i.e., sending and receiving country and university) performance variables (i.e., exams' marks and the gained credits), which will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

The mobility of the students

As stated in the previous paragraph, with the exception of the last project, the number of the students who had an experience regarding the ICM mobility, has always been greater than 100 units⁶. With regard to the gender, the percentage of female students (both incoming and outgoing) is higher than male students in all the three years of the project considered (between 50% to 60%) while, with regard to the age of the students at the beginning of the mobility period, the majority are 22-25 years (the average value is more than 40%; people aged 18-21 years represent the 33.6% and students over 26 are about 25.3%).

Table 1 - Incoming and outgoing students per gender and age at departure - %

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Project</i>		
	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019
Male	47.6	40.0	50.0
Female	52.4	60.0	50.0
<i>Age at departure</i>	<i>Project</i>		
	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019
18-21 years	35.9	29.1	35.7
22-25 years	50.4	44.1	28.5
Over 26 years	13.7	26.8	35.8

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

The aim of the mobility is mainly for taking exams: indeed, on the total of all the three years, the average value of the students who take exams is more than 90% (to this end, 92.1% of the students prefer spending a 6 months

⁶ Nevertheless, it is important to underline that this number is always lower compared to the other mobility programmes which are not affected by the continuous changing of fundings. This leads to a difficulty in comparing these data with the more general statistics at university level. Despite this, the percentage of students and academic staff who are interested in the ICM programme is constantly increasing.

mobility period abroad), while a lower percentage is linked to thesis research (about 7.5%)⁷.

Most of the students are incoming rather than outgoing: 90.3% in 2015-2017, 88.3% in 2016-2018, all the 14 students in 2017-2019.

Analyzing the mobility of incoming students, we observe that the most active country in sending students abroad differs every year due to the intermittent disbursement of funds: indeed, in 2015-2017 about the 14% of students came from Serbia (especially from the University of Kragujevac, the University of Belgrade and the University of Novi Sad), in 2016-2018, 10.3% on the total of the students came from Argentina (particularly from the University of Buenos Aires) while in 2017-2019 students came exclusively from the Gavar State University in Armenia and from the Armenian National Agrarian University (35.7%), from the Yangon University of Foreign Languages of Myanmar (35.7%) and from the Kosovan University of Prishtina (28.6%). As far as the Sapienza's faculties are concerned, incoming students take the larger number of exams in the faculty of civil and industrial engineering, economics and arts and humanities: the first one records the higher value mainly in 2015-2017 (21%), the second one is chosen by the 19.8% of the students especially in 2016-2018 while the faculty of art and humanities includes the 42.8% of the sample.

On the other side, the Italian outgoing students preferred spending a mobility period, among the funded countries, in Jordan, especially in the University of Jordan and in the Princess Sumaya University for Technology (about 25% for the project 2015-2017) and to United States, especially to the City College of New York, in 2016-2018 (42.8%)⁸. Most of these outgoing students belong to the faculty of arts and humanities (31.2% in 2015-2017) to which are added the faculty of information engineering, informatics and statistics, the faculty of medicine and psychology and the faculty of mathematical, physical and natural sciences (for each of them the percentage is equal to 21.4%).

With regard to the academic career's variables, the analysis took into consideration both the exams' marks and the credits obtained (ECTS⁹). First of all, considering the number of exams taken during the mobility period, it is possible to note that incoming students take on average 2 exams while outgoing students take on average 4 exams. Not only that: the number of

⁷ If we separate the data by incoming and outgoing students, we observe a different trend only with regard to year 2016-2018: in fact, with regard to this specific project, a large number of Italian students go abroad for research thesis' purposes (85.7%).

⁸ For the project 2017-2019, no funds for outgoing students have been granted to Sapienza University of Rome.

⁹ ECTS is the credit system for higher education used in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), involving all countries included in the Bologna Process. It stands for 'European Credit Transfer System' (European Commission, 2015).

recognized credits by the home university once the mobility is over is higher for outgoing than for incoming students (average of 27 for the first in the face of 17 for the second).

Examining the data related to the marks obtained¹⁰ by the students after taking the exams, the following tables underline these percentages with regard to the demographic variables such as the gender and the age of the students at the beginning of the mobility period. As far as the gender is concerned, the same trend for both incoming and outgoing flows emerge since female students get higher grades compared with the male students.

Table 2 - Exams' grade of both incoming and outgoing students per gender in the three years considered (2015-2017, 2016-2018, 2017-2019) - %

<i>Exams Grade</i>	<i>Gender of incoming students</i>		
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Fail	10.0	18.2	13.4
Low	8.2	10.4	9.1
Medium-low	19.1	19.5	19.3
Medium-high	29.1	31.2	29.9
High	33.6	20.7	28.3
<i>Exams Grade</i>	<i>Gender of outgoing students</i>		
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Medium-high	66.7	42.9	50.0
High	33.3	57.1	50.0

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

Instead, with regard to the age at the beginning of the mobility period, it is possible to note that a small percentage of students aged 18-21 get higher grade. Considering also the overlapping between the age and the different study cycles in which students are enrolled, it could be assumed that performances between the first two cycles are different because in the transition from a bachelor to a master course, the percentage concerning the low pro-

¹⁰ As far as concerns the exams' marks, grades from 18 to 21 have been aggregated under the label "low"; grades from 22 to 24 have been aggregated under the label "medium-low"; grades from 25 to 27 have been aggregated under the label "medium-high"; grades from 28 to 30 have been aggregated under the label "high".

ductivity decreases while the percentage of those students with high academic productivity increases. This evidence can be explained by the fact that students who are enrolled in a master course have more familiarity with the academic environment, hence this might lead to an easier approach to the academic path.

Table 3 - Exams' grade of both incoming and outgoing students per age at the beginning of the mobility period in the three years considered (2015-2017, 2016-2018, 2017-2019)- %

<i>Exams Grade</i>	<i>Age of incoming students at the beginning of the mobility period</i>			
	<i>From 18 to 21</i>	<i>From 22 to 25</i>	<i>Over 26</i>	<i>Total</i>
Fail	14.5	9.4	23.1	13.4
Low	6.6	12.9	3.8	9.1
Medium-low	23.7	17.6	11.5	19.3
Medium-high	35.5	28.2	19.2	29.9
High	19.7	31.9	42.4	28.3
<i>Exams Grade</i>	<i>Age of outgoing students at the beginning of the mobility period</i>			
	<i>From 18 to 21</i>	<i>From 22 to 25</i>	<i>Over 26</i>	<i>Total</i>
Medium-high	-	60.0	40.0	50.0
High	-	40.0	60.0	50.0

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

As it can be observed from the table below, there are some differences if we consider the exam grades taking into account the nationality of the students: it seems that the most productive ones are the students from China, Serbia and Armenia¹¹ while the students that obtained the lowest grades are from Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Kazakhstan and Vietnam.

On the other hand, the Italian outgoing students get a higher grade especially in the Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Serbian and American universities.

¹¹ The students coming from China, Serbia and Armenia also take the highest number of exams.

Table 4 - Exams grade of both incoming and outgoing students per home University in the three years considered (2015-2017, 2016-2018, 2017-2019) - %

<i>Home University</i>	<i>Exams grades of incoming students</i>			
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium-low</i>	<i>Medium-high</i>	<i>High</i>
Albania	-	-	1.8	1.9
Algeria	11.7	2.8	5.4	-
Argentina	5.9	2.8	5.4	9.4
Armenia	5.9	8.3	12.5	-
Azerbaijani	17.6	8.3	5.4	-
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-	-	1.8	3.8
China	5.9	5.6	8.9	11.3
Colombia	5.9	-	-	-
Egypt	5.9	-	5.4	5.6
Georgia	5.9	8.3	5.4	1.9
Guatemala	5.9	-	1.8	-
Israel	-	-	-	3.8
Jordan	5.9	5.6	3.5	3.8
Kazakhstan	-	13.8	5.4	1.9
Kyrgyzstan	5.9	5.6	3.5	1.9
Korea	-	2.8	-	3.8
Kosovo	11.7	-	3.5	7.5
Montenegro	-	-	5.4	9.4
Morocco	-	5.6	5.4	3.8
Myanmar	-	-	3.5	7.5
Palestine	5.9	8.3	5.4	3.8

Russian Federation	-	2.8	-	-
Serbia	-	2.8	3.5	11.3
Syria	-	2.8	-	-
Tunisia	-	-	1.8	1.9
United States	-	-	-	3.8
Vietnam	-	13.8	3.5	1.9
Total	100.0 (17)	100.0 (36)	100.0 (56)	100.0 (53)
Home University	Exams grades of outgoing students			
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium -low</i>	<i>Medium- high</i>	<i>High</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-	-	20.0	-
Egypt	-	-	-	20.0
Israel	-	-	20.0	-
Jordan	-	-	40.0	20.0
Morocco	-	-	-	20.0
Serbia	-	-	20.0	20.0
United States	-	-	-	20.0
Total	-	-	100.0 (5)	100.0 (5)

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

Finally, examining the faculties in which the exams are taken, it is possible to note that, as far as the incoming students is concerned, the highest grades (from 28 to 30) are obtained in the faculties of “arts and humanities” and “political sciences, sociology and communication” (respectively, 24.5% and 18.9%); on the contrary, the lowest grade is registered in the faculty of economics (35.3% of the total).

On the other side of the coin, outgoing students enrolled in the faculty of information engineering, informatics and statistics are the ones who perform better abroad (40% of the total).

Table 5 - Exams grade of both incoming and outgoing students per faculty in the three years considered (2015-2017, 2016-2018, 2017-2019) - %

Faculty	Exams grades of incoming students			
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium-low</i>	<i>Medium-high</i>	<i>High</i>
Architecture	-	16.7	16.1	13.2
Arts and Humanities	23.4	5.6	16.1	24.5
Civil and Industrial Engineering	11.8	27.8	14.3	15.1
Economics	35.3	41.7	21.4	7.5
Information Engineering, Informatics and Statistics	5.9	5.6	7.1	9.4
Law	-	2.6	10.7	-
Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences	11.8	-	-	5.7
Medicine and Dentistry	-	-	-	1.9
Medicine and Psychology	-	-	-	-
Pharmacy and Medicine	5.9	-	3.6	3.8
Political Sciences, Sociology and Communication	5.9	-	10.7	18.9
Total	100.0 (17)	100.0 (36)	100.0 (56)	100.0 (53)
Faculty	Exams grades of outgoing students			
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium-low</i>	<i>Medium-high</i>	<i>High</i>
Arts and Humanities	-	-	20.0	20.0
Information Engineering, Informatics and Statistics	-	-	40.0	40.0
Law	-	-	-	20.0
Medicine and Dentistry	-	-	20.0	20.0
Political Sciences, Sociology and Communication	-	-	20.	-
Total	-	-	100.0 (5)	100.0 (5)

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

The mobility of the academic staff

As stated by Mike Byram and Fred Dervin (2008, p. 1), «academic mobility in higher education, it is a commonplace to note, is an old, not a new phenomenon [...]. It is an old phenomenon because the idea of a university is of a place of teaching and learning open to all, whatever their provenance, provided they can benefit themselves and others». Indeed, regarding the staff, an ever-increasing number of academics wish to spend a mobility period abroad. Mobility activities are expected to produce improved competences, better quality of the work and activities in favor of students and increased opportunities for professional and career development. By way of example, regarding the incoming staff, a number of opportunities are available for those who want to come to Sapienza: in addition to the Erasmus' projects, Sapienza University of Rome annually finances the implementation of joint research activities for foreign visiting professors.

The ICM project provides scholarships both for teaching and training purposes. More in detail, in 2015-2017, 27 people did an exchange period within an extra-EU country while this number is equal to 42 for the next year (for the reasons outlined above, the data show only 8 academics in 2017-2019).

Overall, summarizing the data of all the three projects, we can see that participants are mostly female aging 40 upwards in 2015-2017 and 2017-2019; on the contrary, for the project 2016-2018, participants are mostly male over 51 years.

Table 6 - Incoming and outgoing academic staff per gender and age at departure in the three years considered (2015-2017, 2016-2018, 2017-2019) - %

Gender	Project		
	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019
Male	40.8	54.8	25.0
Female	59.2	45.2	75.0
Age at departure	Project		
	2015-2017	2016-2018	2017-2019
Until 29 years	-	7.1	12.5
30-40 years	25.9	30.9	12.5
41-50 years	37.0	26.1	37.5
Over 51 years	37.1	35.9	37.5

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

As it can be observed from the table below, most of them are incoming academics for training activities (51.9% in 2015-2017, 66.7% in 2016-2018 and 62.5% in 2017-2019).

Table 7 - Incoming and outgoing flows of academic staff per activity type - %

Project 2015-2017		
<i>Flow</i>	<i>Activity Type</i>	
	Staff Teaching	Staff Training
Incoming	25.9	51.9
Outgoing	3.7	18.5
Project 2016-2018		
<i>Flow</i>	<i>Activity Type</i>	
	Staff Teaching	Staff Training
Incoming	11.9	66.7
Outgoing	-	21.4
Project 2017-2019		
<i>Flow</i>	<i>Activity Type</i>	
	Staff Teaching	Staff Training
Incoming	37.5	62.5

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

Analyzing first the sending countries, we can state that most of the academics come from Serbia (19% of the total in 2015-2017 and 12.1% of the total in 2016-2018) and Algeria (14.3% of the total in 2015-2017 and 9.1% of the total in 2016-2018): more in detail, the sending higher education institutions are the University of Novi Sad, the University of Belgrade and the University of Kragujevac for Serbia while the Algerian universities are the Université Abderrahmane Mira – Bejaia, the Université Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana, the University of Tlemcen and the University of Algiers 2 “Abou Elkacem Saâdallah”. A separate discussion is reserved to the project 2017-2019 since the only countries founded were Armenia (37.5%), Kosovo (37.5%) and Myanmar (25%). On the other side, the Italian academics go mostly to China (33.3% of the total in 2015-2017), to Korea and United States¹² (both nations record the percentage value of 22.2% in 2016-2018¹³).

¹² No flows for outgoing staff within the project 2017-2019.

¹³ The reference universities are Peking University for China, Hanyang University for Korea, University of California - San Diego School of Medicine and the Rutgers - The State University for United States.

Table 8 - Incoming and outgoing flows of academic staff per faculty - %

Incoming Academic Staff			
Faculty	Project 2015-2017	Project 2016-2018	Project 2017-2019
Architecture	19.0	9.1	12.5
Economics	4.8	3.0	12.5
Pharmacy and Medicine	4.8	15.2	12.5
Law	4.8	9.1	-
Civil and Industrial Engineering	23.7	12.1	-
Information Engineering, Informatics, and Statistics	4.8	3.0	-
Arts and Humanities	14.3	24.2	50.0
Medicine and Dentistry	-	6.1	-
Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences	19.0	6.1	12.5
Political sciences, Sociology, Communication	4.8	12.1	-
Outgoing Academic Staff			
Faculty	Project 2015-2017	Project 2016-2018	Project 2017-2019
Architecture	33.3	11.1	-
Pharmacy and Medicine	-	11.1	-
Arts and Humanities	33.3	11.2	-
Medicine and Psychology	16.7	33.3	-
Political sciences, Sociology, Communication	16.7	33.3	-

Source: Author's own elaboration on data collected from Mobility Tool

Finally, analyzing the faculties in which mobilities take place, we note that, as regards to the incoming staff, most of the academics did their training or teaching activities in the faculty of civil and industrial engineering (23.7% of the total in 2015-2017) and in the faculty of arts and humanities (respectively, 24.2% in 2016-2018 and 50% in 2017-2019); on the contrary, with regards to the outgoing staff, the Italian academics spend their mobility period doing both training and teaching activities especially in the faculties of architecture, arts and humanities, medicine and psychology and political sciences, sociology and communication (for all these faculties the value is equal to 33.3%).

Conclusion

Once the material analysis is concluded, it is possible to say that the university student/academics mobility can be viewed as one of the most powerful engines for change and improvement in higher education. During the last years, the mobility flows have increased both in terms of inbound and outbound demonstrating how the higher education area can be considered as not being confined by borders since the knowledge in various fields and the logic of science are universal (Teichler, 2012). In this sense, the Erasmus Programme and more precisely the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility has stimulated both the process of internationalization and the process of the so called “brain circulation” (or “brain exchange”) that more accurately describe the increasingly multidirectional nature of international flows and the growing awareness that such mobility patterns or exchanges are mutually beneficial both for sending and receiving higher institutions because they enlarge the attractiveness and the international dimension of the same (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011).

Therefore, even if these statistics have been conducted within Sapienza University of Rome only and its outcomes cannot be extended to other universities, considering the fact that Sapienza is the largest university in Europe, we can assume that these data can be considered as a sample of the direction that the internationalization is taking among all the universities. Indeed, all the analyzed statistics cannot be meant as simple figures of numbers of mobile students, impact rate of the programme or evaluation of the reform of the higher education since, as stated by Rahul Choudaha and Hans De Wit (2014), «Erasmus has paved the way for the reform of European higher education under the Bologna Process, has been a pilot for its credit point system ECTS, and was an initiator for the opening-up of EU membership to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as it is for current aspiring candidate members. It also inspired cooperation between Europe and the rest of the world, and – unfortunately still with little success – similar initiatives in other regions. The programme has stimulated both national governments and institutions of higher education to develop European and international strategies» (p. 30). Besides, taking into account that the Erasmus+ Programme will undergo a change in the next 6 years and also considering the impact of the current Covid-19 pandemic on the international students' flows¹⁴ (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2020), it is highly interesting to have an in-depth study on this issue with a qualitative approach through the use of interviews and focus groups (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013), which will

¹⁴ In this regard, the ICM programme at Sapienza University of Rome (project 2018-2020) has been extended for one more year due to Covid-19 pandemic. This is the reason why the last data is incomplete and it is not considered in this analysis.

be able to rise, in support of what emerged from the quantitative analysis, how the mobility experience is not only characterized by a mere functional dimension (i.e., improving foreign language and/or in professional skills) but also by a most significant expressive dimension, connected to the identity development and self-reflexivity and personal autonomy (Chessa, 2010).

Moreover, both incoming and outgoing students will be able to share their positive experience at the hosting institution. This “word of mouth” can enlarge the reputation of the institutions in the world and attract new students: indeed, cooperating with other universities will give the chance to update and expand its own curriculum with similar institutions in order to improve the quality of teaching and reinforce the university management.

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