



International Student Mobility between the South and the North

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Increased international student mobility has become one of the salient features of contemporary global migration. According to the OECD, the numbers of international students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide have significantly grown in recent decades: From 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012. In recent neoliberal discourses, international students have been portrayed as playing a key role in research and innovation. This project aims at shedding light on the character and dynamics of international student mobility to Switzerland, through analysis of their study and post-study trajectories, and critically examining the role of migration and university policies in shaping the students' possibilities of sociospatial mobility.

Research questions

In Switzerland, the numbers and character of international student migration have also changed in recent decades owing to growing global mobility and the internationalization of higher education. In 2012, 29.2% of all students enrolled at institutions of tertiary education had a foreign origin (FSO 2014). This is by far the highest percentage of all OECD countries; significantly higher than for example Australia with 18% or UK with 17% (OECD 2014). However, despite their increased quantitative and qualitative importance in contemporary migration flows, international students have received scarce attention in migration studies (King & Raghuram 2013) and policy debates in Switzerland. This project aims at shedding light on the character and dynamics of the new global geographies of international student mobility to Switzerland. It gives special attention to student mobilities from countries of the Global South. We address the following research questions:

- 1 How have the characteristics of the global flows of international students to Switzerland evolved over recent decades?
- 2 What are the different types of study and post-study trajectories of international students who pursue or have pursued studies at Swiss universities?

- 3 What kinds of policies and strategies have been used by the Swiss government and by Swiss universities, and how have they influenced the flows and trajectories of international students?

- 4 To what extent do international students become established as highly skilled workers in Switzerland, and how can differences in outcomes be explained?

Approach

Theorizing on international student mobility at large has mostly focused on Anglo-Saxon countries (Riaño & Piguet in print). Such approaches include supply and demand-side theorizations of international student migration. Demand theories examine how social, cultural and symbolic capital drives families to place their children in Anglo-Saxon universities. Supply-side theories argue that the global flow of students is powered by the financial interests of institutions that can supply elite higher education opportunities (Findlay 2010; Piguet 2013). How powerful are supply and demand-side theories for explaining the mobility of international students to Switzerland? We aim to contribute to current debates by developing a new approach that moves beyond the Anglo-Saxon model, thus providing adequate explanations for the Swiss case. We use concepts from social geography, such as

"geographical imaginaries" (Said 1978; Riaño and Baghdadi 2007), which have rarely been used to examine international student mobilities. In this approach, imaginations of "other" places, and the opportunities associated with these places, are examined to understand the decisions of individuals: whether to migrate or not, where and how to migrate. Further, intersectionality theory (Nash 2008), which examines the combined roles of gender, class and origin in shaping social outcomes, is used for analyzing inequalities among international students regarding their possibilities of mobility, their different trajectories, and the different outcomes of their mobilities. Finally, we also aim to use politically oriented concepts such as "mobility regimes". We define the concept of mobility regimes for the moment as the systems of laws, regulations and policies that regulate student mobility. This perspective will be used to comprehend the role that institutional agents such as governments and universities play in facilitating, or restricting, the cross-border mobility of international students. Overall, we will creatively combine social, economic, and political geographical approaches.

Methodology

This project follows a mixed-methods approach for each one of the research topics addressed: (1) Global student migration flows, (2) student migration flows to Switzerland, (3) motivations, strategies and trajectories of international students in Switzerland, (4) policies and strategies by the Swiss government and by Swiss universities, and (5) labor market integration of international students who graduate in Switzerland. Quantitative methods will be used to provide a statistically representative understanding of major trends. We base our analysis on data sets of UNESCO, OECD, and EUROSTAT (the statistical office of the European Union), as well as ZEMIS data (central migration information system of the State Secretariat for Migration). Furthermore, the student register and the graduate survey, both provided by the Federal Statistical Office will be studied to answer the research questions. Statistical analysis will permit to identify different types of trajectories amongst students, according to their nationality and their gender. Additionally, we use qualitative methods to provide a contextual understanding of the statistical trends. Amongst others, we will use biographical interviews, participatory MINGA workshops (Riaño 2015), and content analysis.

In order to understand the mobility regimes, which are used by Swiss government and Swiss universities, we study various sources: Foreigners Law (AuG), Integration Law (VIntA), regulations, strategies and programs of universities. Conducting policy and discourse analysis, as well as expert interviews, will allow us to identify trends and developments, understand the goals behind, and assess the role of institutional actors in international student mobility.

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