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Professional and personal paths for Europe's qualified youth A survey of French, Italian and English ex-Erasmus students' trajectories

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**Professional and personal paths for Europe’s qualified youth
A survey of French, Italian and English ex-Erasmus students’ trajectories**

Magali Ballatore*

Abstract:

Behind the image of a globalised, mobile elite there is a wide range of social realities. In Europe today, there are many types of international migrants. This paper focuses on the field of qualified, professional migration, a type that falls between the two extremities on the social spectrum: the elite corporation, top executives in the world of globalisation, and poor migrants or asylum-seekers, with little capital. Our starting point is the theory that today in Europe, certain young people from the “middle class” of the south of the continent and/or massified higher education establishments use geographical mobility as a means to social mobility (move out in order to move up). We also hypothesise that this often has consequences on both their lives and their original geographical region. We have chosen to show the “human side” (Smith; Favell, 2006) of globalisation, instead of the more common viewpoint of theory and rhetoric, by asking former Erasmus students about their careers and experiences, both professional and non-professional. We analyse to what extent their careers correspond to new injunctions and how these non-linear, reversible paths have an impact on the entry into adult life for young people from average social and professional categories. On the basis of an in-depth content analysis of around fifty semi-directive interviews with young Italian, French and English people, we show how student mobility corresponds to expectations of the economic and social world, which go beyond the expectations of the participants themselves. The question of a possible reinforcement of existing social and economic inequalities within the European Union is thus raised through the relative “freedom” of the students when confronted with exchanges.

Introduction

The image of “global elites” conceals different social realities. In Europe today, there is a wide range of different international migrants. In this paper we would like to focus on the world of educated and professional migration in the EU, in between both ends of the social spectrum: high-flying corporate elites and poverty-stricken labour migrants and asylum seekers. Taking in consideration only the “elite” can leave out key populations: particularly international students. There has been a decline in

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intra-EU mobility since the early 1970s, as working class south-to-north migration has dried up. But it remains to be seen whether this is going to be replaced by a new type of middle-class professional movement that accompanies the emergence of a younger, more European-minded generation. One of the effects of the increasingly institutionalized mobility in Europe has been a “democratization of access”, through the lower middle-classes, of international migration opportunities linked to careers and education. It may turn out that so-called “elites”, who have opted to move internationally are often not from elite backgrounds, but ex-mobile students, who have gambled with spatial mobility in their education and careers abroad to improve social mobility opportunities that are otherwise blocked at home.

This paper presents the results of a research on the ex-Erasmus Graduates at entry on the Labour Market. This research is a micro-level study of everyday reality of “global mobility”. We have considered the “human face” of middle class mobility, by interviewing ex-Erasmus students on their trajectories and the way they entered the labour market. We have examined Erasmus students’ educational trajectories and international professional experiences as well as the consequences of internationalization on their life course. We present both the extent of internationalization, and the forms it assumes, for the citizens of three countries: France, Italy and England. After a state of the art piece of research in Europe, which focuses on students’ geographical mobility and its impact on youth trajectories, we will analyze how ex-Erasmus students from three universities (Turin, Provence and Bristol) enter the labour market, 4 to 5 years after their Erasmus year.

Our study examines how the increasing institutionalized student mobility features in the real life experiences of agents, both individual and collective, as mediated by context, contingency and the unpredictability of life stories. Our article presents various analyses of student mobility, and then moves onto a substantial selection of specific interviews-based case studies. We test the following hypotheses: In Europe today, it seems that a certain middle-class from some southern European countries and from some HEI (Higher Education Institutions) have to move out in order to move up. But this always has costs, in particular on the life course. International middle-class migrants have no voice in Europe – neither politically, nor socially. These less capital-rich immigrants may be constrained to live the expensive life of the “permanent expatriate”. This can become a form of transnational “fragility” of lifestyle. It seems also that institutionalized students’ mobility fits with and contributes to changes in educational and work spheres, to increase individualization and personalization of individual trajectories, along with the need for increased flexibility, mobility and adaptability (Castel, 2009). Does the rise of geographical movements within transition periods – between Higher Education and work – create more unstable situations?

Is that phenomenon in keeping with a new injunction, a new social norm, which consists, in the face of uncertainties, of the need to postpone a certain numbers of choices, to circulate, to look for more or less unpredictable balances, in a “destandardized” labour market (Beck, 2003)? Nowadays, how do young couples manage to stay “together”, while experiencing their relationships face-to-face yet living most of the time at distance from each other?

1. Organized student mobility and employment perspectives for graduates in Europe

1.1. Multiplication of support measures and research on mobility

Geographical mobility in Europe, as a tool to ensure a high rate of employment and European competitiveness, is at the heart of Member States’ preoccupations. That is why, for several decades, measures and programs that place emphasis on facilitating and encouraging students’ and workers’ mobility, has risen. Mobile students can be defined as those who study abroad for either a degree or for a period of their study time. The mobility can be organized or institutionalized by Higher

Education Institutions or by the students themselves (“free-movers”). We will call the first type organized or institutionalized student mobility. Higher Education international exchanges operate between organizations, which are in contractual relations (often at a research level) and include a certain reciprocity, even if this principle is not respected, because of the linguistic supremacies and socio-economic inequalities that exist in Europe (Ballatore, Bloss, 2008).

Methodological note

Thanks to the National Agencies and Universities international offices, which have systematically registered “incoming” and “outgoing” students every year since the creation of the Erasmus program (1987), it is possible to follow students’ flows, their orientation and development. However, once back in the University of origin with a degree, the Erasmus can be statistically spotted. If they decide to come back to the host country to carry on studying, for example, they enter the population of overseas students, which covers a large variety of situations. If they chose to work in the host country, analytical difficulties increase. The statistics of European authorities allow neither us to analyze the migratory trajectories of these students, nor to identify the social origin, the educational and professional paths. For that reason we designed a questionnaire and interviewed the “outgoing” students in 3 universities (in 3 different countries), who participated at the Erasmus program in 2004-2005. In this way, we were able to ask them for their email addresses and to keep in contact with them for some/several years after their Erasmus stay.

We have chosen Italy, France and England for the case study, because of the differences that subsist between “exporter” and “importer” countries, regarding the exchanges and mobility data. To choose the universities, we predefined some common characteristics and criteria, to avoid bias during the comparison. We chose multidisciplinary universities, created in years prior to the “massification” of education, located in peripheral cities of almost the same size.

This mobility can be described as “short-term” because unlike *spontaneous* mobility – which describes students who have chosen to complete an entire course overseas, ending with a degree – institutionalized mobility cannot exceed 9 months and is fully integrated in the curriculum of the University of origin. Apart from joint-degree courses, students participating in institutionalized mobility only obtain a degree from the University of origin. It is expected then, that at the end of her/his stay, that the Erasmus student will go back to her or his own country. The question is what happens once they finish their exams and obtain their degrees : does this kind of mobility give birth to other types of mobility? More generally, in what ways do the social uses of institutionalized student mobility have an impact on labour-market entry?

Interest in student mobility has been increasing over the past years; this can be seen in the number of PhD theses written on this subject since the end of 1990’s in France (Lerot, 1999 ; Papatsiba, 2001; De Federico, 2002; Garneau, 2006; Ballatore, 2007). Some pieces of research sponsored or carried out by the European Commission, which are essentially compilations of statistics, have also set the stage for the debate. The main comparative and quantitative pieces of research dedicated to the mobility of institutionalized students, by the way of European exchange programs, have focused on the evolution of orientation(s) in flow, and on the profile and social characteristics of this population. (Jallade et al., 1996 ; Maiworm, Teichler, 1997 ; Cammelli, 1999 ; Pichon et al., 2002). Despite the multiplication of measures supporting students’ mobility, these students only constitute a minority; less than 2% of enrolled students in Higher education institutions take part in Erasmus program. On average, this population has easy access to resources and strong social advantages. The results of our survey also show a significant over-representation of privileged social classes, which is even clearer in fields

where language classes are not compulsory (Ballatore, 2008). Moreover, Erasmus students enrolled in non-selective university fields have, on average, a quicker education path and special migratory competences resulting from a rich "migratory" past. Several studies have focused on the daily life, on experiences abroad and on friends' social networks (De Federico, 2002; Papatsiba, 2001, Murphy-Lejeune, 2001; Agulhon, Xavier de Brito, 2009). What is missing from a lot of student mobility surveys is an analysis of how these mobile students enter the labour market. The data available is based generally on estimations made from opinion questions directed at students right after their stay abroad. This research focuses on the stay abroad and its impact on graduates' futures. One of the observations made is that students who have partaken in institutionalized mobility often have a better and easier entrance onto the labour market, better jobs, and higher responsibilities compared to their "sedentary" colleagues (Oppen et al., 1990; Maiworm, Teichler, 1996 ; Messer et Wolter, 2005). One of the questions that remains is how to dis-entangle which characteristics of this population are making labour-market entry easier: the stay abroad, social characteristics or educational background? The more internationally open universities are often the most selective: In France, this refers to the engineering and business schools that are part of the "Grandes Ecoles". In England, it is mostly old universities that take part in student exchanges. In Italy, the majority of these universities are located in the North (Cammelli, 2001, Ballatore, 2007). The inequality of prestige between HE institutions, and more generally between cultural areas, also has an effect on the social morphology of an Erasmus population usually hailing from a high socio-economic background. It is therefore not possible to ignore the education, social and national characteristics of students when looking at mobile graduates' entrances on the labour market. Even if the Susan Oppen, U. Teichler and J. Carlon survey finds that 3/4 of the youths interviewed think that the stay abroad was useful for finding their first job, the IZA¹ survey concludes that the students' advantages on the labour market are not linked to the experience abroad in particular but are highly correlated to the educational and social characteristics of these students (Messer, Wolter, 2005). In addition, many professors emphasize that the Erasmus student population is to a large extent constituted of the "best students" of a given department, even if less "bright" students are also driven to expatriation in order to break with daily monotony in a context of increasing competitiveness and insufficient unpredictably (Ballatore, 2007). Moreover, some individual predispositions to mobility and some very different socio-economic contexts in Europe also play a role, even if indirectly, in the process of "international learning" that influences the professional mobility of Erasmus during their life course.

1.2 Employment perspectives for graduates: significant inequalities in Europe

In spite of the diverse situations in which job insecurity occurs, and which are more or less bearable, they now concern a new population; the children from lower middle class who we thought had been spared (Chauvel, 2006). They certainly enter the labour market, while others are more or less permanently excluded, but their itineraries are often marked by uncertainty. They are in some ways occasional or casual workers, alternating periods of activity, sometimes lucratively when employed full-time, with periods of unemployment or inactivity after temporary contracts (which could also be part-time) end. And that often goes hand in hand with several residential moves, which come with certain social and economical costs. Among the ex-Erasmus expatriates, an important part express his/her desire to escape a difficult entry into the labour market, as observed by Deborah, an Italian working in Switzerland, and by a French woman, Florence, living in Singapore:

¹ IZA is an Institute for the Study of Labour, a Bonn-based think tank focusing on the analysis of global labour market developments.

“I’m looking, and looking! I’ve passed interviews, but... we are talking about two completely different realities. Switzerland, is a particular place... there is a different currency, it’s outside the European Union, the country has 300 000 inhabitants... it is a little Lombardy, let’s say. It is a country that is very prosperous, economically I mean, the unemployment rate is under 3%, so, in fact, it is obvious, it is completely different from Italian’s labour market. In Italy firms are all in a big crisis, they are not helped, clients don’t pay, and banks have blocked all funding. It is obvious that this is a very difficult period, with the global financial crisis, but for Italy, in my opinion, the cost weighs heavily on the shoulders of young graduates, who maybe should have the opportunity to find better jobs, rather than to be treated equally with those who don’t have degrees”

Deborah, 28 year old, degree in Economics from the university of Turin

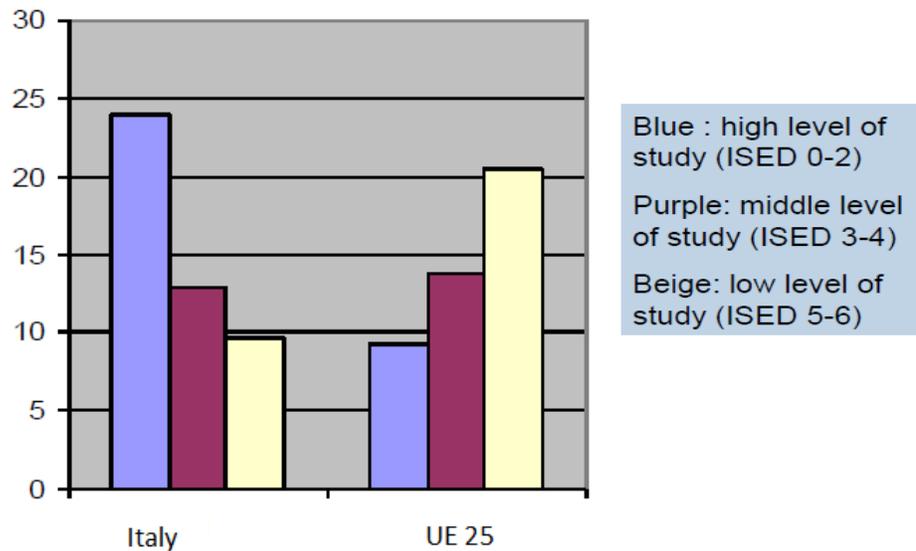
“To come back in France? In south of France? Well... When I talk about that with my friends, who have stayed there... it’s not easy for them on a work level... There are a lot of unemployed people. Here, there are not a lot of problems, at least for us, the expats, actually we live in a bubble, in a cocoon. For that matter, those who go back are often disappointed, they find the old Europe... not very... dynamic!”

Florence, 29 year old, LEA degree at the University of Provence

A lot of Erasmus graduates who are today overseas think they have been slowed down in their desire for upward social mobility, by a stigma attached to their field of study or by the “school inflation” in their region of origin (Duru-Bellat, 2008). Florence says she feels “hang ups” compared with people who have Business or “Grandes Ecoles” degrees, and who, in her opinion, have a better education. In France, the graduates from provincial Universities often use Europe, North America and emerging countries as an alternative road to go up to Paris; a traditional road for those who wished, and still wish to have a career (Smith, Favell, 2006). In fact, emigration to Paris to find a job in line with the qualification obtained is still an interesting road, but other routes, which were more exceptional, are becoming a common phenomenon, because of the increasing competition between qualified youth. As a result of the new information and communication technologies, space and time are reducing. An example of this is the reversible mobility that Malia is experiencing—after a PhD obtained at the university of Provence, she moved to Paris, then decided to go back to Provence, to finally move again to the North of Europe, to Luxembourg—which is symptomatic of new experiences of mobility. The latter are characterized by increasingly closer movements in time and distance. The “return to the origins”, to the south that she had desired, has for her been very painful, due to hard work conditions (if compared with her experience in North of Europe), hence her initiative to move again.

Not all Erasmus graduates are confronted with the same necessity to insure themselves against the risk of unemployment or against the loss of social position as a result of geographic mobility. Employment prospects immediately after graduation are extremely sensitive to the general state of segments of the national labour market. Indicators of international comparisons seem to put France in an intermediate position, between a South of Europe, where young graduates are the first to be affected by the mutations of employment, and the Anglo-Saxon world, where young graduates continue to enter the labour market quite young and without too many difficulties. Finding a graduate entry job immediately upon graduation seems particularly hard in Italy. It is the only European country where the employment rate is lower for youth with a degree than for youth without a degree. The unemployment rate of graduates from Italian universities between 20 and 29 year old is around 24%, by far the highest percentage among the 25 European countries at the beginning of the 21st century (Figure 1.).

Fig.1. Unemployment rate of 20-29 year old in Italy and Europe by level of study, 2005 (percent).



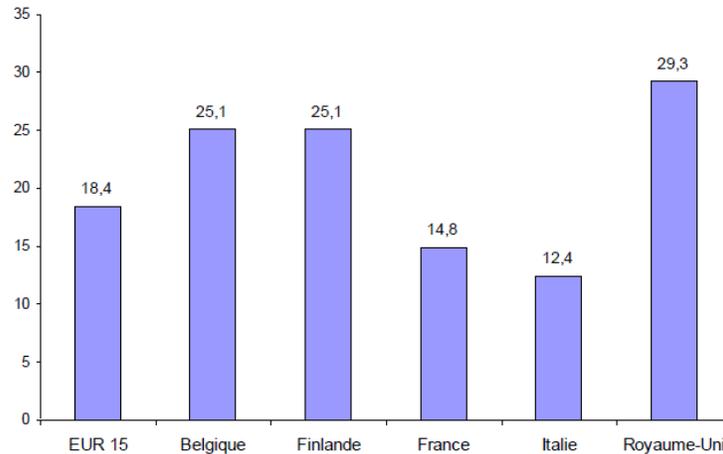
Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

In the United Kingdom, contrary to what happens in Italy, the activity rate increases with the degree of qualification and this relation is even more noticeable for women than for men.

Moreover, whichever country you look at, course selectivity turns out to be significant for entry on labour market, the most selective courses offering the best professional prospects. “The institution effect” appears from the first degree in UK, but in French universities the type of degree affects labour market entry only after the second or the third level (Master and PhD) (Paul, Murdoch, 2000). Furthermore, the over-qualification impact is bigger for youth who graduated and subsequently work for small firms in their first jobs, if compared to successive positions. Yet there are four countries where more than a third of the labour force is employed in big firms: Belgium, Finland, Germany and the UK (Kivinen, 1997). The activity rate in big firms is quite important in France as well, but it is rather low in Spain, Italy and Portugal in particular (Figure 2.).

Ex-Erasmus students do not face the same situations regarding the valorization of their studies and of their stay abroad in their country of origin. What are the projects of Erasmus students after their stay abroad and how have they materialized some years after being formulated?

Fig. 2. Percentage of the service class among the workforce in Europe



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 1997

1.3. National differentiated projects of Erasmus students

We are now going to break down our survey sample by nationality, in order to explore the extent to which the observed mobility trajectories and their reversibility, contribute to the creation of a new norm of increasingly unpredictable relations to work (Castel, 2009). Immediately upon their return to their university of origin, British ex-Erasmus students express mostly their wish to work in their home country. Around 10% of them, who are also often in languages departments, mention the possibility of leaving the UK (Table 1). This is in high contrast to their Italian counterparts' aspirations, of whom, after their stay abroad, more than 30% want to carry on studying, to go on a course or to work outside their own country. If we take in consideration the students who want to do research whatever the location; more than 40% of Italian Erasmus students wish to carry on the experience of mobility.

Table 1. Educational and professional projects of ERASMUS students 2004-2005 (by percentage)

| | University of PROVENCE | University of TURIN | University of BRISTOL | Together |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| A defined career plan –private sector- in the country of origin | 38,1 | 31,5 | 61 | 41,0 |
| Teaching or competitive examination –public sector- in the country of origin | 27,0 | 5,5 | 9,7 | 15,5 |
| Study in a foreign country | 1,3 | 12,6 | 2,4 | 5,5 |
| course or job in a foreign country | 9,2 | 18,1 | 4,9 | 11,4 |
| Research, anywhere (country of origin or abroad) | 4,6 | 7,9 | 4,9 | 5,8 |
| Any defined career plan | 19,8 | 24,4 | 17,1 | 20,8 |
| Total N= | 100 (152) | 100 (127) | 100 (82) | 100 (361) |

Comparison of these plans with the actual trajectories of Erasmus graduates enables us to confirm the idea that the variability of itineraries reflects institutional and national backgrounds. Certain Italian and French ex-Erasmus graduates have experienced difficulties finding their first qualified job, and a salary in line with the degree obtained in their country. And when mobility becomes immigration, the attractive factors are, in the first instance, related to the work conditions and to the career opportunities that the host country offers.

A significant number of graduates from Turin university emphasize the “higher opportunities” that North Europe has to offer as regards academic careers. Thus, Roberto says that he is attracted by a “newer, a better resourced institution”. For many French and Italian ex-Erasmus students there is a direct link between their Erasmus stay and their emigration. Some have decided to stay in the host country, others even to change continent, such as Angelo and Grégory who wish to improve their Curriculum Vitae, to distinguish themselves from their peers who remain in their country of origin. To do so, they demonstrate a willingness to volunteer and sometimes develop a quasi-ascetic work ethic (Castel, 2009).

“I thought that staying in Italy, I would have done a job without any connection with my studies, as my friends do, and earning? maybe the same things ??? to survive. So, I decide to go to the USA. I’ve done experiences to an international level, with a great value, a great impact on my curriculum.

Your friends, who have remained in Italy, what they do?

Short term contracts, renewed each 3 months, if it’s ok, or in offices, they do photocopying, nothing much! Italy is a very hard country. As a new graduate, it’s very difficult to find a good job. It’s difficult, you need to wait a long time, before finding a position in line with your graduation”

Angelo, 29 year old, graduate in engineering

“The persons overseas, from the other part of Atlantic, have a way of working which is completely different, from what we can find here in Europe and so...for me it was much more interesting and hummm.. more rewarding to work there! In the same manner, regarding the future, regarding.... At a career level... at a professional career level, we have contacts, which are made more easily... and also, maybe after that, it may have an impact on my CV, but, it’s not really... it’s really the international aspect of the thing... that has counted.”

Grégory, 26 year old, LEA graduated, business agent

The ex-Erasmus graduates from the University of Bristol who were interviewed, consider and chose less, by far, professional migration to other countries. The impact of a year abroad doesn’t seem to be a decisive factor in their ability to obtain a position appropriate to their qualification. The professional career often begins in the country of origin, apart from languages course graduates, who, unlike their French and Italian counterparts, experience fewer difficulties on the European labour market. The ones we have met, who live in south of Europe, teach English. The situation is different in the north, in particular in Germany, where their activities are much more diverse. Like the majority of University of Bristol’s graduates, Jack and Thomas underline that to do an Erasmus stay and learn another language are not necessary steps to succeed professionally.

“The year abroad doesn’t change much, because with a 3 years course I would do the same without the year abroad. So seems to me make sense to do a year more to go abroad and learn languages.

Learn languages for... your career maybe...

Hum... For my career not necessarily ... I didn't do it in terms of... I did not do it for my future, because I don't think it is really important in England to know other languages on a professional level. I wasn't really interested in the cultures of others countries, but just... if you want to communicate with somebody in another country... it is more interesting than actual learning about culture. You don't HAVE TO go abroad to find a good job in Britain... I don't really remember why I wanted to do that... probably because of my previous travels in Europe, maybe because of my year out, my dad also... My dad is Dutch. I'm actually half Dutch."

Jack, 27 year old, PhD in Mathematics, post-doctorate position in Germany

"I like England and I want to stay in this company. [...] I think Erasmus was useful for my career, but probably more from a... personal development standpoint than from... an academic standpoint. I don't think the exact Maths that I studied in Bordeaux was a factor.

What do you mean by personal development?

Um, I would say... certainly having, uh... having been... an Erasmus student in Bordeaux, the experience was... positive from a standpoint of, uh... my network of friends being more international, um... my outlook being more international. I was probably more mature, actually, when I came back than when I went. Um... (...) But... Well, I think, I would say... linguistically we were probably more qualified still to, to apply for jobs in the U.K. versus... say, France. It was easier, I mean. Yeah, to find a job in your own country, it's easier."

Thomas, 26 year old, Master in Economics, manager in London, in an investment bank

For the University of Bristol's graduates, the Erasmus stay seems to be less a way to distinguish themselves economically and to enlarge their horizons and their employability, than it is for the Turin and Provence Universities ex-Erasmus students. Having done an Erasmus stay in a northern country or in a southern country also affects the dialogues the graduates have. It is a function of each regional and national context that we may discern situations where the stay abroad represents (1) an almost compulsory requirement for social success (for some Italians), (2) an alternative path on the road toward the capital for the mass university graduated (for a part of French youth), or (3) a choice, which could compromise the national position, if the distance becomes bearable (for certain British). It's obvious that thesis types don't exhaust the diversity of expatriation social stakes, and that inside each country these three situations could coexist. But, among mobile students and graduates, the terms of choices between an international trajectory and a return to the country of origin are radically different. The development of white-collar workers' international mobility, their more and more transnational strategies, allow a whole set of games and social dynamics, which have different effects according to the national, economical and social realities. Enchantment with the life abroad, high satisfaction expressed by Erasmus students interviewed back home, who enthusiastically describe a picture of the "Erasmus spirit", perhaps leave out some important questions. This may hide a mixed reality, created by conditions of study that have deteriorated in certain university courses and by career prospects for young people that are more and more scarce and/or unstable in some European regions. Their reality is determined by an economy increasingly orientated towards flexibility and mobility, coupled with precariousness for a part of the population. Consequently, they will have to change jobs frequently and to move often, at times abroad, to take up employment.

2. "Maintain" mobility and "Living Apart Together" Spaces

2.1. To move out in order to move up?

While the "international" element at the beginning of a career could be a means of reinforcing

employability in a national career perspective, it could also lead to a more durable migration or to a sequence of mobility experiences. One impact of institutionalized mobility is the significant increase in training and career opportunities abroad for students from mass universities, seeking through mobility a form of “distinction” that their stratified Higher Education system denied them. In fact, a sizeable proportion of Erasmus graduates that we interviewed, coming from mass, non-selective courses, have sought, through geographical mobility, an upward social mobility that seemed compromised in their environment. After graduation, a lot of ex-Erasmus students emphasize the uniqueness their international competencies. Even if study mobility trajectories and aims are diverse, they seem to operate as a springboard toward other types of mobility. So the mobility of young people can be seen at the same time as a predisposition (Erasmus students are rarely first-time travellers) and as a way to enlarge horizons, reflecting an autonomous choice. But the need for mobility and flexibility is also something that has to be accepted, in order to insure oneself against the risks of unemployment and reduced status.

For most of the graduates we met, mobility seems to be an answer to a largely “uncertain” context; a context that is “not very predictable” (according to the words used by the youth interviewed) and that creates an extension of the training to work transition period. Thus, Loic, Caroline and Silvia, as important examples of French and Italian ex-Erasmus students who we have met 4 years after their Erasmus stay, have not finished, by far, their geographical and professional trajectories (vertically or horizontally).

And in the longer term?

“I don’t know. Each time I try to see myself in the long term, everything changes, so, I don’t see myself in the long term! I try to see myself on a mid-term already. So, now... Let say that my priority, it’s not.... It’s not the work I would say, ie. Think about work. It’s to find a job where I feel happy. Because until now, I haven’t been really content, in what I have done, not completely. So, now I’m looking for something else. I want to enter another sector. I’m trying to be in business, preferably import-export. To work with foreigners, but preferably in commercial prospection, which is different from transport, what I’ve done before. I want to see something else.”

Loic, LEA courses at the University of Provence, trading sector, looking for another job

“After all, you know, plans are... after all, it happens rarely that you realized your plans exactly as you wanted. As a result... at the moment, it’s more by day after day I would say than 'year-by-year'!”

Caroline, University of Provence, International Management degree, job-seeker

“Anyone who gets a degree today, is in my situation: today the employment opportunities are few in any case, you need to have something more on your CV... After all, so, I’m waiting, I’m going on looking around me, but yes.... I don’t know, I think it’s important to have an experience overseas... but depending on... if it becomes a durable work experience, let’s say, a transfer to a foreign country, I don’t know.”

Silva, University of Turin, anthropological and literature degree, job-seeker

The interviews suggest that Erasmus graduates today have to face frequently unpredictable situations; their trajectories of mobility are reversible. May we say more than over past years? May we talk about trajectories without origin and destination as Vincent Kaufman does (Kaufman, 2005)? These situations may not come across as unusual, but the scale of the movement, the technological innovations that enhance different types of mobility, the perceptions of mobility generated by labour market transformations and the rhetoric of “fleximobility”, all contribute to the originality of the

observed patterns.

Moreover, the majority of young graduates would like this “transitory” period to be temporary and to have different mechanisms to cope with it, depending on their gender, age and social origin. These types of migration are becoming more open to women, as at university women become predominant, even if men are not spared the new movement injunction to maintain the value of the degree obtained. Even if some people (traditionally women) are mobile for other reasons, such as joining their partner, the majority of Erasmus graduates are involved in career migration or are in pursuit of a professional project. For professional migrants, job satisfaction and job fulfillment are essential. Thus, Lisa says she is not thinking about the family dimension, she favours geographical mobility to find an interesting job and Grégory explains what has led him to separate from his girlfriend: they will give priority to their careers.

“I believe that in fact.... To be mobile, sometimes, it’s a bit incompatible with a stable couple life... in fact... I don’t know what is leading what... to be not stable that makes mobility an easy choice or the fact that to be mobile doesn’t allow me to meet someone, at least durably.... If before I emphasize the fact that I feel rather mobile at the moment and that I would prefer an interesting job, even if I have to move and that doesn’t bother me, it’s also because at the moment, I don’t have a family plan, or a plan to join a partner.”

Lisa, 28 year old, Italian, PhD candidate, single

“At some point, you reach a condition in your relationship... where you want to carry on, to try to build something else and then... and then you don’t want anymore to spend all your time in a plane to see the other person, you know! You want to live daily life with her and... so, that’s it. So, we have thought about the situation for a long time and it’s true that... well, our professional careers... we have decided to give priority to our careers, so that’s it, it’s a choice. So, we have taken this decision, which is the most sensible one... and we said to ourselves, in any case, it’s not worthwhile going on like this... Me in the USA and you in Argentina! And then, what would happen? ...At the moment, this is how things are.”

Grégory, 26 year old, LEA degree, Commercial agent, recently single

However, professional consideration doesn’t explain all choices. Familial and residential considerations play an important role in decisions to move elsewhere, to decide to go back home or to organize a dual-country residence system. To study the arbitration between mobility and anchorage is particularly interesting. The post-Erasmus migration is not always chosen and can be a complex and tense conciliation between, on the one hand, unemployment risk and, on the other, territorial “registration” and a person’s social integration (Vignal, 2005). The decision to emigrate depends on professional positions and economical limitations and restrictions, but it is also affected by residential and familial dimensions, which have not yet been analyzed very deeply. To adapt to employment, geographical flexibility is not always seen as easy and positive. Young and single people feel better about it.

2.2. Are the compromises of migration still highly gendered?

The back and forth movements that Erasmus students make during their stay abroad and the binary structure of their lives (country of origin/host country), will gradually incorporate pluri-centralistic movements for those who pursue professional mobility. In ex-Erasmus discourses, tensions and possible compromises interfere between the work and family spheres of life, and cloud the issue of anchorage and migration. Erasmus graduates don’t really leave their region of origin. They often continue to refer to the place they come from. The migration scene appears endowed with a secondary

status, or at least relative one, which can be named a resources space (Rosental, 1990).

The survey of ex-Erasmus trajectories also shows that graduate migration, and sometimes the precariousness of the jobs that the graduates get when enter the labour market, lead them to stay for long periods in atypical “living Apart Together” spaces (lonely or living with parents). In the opinion of ex-Erasmus graduates, these situations are made more sustainable by increasingly rapid and numerous communications technologies, which reduce distance and lower travel costs (Levin, 2004). The phone, internet and low cost flight companies, make virtual and real contacts easier. Vanessa, French, who works in Spain and is in a relationship with a German ex-Erasmus student, underlines the importance of co-presence and the ability to travel often:

“Well... I was lucky to be able to work, to have a job and my boyfriend as well! And as a result, as a result we manage to see each other... We manage to be together every 2 weeks. We try. Every 2 or 3 weeks and if it's more, then we stay together more. But, we try to do that, to make the relationship last, if we don't see each other, it doesn't work! There are cheap flights. We have even talked about living together. We are talking about that. Yeah, we are talking about that and it's me who would have to go there and as... as he is still on training, he hasn't an extraordinary income to live together... but still I really want, I really want a job, before I go to Germany finally... because I don't know German, if I don't have a job, it could be a nightmare!”

Vanessa, 26 year old, working in Spain, project manager

Although Vanessa would like to move to Germany to live with her partner, in her economical situation, employment is the main reason for extending the “Living Apart Together” situation. The durability of this phenomenon does not have the same consequences for men and women. The latter are clearly keener than the former to renounce to their jobs, or to make some compromises regarding the work sphere, even if not all women make these concessions without apprehension. In the majority of “couples apart” situation that we have encountered, women assume the decision to follow, to accept a compromise or to settle down durably in a “living Apart Together” situation. Today, even if most of the men seem to accept that women keep their jobs, the traditional model of a conventional family doesn't disappear. Mary gives us an example of tradition influence on the arbitration between mobility and non-mobility in a couple:

“So, now we live with my parents and we could remain a long time. My parents don't mind, it's not a problem for them, but we... we are disappointed to have to stay at home... like that, if he find something, or if something happens, so we will stay in Italy, if not, he can't stay unemployed... because also, he and I, we have an idea ... of a traditional family, of a family where it's the man that is bringing money back home, who works, who earns money... it's also for that, if we move, even if I would not find work for a while, it's ok too, it's not a problem, but if he doesn't find any, it's a problem”.

Mary, Italian, 28 year old, chemist, Pharmacist

Angelo, who is engaged to a German girl (of Italian origin), talks about his difficulties in making decisions between “heart” and “head”, but never considered the possibility of joining his girlfriend without having first a professional opportunity for himself. On the contrary, Florence, who has followed her boyfriend to Singapore, never thought about finding a job before leaving, but today, after separating from him, she regrets not getting married.

“For me, it was a dream opportunity to be able to leave, so many people don't have this chance, it has opened my mind to other cultures... Moreover my current boyfriend is not French. To live

elsewhere, living abroad, it is an opportunity... Now, there is a thing ... I would advise young couples who are not married and that want live abroad to get married first. That way, when the wife arrives in the country, it is easier for her, for social security for example. Easier...

In a juridical sense I mean. You don't have a residence permit, as we weren't married, we were nothing... I wasn't really considered here... at a status level, it was a bit complicated. It is less complicated today, because they want European people to come actually. So, even if you are not married here, now the wife can have an expat's wife status. The expat's wife, it's a whole network actually, an international network, so at a social level, there are no problems, you meet others couples by the way of dinners or even when your firm organizes things. Right, you have to like it, of course, I never feel so good at 100% ???, but I'm a kind of an exception".

Florence, French, 31 year old, LEA degree, cultural event assistant manager

As time goes by, and short term mobility experiences multiply, the more the labour migration is related to social fears and "risks" (break-up, celibacy, loneliness, etc.). When mobile people are well off and are able to, they try to reduce these risks. Choosing a strategy of double residence is a solution; a "familial compromise" that allows couples to sustain their working lives and mobility, as well as their family lives. Because of these possibilities and the reversibility of this type of migration, numerous authors distinguish between a past migration (south to north of Europe) and a present one, as being, in the first case, forced and, in the second, resulting from an independent choice. In comparison to the past, young workers today are more mobile and have a greater freedom of choice to live abroad (Bartolini, Volpi, 2005, p93). Yet, when the people interviewed in England, in Asia and in the United States, etc., think about going back home eventually or to the south of Europe, they frequently mention the same situation of reducing possibilities in their home regions. Many, after several periods of work experience in different cities or even different countries or continents, wonder about the "sense" of their movements, in relation to their private life or their country of origin, as Paolo underline:

"There is no direct itinerary, because of the Erasmus stay, I did it in Spain. Concerning the reasons that lead me to emigrate, as, I think, for the majority of Italian people in England, I came here for Educational and career opportunities, which aren't real in Italy... The desire to do something for my country, to improve it is huge, but it's precisely in Italy, the country where I have lower possibility to work in my sector".

Paolo, researcher, post-doctorate position at the University of Brunei

The image of an international traveler, completely indifferent to work and living places, seems distorted by a liberal ideology, which sees the individual as the sole master of his/her own fate. The Erasmus graduate responds more or less consciously and voluntarily to the flexibility injunction, with levels of constraint that are variable, depending on country of origin, and educational, social and gender context. (Ex-)Erasmus students have diverse nationalities and social origins. They have not only been conditioned in different ways and have different career trajectories but also have different expectations of the future. Of course, in a general way, as Erasmus students, they are a homogeneous group, with respect to the level of their studies, the fact that they are studying abroad and in some general aspects of their social background. However, such homogeneity does not exhaust the underlying diversity of the population of ex-Erasmus students. The professional and personal perspectives and future of the youth graduates in each country of origin are different.

Conclusion

This new age of European migration is indeed less massive than previous ones and harder to apprehend, because of its mixed and “all over the place” social characteristics, but it remains definitely socially significant. The cosmopolitan and international aspirations of Erasmus graduates relate to a desire for upward social mobility (of the kind normally associated with an elite). The lower middle class and even certain less privileged social categories, whose “localism” is despised, seem attracted by the “international” which provides a certain form of social recognition. But firstly, widening participation in higher education does not, as such, guarantee the “achievement democratization” on the labour market. Choices made by ex-Erasmus graduates remain clearly related to the employment perspectives when they enter the labour market with a degree in their own country. These employment perspectives for youth are themselves extremely sensitive to economical conditions on national and local professional segments of work (and to the political decisions associated with them).

Secondly, in this survey on trajectories of Erasmus graduates, it emerges that the multiplication of “circulatory” experiences renders ineffective the differentiation between mobility and migration (Tarrus, 2000). However, as Alain Tarrus suggests, we may be able to replace the concept of “in between-two”, with “in between various places”, which seems more characteristic of ex-Erasmus experiences, where mobility is often not confined to a pendular movement, but to a pluri-centralistic one, between places invested by divers affects and practices. Many ex-Erasmus graduates today, stay a long time in “between various” places. Bi-national couples tend to actually redefine the “be together” rules, inside more or less durable provisional connections and temporary neighborhoods.

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