

## **Future Scenarios of the European Political Science Design Thinking Event. Three deliberative tables**

### **Table 1: Expanding Political Science Mobility. Teaching and Research Participants**

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#### ***A Preliminary Distinction: Mobility vs. Internationalization***

We normally think of international mobility as physical movement from one country to another. This is certainly true, as physical mobility of students and scholars is a crucial component of academic internationalization. At the same time, we should not forget that internationalization is not *only* understood as mobility. Publication with international co-authors, or in international journals and publishing houses, is an indicator of internationalization, as well as having received funding from an international organization or being involved in a teaching program in a language that is different from the majority language of one's own country. In the remaining of this report we focus on international mobility. At the same time, we should keep in mind that internationalization is now possible, to a certain extent, also without physical border-crossing. The digital revolution has in fact provided an increasingly high number of students and scholars with means to be connected and cooperate over long distances. This might be more and more often the case in the future, as concerns grow about the environmental impact of mass transportations. Moreover, many scholars confront negative incentives to physically move to other (foreign) institutions for long periods, leaving their teaching and management duties at home universities. At the same time universities and research institutions normally value internationalization as a positive aspect (see below). As a consequence, in the long term we can expect mobility to be combined, but not replaced, by other tools of academic cross-border cooperation.

#### ***Academic Mobility: The Good and the Bad***

In the first session of discussion, all participants agreed that, in general, international mobility is a good thing for Political Science and academic life in general, at all levels (from students and PhD candidates, to early career stage scholars, to established scholars). There are many (obvious) reasons for this. In first place mobility allows a healthy circulation of ideas, an exchange of views and experiences that can only represent an enrichment from the personal and intellectual point of view. Being exposed to different traditions, academic institutions, social, political and economic realities means putting in perspective our own personal experiences and beliefs. This, ultimately, allows a better understanding of the world, that is the fundamental mission of political science, a discipline that is comparative by its own nature.

However, some potential negative aspect too can descend from mobility. We can call them the dark side of (international) mobility. In first place brain drain. If mobility is unidirectional, from less developed to more developed countries, from newer and less wealthy academic institutions to more established ones, from smaller to bigger countries, in short, from the peripheries to the centre, then risks are high that mobility is

translated into a depletion of intellectual resources of peripheral countries. In turn, this means reinforcing instead of reducing imbalances between countries and academic institutions.

Segmentation of scholarly communities within countries is another potentially negative consequence of mobility. By segmentation of scholars we mean the establishment of two separate groups: the first one is a minority of people highly internationalized in terms of research and publications, with frequent opportunities to physically cross the borders of their own country to meet colleagues abroad in conferences and workshops; the second group, instead, includes the majority of people who rarely or never moves abroad, who do not participate to international networks, who is not much aware of the global trends of the discipline.

Another, related, source of concern is about academic diversity, meant as the survival of and dialogue among a plurality of intellectual traditions, methodologies, research focuses. If mobility is unidirectional (only certain countries and institutions are attractive) and only affects a tiny minority of scholars, then it easily turns into intellectual colonization, and a mainstreaming of the discipline towards the most diffused standards.

### ***Is Academic Mobility Expected to Increase?***

In general, it emerged from our discussion that academic mobility is expected to increase over the next few years. International mobility is generally regarded as a valuable addition to the CV of both students and researchers. Thus, many PhD as well as MA programs expect candidates to spend at least one period abroad. To this aim, the EU has established one of its most successful programs, the Erasmus+ program, that has grown considerably over the last years and is expected to continue to grow in the future. Other European schemes are meant to increase collaboration between scholars of different countries (like the COST actions). Several national programs go in the same direction. One possible limitation to the growth of such programmes might be represented by the spread of “sovereignist” and Eurosceptic parties all over Europe, which in some cases have entered their respective governments. By undermining the legitimacy of the European integration project, these political forces might lead their countries to a retreat from an “ever closer Union” and to reduce the EU budget. This would in turn put in danger the funding of mobility schemes in the future. The table agreed, however, that this development is not the most likely one at the moment.

In the frame of optimistic expectations for increased mobility opportunities and funding, the table envisages a risk of asymmetry in the distribution of resources. This risk may be driven by different sources. One is an unequal opportunity to access EU funds, brought by different levels of professionalization and specialization of university administrative offices. This is especially the case for access to some prestigious EU research programs (e.g. Horizon 2020) that require the establishment of large international networks of universities to compete for generously funded and extremely ambitious projects. While this has some obvious advantages, the risk is that peripheral, small research institutions are cut off such opportunities. A second source of potential asymmetry is the availability, for some countries only, of “excellence programs” aimed to attract international students and faculty and to provide their own students and researchers with opportunities of international mobility. This clearly brings geographical inequalities, to the point that, for some northern European countries (and “excellent” universities and research institutions in other countries) European schemes are not the main source of funding for mobility. From this point of view the table mostly agree that the risk of asymmetry is more widespread for research mobility than for teaching mobility, because of the strong competition to get EU or international research funds. For its part teaching mobility mainly suffers for the huge diversity in the curricula among different countries and institutions (reflecting the partial failure of the Bologna process), which discourage some professors to move abroad as they are not allowed to teach their own discipline.

### ***Some Suggestions to Avoid the Perils of Asymmetrical International Mobility***

Given the considerations above, the discussion focused on possible measures to strengthen international mobility and avoid (or limit) the perils of asymmetric distribution of resources, brain drain and segmentation of academic communities.

First, smaller and accessible research and teaching schemes should be foreseen beyond and in addition to the big hyper-competitive programs. This would allow researchers of small and less wealthy institutions not to be excluded *a priori*, and to participate with reasonable chances of winning. Along the same line, some programs should be specifically targeted to institutions of less developed countries, or of less developed regions. This may also favour a change in the attitude of many scholars from countries where the discipline is more developed to (unconsciously?) exclude colleagues from peripheral countries when they arrange their research and teaching activities. Moreover, a larger flexibility in the construction of curricula from the different institutions is needed in order to promote teaching mobility, although sometimes national policies impose standardization. For their part, scholars themselves should become more flexible and accept to partially adapt to the new national context when they move for a teaching stay abroad.

Second, re-integrations programs could be of key importance in order to avoid brain drain. After spending a research or study period abroad, researchers should be given the opportunity to go back to their own country. This is already done in some programs (e.g. Mary Curie fellowships) by awarding sufficient fundings to departments which host returning researchers with a fixed-term contract of at least three years.

Third, geographical inclusiveness of research and teaching programs could be promoted. Gender balance is now accepted as a compulsory requirement (or an advantage in terms of competitiveness) for many programs. The same could be done in terms of geographical distribution of researchers and teachers. It must be said that such measure does not concern only state or EU-funded programs. It could be certainly adopted, in first place, by scholarly associations (like the ECPR) in the drafting of their conferences, round tables, workshops.