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MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

**PROCEEDING &
ABSTRACTS BOOK**

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Non-European Mobility at Higher Education Institution: A Case Study from Sapienza University of Rome

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Abstract

The promotion of mobility among students and academic staff is one of the main objective of the Bologna Process, a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries put in place to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications. According to the last Erasmus+ Annual Report (2019), almost 10 million people enjoyed the Erasmus programme during the last three decades and the increase of this phenomenon has been recorded in all of the European countries. However, it is important to underline that this number includes not only all the students that experienced a mobility period in Europe but also those who have taken advantage of the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM), a specific programme which aims to promote the international mobility of European students and staff to and from non-EU partner countries. Indeed, the mobilities to countries across Europe are a more recent initiative and, starting from 2015, more and more students and academic staff spent part of their academic path in another higher education institution around the world.

In addition to this programme, other specific programmes referring to non-EU mobility are double degrees and bilateral agreements, an agreement signed by two universities which choose to become partners in order to achieve common specific aims related to students' exchange periods.

For this reason, the aim of this contribution is to focus the attention particularly on non-European mobilities during the last academic year (2018/2019) in one of the most important university in Europe, that is Sapienza University of Rome. The data analyzed will take into consideration demographic variables, mobility variables and academic career's variables.

Keywords: *Italy, Incoming, Outgoing, Students, Internazionalization*

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, after several ministerial meetings among European countries, the Bologna Declaration, which aim is to achieve the harmonisation of the higher education systems, was signed by education ministers from 29 European States. Through this agreement, all the Bologna members undertake to adopt a common credit system (the so-called ECTS - European Credit Transfer System¹), a common structure for the Diploma Supplement, a 2 (later 3) cycle structure of study and a European cooperation in terms of quality assurance (Reinalda and Kulesza, 2006; Kozma, 2014; Moscovitz and Zahavi, 2020). At the basis of these measures, there are two fundamental motivations, which are

¹ The ECTS - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is a tool of the European Higher Education Area for making studies and courses more transparent and represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. It helps students to move between countries and to have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognized. To this end, this tool has been adopted by most of the European countries since it is the core of the Bologna Process, which aims to make national education systems more comparable internationally (Commission of the European Communities, Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, 1990).

represented by the enhancement of graduate employability and the promotion of student mobility: indeed, on one hand, especially through the adoption of shared programmes/curricula, Bologna Declaration «has led to an intensification of the dialogue between governments, higher education institutions, employers and students» (Tauch, 2006: 7) while, on the other hand, mobility «has been conceived both as a transversal action to complement the original action lines of the process, and as a key instrument to develop the European Higher Education Area» (European Commission, 2012: 151).

As it is possible to notice, thus, mobility is one of the heart of the Bologna Declaration and it is also of paramount importance considering that it is closely linked to the attractiveness and the internationalization process of higher education. Indeed, the integration of global dimensions into the objective function and provision of higher education (Knight, 2004) contributes to: *a*) enhance quality of education programs, including the competences of graduates; *b*) enhance quality of research; *c*) ensure financial benefits; *d*) ensure benefits to the wider community; *e*) enhance university reputation (Hudzik and Stohl, 2009). In addition, especially during the last decades, internationalization, thanks to the implementation of courses taught in English and the interaction among local students and students from abroad, has allowed the creation of an international and multi-cultural environment at home institutions also for those who cannot pursue a study period abroad (European Commission, 2012).

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze, in a case study perspective², the student mobility at Sapienza University of Rome that, according to the last Erasmus+ Statistics (2018), ranks, together with Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna and the University of Padua, among the top three Italian sending institutions. Nevertheless, the focus will not be on European mobility but on non-European mobility that, as we can see in the next paragraph, is increased to an exponential rate especially during the last five years. In this respect, the possibility to experience a study period in another place all around the world can not only have an impact on the institutional level but also on the individual level, broaden cultural and intellectual horizons of the students³, exposing them to different social and cultural environments (Calleja, 1995; Saliba, 1995), thus promoting the acquisition of a «new-found recognition of the extent to which their own cultural values and norms differ from those of their counterparts in their host country» (Roberts, 1998: 65).

AN OVERVIEW ON THE NON-EUROPEAN MOBILITY AT SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

Sapienza University of Rome, founded in 1303 by Pope Boniface VIII, is the largest university in Europe and the oldest university in Rome. Currently, it is composed by 11 faculties, 59 departments, 20 research centres, 1 school of advanced studies and 1 school of aerospace engineering and it is characterized by a large professional and students communities: actually, there are 3.311 academics (professors, researchers and lecturers), 2.203 administrative and technical personnel, 1.729

² «What is a case study? The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible [...]. The case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural settings, recognizing its complexity and its context. It also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case. Therefore the case study is more a strategy than a method» (Punch, 2005: 144).

³ The results of a research conducted by H.B. Van Hoof and M.J. Verbeeten (2005) on students' opinions about international mobility, show that most of them saw, among the greatest benefits of studying abroad, a greater understanding of other cultures, that helped them appreciating their own culture and learn more about themselves.

administrative personnel in University Hospitals, 113.494 students enrolled in bachelor courses, masters courses, single cycle courses, postgraduate courses and 9.234 enrolled international students.

As far as the mobility is concerned, Sapienza supports study abroad experiences through the implementation of several programmes which fundings come from the European Commission, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research or Sapienza's own budget:

- *Erasmus+ Programme countries (E+ UE) for study and traineeship*: the Erasmus+ Mobility Programme is promoted by the European Union to allow students to spend three to twelve months in another university in Europe. Erasmus students attend courses, take exams and transfer the earned credits, guaranteeing to all students the acceptance of all educational activities completed abroad. Moreover, the Erasmus+ Programme also provides a grant to help students covering the costs of living abroad;
- *Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM)*: for over 30 years, Europe has funded the Erasmus programme, which has enabled over four million European students to spend part of their studies in another higher education institution in Europe. In 2015, Erasmus+ opened up these opportunities, funding mobilities from other parts of the world to the so-called Programme Countries, and for outgoing mobilities for European students to go to the Partner Countries. International Credit Mobility can be defined as a limited period of study or traineeship abroad (in the framework of on-going studies at the home institution) for the purpose of gaining credits. After the mobility phase, students return to their home institution, where the credits are recognised and they complete their studies;
- *Bilateral agreement for student exchange with non-EU Universities*: thanks to fundings provided by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), Sapienza provides bachelors, masters and PhD students (who are not on scholarships) with the opportunity to enjoy a period of studies abroad, either to take exams or work on their research for the theses, in one of over 200 non-EU universities that signed a bilateral agreement with Sapienza. Bilateral mobility agreements between Sapienza and other universities provide reciprocal advantages both to outgoing and incoming students as neither have to pay any tuition fees;
- *Double degree agreements*: these programmes are organised by Sapienza University with one or more foreign universities. The double degree programme allows students to complete part of their university career abroad and obtain a degree that is recognised in two countries. This is an ideal programme for anyone strongly interested in working in an international context. Sapienza runs a number of international joint degree programmes in collaboration with foreign universities that allow students to study both in Rome and abroad. Naturally, the degrees are recognized in all the countries participating in the programme.

Overall, Sapienza signed 1.764 agreements with 622 partner universities in 59 different countries all around the world (Erasmus+ and bilateral agreements), giving each year the possibility to more than 2.000 outgoing students and more than 1.000 incoming students to spend a mobility period.

Focusing the attention on the topic of this work, also the non-European mobility at Sapienza University of Rome has been growing exponentially over time: by way of example, incoming students that take advantage of bilateral agreements increased by 150 units from the academic year 2012/2013 to the academic year 2018/2019 while, on the other hand, students that take advantage of International Credit Mobility Programme (ICM) increased from 130 in 2015-2017 (first year of the project) to 162 in 2016-2018 (last completed data). Furthermore, thanks to this last specific programme, also academic staff can get the opportunity to do a mobility period abroad since, looking at the statistical

data, also an ever-increasing number of academics take advantage of mobility periods both for teaching and training purposes: indeed, in 2015-2017, 27 people did an exchange period within an extra-EU country while this number is equal to 42 for the next year. So, as stated by Mike Byram and Fred Dervin (2008: 1), «academic mobility in higher education, it is a commonplace to note, is an old, not a new phenomenon [...]. It is an old phenomenon because the idea of a university is of a place of teaching and learning open to all, whatever their provenance, provided they can benefit themselves and others»: this is the reason why the mobility process and more in detail the non-European mobility promotes the global cooperation, enhancing the quality of European higher education by fostering partnerships with non-EU countries (Gürüz, 2008).

INCOMING AND OUTGOING MOBILITY FLOWS: A DETAILED ANALYSIS

With reference to the last academic year, both the number of incoming and outgoing students reached almost 300 units. More in detail, students from abroad were 268 and most of them were related to the bilateral agreement programme (67.9%) while a marginal part refer to ICM programme (29.8%) and double degree (2,3%, equal to only 6 students); on the other side of the coin, Italian students that decided to spent a study period abroad were 313 (78.6% of them has benefited from bilateral agreement programme, 21.1% from doublee degree and only 0.3% from ICM programme).

As mentioned before, the aim of this paragraph is to explore, for both the mobility flows: *a*) demographic variables of the students (i.e., gender, age at the beginning of the experience abroad); *b*) mobility variables (i.e., length of the mobility, home university for incoming students and host university for outgoing students, university faculty); and *c*) academic career's variables (i.e., objective of the mobility, exams' grades, ECTS credits recognized). As far as concerns the first of these three aspects, as it can be observed from the table below, most of both incoming and outgoing students are female (the percentage is more than 70%) while, analyzing the age, we can note some little differences: indeed, the incoming students are indistinctly from 18 to 21 years (42.7% of the total) or from 22 to 25 years (42.7% of the total) and the outgoing students are, mostly, from 22 to 25 years (56.2% of the total). Considered the different graduate-levels university, it could be assumed that incoming students are equally distributed in bachelor's and master's degree programs while outgoing students are mainly people enrolled in a master's courses.

Table 1: Incoming and outgoing students by gender and age (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

Gender	Incoming students	Outgoing students
Male	29.8	24.3
Female	70.2	75.7
Age		
18-21 years	42.7	31.3
22-25 years	42.4	56.2
Over 26 years	14.9	12.5

Source: Author own elaboration

Going on to analyze the universities where the mobility period of the students can be carried out, we examine that mobility flows are generally from and to Asian and South America's higher institutions. In the last academic years, almost 40% of the incoming students came from Asia (especially from China⁴ and Russia) and 32.1% came from South America (among the first three

⁴ This data is in line with the European Statistics: according to Eurostat (2019), across the whole of the EU, China was the most common country of origin for tertiary students from abroad in 2017, accounting for 11.2% of the total. Overall, there were more students from China (than any other foreign country) studying in Germany (excluding doctoral studies), Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom.

nations there are Brazil, Argentina and Colombia); in the same way, most of the Italian students (65.6% of the total) preferred to spend a mobility period in Asia (principally in China) and in South America (19.8% of the total).

Generally, all the mobility's periods range from 3 to 6 months⁵: Table 2 shows that only 2.3% of incoming students and 17.9% of outgoing students spend at least 3 months abroad; instead, the students that spend about one year of study at Sapienza University of Rome are mainly Brazilian and Argentinean (respectively, 13.7% and 12.2% of the total) while Italian students who go abroad for one year are mostly students enrolled in a double degree programme in China and Japan (respectively, 29.7% and 20.3% of the total).

Table 2: Incoming and outgoing students by length of mobility (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

Length of mobility	Incoming students	Outgoing students
3 months	2.3	17.9
From 3 to 6 months	70.2	58.5
From 6 months to 1 year	27.5	23.6

Source: Author own elaboration

Looking at the university faculty of students on mobility, we can find two different trends: on one hand, incoming students attend courses at faculty of architecture (26.7%) and arts and humanities (25.6%), which confirm also the learning mobility statistics by Eurostat (2019), according to which, nearly one quarter (24.8%) of all students from abroad studying in Italy in 2017 followed a course in the arts or humanities; on the other hand, outgoing students are principally students enrolled in the faculty of arts and humanities (60.1%).

Regarding the incoming students that attend courses in these disciplines, they are mainly female from 22 years old and upward coming from South America for architecture (the university that ranks the higher value is the Universidad de Buenos Aires) and Asia for arts and humanities (especially from the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies); differently, outgoing students are primarily male under 22 years old who spend the mobility period in Asia for carrying out exams in arts and humanities (most of these students attend the Beijing Foreign Studies University in China).

Table 3: Incoming and outgoing students by university faculty (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

University faculty	Incoming students	Outgoing students
Architecture	26.7	6.1
Arts and Humanities	25.6	60.1
Civil and Industrial Engineering	5.3	3.2
Economics	19.5	7.0
Information Engineering, Informatics and Statistics	1.5	1.3
Law	5.0	1.6
Mathematics, Physics and Natural Sciences	3.1	1.6
Medicine and Dentistry	0.3	-
Medicine and Psychology	3.4	8.6
Pharmacy and Medicine	3.1	-
Political Sciences, Sociology and Communication	6.5	10.5

Source: Author own elaboration

⁵ This classification has been obtained adding the days of real mobility and, then, dividing them in months.

As underlined by the data, the majority of the students take advantage of the mobility period in order to do exams; only a small proportion of students go abroad for thesis research purposes (6.9% of the incoming students and 13.4% of the outgoing students). For this reason, it has been decided to analyze the variables concerning the ECTS credits recognized and the exam's grades. To this end, with regard to the first of these two aspects, the Transcript of Records⁶ have been taken into consideration in order to analyze the number of ECTS recognized; instead, as far as concerns the exam's marks, grades from 18 to 21 have been aggregated under the label "low", grades from 22 to 24 have been aggregated under the label "medium-low", grades from 25 to 27 have been aggregated under the label "medium-high" and grades from 28 to 30 have been aggregated under the label "high"⁷. Table 4 shows the output of this statistical elaboration.

Table 4: Incoming and outgoing students by ECTS recognized and exam's grade (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

ECTS recognized	Incoming students	Outgoing students
0-12 ECTS	35.5	36.7
13-24 ECTS	32.8	23.0
More than 25 ECTS	31.7	40.3
Exam's grades		
Low	26.2	-
Medium-low	18.9	10.0
Medium-high	30.7	5.5
High	24.2	84.5

Source: Author own elaboration

The table above indicates that if, on one hand, it is evidence to suggest that there is an equal distribution of number of ECTS recognized for incoming students, on the other hand, observing data related to outgoing students, we note that more than 40% of them obtain more than 25 ECTS thanks to the exams carried out abroad. Furthermore, crossing this data with the length of mobility, we can assume that the number of ECTS recognized also depends on this last variable: indeed, all the students obtain more than 25 ECTS when their mobility period is longer (from 6 month to 1 year) because they can perform more exams; on the contrary, people that spend only 3 months in another institution can achieve 12 ECTS at most (83.3% for the incoming students and about 50% for the outgoing students). Considering the university faculty, data underline that incoming students take more than 25 ECTS in architecture (41.4% of the total) and economics (37.3% of the total) while Italian students get more credits in law, civil and industrial engineering and information engineering, informatics and statistics (the mean is equal to 82.2%).

⁶ «The Transcript of Records provides an up-to-date record of students' progress in their studies: the educational components they have taken, the number of ECTS credits they have achieved, and the grades they have been awarded. Since the Transcript is a vital document for recording progress and for recognising learning achievements, it is crucial to determine who is responsible for producing it, how it is issued, and how it is delivered. Most institutions produce the Transcript of Records from their institutional databases» (European Union, 2015: 60).

⁷ Before proceeding with the classification, the exams' grades that outgoing students have obtained abroad were converted into the Italian academic grading scale (18 to 30).

Table 5: Length of mobility of both incoming and outgoing students and ECTS recognized (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

ECTS recognized	Length of mobility period for incoming students		
	3 months	From 3 to 6 months	From 6 month to 1 year
0-12 ECTS	83.3	34.8	33.3
13-24 ECTS	16.7	35.3	28.7
More than 25 ECTS	-	29.9	38.0

ECTS recognized	Length of mobility period for outgoing students		
	3 months	From 3 to 6 months	From 6 month to 1 year
0-12 ECTS	46.7	27.5	16.4
13-24 ECTS	48.9	27.5	8.2
More than 25 ECTS	4.4	45.0	75.4

Source: Author own elaboration

Proceeding with this analysis and observing data concerning the exam's grades, Table 4 also demonstrates that, generally, outgoing students get higher grades than incoming students (84.5% versus 24.2%).

Going deeper into detail and focusing the attention only on incoming flows, we can examine from Figure 1 that students coming from abroad achieve a good grade (medium-high or high) in some definite university faculties: architecture (68.6%), arts and humanities (56.5%), civil and industrial engineering (60%) and economics (50%⁸); vice versa, grades obtained in all the remaining university faculties (information engineering, informatics and statistics, law, mathematics, physics and natural sciences, medicine and dentistry, medicine and psychology, pharmacy and medicine, political sciences, sociology and communication) are very low (the mean is equal to 61.2%).

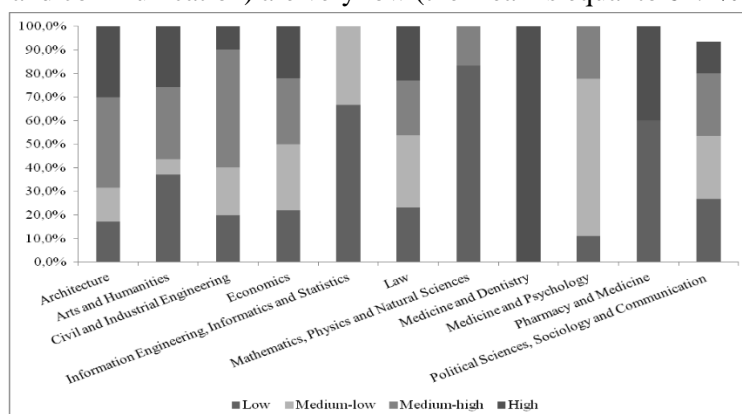


Figure 1: Incoming students by exam's grades and university faculty (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

Incoming students who obtain a higher grade come especially from Middle East and North Africa (Mena Countries), Australia and South America: looking at the Home Universities, we found the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, the University of Melbourne and the Universidad de Buenos Aires; on the other side on the coin, Asian students get the lowest grades (36.3% of the total).

With regard to the outgoing students, Figure 2 shows that they obtain high grades in most disciplines. The only exceptions are represented by the faculties of arts and humanities and architecture for which the percentage concerning a medium-low grade are respectively 14% and 10% (they are mainly students that do exams at Ain Shams University in Egypt).

However, going beyond the exam's grade, the payoffs of international education can be summarized as follows: a) exposure to different social and cultural environments; b) changing of

⁸ All these percentages have been obtained adding "medium-high" and "high".

stereotypes that might exist; and *c*) students become more mature because they live in other cultures and become well-rounded, culturally sensitive adults (Van Hoof and M.J. Verbeeten, 2005).

It is in that direction that both incoming and outgoing student mobility seems to top the list of the most common instruments included in the national internationalization strategy in Italy (OECD, 2019).

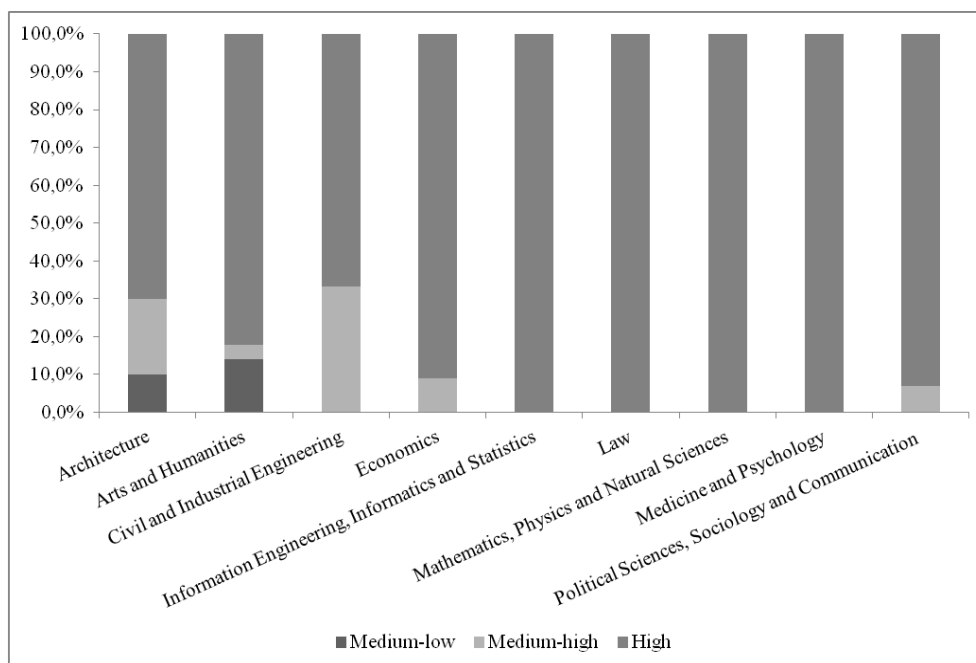


Figure 2: Outgoing students by exam's grades and university faculty (a.y. 2018/2019) - %

CONCLUSION

Once the material analysis is concluded, it is possible to say that the student mobility can be viewed as one of the most powerful engines for change and improvement in higher education. As we can examine, during the last years, the mobility flows (particularly the non-European ones) are even more consistent both in terms of incoming and outgoing demonstrating that «the essence of higher education can be viewed as not being confined by borders. Knowledge in various fields and the logic of science are universal; ideally, the search for new knowledge is not limited by borders; universities are more international in scope than most other organizations, and many scholars harbour cosmopolitan views» (Teichler, 2012: 34). In this sense, starting from the consciousness that educational statistics reinforce the view that higher education in Europe has become more attractive for students from other parts of the world wishing to study abroad since 2010 (Teichler, 2012), the extra-EU mobility, thanks to the bilateral agreements that had been signed, the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programme and the double degrees, has also favored the integration of the internationalization process where «the term *process* is deliberately included to underscore the continuous and ongoing nature of internationalization; the verb *integrating* is used to ensure that internationalization is central, not marginal to higher education in today's world; finally, the term *purpose* is used to refer to the overall role and objectives that higher education has for a country or a region where individual institutions have specific mandates and missions» (Gürüz, 2008: 139).

To conclude, all the analyzed statistics cannot be meant as simple figures of numbers of mobile students in a specified context (principally for those who work in the university such as teachers or administrative staff): without a doubt, as underlined by Byram and Dervin (2008: 32), «they are not mere statistics; they mark a qualitative change in university life, and it is in that sense that they gain importance and become meaningful. That change has already been identified and labeled as the

“internationalization” of universities, and “international offices” and “officers” are a further sign that universities have had to change their administrative structures to respond to the change, sometimes before they have changed their thinking and educational philosophy».

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