SPECIAL THEME

STUDENT MOBILITY: RECIPROCITY AND EXCHANGE

Editorial

The history of student exchange has as many forms as it has purposes and objectives. It would not be correct however to see such objectives as entirely independent from other considerations of a more long term nature, drawn up by bodies other than those of higher education. Most of the latter entertain agendas of varying degrees of explicitness and generosity and it is as well to bear them in mind before one goes into the technical details of who is exchanged, the obstacles they face, the benefits they enjoy and the challenges they have overcome. For example, that conceit to which many Parliamentarians are pleased to allude whenever mention is made of student exchange – the *Peregrinatio academici* – was not simply an expression of the lust after learning of the wandering scholar where ever it was to be found. For whilst the medieval universities gradually increased their independence of the Church Universal, the belief which underlay such travelling – and sought to give continued credence to it – continued to be the unity of Christendom. In short, despite the ambitions of Princes and the claims of nations, student exchange, to use a handy anachronism, had the very explicit purpose of upholding a species of 'World Order' even if the definition of the world was subsequently revealed as a trifle narrow.

ESCHATOLOGIES OF EXCHANGE

This particular mission has, one might suggest, not greatly changed since. There are, to be sure, different eschatologies involved. There is the concept of student exchange to uphold an established order which, depending on the concerns of the sponsoring agency, may be simply national or with a wider remit. In the maintenance of the 'national dimension' in student exchange one may cite such motives as the dissemination of a particular language, its attendant culture and through them, the upholding of the 'national presence' in those parts of the world which it is useful for nation-state governments to cultivate long-term links. Here one thinks, for instance, of the creation in 1912 in Paris of the Office for Franco British exchange. In another setting, this time on the other side of the Channel and ten years on, the development of the British Ph.D, which, as Simpson's small monograph pointed out, was prompted, amongst other considerations, by the need to attract into the British ambit, the sons of the East Coast American élite who, previously, had gone to German universities to study at doctoral level (Simpson, 1981). Seen in this context, student exchange provides a neat illustration of the principle, developed a quarter century ago by Coombes, that education is diplomacy by other means (Coombes, 1964).

Another variant on this theme but with a slightly different eschatology, is the use of educational exchange, less to maintain the status quo than to forge a new one. Such a consideration lay beneath the development of the programme named after the American senator, William Fullbright, whose principle concern, in 1944, was the development of a new world order, based on the democratic principle and on its spread amongst the younger members of the future political élites of the major industrial countries.

THE IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Not surprisingly, at any time in history, what is one man's desirable world order is another's upkeep of tyranny. Thus, it can come as a surprise to few that during the days of the Cold War, student exchange, limited though it often was in sheer numerical terms, became an instrument used by both East and West as a means of 'winning friends and influencing (young) people'. Within each of the two respective camps, however, one may detect equally interesting sub-variants in the strategic mission of such undertakings. For if the goal was, in the case of the latter, to strengthen 'the Free World' and, in the case of the former, to demonstrate the virtues of democratic centralism, there also existed two other priorities. These priorities were the consolidation of the relationships already established on the one hand and, on the other, programmes designed to expand what would have been known to adepts of geopolitics, as a country's sphere of influence.

This distinction can, of course, be deduced from the pattern of student flow noted in Kouptsova's article which deals with student exchange in the Soviet Union, though clearly, it can also be seen in similar exchange programmes mounted by other States as well. Exchange within countries of the Eastern bloc correspond to the first objective, whilst the foundation of the Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University, created especially for the training of foreign students mainly from Third World countries, can be said to fulfil the second. Clearly, under the public rhetoric of amity between the peoples, which need not, of course, be absent nor a cynical use of idealism, such motives as lending strength to a shared *Weltanschauung* as well as helping in development – whether industrial, economic or political – are equally present.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECT

So far, we have centred on official programmes designed to foster movement of students, academics and researchers across frontiers. These frontiers, *soit dit en passant*, are not just physical or geographic. They can just as well involve ideological frontiers. Indeed, one can make a very good case, both from history and from the development of post-war international relations, that the ideological dimension is, if not the first, then far from being the least important, factor involved. Now one may cross frontiers with official support and sponsorship or one can make the crossing on one's own initiative.

The difference between what some authorities have termed 'wildcat' mobility in contrast to 'organized mobility' is a major one (Masclat, 1976). It is also part of the dialectic in the history of education as the fourth dimension in diplomacy. If, conceptually, these two modes of exchange, are clear enough, from an historical standpoint, this clarity tends to become somewhat fuzzy at the edges. Like the childhood riddle of chicken and egg, determining which came first is no small task. Some of our wandering medieval scholars would certainly have enjoyed the blessing – if not the support – of a patron. But whether the individual patronage of the Prince or the local Lordling may be interpreted as an early form of 'organised mobility' depends, not unnaturally, on the breadth of the Prince's vision and the depth of his pocket! It remains then a moot point whether in the early 18th century, the initiative by Peter the Great of Russia to send the sons of selected noblemen for education in the West stands as the first example of 'organized mobility'. However, the generosity of the gestures was, one suspects, somewhat diluted by the fact that those sent were not wholly volunteers (Sumner, 1944).

It is probably correct then, to ascribe to governments the development of organized student exchange, providing in one package financial support and officially recognized and validated links between countries and between individual institutions – though one should not discount the role played by individual private foundations and charitable bodies, many of them located in the United States. And, it is not wholly out of place to underline, once more, the geostrategic if not ideological considerations involved since the development of such programmes coincided with the World confrontation of the two superpowers.

There remains the issue of 'wildcat' mobility – that of individuals deciding on their own to move bag and baggage and study elsewhere. Just as in the Fifties and Sixties, organized mobility was aimed at students likely to occupy later positions of influence, so it is reasonable to suggest that the development of mass mobility took place primarily as a 'wildcat' exercise. And it is likely – though we can say no more than that – that those involved came in the first place from well-off families, seeking to increase the chances of their children's access to élite positions by dint of foreign study and qualifications, without necessarily being themselves from the topmost strata.

One thing, however, is clear. The transition of student mobility from being concerned with evident élites and restricted numbers to becoming a mass phenomenon was not, in the first instance, the product of the Western world, though clearly the West was often its main attraction. It was, rather, the result of the spiralling demand for higher education in the developing world and with it, the rise in the numbers of students from those countries seeking undergraduate and graduate training in the higher education systems of the industrialized areas of the planet. It is by no means easy to say exactly when international student flows assumed all the dimensions of a mass undertaking. And one of the difficulties involved in this otherwise irrelevant detail arises from whether the definition of 'mass status' is determined by the number of non-nationals in a host country system or whether, on the contrary, it is to be reckoned on the basis of those students studying abroad expressed as a percentage of all in higher education in the country of origin.

The rise of 'wildcat' mobility was not a chance development. Nor was it chance either that student flows tended to concentrate between the centre and periphery of higher education systems which, very often, shared the same administrative and historical origins even if located in different countries if not different continents. Thus the majority of non-nationals in French universities are still today, from what was the area of French influence, whilst in Britain, for example, the Commonwealth connection has maintained the major supply of non-home students. Seen in this context, an interesting hypothesis remains to be tested: whether highly selective programmes of organized mobility did not stimulate wildcat mobility as a consequence of the apparent benefits which studying in the metropolitan system appeared to confer upon participants in the former mode.

EUROPEAN INITIATIVES

The point of tracing the historic development and the various considerations that lie behind schemes of student exchange is to set in context the initiatives which have mobilized the European region around this same issue over the past half decade or so. The launching of the European Community's European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) in 1986 and the parallel initiative, set up in May 1990 under the title of TEMPUS – Trans European Mobility Programme for University Students – as yet limited to students from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary should be seen against this wider backdrop. And it is in this setting that many of the articles included in this issue of *Higher Education Policy*, fit.

Both programmes possess a number of features which give them, to some degree, claims to originality and uniqueness. In the first place, they are designed as mass programmes within the European Community, though clearly extensions are being put in place to the East and associate linkages for student exchange to the North with the Nordic bloc. In the second place, they are based on the presupposition that mass exchange systems are best conceived within an organized framework, thereby reversing the process underpinning earlier developments in mass mobility which emerged spontaneously between higher education systems in the developing and the developed worlds. In this respect, Community initiatives in this area retain that degree of formal organization which one found in the case of the early post-war élite exchange schemes for students, only with the clear remit of placing them on a mass footing. One may certainly find in the projects of the European Community elements of that eschatology which, we suggested earlier, is a not unusual accompaniment of such ventures. The forging of a new European consciousness is one. The establishment of a higher education space – the university counterpart of the mobility of labour – is another. The rooting of a political consciousness amongst the younger generation – which has always been a goal of Community education policy from the early Seventies – is a third (Neave, 1987).

Objectives such as these fall foursquare in what one might interpret as the classic purposes of the *genre*. The aspect which gives claim to uniqueness is not particularly the hefty injection of resources, though with ECU 192,000,000 over the period 1989-1992 for the ERASMUS programme alone (ERASMUS, 1990), these are impressive enough when taken globally. It is, rather, the seeming ability to bring about substantial change at institutional level, the remoulding of student expectations, the creation and assignation of resources, courses and personnel to the long term commitment of exchange – if not always reciprocity – between establishments and all that on a scale of funding to individual establishments which, if taken as part of their overall operating budget, scarcely meets the costs of the canteen. Whether such mobilization is simply the reflection of ‘an idea whose time is come’ or whether it reflects the well-known propensity amongst university administrations to operate the ‘law of anticipated results’, must remain, for the moment, a matter of personal judgment. Finally, the outstanding characteristic of these programmes is their ability to act as normative instruments – that is, setting down the conditions, terms and framework within which inter-institutional linkages are set up. Key to this is an ancillary section of the ERASMUS administration engaged in devising a cross national credit transfer system – ECTS.

CREDIT TRANSFER AND NORMATIVE LEVELS

He who is engaged in creating the framework conditions for credit transfer is, whether he likes it or not and irrespective of whether the institutions on whose behalf he is working like it or not, engaged in an indirect form of curriculum planning. Prior to the establishment of ECTS, arrangements for recognition of study time spent away from the home establishment was a matter for negotiation between individual institutes and between their staff. Though none will deny that the ability to continue to plan and develop courses remains intact at institutional level, the process of developing a standardized framework for evaluation places a layer of control in addition to that which in many Member States is exercised by central administration or *Ministère de tutelle*.

This matter is all the more delicate for the fact that, as Squires’ article points out, curriculum development in higher education is an area where little systematic study has been done on a cross-national basis. It is also complicated by the fact that very considerable essential differences exist behind the nominally similar subject fields. Such differences, if already substantial in the various domains of Engineering across nations, become even more marked the more deeply one penetrates into what may be termed the value sciences – the Humanities, Philosophy and the Social Sciences. Coming at a time when public attention is focused on the issue of quality – a matter not lightly to be tampered with even within one specific nation, as the contributions in this issue from Yugoslavia make plain – one is perhaps permitted to wonder whether credits are meaningful when like is not compared with like. The problematic becomes even more fraught when one bears in mind the highly radical changes in curriculum structure and content which are currently being introduced as the result of Marxism being thrown – perhaps temporarily – onto the scrap heap of both history and didactics in East and Central Europe.

Here, we would suggest, the central issue of curriculum coordination to ease the flow of students, graduate and undergraduate, across Europe’s higher education space is less a matter of administrative flexibility, though in such instances where central authority keeps a tight reign, this is the most visible challenge. It is rather who is to act as the standard setter, who is to coordinate and who is to be ‘the coordinated’ and at what level. There is, in addition, the very real temptation to equate coordination with standardization, with all the hidden shifts in the balance of power and control this may entail, above all in countries where central government does not, for reasons of convenience, history or constitutional provision, exercise primary power over higher education.

DIPLOMACY OR DIDACTICS: TWO FACES OF THE BALANCE OF POWER

Clearly, these are issues without precedent in the development of student exchange programmes. They are also without precedent in the degree of formalized agreement that will be required. Recent Community legislation for recognizing higher education diplomas of three years duration and above as conferring the right to exercise that professional activity for which individual diploma holders are qualified in their home country, is a step down this road. So far, however, this Directive is based on the principle of ‘mutual trust’. But this cannot avoid the fact that such mutual trust is, at best, only a stop-gap solution to give time to absorb the rather more ticklish implications that may follow the erosion of that trust.

If, as many reckon – rightly – that higher education is a key to the integration of Western Europe just as it is a key to bringing the populations of Central and Eastern Europe up to a similar level of productivity and conditions of living, it is clear that higher education is, by dint of being ascribed these aims, a strategic instrument. To be sure, it is not the only one, but it follows from this situation that higher education is also in such settings an instrument of governmental strategy even though it is sometimes polite to observe the niceties of autonomy in the realm of internal as opposed to international relations.

Yet, governments are rarely equal in their power, influence and effectiveness. It would, of course, be simplistic to suggest that on the world arena, weighty and influential systems of higher education tend to coincide with countries having similar status in the economic and political ambit, but there is often a close fit between the two spheres of activity. There is then the not inconsiderable risk when recognition agreements are being worked out on a bilateral or multilateral basis – and some are currently under negotiation – that the element which bears down in the balance is sheer financial and industrial clout rather than essential merit. If, as we have argued, in student exchange, education is the handmaiden of diplomacy, it is not always so that diplomacy is the servant of education.

EXCHANGE SYSTEMS AND ACCESS

There remains one final aspect in the saga of exchange and reciprocity. And this has to do with the deceptively simple question of access. As the student exchange programmes got under way in the European Community, a very real disquiet developed

amongst the countries on its periphery. Was Western Europe going down the path towards an intellectual equivalent of protectionism? Would the Community's integration mean, in the university world, their implicit exclusion? Subsequent developments – some anticipated, the most unforeseen – have removed this danger. But in removing it and by extending the possibilities for academic staff and students to work together to Central and Eastern Europe, another seems to have replaced it. Put dramatically, in concentrating on the construction of Europe, has Europe put the rest of the world in the backseat? Has the development of student exchange in the Community spelt oblivion to the reciprocal obligations that individual Member States had assumed from the days when a more substantial overseas commitment was the norm?

Evidence either way remains sparse, but the suspicion remains nevertheless. There are, for instance, indications to hand that large numbers of overseas students in Central and Eastern European countries are returning home, sometimes under instruction from their governments. In Member States of the Community, one may note the coexistence of the two modes of exchange: organized and subsidised for students of Community nationality; largely independent and 'wildcat' mobility for the mass of non-Community nationals and particularly those from the Third World. Thus in a very real manner, though in a form slightly different from the one usually associated with the term, access to higher education systems in Europe has, once again, become an issue of moment. In the twin imperatives of exchange and reciprocity, the former does not always denote the latter.

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