

Higher Education and Internationalization: students' mobility and participatory university for the Euro-Mediterranean Area

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Abstract: “Internationalization” became a key theme during the 90’s in higher education policy debates. Higher education European policy tends to highlight the fact that the future of each individual institution of higher education in Europe – and in the Mediterranean area – grows in a process of internationalization within the common framework of the European Higher Education Area. The internationalization process press European and Mediterranean universities towards new challenges that are accompanied almost everywhere by decreasing of public funds as well as by conflicting demands: this coincidence has given raise on the one hand to the introduction of NPM strategies for institutions’ governance, on the other to the emerging of new forces capable of influencing internationalization such as the business community, NGO’s, multilateral organizations. This paper focuses mainly on the conflicting demands involving the increase of students’ mobility in an area that comprises European Union countries as well as the Euro-Mediterranean ones.

Keywords: Higher Education, Internationalization, Student’s Mobility, Erasmus Boundaries, Mediterranean, Participatory University

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L'Europa è infatti oltre a tutto ciò che è,
anche una rete molto fitta di frontiere.
Quando dico questo non penso, naturalmente ai confini statali.[...]
Penso ai confini culturali,
che danno forma alle strutture che concretizzano
il vissuto del mondo e l'andamento del giorno,
i riti quotidiani e il rapporto verso le comunità.
Penso alle frontiere tra le lingue [...].
Penso alle frontiere fra le diverse tradizioni nella derivazione del cognome. [...]
Penso alla frontiera fra la birra e il vino
che una volta era relativamente chiara e ora è talmente fluida
che in molte case europee passa nel mezzo della tavola da pranzo.

David Karahasan, *Elogio della Frontiera*

Euro-Mediterranean partnership and Universities' role

“Internationalization” became a key theme during the 90’s in higher education policy debates as well as in higher education research (Altbach, Teichler, 2001). Though higher education policy remains basically shaped on a national level as well as it tends to highlight specific traditions and conditions of each country, the future of each individual institution of higher education in Europe – and in the Mediterranean area in particular – grows in a process of internationalization which is accompanied by growing pressure for diversity as well as by a policy of the European Commission which appear to promote de-nationalisation of higher education. In this perspective the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at the Barcelona Conference in 1995 as the reference framework for political, economic and social relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean Partner Countries has been an important step towards creating an inter-connected and harmonised Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area (EPUF, 2010).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has, however, been affected by two major developments during the last years: the persistence of conflicts in the area and the global financial-economic crisis which burst out in 2008. In this context the European Union external strategy and actions towards the neighbourhood countries have become more complex and differentiated, structuring the relations between the EU-27 and the Mediterranean Partner Countries through at least eight different frameworks. Here we’re going to

consider only the aspects related to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995) as amended by the Union for the Mediterranean (launched at the European Council of 13 March 2008).

During the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of the Heads of States or Government – held in Paris on the 13th of July 2008 – the participants adopted a “Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean” in order not only to enhance multilateral relations and increase co-ownership of the Barcelona Process but also to set the governance of the whole process. The Heads of States or Government considered that it was crucial to define regional concrete projects in order to achieve the goals set by the Barcelona declaration of 1995 and the work programme of 2005: in particular, as listed in the Annex to the Joint Declaration, one of the projects was focused on Higher Education and Research with the aim to a) set up an Euro-Mediterranean University – based in Slovenia – which will develop postgraduate and research programmes, b) strengthen the use of the possibilities offered to the partner countries by existing higher education cooperation programmes such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus, c) enhance quality and ensure the relevance of vocational training to labour market needs (Lannon & Martin, 2009).

Regarding the first point the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) was inaugurated in June 2008 in Piran, Slovenia, with the aim of becoming a university of universities. Till now, and jointly with partner universities in Belgium, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Slovenia and UK, the EMUNI has launched four pilot Master Study Programmes as well as several Summer Schools, doctoral research seminars and international academic conferences.

For what concern the second point, apart of the Tempus and Erasmus Mundus Programmes the aim to create a Euro-Mediterranean Area of Higher Education (similar to the European Area of Higher Education fostered by the Bologna Process) is still far away notwithstanding the steps made such as the realization of the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Research (2007), the first EuroMed University Rector’s Conference (2006) and the creation of the EuroMed Permanent University Forum (EPUF).

With relation to the third point the main initiative has been the MEDA-ETE – Education and Training for Employment, a programme that supports Mediterranean Partner Countries in the design and implementation of technical and vocational education and training policies that can contribute

to promote employment through a regional approach to training institutions. The main goal of the policies related to this point regards the development of professional mobility within the Euro-Mediterranean area, mobility considered as crucial for strengthening the qualifications and competencies of workers of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Within this framework – and according to what stated by the EPUF in 2010 – we consider mobility as a key factor towards the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area: “Mobility in the field of knowledge and academic life has been part of the history of Mediterranean universities since their beginning. [...] mobility continues to be a challenge and a necessity to improve university systems, not to make all the same, but rather to achieve equivalence” (EPUF, 2010, p. 7). However mobility does imply some questions, not related only to imbalances or asymmetries in the flows between countries as well as in the inner flows of each country (i.e. the balance between outward flows and returns: is the phenomenon that used to be called *brain drain*) but also to the very conceptualization of mobility with relation to its functional and expressive dimensions.

Borders and Boundaries as key concepts to foster international mobility

Karahasan in his praise of the border (Karahasan, 1995) reminds us that boundaries and borders are the place of distinction, the place that identifies our *lebenswelt*, which marks our experience and shapes our identity and our mental horizons. Mutual recognition is at stake on the border, and daily life in modern societies is familiar with the borders as people are living a continuous series of crossing boundaries: entry/exit/entry from organizations, institutions, communities. This easy crossing is due to the mono-functionality of the spaces organized by the boundaries, spaces that have a main goal and lines that mark inclusion or exclusion of people according to the pursuit of the goal in question.

In this way the strong sense of evidence of the border get the people used to the presence of more boundaries but also to the perception of the easy crossing of them, transforming the boundary in a weak concept, because the identities that it enclose and separate are interchangeable and their functions are quite fragmented. The identity is not static but it is

constantly subject to a process of reformulation also based on relations, on exchanges, on powers, on insular autonomy processes, on relationships with other identities; the boundary reaffirms itself because the identity was created and developed within a context in which different groups are finding themselves in a situation of interaction, often competitive, and therefore in a space that tends to be contrastive and oppositional.

Usually this kind of boundaries do not need a defined territory, a definition of space, although this often happens: the physical space becomes a projection of one's own need for recognition, affirmation of identity and the boundaries become signs that mark the differences, they objectifies themselves in stones, trees, lines, bars, become symbols of closure, fences, gates, railings. The unlimited space is divided into open and closed space, walls divide and distinguish the city from the countryside, the space of the city, in turn, differs in public space – that one of the streets, squares, parks – and private space – the one of the houses, shops, offices.

Within this process public space has also surrounded itself with barriers, has been privatized, closed. The boundaries has increased, the thresholds has become more sophisticated, controlled by electronic devices (magnetic cards, video controls, sensors, etc.): access has been even more limited. Spaces disappear behind this proliferation of barriers, and the space of relational contact more and more narrows, reducing itself to the virtual interface of the screen, so becoming a no-place. These enclosed spaces, cut precisely and controlled, are the spaces of fear of contagion, of fear of contact with others, of the contamination by the enemy.

The problem is not only related to space and its transformations, because of the close interrelationship between space and time (spaces and times) means that talking of space also means re-examining the categories of proximity and distance, of direct and indirect interaction etc., also measured on time basis (Leccardi, 2009). The boundaries between the near and far are weakening and confusing as well as those between the memory of yesterday and the project of tomorrow that appear to be focused on the immediacy of real-time. The acceleration of history – related to the great facts of history, regarding the macro-social dimension – is, at the same time, the acceleration of the stories – related to small facts of personal stories, regarding the micro-social dimension. Even time is “stretching” itself, ignoring the development of history and of the stories between memory and anticipation.

The transformations of space, time and of the interactions that occur in space and time, represent both epistemological and ontological challenges that universities are now facing because the time-space compression has produced its effects also at the level of university education, reducing the duration of study to get a degree but also the time devoted to discussion of Bachelor's, Master's and PhD thesis. The didactic has gained speed so that within subject's programs area disappearing fundamental epistemological elements such as the history of the discipline, its scientific status, the knowledge of classical works, the fundamental questions and their changes.

But it is the very idea of knowledge that appears to vary with respect to the past by moving the center of gravity closer to the problems (applied science) than to codifications (pure science) and thus placing itself even closer to the areas of industrial production and business. It is also subject to a more intensive use of computer networks that has produced a new technological landscape of knowledge in which tangible and intangible, natural and artificial, reality and representation mix and mingle, making the peer review an out-of-date mechanism because today knowledge has to demonstrate its social importance and its economic efficiency (Gibbons, Nowotny & Limoges, 1994).

Upon these bases one presents proposals for the transformation of universities through the introduction of managerial models that lead to conversion of *Universitas Studiorum* in corporations, places of independent business or vocational training, or global electronic universities or other (Milojević, 1998). Since the Lisbon Strategy - and through the Bologna Process - Europe has set itself, for example, the goal of becoming "the most competitive knowledge-based society and economy in the world" and to achieve this goal has chosen to apply also to higher education and scientific research management techniques to administration and evaluation. It is thus changed, not only in Europe, the way of regarding knowledge: talk about knowledge today means recognizing the fact that knowledge constitutes the backbone of the global capitalism networks. It should be over a perspective that considers the centrality of knowledge to the economy as a mere hegemony of technique to keep account of that "need to imagine, communicate and experience to explore the complexity of emerging technology that technique excites and is unable to dominate." (Rullani, 2009, p. 275; Galimberti, 1999; Bourdieu, 1995; Toscano, 1990).

The structuring of universities through strategies and programs of organizational efficiency appears to pave the way to the risk of giving rise

to structures in which teachers and students are engaged in tasks increasingly alienated from the intellectual work and the care of people. The fragmentation of contemporary society requires, in other words, greater attention to the issue of the need for “a planning sense based on a consensual control overcoming the split between subject and system.” (De Vita, 1993). Thus it is the interplay between social action and social structure – due to a vision of the social actor considered not as an individual but as a person (Gruppo SPE, 2003 and 2007) – that help to protect sociological theory from the drifts of determinism and of methodological individualism and allowing it to not lose its object of investigation:

This object is the society as part of a human world, created by men, inhabited by men, and, in turn, manufacturer of men, in a continuous historical process. Not less important is the result of a humanistic sociology, his ability to reawaken our wonder at this amazing phenomenon (Berger & Luckmann, 1969).

The approach of Berger and Luckmann, which consisted in an attempt to identify the possibility of a theoretical synthesis between weberian paradigm centered on action that makes sense, and the durkheimian one that consider social facts as things, is not far from Ardigò's point of view who considered the subjective dimension of lebenswelt and the structural dimension of social systems as two closely interrelated dimensions that can “be understood by the observer only by an effort of in-and-out, that is proper of the social knowledge.” (Ardigò, 1980).

It is precisely the ability of social knowledge to cross continuously the existing boundaries between society as objective reality and society as subjective reality (the “in-and-out”) that allows someone to think about the possibility of transformation of Erlebnis, that is to say the real experience, in Erfahrung, experience gained and sedimented, able to settle the biographies and to connect experiences in composite identity such as the one of the homo insularis, a kind of man not static but itinerans, always on the move and other than himself, built into every moment of the trip in relationships with other people, other cultures and other social contexts (Merler & Piga, 1996; Niihara, 1997).

Research design and background data

Given the objectives of the research, tools and techniques should be varied. First it was necessary to start an investigation on the themes of the research literature to assess the state of the art: the investigation has focused on theoretical texts (national and international literature on the themes of internationalization of higher education's institutions, mobility of students and teaching staff, Euro-Mediterranean policies in the field of higher education), thus giving rise to the identification of a theoretical framework in which concepts have been better defined for the empirical phase of the survey.

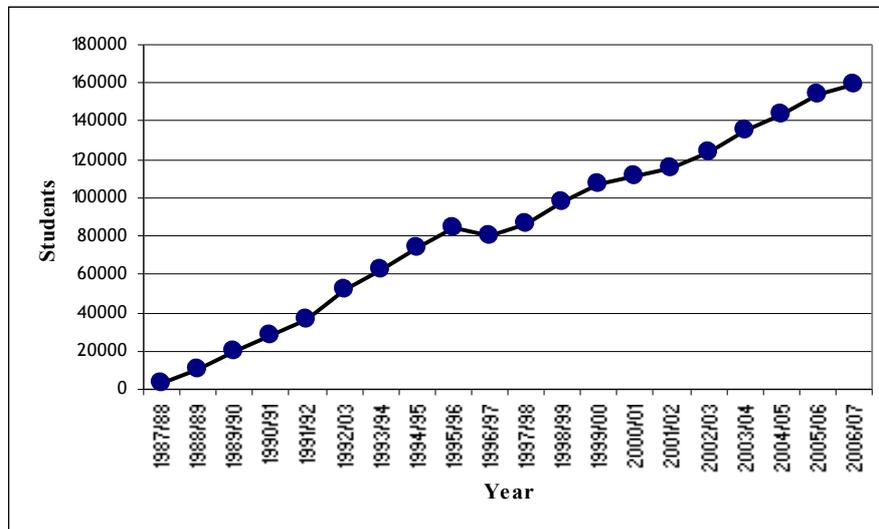
The second step consisted of a documentary survey of international and national official documents regarding Euro-Mediterranean policies, with particular attention to all official papers and reports regarding the mobility of students and teaching staff of higher education's institutions, in order to observe the strategies used to define the idea of an Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area. A third step involved carrying out in-depth interviews to a sample of students relevant to the investigation (students coming from several European universities that studied for at least one term in the University of Sassari, thanks to the Erasmus Programme, during the last ten years) whose purpose was to survey the balance between functional and expressive dimensions within the Erasmus experience. To this end, this phase was divided into: a) identification of significant sample on the basis of a survey of existing data-base at university level, b) definition of the outline of the interview; c) conducting interviews; d) data analysis.

A first element to be considered is given by the constant growth of the annual number of students participating in Erasmus: from the 3,244 pioneers who, during the academic year 1987/88, have started the program, the number of participants has grown almost each year (with the only exception of the academic year 1996/97) till it reaches the number of 159,320 mobile students in the academic year 2006/07, as shown in Fig 1.

The Erasmus programme has now gained such a reputation that is almost impossible for universities and students to ignore it, even in spite of the fact that the amount of a scholarship awarded by the European Union to support the study period abroad is unanimously considered too low. "No programme launched during the Unions first half-century has contributed more than Erasmus to bringing Europe closer to its citizens" (ESN, 2007) – as the European Commissioner for Education, Training and Culture, Ján

Figel', wrote in the preface to the volume edited by the ESN-Erasmus Student Network to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Erasmus programme, highlighting how the programme goes beyond the single technical dimension of learning to embrace rather, and above all, comparative dimensions as well as dimensions of cultural and social reassembling that for Figel' will substantiate themselves in the fact that "Erasmus draws Europe into the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of people across the Union, demonstrating in a really practical way what closer European collaboration can do for them." (ESN, 2007).

Fig.1. Erasmus Programme 1987/88-2006/07: European students' participation



Source: European Commission, *Statistical Overview of the Implementation of the Decentralized Actions in the Erasmus Programme*, 2010.

In this perspective, however, we have to note that the construction of an European identity, i.e. a sense of belonging to Europe, through the Erasmus programme is "significantly curved toward the realm of subjective experience and identity," with this meaning that the European identity in this case rests more on the side of the subjectivity than on rational one linked to the political-institutional dimension (Bettin Lattes & Bontempi, 2008).

Being European means, therefore, to have friends in other countries, have relations with other cultures, other *weltanschauung*, other knowledge, other languages, religions, etc. rather than feel belonging – and therefore subject to a constraint – to European institutions and social regulation models: the process of Europeanization is configured as subordinate “to the calculation of interest and gratification, a sort of *utilitarian affectivity*” or, maybe, a form of *European-individualism*: the process of Europeanization is interpreted by the subject in relation “to the needs of nomadism, of comparison, of opening possibilities of choice parallel to the needs of a solidarity network as a guarantee to the uncertainty and volatility of the references” (Bettin Lattes, Bontempi, 2008).

If it is true that the enthusiasm of Figel⁷ is supported by the quantitative success of the Erasmus Programme is also true that the considerations taken with respect to achieving a key objective of the European project of student mobility (the construction of a European citizenship) seem quite reasonable – considering the empirical data from ESN-Erasmus Student Network interviews as well as the ones published in other electronic or printed publications (Souto Otero, McCoshan, 2006; Krupnik, Krzaklewksa, 2007; Fenner, Lanzilotta, 2007).

A second point is related to the necessity to reflect on the characteristics of the ideal type of the Erasmus student: the average profile of the Erasmus student is a person of 23 years, female, coming from one of the founding countries (Germany, France, Spain, Italy) who have spent abroad (mainly in Spain, France, Germany and United Kingdom) a period of about six and a half months, although often a further stay follows, for study or business reasons or simply for a holiday.

These first elements, however, gain greater significance if related to the socio-economic background of students, namely the situation of the family of origin. The results of a research conducted by Souto Otero and McCoshan show that it is more likely that Erasmus students come from families where parents work in high level positions, compared to what one might expect from an analysis of the percentage distribution of types of employment in population: about 29% of Erasmus students come from families where both parents work in high level positions (managers/officials, professionals, technicians); for an additional 23% of these students only the father works in high level positions, while in 9% of cases is the mother who works in high level positions. The picture that emerges aggregating data shows that nearly two-thirds of the Erasmus

students come from families where one parent has a high level of employment status: percentage much higher than about 40% of the distribution of this type of employment in the European population over 45 years of age (European Commission, 2000).

Another significant variable is the schooling rate of the family of origin: about 58% of the students come from families where at least one parent has completed a higher education qualification (35% of Erasmus students come from families where both parents have a higher education qualification, 13% from families where only the father has a higher education degree, 10% from families where only the mother has a higher education degree). Considering these data is not surprising to observe that a large majority of Erasmus students declare that the level of their parental income is average or above average: almost half of the students (48.3%) declares that the income of their family of origin is average compared with just over one third that believed that it is above average (31.3%) or significantly higher (5.9%). Only 14.6% of students report that their parental income is below or significantly below the average: data show changes, comparing to the 1998 survey, that indicate how participation in the programme by students from families with average or below average incomes is slightly increased (from 53% to 63%).

Looking more carefully at the data we can see how differences in family incomes by country of origin indicate that in some countries student mobility is more common among social strata with higher income levels (especially in the case of Holland, but also significant in the case of the United Kingdom, Norway, France and Poland), while in other countries there is a relatively high percentage of mobile students in classes with a household income less than or much below average (see the case of Bulgaria, but also that of the Slovak Republic, Latvia and Czech Republic). These are countries with a relatively low income per capita but with an amount of the Erasmus scholarship above average (with the exception of the Czech Republic): in this case the scholarship is a sum of money relatively high and could be attractive for students from lower-income classes.

It is clear that despite the fact that access to student mobility – which can be considered as a good investment (Besozzi, 1998) – is formally open to all, its real fruition is not homogeneous between all the users of higher education systems: students develop behaviors based on orientations and motivations that depend primarily on their personal situation but also on

their social, economic and cultural position. In other words the decision to take part in the Erasmus programme, so making a particular investment in training, is strongly in connection with a series of personal and structural factors that are intertwined in a composite way, giving rise to choices and strategies of action specific to each subject, operating in a given context.

If, on the one hand, an important component in investment decisions is constituted by personal resources, on the other we can refer it mainly to a complex of factors that could be summarized in the concept of cultural and social capital, i.e. the set of cultural, social and economic factors that are the student's family background. As several researchers have shown, in fact, both the educational level of parents (particularly the father) and the level of household income are closely related to the educational choices made by children as well as the success or the fail resulting from these choices.

The uneven distribution of resources – in this case represented by the use of the Erasmus programme – substantially defines a differentiation of what Sen calls “operational capacity” (Sen, 1994): in this perspective, the weak, the bearers of a shortage of material and cultural resources, exhibit a reduced capacity to function both at the level of choice and at the level of use of training resources. These subjects are therefore more than carriers of an inherent weakness or a ‘cultural deprivation’, but rather of “a relative deprivation to something” (Besozzi, 2006) that affects the manner in which you think your position in university courses. It should be added that the differences between the incomes of families belonging to the European higher education space give rise to particular tensions in the movement of student mobility: the proportion of monthly income required to financially support a course of study in a specific country produces the effect that students from countries where their monthly income (or that one of their family) is comparatively high, have the widest possible choice with respect to the place of destination, while students who come from countries with low levels of income per capita or per family have a more limited range of choice of destination countries (Orr, 2008).

In conclusion we can say that the main analysis on student mobility through the Erasmus programme show that participation in this type of mobility is socially selective and that the size of this selectivity can be mitigated or amplified by several factors related in particular to economic insecurity, to the lack of personal reasons but also to the lack of external support. The propensity to mobility is thus influenced by a combination of

push factors (for example the desire of the student to take part in a trial) and pull factors (e.g. the existence of pre-conditions that encourage the student to take part in the process) (HIS, 2008).

With reference to this set of factors the changes to the structures of higher education systems in Europe within the Bologna Process have been often mentioned as a clear and decisive contribution to the facilitation of international mobility. For some countries the introduction of a cycles structure in their higher education system has meant greater transparency of the institution and a clarification of the hierarchy among different levels; moreover the gradual adoption of the credit system as a “currency” for the accumulation and the progression of the studies’ content has been considered as an appropriate way to provide students with an opportunity to change the place of study during their training so as to incorporate a semester of study in a foreign country without increasing the duration of their study course beyond the allotted time.

However, some surveys have shown that the new structure of higher education studies may lead to a reduction of student mobility to other countries (Heublein, Hutzsch, 2007; German Academic Exchange Service, 2006; Reichert, Tauch, 2005), but, above all, the managerial trend in the governance of universities, aimed at increasing the efficiency of higher education systems, often results in a push – through incentive or disincentive mechanisms – to the efficiency of the students’ study that can lead many of them to consider the international mobility as an “optional extra, which would be nice, but is not necessary and will only be taken when all other study conditions are sufficiently met.” (HIS, 2006). That is to say there is a strong connection between the general conditions of the study and mobility rates, connection that can become even more significant in the case of non-traditional students and/or countries with low levels of income per capita (Orr, 2008).

Main results

In this perspective, university education (just like post-compulsory education) is characterized as a period in which one learns the important things in life. Scanagatta shows how the graduates even consider “school and university experience as more important than the work itself, because [they] evidently believe that this experience makes a difference”

(Scanagatta, 2007), thereby highlighting how the educational certifications' crisis appears to involve more the expendability of the qualification in the labor market than its importance in life. Similarly the Erasmus experience is evaluated as a training, cultural and even economic investment (albeit in perspective): the experience of studying abroad really "affect the identity dimension and strengthen the reflexivity of the student" (Bettin Lattes & Bontempi, 2008) but, at the same time, it affects their professional career (Fondazione Residenze Universitarie Internazionali, 2001).

The wide circulation among European students of the Erasmus programme seems to testify the quest for a kind of learning considered more as an experiential process that engages the whole person than the acquisition of an high-level technical/professional knowledge. The experience is not only related to daily life nor to the acquisition of a specific know-how but it concerns all "the process by which we take note of our life and try to decipher the meaning of it" (Jedlowski, 1999) thus highlighting the reference to the self-reflexivity of the person.

It is a hallmark of modernity (and late- or post-modernity) the idea to interconnect in a clear way the experience of the person to his/her education path: the pattern of the nineteenth-century's *Bildungsroman* – that could also be found even in twentieth-century literature, albeit reversed – as it shows how the young man/woman during the journey comes into contact with the world and learning to know himself/herself is able to fulfill himself/herself, just as in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in which, through the removal from the parental home and the subsequent wanderings the apprentice is able to develop himself in a master craftsman.

Similarly, students' wandering through the Erasmus programme allows a self-reflexive development that goes beyond the distinction between the functional and expressive dimension of the experience: university learning supported by an experience of mobility appears to lead to benefits that "are neither improvement in knowledge of foreign languages nor the refinement of professional training in the strict sense [...] the engineering student involved in Erasmus becomes not a better engineer but a better person." (Corradi, 1991).

Due these reasons it seems useful to reflect upon the logic currently used in restructuring European higher education systems, according to the guidelines and objectives defined by the Bologna Process. The discourse of the European Commission on higher education defines learning as "an inherently productive activity, through which students accumulate and

generate knowledge for personal and social benefit” and, above all, it supports the idea that “activities and educational outputs are measurable.” (Keeling, 2006). In this perspective, knowledge and training becomes something that is produced by the researchers/producers in order to be sold and purchased by students/consumers through the trading currency of the credit system (ECTS) losing sight of the meaning of knowledge transmission, considered as a moment in which individual and collective processes of subjectivation are reunited (Nyborg, 2005; Shore, 2010).

This process have placed questions of organizational design, structure, culture and co-ordination at its centre and one significant dimension of the restructuration of the European higher education systems according to the shaping of an homogeneous European Higher Education Area is the managerialization process, i.e. the shift towards managerial forms of organizational coordination. A whole range of studies have discussed the emergence and rise of a New Public Management (NPM) as a “combination of processes and values developed during the 1980’s as a distinctively different approach to the coordination of publicly provided services” (Clarke, Gewirtz & McLaughlin, 2000). Even considering variations in defining what is NPM, it is possible to point out some typical and shared features ascribed to it: attention to output and performances rather than to inputs; organizations considered as chains of low-trust relationships, linked by contracts or contractual type processes; the separation of purchaser/client and provider/contractor roles within formerly integrated processes or organizations; competition as an instrument to enable exit or choice by service users; decentralization of budgetary and personal authority to line managers (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994).

Managerialism – the cluster of beliefs and orientations of the managerialization process – defines a set of expectations, values and beliefs, being a normative system that defines what counts as a valuable knowledge, who knows it, and who is empowered to act in what ways as a consequence. It brings about strong changes in power, knowledge and calculation within organizations, between organizations and in the organization of education at national and international level. In particular managerialism promulgates a conception of performance founded in competition and the claimed pursuit of excellence: rankings and a system of funding in which high-performing universities are intended to prosper and those which fares badly are doomed to languish or disappear.

Within this framework also knowledge is handled differently: it has become interdisciplinary, problem-centred, produced in areas closer to its application; it makes intense use of electronic networks; it is subject to a variety of quality controls; and now it has to demonstrate its social relevance and economic efficiency. Where managerialism is concerned, university has become an administered organization, splitted up into micro-organizations that take up the researchers' time and submit students to requirements not directly related to intellectual work. The assessment on the sheer quantity of publications, symposia and congresses, the growing numbers of commissions and reports etc. contribute to realize a university that "operates and therefore fails to perform" (Tünnermann Bernheim & de Souza Chaui, 2003). This "operational university" is more involved in structuring itself according to the market needs and producing experts for the same labor market (hypostatization of the weberian ideal-type of the specialist) than in its specific missions of creating, transmitting and disseminating knowledge.

This university type is considered to contrast the "cloister university" type, founded on a misguided sense of specificity, autonomy and scientific rigor that has resulted in defensive mechanisms put in place by the institution, translated in terms of resistance and defense from the intrusiveness of the society which appeared to menace the free exercise of teaching and research activities as well its scientific rigor, politically neutral and non-partisan. We can draw another ideal type of university close to the preceding ones: the militant university – in which society tends to be invasive – that is the opposite of the cloister one.

The academic world should undoubtedly be more involved in social, economical, cultural processes, but maintaining the feature that set it apart as academia, preserving and developing its "crucial functions, through the exercise of ethics and scientific and intellectual rigour" (World Declaration on Higher Education, 1998). An alternative to the reductionism of operational, cloister and militant university can be found in the idea of a "participatory university", location of an active and cooperative presence concerning all aspects of social life, without withdrawing his specific academic aim. This kind of university is able to create an expressive relationship with the society in which is inserted and of which is, at the same time, a specific expression. The review of the so called third mission of universities is closely related to new and different relationships that should be developed with societies and societies' representatives – at every

level – in order to meet new and increasing social demands. A participatory university, as a social institution, is a social action and a social practice concerning the changes and the development of the community: from this point of view it cannot be reduced to governance issues but concerns the very way in which research, didactic and society engagement are intended, planned, connected and realized.

It is inside this participatory university that could be rethought the weberian ideal-type of the specialist as the educational ideal type of modern societies: we can talk about a kind of friendly expert as the one who is able to see in the other a person in progress, who is a responsible actor as well as an active and integrated subject within the community, who is able to do some repairs, to maintain, to care, to make his/her own actions transparent and, above all, to exchange it with others (Cesareo & Vaccarini, 2006).

In this perspective we can consider the experience mobility: mobility plays a key role in modern societies because leads to knowledge of the other, thus representing a key factor in academic life. Student's mobility does not only involve an exchange of disciplinary knowledge, it is not only a technical fact relating to the acquisition of specific professional skills, but mainly a cultural and social fact, which involves the deployment of a real experience and its interpretation and location in the context of the traveler's identity. The process of elaboration of the Erasmus experience reveals the role of the subject, that, interpreting, gives meaning to his/her social experience acquiring at the same time a comparative method of observation due to the curiosity that makes him/her capable of seeing beyond the familiar facts. The journey becomes a metaphor of our knowledge, structuring between the mobility of the object and the crisis of the subject, when one accepts a comparative perspective able to compare the cultures that the subject-traveler crosses, re-discussing the boundaries of his/her own culture, as well as the limits and the certainties of his/her belonging (Papatsiba, 2003).

The sociological approach is able to single the plurality of meanings out of the Erasmus experience: openness to new context, redefining belonging, re-thinking the framework of the fundamental relationships, but also the acquisition of new academic paradigms, comparison with different techniques of teaching/learning as well as with other communication styles, cultural backgrounds etc. The distinction between a functional dimension – more related to a rational action for a specific purpose such as the

deepening of a foreign language, obtaining a higher professional qualification, the thesis work, attending a practical on-site training etc. – and an expressive dimension of experience – more related to identity development, personal autonomy, etc. – although detected in most surveys, however, seems to be blurring and altering during the experience as well as after the conclusion of the study period abroad.

After the Erasmus experience, in fact, the expressive dimension takes on greater importance and students tend to evaluate the cultural experience, the improvement of language skills and especially the development of personal identity in a more favorable way than the academic value of the period of study undertaken abroad (Teichler, 2002). The relevance of the dimension of identity is revealed through the discovery by the students that its nature is basically relational: the identification process occurs through differentiation, discovering otherness and deconstructing the idea of a stable identity in favor of a conception of an open, flexible and composite identity (Merler & Piga, 2006).

The Erasmus student is a kind of traveler, of *homo itinerans* or *movens* (Niihara, 1997) who experiences the difficulties of not fully understand the reality in which he/she is or where he/she comes back, but at the same time, is able to take more points of view, assuming a “locative function”, through his/her placing him/herself within a texture of social relations imbued with boundaries. Drawing boundaries, in fact, has a decisive role in the symbolic construction of personal and community identity because provides social actors with the ability to make meanings through behavioral breakdowns. But the experience of the border also plays an integrative role, as it appears through the self-recognition within that particular group of peers that is the Erasmus Group which becomes the reference point throughout the stay and that makes the intercultural experience not only structured on the bilateral relationship between their own culture and that one of the guest country.

In this perspective the value of the experience appears to be related to the level of differences between the country of destination and the country of origin: if the social and academic differences are too great the risk of culture and/or academic shock is greater, but if these differences are minimal the risk is that students may not consider sufficiently interesting to accept the burden that accompanies the choice of studying abroad.

Implications for future Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area

Mobility in the field of knowledge has been part of the history of the Mediterranean universities since their foundation in the 12th and 13th centuries. In colonial and post-colonial period this mobility was exclusively from the south to the north, nowadays this mindset has been overcome but mobility continues to be a challenge for Mediterranean universities as significant obstacles remain: for Southern Mediterranean universities the main issue is the so-called brain drain whilst for Northern Mediterranean universities it is the anxiety over security and uncontrolled immigration.

The reasons that fostered the necessity to create a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area are the same that were behind the creation of the European Higher Education Area with the significant difference that the Cairo Declaration faces the challenge of “overcoming – through higher education – the disparities in levels of innovation and development between the north and south shores of the Mediterranean” (EPUF, 2010).

This more general challenge is related to specific changes that Mediterranean universities have to face on three different levels: internal change; socio-political transformations; mobility and cooperation. Internal change is related to governance and management, universities’ mission and accountability with regard to quality; socio-political transformations involve the responsibility role of the state and of public bodies; mobility and cooperation have to be stimulated and have financial support.

For what concerns in particular the third area one may say that mobility does entail some problems when there is an imbalance in the flows between countries. If no corrective measures are implemented the risk is that countries with limited resources end up financing the schooling of students from richer countries: appropriate return strategies should be planned as a fundamental part of Euro-Mediterranean university policies.

As observed in several studies on the Erasmus’ Programme one can see that there is a variety of potential push/pull factors that may hinder or facilitate students’ choice to take part in a mobility programme. Considering all the existing evidence and according to the most recent studies (EU Parliament, 2010), one can identify five areas of possible barriers: financial issues; personal motivation; awareness about mobility programmes; mobility conditions; and incompatibility between Higher Education systems.

Financial reasons may be one obstacle why students decide not to take part in a mobility programme. Even if students are entitled to receive a grant, most of the studies about Erasmus Programme show that usually the grant does not cover fully the expenses that studying abroad causes. Furthermore, financial issues are particularly important for the access to mobility for lower socio-economic groups.

Personal motivation is a starting point for participating in a study abroad programme and it involves several aspects: a) perceived benefits on future careers and salaries but also related to the wish for a living experience in another culture, learn another language, develop new soft skills, and meet new people; b) general pressure for a study abroad experience, depending on peer pressure or on national internationalisation policies and institutional encouragement to participate in a study abroad programme; c) language barrier; c) other personal aspects such as care taking relationships or employment at home.

Awareness about mobility programmes is an important prerequisite for participating: it concerns general awareness about mobility programmes and the support they offer to students in terms of finding an institution and application procedure as well awareness about any kind of financial support related to mobility.

Mobility conditions include the administrative burden of the mobility programmes such as the range of institutions and the length of the study abroad programme: the strengthening of cooperation initiatives could result in the creation of joint diplomas (particularly at Master level) and PhD as well as in the realization of short stays designed to enable first contacts between universities. Short intensive (1-3 weeks) programmes with participation from students and teachers from multiple countries and institutions could be very attractive to those not (yet) sure of the benefits of a longer period.

Higher Education system compatibility: one major problem is the lack of harmonization between the academic offer of the country of origin and the country of destination as well as the validation of the subjects at home university. The implementation of common systems for the recognition of student's mobility credits and diplomas and the creation of specific mobility programmes for university staff are considered the most effective instruments to promote and improve mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean region. According to the experience with the Erasmus Programme the main measure that will favour the mobility of students is the implementation of

an exchange programme based on simple principles, such as the mutual recognition of diplomas and subjects and a policy of reciprocity on students' exchanges. It seems useful to share the generalized use of the European 3+2+3 system (3 years Bachelor; 2 years Master; 3 years PhD) and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) considering the fact that these systems are already recognized by a large number of universities in the Euro-Mediterranean area (i.e. the EU universities).

One significant issue is that one related to language: although the development of multilingual education programmes would facilitate the mobility of students, they are usually conducted in northern languages (mainly English or French). The rise of English as the dominant language of scientific communication is unprecedented since Latin dominated the academy in medieval Europe, and it has been strengthened by information and communications technologies. These changes have created a universal means of instantaneous contact and simplified scientific communication but, at the same time, they have helped to concentrate ownership of publishers, databases, and other key resources in the hands of the strongest universities and some multinational companies, located almost exclusively in the northern part of the world.

This trend can offer new opportunities for study and research no longer limited by national boundaries but, at the same time, can weaken national cultures and autonomy: from this point of view it would be important to foster the learning of southern languages in EU countries in order to promote the diffusion of multilingual skills and, at the same time, to contrast the disproportionate influence of the northern elite universities over the definition of approaches to teaching and learning international standards for scholarship, and management models. These universities have a comparative advantage in terms of economical, material and human resources that leaves other universities (particularly those in southern countries) at a distinct disadvantage (Altbach, 2004). African universities, for example, barely register on world institutional rankings and league tables (Teferra, 2008); they produce a tiny percentage of the world's research output (Gaillard, *et al.*, 2005), and were long undermined by a powerful global policy discourse that downplayed the role of higher education in development for the world's poorest countries (Teferra, 2008).

Final remarks

The difficulty of finding the right balance between proximity and distance in the development of exchange relations between universities is now facing more difficulties due to the implementation of Bologna Process which has the structural objective to create a common European Area of Higher Education: area, as in official documentation, that must be able to a) promote mobility of students and teaching staff; b) attract students and teachers from various European countries, but also from other countries of the world, and c) become internationally competitive.

In this perspective they singled out the objective of creating similar training structures in various European countries, with the risk – however – felt by many, to produce an excessive homogenization of learning environments and curricula therefore annulling the attractive power of mobility students through the Erasmus programme. The same initiatives to encourage convergence among different systems of higher education – started even before the Bologna Process – could also be traced, according to some, to the gradual dissemination of ideas related to the rhetoric of New Public Management (Musselin, 2005).

In the latter direction is the tendency to register a greater use of terms such as competition, management, marketing and the like in the debate on internationalization of higher education at the expense of terms and phrases such as knowledge society, global village, global learning etc. This phenomenon seems to suggest that the main forces that act on these processes of higher education are those of turbo-capitalism at the expense of a broader vision that takes into account higher purposes such as social cohesion and ecological survival (Currie & Newson, 1998; Altbach, 2000; Teichler, 2004).

The Erasmus Programme is an academic experience but also an experience of human formation which plays functions related to teaching and research, but also supporting the construction of interpersonal networks, of intercultural socialization, of stimulus to social cohesion: in other words it connotes itself as an area of integrated and participatory training. It is within this perspective that we can think about a different idea of an Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area more related to the so called third mission of the university: “Rather than just focusing on research and teaching, the university community needs to reflect on its

contribution to social progress and the best way of producing it” (EPUF, 2010).

Of course, as pointed out by Schwartzman, one has to take into account the role of the new forces influencing exchanges and internationalization such as governments and different national agencies at various levels, professional organizations, the business community, non-governmental organizations as well as multilateral organizations (including EU, World Bank and others): in this way assuming the mission to contribute to social progress means that universities has to re-establish contact with these multiple stakeholders on a different basis in order to define “a more sophisticated and instrumental understanding of international activities, including exchanges, in higher education” but always maintaining a “consciousness of the broader public interest” (Altbach, Teichler, 2001).

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