

## Research Article

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# The Academic Mobility Regime: Analysing Perceptions of Students and Academic Staff

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**Abstract:** Referring to the concept of the ‘mobility regime’ this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelations between internationalisation of higher education and individual perceptions of members of the academic system. Academics and students in Germany, both with and without international experience, were interviewed in order to find indications how the mobility regime dimensions of normalisation, rationalisation and time-space compression are structured particularly in the academic system. Using an exploratory research design and qualitative content analysis to interpret data of in-depth interviews helps to understand the specific shape of the regime dimensions. We reconstruct how dimensions of a mobility regime are perceived across all sampling groups. Slight group differences in the perceptions of single dimensions provide additional insights. We propose the specific concept of an ‘academic mobility regime’ in order to capture the specifics of the mobility regime in the academic system.

**Keywords:** Academic mobility; mobility regimes; internationalisation of higher education; study abroad; exchange programs

## Introduction

Over the last decades, the internationalisation of higher education has become a central paradigm in the higher education policy all over Europe. The OECD report on *higher education to 2030* emphasises the crucial role of the higher education sector in the ongoing globalisation processes all over the world as key element in the

formation of the global environment (OECD 2009). The development towards an increasing internationalisation is reflected by complex processes of re-structuring the higher education sector. Both, more international courses are offered at universities and they universities become generally opened for foreign suppliers and students.

The most visible component of this ongoing process is the highly increasing mobility of students and academic staff (OECD 2014). While international mobility was just accessible to a few students and academic staff up to 30 years ago, today a lot of students and academics has the opportunity to spend a period of time abroad during their academic education and career. For example in the academic year of 2013/2014, 272000 students and over 57000 staff took part within the intra-European exchange (European Commission 2015). This change is forced by political and social development. Particularly in Europe institutions for promoting and financing academic mobility were created. This is exemplified by the establishment of the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) in 1987 (cf. European Commission 2014). This well-known program aims to support students on their international exchanges. Furthermore, the scheme program has been extended over the last decades so that now academic staff can also participate in exchanges. In addition, university systems were aligned all over Europe for advancing international exchanges, not only in the financial sense but also in form of similar performance evaluations.

The institutional efforts apparently have an impact, as a considerable increase of stays abroad of students and academics can be observed since the turn of the millennium. Globally, the number of students enrolled at universities outside their home country has more than doubled in the period from 2000 to 2012 to more than 4.5 million, with an average growth rate of 7% per year (OECD 2014, 342–343). In Europe, a total of more than three million exchange visits have been supported within the framework of the Erasmus programme since its initiation.

In line with these developments, the internationalisation of the higher education system and

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mobility in the academic system increasingly became the focus of social scientists over the last decade (e.g. Morano-Foadi 2005; Hoffman 2009; Brooks and Waters 2011; DAAD and DZHW 2014; Van Mol 2014b; Bauder 2015). International academic mobility is generally considered as advantageous due to its positive effects for the acquisition of language skills, intercultural competences and individual adaptability, which in total form a student's personality and subsequently lead to labour market success (cf. Konevas and Duoba 2007; Zimmermann and Neyer 2013; European Commission 2014; Potts 2015). For instance, previous studies have shown that the employability of graduates with study abroad experience is slightly higher rated than those of graduates without (Crossman and Clarke 2010; Wiers-Jenssen 2011; Humburg and Van der Velden 2015; Petzold 2017a). This is particularly true if the employer has a clear international orientation and is looking for applicants with internationally relevant skills (Norris and Gillespie 2009; Parey and Waldinger 2011; Van Mol 2014a; Petzold 2017b).

However, this development is also been seen critical in the sociological discourse towards mobility. Frändberg (2015), for example, draws attention to the fact that young persons do also use international moves abroad to avoid professional commitments during transition to adulthood. In her study, stays abroad are in fact not fostering but retarding individual careers. Using graduate surveys other studies show that domestic graduates with a foreign degree even have a lower job probability and a higher risk of over-education compared to graduates with domestic degrees (Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005; Støren and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). Here international experience abroad has a clear negative impact. Furthermore, there is first evidence that a period abroad is primarily beneficial for those graduating in an occupationally unspecific field of study such as educational sciences, social sciences, or management, while there are no returns for those graduating in occupationally specific fields of study such as law, medicine, or engineering (Waibel et al. 2018). With reference to these ambiguous results regarding the significance of international stays abroad on individual professional success, some authors point to the importance of ideologies and social norms towards mobility in the academic system (Brodersen 2014; Petzold and Peter 2015). The omnipresence of mobility narratives in everyday life gains normative ideas and makes students and academics sensible for the 'obvious' necessity of international mobility experience. In other words, the fundamental discursive change is that the possibility to become mobile has been replaced by the necessity of

mobility.

This kind of narrative necessity to become mobile is sometimes also called 'mobility imperative' by other authors writing more generally about contemporary mobility phenomenon, and it is, in turn, considered as key principle of 'mobility regimes' (Kesselring 2015). The power of mobility is again and again reproduced by interaction and the perception of mobility by people. This, in turn also constitutes the power of mobility itself (Jensen 2013). Applying the more general mobility imperative to the higher education system the question arises whether indications for a mobility regime in the academic system can be found and how its dimensions are empirically perceived by students and academic staff.

To accomplish, in this study students and academic staff are surveyed by qualitative interviews according to their experiences towards international mobility in the higher education sector. To examine the perception of mobility in the academic world and to explore hints to an academic mobility regime a theoretical framework is developed in a first step. In a second step, the theoretical background is confronted with new empirical data using a sample of students and academic staff with and without international experience. Finally, the question is discussed whether and how the results supports in the assumption that there may exist an academic mobility regime.

## The Concept 'Mobility Regime'

In context of globalisation processes the concept of mobility regimes has been brought into the debate by a number of authors to understand and investigate the interrelations of power, inequality, closure and containment, border management, social policy and welfare administrations, and movements within and across borders (Shamir 2005; Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2012; Jensen 2013; Kesselring and Vogl 2013; Kesselring 2015; Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Behrend 2015).

Kesselring (2015) points out that mobility has grown to an omnipresent phenomenon, which made especially the trading and labour market undergo a radical change. These considerations can easily be specified for the higher education system. Academic institutions need to be present at other academic institutions, to build up collaborations and professional networks. The flexibility and mobility of students and academics is the basis of presence and exchange. In this view, mobility, i.e. physical travel, guarantees the competitiveness of academic institutions, such as universities or research institutes. The continuous exchange of knowledge, ideas,

resources, and sometimes goods is necessary for the academic productivity and success in higher education. Although much of this exchange can easily be realised via modern communication technologies, physical presence, especially when activating and organising concrete professional co-operations, remains highly important (e.g. Urry 2002).

Since the ability for professional networking is increasingly crucial for the success of academic institutions, the mobility of academics and students becomes more and more important and the need for regulations of the access to mobility arises. It is essential that not only the effective mobility of academics increases, but that mobility becomes also a central discursive topic. Mobility regimes construct a normality of mobility in social discourse.

Those abstract social directives towards mobility, which are widely accepted and retain full validity as far as it is unquestioned, refer also to the notion of ideology. The basic idea of ideology factors and obstacles to international academic mobility has recently been applied to current mobility requirements in contemporary capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 24; Adey 2010, 85). Accordingly, current societal preferences for change, risk and mobility replace security preferences of mobile persons. Here, success is measured by the number of activities, contacts and options that can be shown by an actor in the modern professional world, where project-based working and networking is crucial. This can be captured by the notion of mobility imperative, which implements that everyone who wants to be successful has to be mobile. The necessity of mobility has replaced the possibility to be mobile (cf. Kesselring 2015).

Recent studies have revealed ideological and normative ideas in the context of international student mobility (Brodersen 2014; Petzold and Peter 2015), which points out that the mobility imperative just moved into the academic world. Petzold and Peter (2015) show that there is a social norm to study abroad, unless the fact that students with international experience are not certainly advantaged in the labour market. Remarkably, the empirically observed norm proves to be the strongest predictor of a subjective intention to study abroad. Similarly, in a comparison of students with and without study abroad experience, Brodersen (2014) points out that ideologies are perceived as a dominant 'mobilitarian discourse' by all interviewed students in the form of a social pressure to international academic mobility, regardless if they have been mobile or not.

According to Kesselring (2015), a mobility regime can be empirically described addressing three dimensions.

The first dimension is *normalisation*. This means that mobility has changed from a source of social distinction for a privileged small group to a necessity for professional success for the majority of persons in an industry. In addition, normalisation of mobility indicates the 'demystification of the modern mobility promise'. Furthermore, *rationalisation* means the subjectification of mobility both, in a materialistic way and through internalisation. Additionally, professional interests according to mobility are internalised. Finally, the *time-space compression* means that communication has changed because of the arising of new technologies what results in a permanent availability and omnipresence of mobile actors.

The dimensions of normalisation, rationalisation and time-space compression provide an enriching venue for the examination and description of interviewees' perceptions. The individual considerations and narrations of students and academic staff for or against spending a period of time abroad are explored referring to the theoretical dimensions for interpreting the empirical material. By analysing individuals' perceptions it is aimed to be identified how the mobility regime is particularly shaped in the academic system.

## Methods

For the investigation of the role of normalisation, rationalisation and compression by asking for individual decision making process concerning international mobility a qualitative research design is appropriate (cf. Flick 2007). 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and academics of a small but quite internationalised German university primarily working in the social and human sciences with and without international mobility experiences. The precise sampling structure is shown in Table 1. The interview guide contained several parts such as opinions about academic international mobility in general, the institutionalisation of international mobility as well as its social expectations (see Tables A1 & A2 in the appendix).

The interviews were all conducted at the beginning of 2015 and had an average duration of 45 minutes. The conversation was started by an initial question that should motivate respondents to tell their story: 'You spent/didn't spend a period abroad during your study/academic career. Why?'. Afterwards, separate questions were asked to gain additional material and to reflect on their individual narratives on international mobility. For the interviewed individuals with mobility experience,

questions were asked on the reasons why they became mobile, the expectations they had, their experiences abroad, their organisational effort as well as a on the retrospective evaluation of their stay abroad. The non-mobile individuals were asked about their reasons for not going abroad. Other parts of the interview guide contained general questions about opinions for or against international mobility, the beliefs they got about international mobility in the academic system as a whole and the results and opinions they generated by their own experiences. All interviews were conducted in German, recorded and transcribed.

The data were analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014). This method consists of several analytical steps. First, certain categories were built based on the primary data. Subsequently, the interviews were analysed again following these categories. The interview excerpts presented in this paper are translated into English to enhance better understanding. We took great care in maintaining the meaning as precisely as possible. The excerpts represent typical statements made by the interviewees and underlie the interpretation of the constructed categories. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all respondents' names in this paper are fictitious.

## Sampling

During data collection, respondents were selected according to a prefixed sampling strategy. By doing so, existing knowledge about the distribution of social-structural and cultural characteristics in a defined population is used for the composition of the sample (cf. Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2010). Group snowball sampling (Flick 2007) was used to contact students,

meaning that respondents were asked to provide contact details of other individuals in their social network. To recruit the academic staff, an official inquiry was sent via an e-mail distributor of the university. The potential risk of this method is to oversample people from one social network with specific attitudes, opinions, and profiles and therefore to neglect other perspectives. Yet, we tried to overcome this potential bias by determining the sampling structure previously. To achieve a broad representation of the empirical field, we tried to include interviewees from different institutional levels into the analysis and with and without international experience as it is shown in Table 1.

In addition, the selection of persons with and without abroad experience for comparison is based on the assumption that perceptions of and attitudes towards academic mobility may change by the experience. Brodersen (2014) uses the same comparison design in her study and found different distributions of attitudes and ideologies among mobile and non-mobile students. To find the different perceptions and evaluations connected with academic mobility in higher education system this previous variation is indispensable for the study. Apart from students, academic staff was also interviewed. This choice was made to include a higher variance of social, cultural and economic capital due to the variation of professional experience and academic degrees. Furthermore, processes of internationalisation of higher education do not only focus on students. Academic staff has also to be considered, since both groups are involved in the higher education system.

Both, the variation of abroad vs. no abroad experiences and the variation of students and academic staff, serves for a broad composition of various experiences and resources in the interviewee sample. If similarities can be identified regarding narrations of mobility normalisation,

**Table 1.** Sample of interviewees in comparison groups

	Experience abroad	No experience abroad
<b>Students</b>	Group 1 <i>Alex: male, social sciences (26 years)</i> <i>Johann: male, social sciences (23 years)</i> <i>Lara: female, social sciences (24 years)</i> <i>Anna: female, pedagogy (25 years)</i>	Group 2 <i>Klaus: male, pedagogy (23 years)</i> <i>Markus: male, psychology (25 years)</i> <i>Stefanie: female, social work (25 years)</i> <i>Nadine: female, economics (25 years)</i>
<b>Academic staff</b>	Group 3 <i>Fabian: male, social sciences (35 years)</i> <i>Aishe: female, social work (32 years)</i> <i>Carmen: female, social work (46 years)</i> <i>Lisa: female, economics (29 years)</i>	Group 4 <i>Momen: male, social sciences (29 years)</i> <i>Sarah: female, social sciences (33 years)</i>

rationalisation and time-space compression across this broad sample composition, the emergence of an academic mobility regime is more likely.

## Results

### Normalisation

The interviews conducted with students and academic staff reveal that internationalisation in the higher education system goes ahead with the perception that mobility is becoming more and more normal. First, all interviewees refer to the omnipresence of the requirement of international mobility especially for labour market placement and career issues, regardless of their mobility experience and formal position in higher education system. Second, even contradicting subjective experiences do not challenge these opinions.

In the daily life of the academic world, all respondents find themselves confronted with the decision to go abroad or not. This is accompanied by a progressive institutionalisation of international academic mobility, which is particularly revealed in the student's interviews. The requirement to be mobile has already been systematically included in the structure of certain study programmes so that international experience is not just a possibility but a necessary prerequisite for the acquisition of some academic degrees. This structural change is obvious to every interviewed student and is reflected on an emotional level, since all interviewees at both institutional levels describe a feeling of a certain social pressure towards international mobility.

Thus, international experience appears to be considered as a forced requirement in the age of globalisation and increasing networking. Students particularly describe an international experience as an indispensable condition for their future career perspectives. This is typically represented by the answer of Johann, a non-mobile student, when he was asked why he mentions that international experience is a benefit for labour market success:

*'If you think about the future and ask yourself what you can do to get a better job, then perhaps it comes to your attention that you should go abroad.'*

Furthermore, the interviewed students mentioned that they feel compelled to go abroad by the university itself. They all describe that studying abroad is highly promoted by the university through advertising posters, for example

in the library, as well as through informing events where international exchange is presented in a positive way. The most powerful motivating force described by the students is the influence of other students who already spent a period abroad. Markus, a non-mobile student, describes the promotion between students as a self-reinforcing process:

*'It's almost like there is some sort of implicitness to go abroad because more or less everybody does it and then obviously you want to do that, too [...].'*

As students do not consider any experiences in the labour market, the interviews made with academic staff are a useful addition to analyse the theoretical assumption, that mobility is not positively assessed in the labour market anymore.

All academic staff asked in this sampling refer to the omnipresence of the ongoing internationalisation in the higher education system. Furthermore, they all mention that an international curriculum vitae was no requirement they were asked for in their job interview. By the academics, mobility is seen in a positive way towards their ongoing careers, but on the other hand, no one of them mentioned to have experienced advantages concerning their opportunities in the academic system because of international experiences. Sarah, an academic without international experience, mentioned in an interview:

*'I in fact think that this has a certain value after having the doctorate. [...] If there are two postdocs applying for the same job having exactly the same abilities and one of those spent some time in another country, would this person more probably get this job? That is what I ask myself. I also see the tendencies, internationalisation at the university, internationalisation at the faculty. To me, it is not relevant at the moment but maybe it might be relevant in the future, precisely because there are the rumours about it [...]. As I said, I think it is a good thing. If my conditions permit, I would do it somehow, also if it is lecturer mobility.'*

This statement highlights the shared opinion in the sample that international mobility is, on the one hand, connected with an improvement of career opportunities in the academic sector and the presumption that it is not rewarded, what refers to the demystification of the modern mobility promise and therefore as an indicator for the normalisation of international mobility in higher education.

In sum, the interviews show two aspects that point to the existence of an ongoing normalisation of academic mobility: On the one hand, the necessity of mobility, which especially can be found in the interviews held with students, that has replaced the possibility, and, on the

other hand, the demystification of the modern mobility promise, which is reported by the academics.

## Rationalisation

In the academic world, there are special programs that help students and academics to finance their international exchange. For example the already mentioned ERASMUS –programme in Europe. However, sometimes not all costs are covered by these fundings. Especially in the academic exchange programs the participants in the sample had to pay parts of their exchange by themselves. However, not any respondent criticized this substantially, what indicates rationalisation at the individual level.

Moreover they stress the positive effects of international exchange for the university on the one hand, and for themselves on the other. Carmen, the responsible person for student exchange for the faculty of social work often pays the whole exchange by her own and justifies this payment with her responsibility for the students:

*'I often visit my students on their exchange all over the world. Last year I was in India...This was not paid by university, but I have a good position at University and high wages... I think it is my responsibility to take care of the students and this is a good investment of my money [...].'*

Furthermore, the interviews show that the academics asked do not separate their personal interests from those of the university. They consider outbound mobility to be part of their job as well as implements positive effects for themselves. This can be interpreted as subjectification. The interviews held with mobile academics give indicators for the second level of rationalisation by mobility regimes, the internalisation of professional goals.

This can be seen in the Interview with Fabian, an academic who spent some time in Barcelona with the ERASMUS exchange programme for academics. In his statement, personal interests (language skills) fuse with professional ones (give lectures in English).

*'It is very important to possess good English skills, that you are able to give lectures in English. If you acquired these skills during a stay abroad, it has a greater value as if you acquired them in language courses.'*

The interviews with the mobile students show, that there is a qualitative difference within international mobility made by some of them. This can be seen in the willingness to pay for special exchange programmes in diverse countries. With the ERASMUS programme it is possible to spend a period of time abroad without paying anything.

One of the students asked spent a semester abroad in Hungary and for him, the funding of ERASMUS was more than enough. On the other hand, one of the students asked passed separate months in the USA and had to pay a lot of money for this exchange by her own. By doing this, she mentioned that it was very important for herself as well as for her career to go to the USA, because of the culture, experiences and for the language skills:

*'I am a student of teaching... and I want to teach the children in a good way, and for this it is not just necessary to speak English in the right way and knowing the grammar, but also have cultural skills, intercultural competencies, and for this I decided to go abroad... For living the language and to give these skills to the children [...].'*

This also shows the subjectification of mobility: Mobility is considered to have positive effects for the career and therefore, some of the students are willing to pay for this by their own. The analysis also shows, that the supposed positive effects of mobility can't be departed in personal and professional interests anymore, moreover these two aspects are merged together. This can be interpreted as a form of internalisation of professional interests and therefore as subjectification.

## Time-space-compression

In the interviews indications for a perceived time-space-compression can be found primarily in the differences of social contacts between the mobile and the immobile persons. While non mobile students and academics that were asked in this sample mainly focus on long lasting relationships, for example their family and long-term relationship, the mobile ones seem to be more interested in establishing widely friendships all over the world. Moreover, these social contacts are also mentioned as a reason for them to become mobile.

This shows, that the attitude towards relationships is different between mobile and non-mobile persons and leads to the assumption that mobility goes ahead with a change in the values according the social environment. Having friends all over the world is related to the spread of new technologies, because without these the friendships can't be maintained.

The academics also stress the argument, that international mobility indicates an exchange of scientific work and therefore is an important foundation of international research. A statement of the economist Lisa exemplifies this result.

*'On our faculty we do a lot of international research... therefore, in the eyes of students and academics this is perceived as a big enrichment [...].'*

The linking of international exchange and international research shows the replacement of documents all over the world and can therefore be interpreted as a sign for the time-space-compression in the academic sector.

The other part of this dimension of mobility regimes is the disappearance of borders between working sphere and privacy, what can be found in the fundamental nature of exchange: As all mobile persons asked mentioned, they do participate in international exchange because of the positive impact of international experience they expect for themselves and for their future career. Therefore, in the motivation of spending some time abroad, as well as in their development, there can't be made a difference between these two spheres anymore.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The occasion for this research is the highly increasing ongoing internationalisation of the higher education sector, which is particularly reflected by the growth of international mobility of students and academic staff. For this purpose, we asked a sample of students and academic staff with and without international experience regarding their perceptions of processes of internationalisation in the higher education system.

According to Kesselring (2015), a mobility regime consists of three different dimensions: normalisation, rationalisation and time-space-compression. Our empirical analysis revealed indications for all three dimensions in interviewees' perceptions what suggests that an emerging mobility regime in higher education system is constructed in discourses. We therefore suggest that the perceptions of social structures and policies towards mobility in higher education system can be captured by the particular notion of an *academic mobility regime*. The term focuses on the perpetuation of professional relationships via mobility in the academic world. It means the control of the movements of the members of the academic system that are structured by specific sets of principles, norms and regularities.

A basic principle of the academic mobility regime is the impetus and need for physical travel as a general prerequisite for academic productivity. Inasmuch mobility becomes an issue in academic life members of academic institutions have to position towards it and be made aware of this. The mobility conceptions of working life are integrated into everyday life, so that mobility takes

a basic position in the life of actors. Therefore the force of an academic mobility regime could be proved in the perception of students and academics (cf. Jensen 2013).

In the academic context, *normalisation* means the shift of mobility from something that is just available for a few persons towards a requirement for the majority of students and academic staff. Additionally, normalisation refers to a 'demystification of the modern mobility promise'. This means, that international mobility is positive evaluated in the perception of the individuals, but in the course of normalisation it is not fully rewarded anymore. Normalisation has been found in the subjective view of all asked participants in the sense of both the necessity to become mobile and the demystification of the modern mobility promise. The positive effects of mobility are introduced by the students and academics.

*Rationalisation* contains the proceeding subjectiveness of academic mobility, which means that persons in higher education system promote the optimisation of academic mobility by their own because they already have internalised mobility as a goal on an individual level. In our study this manifests, first, in a materialistic way. Existing monetary and organisational costs are externalised so that students and academic staff have to pay for it by their own. Our respondents cope with this requirement by subjectification, the second level of rationalisation: the internalisation of professional interests according to academic mobility. International mobility is considered to be positively related with employers' specific professional requirements. This is especially true for the interviews held with the academic staff.

In the academic mobility regime, *time-space compression* stands for the change of communication arising from the spread of new technologies. For the academic working environment, this means that communication is everywhere and always possible. Relating to mobility regimes this implies, that not only persons, but also documents, signs and symbols can be exchanged all over the world and further the borders between work and privacy become blurred, because of the permanent availability these technologies. The empirical results contain clear statements for the perceptions of the ongoing development of internationalisation in higher education and the importance of exchange in this context.

In the sample we included students and academics with and without international experiences in order to capture different resources and experiences. As the analysis shows, this was very helpful to understand the different dimensions of the academic mobility regime. It was pointed out, that the aspect of normalisation is

perceived in different levels by students and academics. Especially the demystification of the modern mobility promise is perceived by the academic staff in a deeper sense. Moreover, also the level of rationalisation shows, that its perception differs between the group of students and academic staff while all mobile respondents address the aspect of rationalisation. Moreover, in the analysis of perceptions of time-space compression, the differentiation between mobile and non-mobile persons was helpful to figure out the differences in the prioritisation of social contacts.

Despite of the insightful analysis, the results are limited in their outreach mainly due to the chosen sampling strategy and gained sample structure. First, the study relies on an exploratory research design, limiting the generalisability and scope of the results, particularly by the small number of interviews. In the future, larger control groups should be examined. Second, due to the profile of the university chosen, the sample consists mainly of students and academics of the social sciences. It would be interesting in the future to investigate, for example, the view of natural scientists or engineers. Third, the scientists are rather homogeneous in terms of their socio-economic background so that class differences cannot be investigated thoroughly. Finally, only members of a single German university were interviewed. Future research could benefit from a comparative perspective, including different disciplines, universities and countries.

Another venue for future research lies in the usage of more structural or processing data that may indicate the emergence of an academic mobility regime. In study, only subjective indications of the dimensions of an academic mobility regime were focussed. However, a systematic comparison of, for instance, exchange programs, formal regulations, or socio-structural patterns of those going abroad, may provide further insights into the formation of an academic mobility regime.

This point is directly related to a last issue in this field. Since the access to educational and professional mobility is highly selective in terms of the socio-economic background of persons (e.g. Salisbury et al. 2011; Netz 2015; Van Mol and Timmerman 2014; Lörz et al. 2015), some authors argue that international academic mobility generates social inequalities (e.g. Morano-Foadi 2005; Matthews and Sidhu 2005; Waters 2006; Brooks and Waters 2011; Gerhards and Hans 2013). It would be interesting to figure out about the interplay between the dimensions of an academic mobility regime and aspects of social inequality.

Nevertheless, it was the aim of this study to find empirical references on how a particular academic

mobility regime is perceived by students and academics. For this, the method used offers interesting results which should be followed up by deeper investigations. In order to be able to make more precise empirical descriptions using the proposed concept of an academic mobility regime, more studies, broader samples and a deeper analysis are needed.

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## Appendix

**Table A1:** Interview guide for respondents who spent a period abroad

Question	Purpose of question
1. You´ve spent a period abroad during your studies/employment at the University. Please tell me about this!	Initial conversation questioning.
2. Why did you decide to go abroad?	Summary of reasons for a stay abroad.
<b>I. Recapitulation of the stay abroad</b>	
a. Think back to before you went abroad: What were your expectations of completing a period in a foreign country?	The purpose of these questions is to remind the stay abroad. This is important to a more detailed response of the following questions.
b. How did you prepare yourself for your stay abroad?	
c. How did a typical day abroad look like?	
d. What was your best/worst experience during your stay in the foreign country?	
e. How did you feel as you came back to Germany?	
<b>II. Organization of the stay abroad</b>	
a. What do you estimate the organizational effort of your stay abroad? Was it difficult/simple to do all the organizational stuff?	These questions refer to the analysis level of the institutionalization/normalization of studying abroad. Especially the question about the funding of international exchanges should focus on whether indications are reported that proclaim structural disadvantages of some students.
b. Did you take part in a study abroad program (e.g. ERASMUS)? If yes: How did the promotion within this program does look like?	
c. How did you fund your stay abroad?	
d. Which were the criteria you relied on choosing the country you decided to go?	
<b>III. Reasons</b>	
a. What are, in your opinion, general reasons why students/academics decide to go abroad?	These questions focus on the individual decision-making process of the respondents. Furthermore it is the aim of these questions to figure out the social dimension in this process.
b. Were these reasons also relevant to you personally? Why?	
c. Think of your social environment (friends, fellow students/colleagues): Have they been abroad?	
d. Has this influenced your decision?	
e. If people do not spent a period of time abroad: In your opinion, what is the reason for this?	
f. What do you think: Why is the number of international exchange in the academic sector steadily increasing?	
g. Do you think that there is kind of a social pressure according to the international orientation of students/academic employees?	
h. If yes: Where do you see evidence for this?	
i. Does social pressure influence your decision to go abroad?	
<b>IV. Consequences</b>	
a. As a conclusion: What are the summarized consequences of your stay abroad?	These questions refer to the different levels of consequences in the perception of the respondents. (rationalization/time space compression)
b. Did you develop your personality? (How does this look like?)	
c. Do you think your stay has an influence on your professional career?	
d. Think about your experiences: Do you think there exist any differences between individuals with or without international experience?	
e. Do you have some practical tips for students/employees that plan to go abroad?	
<b>V. Conclusion</b>	
Please give a short summarize of your opinion about periods abroad.	End of the conversation.

**Table A2:** Interview guide for respondents who did not spent a period abroad

Question	Purpose of question
1. You didn't spent a period abroad during your studies/employment at the University. Please tell me about this!	Initial conversation questioning.
<b>I. Reasons</b>	
a. <b>What</b> are, in your opinion, general reasons on which basis students/ academics decide to go abroad?	These questions focus on the individual decision-making process of the respondents. Furthermore it is the aim of these questions to figure out the social dimension in this process. (normalization/rationalization)
b. Think of your social environment (friends, fellow students/colleagues): Have they been abroad?	
c. Has this influenced your decision-making?	
d. If people do not spent a period of time abroad: In your opinion, what is the reason for this?	
e. What do you think: Why is the number of international exchange in the academic sector steadily increasing?	
f. Do you think that there is kind of a social pressure according to the international orientation of students/academic employees?	
g. If yes: Where do you see evidence for this?	
h. Does social pressure influence your decision not to go abroad?	
<b>II. Consequences</b>	
a. <b>Do you think</b> your decision not to go abroad has any consequences for your future life?	These questions refer to the different levels of consequences in the perception of the people asked. (rationalization/time space comprehension)
b. Do you think it has an influence on your professional career?	
c. Think about your experiences: Do you think there exist any differences between individuals with or without abroad experience?	
d. Do you have some practical tips for students/employees that plan to go abroad?	
<b>III. Conclusion</b>	
<b>Please give</b> a short summarize of your opinion about periods abroad.	End of the conversation.