

**INTERNATIONAL ROMANIAN STUDENTS  
MIGRATION PATTERNS - A SOCIAL NETWORK  
ANALYSIS STUDY**

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**Abstract:** Although it is not a new phenomenon, study migration in Romania has been until recent out of the focus of social researcher's interest. Before the revolution of 1989, the direction of study migration was from other countries to Romania, as the Romanian faculties, especially the medicine ones; international students, mainly from Arabic countries appreciated the education offered in Romania. After the revolution, study migration patterns changed and new relations emerged.

Our article main goal is to present a situation of the international Romanian students, according to the European statistics and the official Erasmus programme statistics.

Using Social Network Analysis, we are building maps to study migration patterns, from 2008 until 2013, in an attempt to understand what lies beyond the motivation of Romanian students when they choose a certain country to study abroad.

The results of our study show that there is a clear trend for Romanian students to choose some countries to study in; results that partially confirm the theory behind the study migration, but more research needs to be done and Romanian statistics need to be updated in order to offer a real perspective of this phenomenon.

**Key words:** international students, mobility, networks

## **1. General context of the higher education institutions internationalization (HEI's)**

In the 21th century, international students' mobility can and must be a main factor in the development of internationalization of the higher education institutions. Beginning from Marshal McLuhan (McLuhan, 1989) idea of a global village, we are now facing the challenges of the world becoming small. As traveling distances became smaller and smaller and technology allows us to minimize distances between people, a new trend emerges to appear people travel farer in pursuing their dreams. Higher education institutions, today, are force to become aware of their role and identity in the global context, as they are no longer an isolated entity. Challenges of adapting the new education market create an appearance of brittleness through which these institutions can survive only if they manage to develop coherent long time policies.

Over the last fifty years, society's transformation has benefit by the expansion of the educational process. Castles (Castles, 2003) shows that if higher and secondary education were, in 1961, a privilege, today, majority of people graduate high school and one out of three adults has a university diploma. Even more in same countries there are discussions regarding a 50 percent population that might obtain a university diploma.

Following the student's mobility phenomena is not an easy task, as until late 90s there was no standard methodology for collecting data. In order to be able to offer a true overview of these movements consistent data are required.

The 80s represent a moment of change in the history of higher education, as many researchers became interested in the topic and specialty literature begun to emerge dealing with different areas of interest, from higher

education system management to the financing of higher education institutions. (Marginson, 2006).

Starting from here, higher education institutions become very important social actors and were investigated from two different points of view: either as international institutions where cosmopolitan values are promoted and mobility and cooperation are encouraged, or as national institutions that create the future national officials. The main idea is that also the whole discourse was about universities, centers of internationalization, international activities were peripheral, higher education institutions needed to form individuals capable to respond to the urgent requests of the society.

## ***2. Internationalization of higher educational institutions***

According to Jane Knight's definition, internationalization represents „the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension, in the purposes, functions, or delivery of higher educational services.” More clearly, inserting an international dimension in teaching and researching activities as well as in the functionality of universities is the way internationalization needs to be. (Knight, 1994)

Same author said that an international dimension is, in fact, an overview, an activity, a perspective that inserts an international attitude in higher education institution's activities, but at the same time, she expresses her doubts regarding the long time utility of internationalization if universities tend to consider this as a caprice.

At international level, there is a certain concern regarding the policies that have to be promoting in order to keep the interest for internationalization and to create a culture of internationalization.

Although student's mobility was the focus of internationalization, lately the attention of officials has commute to new strategies that involve personal development, research, curriculum change, quality assurance in higher education.

In our opinion, the main purpose of internationalization is to help the development of individuals capable to evolve and face the challenges of living in a world that is both local and global.

As the globalization accelerates, the internationalization of higher education institutions is a "key" for the formation of individuals capable to understand the complexity of social changes, the accelerate rhythm of this phenomenon and, in the same time, to handle opportunities offered by technology spread.

The renaissance savant Erasmus, whose name is use for the well-known mobility program of the European Union, represents the tradition of studying abroad in Europe, Asia and in The Middle East.

Experiencing a rapid growth, students mobility is a phenomenon that shows people wish to study, to travel, to gain access to knowledge that are beyond their geographical limitation. There were always individuals that pursued their dream of studying in a prestigious university in an attempt of enlarging their education and cultural horizons.

The analysis of statistics and literature shows us that as new countries become interested in the international student's mobility, the dynamic of this phenomenon changes. If in the beginning of international exchanges, it was all about students from countries that do not have strong educational systems migrating to better study opportunities and countries with tradition in higher education simply changing students among them, the direction of migration is now switching to a more equilibrate image.

In the beginning of the twenties century, the countries that attracted the most students around the world were United States of America, United Kingdom, France and Germany, all countries with a long tradition in receiving international students. The landscape is now transforming as new players (like Singapore and Malaysia) emerged on the educational market, offering study opportunities adapted to students and labor market requests. Not being, under these circumstances, constraint to choose only between few prestigious institutions, students forced universities to develop new strategies of attracting them. Countries that were usually receiving destinations for international students are now open to receive students and they are applying new marketing strategies to keep up with the development of new out comers.

Countries that were usually providers of students are becoming slowly destination countries for international students and have to face challenges in order to optimize their educational system to be able to deal with the their own educational needs and international students requests. The development of mobility depends on factors like international prestige of an institution, financial support or the difference between educational systems. In the same time, there are factors that slow mobility, the most important being, in our opinion, the living cost, which in some countries is excessively high for non-residential students. Some states, for reducing the impact of living costs offer financial support, either on limited period of time (one semester) or the whole period of study.

### **3. International Romanian student's mobility**

After the fall of the communist regime, Romania entered in a complex process of transformation, a process that affected every aspect

of the society. As changes began to occur at all levels, social, economical, political and cultural, the changes in higher educational systems appeared naturally as the society needed individuals capable to think different. It was then obviously that the system needed to change completely. The renew of the educational network had two phases, or better said, people first focused on the elimination of old organizations and contents, considered obsolete and second objective was the construction of a new legal framework capable to offer to young Romanians a better higher educational system. This framework has to respond to the requests of the knowledge society, the European Higher Educational Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA).

Romanian higher educational institutions try to adapt and fulfill European requests and have developed different strategies in order to align European regulations, such as international students' exchanges, the acceptance of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), academic staff mobility, etc. Romanian higher education institutions have been, starting with 1991, actively involved in all international exchange programs (TEMPUS, SOCRATES, LEONARDO da VINCI, CEEPUS, etc.).

Interestingly in recent years there has been a dramatic change in Romanian student mobility. In 1998 there were more foreign students enrolled in Romanian universities (13,279) than Romanian students studying abroad (9,247). Since then the number of students coming to Romania has declined slightly before returning to 13,857 in 2008 but the number of students leaving Romania has increased to 24,597.

Romania has become a sending country of international students.<sup>1</sup> Incoming Erasmus students make up a very small 0.1% of all students in Romania, significantly down on the 0.7% European average; incoming

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<sup>1</sup> Mapping mobility in European Higher Education, volume 2, 2012

Europe 32 students of all types make up just 0.15% of the student population. By contrast, the outgoing rate of 2.7% of the total number of students is much closer to the European average<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1 and figure 2 allow us to see the differences between the number of outgoing Romanian students and the number of incoming international students to Romania.<sup>3</sup>

*Figure 1. Number of outgoing Romanian students from 2000 to 2011*

*Figure 2. Number of international students coming to Romania between 2000 - 2011*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Data used in this article were retrieved from the European Union official statistics pages <http://www.statisticsforall.eu/maps-erasmus-students.php>

Looking at this graphics we can see that Romania is mainly a provider of international students for countries with, we can assume, more mature educational systems and better funding opportunities. Using Gephi programme (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009), designed for network visualization and Google Earth we managed to obtain ego - networks of Romanian international students' movements from 2007 to 2013, as those were the years that offered the data we needed.



Figure 3. International Romanian student's movements 2007 - 2008

We have created similar maps for each academic year starting with 2007 until 2013, but in order to make our data more clear we have decided to use, in this paper, maps that show only the destination country and the number of students that went in that country.



Figure 4. International Romanian student's movements 2008 - 2009

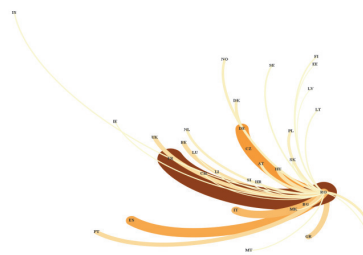


Figure 5. International Romanian student's movements 2009 - 2010



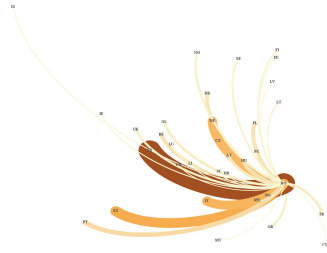


Figure 6. International Romanian student's movements 2010 - 2011

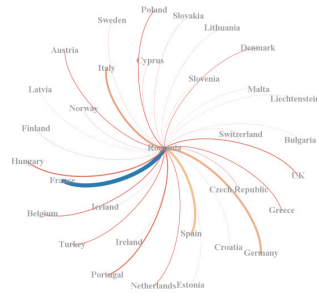


Figure 7. International Romanian student's movements 2011 - 2013



Figure 8. International Romanian student's movements 2012 - 2013

After seeing the resulting maps, it was clear that Romanian students have no restrictions regarding distances they have to go for study. In the academic year 2007 - 2008, main destinations for Romanian students were France (1020 students), Germany (604), Italy (564). In 2008 - 2009, the situation changed a little as a new country appeared as a favorite destination for study Spain (423 students), but main destinations remain unmodified France (1100 students), Germany (478

students), Italy (423 students). For the next four academic years, the situation shows the following:

5. 2009 - 2010 France (1094 students), Germany (532students) and Spain (460 students);
6. 2010 - 2011 France (940 students), Spain (436 students ) and Italy (394 students);
7. 2011 - 2012 France (1094 students), Spain (606 students) and Germany (529 students);
8. 2012 - 2013 France (1020 students), Italy (604 students), Germany (564 students) and Spain (563 students).

When it comes to countries that were less attractive for international Romanian students, Liechtenstein had six Romanian students over the period covered by our study, Latvia and Luxembourg; both had only one Romanian student.

When we review our data together with the visualization of networks, a certain pattern begun to emerge, international Romanian students prefer to go study in France, Spain, Italy and Germany. This pattern might be explained by two situations: Italy, France and Spain are Latin countries and languages are similar to Romanian language situation that would help students to cross the language barrier easier; Germany on the other hand, represents a special situation as in Romania there is a large community of German ethnics.

The motivations beyond Romanian international study migration are diverse. Latest research in the field identifies, that the most important factors are academic environment that offers a good educational process and international recognition, better perspectives in finding a job, superior financial stimulation, etc., but in order to have a clear view of this phenomenon, more research is required.

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