

Chapter 8

Academic Mobility Programs as Part of Individual and Professional Development in a Globalized World: Uncovering Cultural Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to establish a connection between the effects of globalization on contemporary societies and the increase in individualist attributes in former collectivist societies. To achieve it, the chapter presents the study of the experiences of Russian students participating in academic mobility programs. A two-step survey conducted among the Russian university students reveals, by means of cultural dimension analysis, individualist attributes in their academic behavior while studying overseas and at a home university. The interest towards academic mobility programs expressed by the students of various years of study, their desire for independence and self-development as well as an enjoyable process of acquiring a diploma are examples of individualist attributes. The conclusion is made that individuals trying to find their place in a globalized world acquire more individualist attributes in their behavior and world perception.

INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY

The purpose of this research was to establish a connection between the effects of globalization (academic mobility programs in this case) on contemporary societies and the increase in individualist attributes in former collectivist societies. This purpose was achieved by studying the experiences of several Russian students participating in academic mobility programs and uncovering cultural dimensions in their perceptions of an academic environment (see, for instance, Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The analysis

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of individualist attributes in Russian students' academic behavior in an overseas academic institution and in a home university shows interconnection between modern students' desire for independence and self-development and their interest in academic mobility programs.

The goal of this research is accomplished through a case study based on the experiences of Russian students who took part in an academic mobility program established between Kuban State University (Krasnodar, Russia) and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). The research led to the conclusion that, on the one hand, despite unification processes and some changes in the national character, numerous practices within societies continue to maintain their local flavor: although an attempt has been made to make the process of education similar all over the world to enhance international cooperation, notions of what constitutes the process of learning and how it can be organized still differ. Yet, on the other hand, the students' (those who participated in academic mobility programs as well as those who never opted for them) expectations from academic processes illustrate the increased number of individualist attributes in their decisions and choices.

Whereas *globalization* may be described in so many words, one expression that captures the essence of such a phenomenon as globalization is *connectivity*. Prior to increases in the transnational transfer of knowledge, human and financial capital, technology, culture, and so on, entire nations were isolated. As Tomlinson (1999) observed, globalization connected otherwise remote, isolated, and inaccessible communities and entire nations. Twenty-first century technology has enabled intercultural-international communication and increased mobility and connectivity to "the centre of our lives" (p. 42).

A 21st-century individual enjoys the "right to unlimited travel and cultural consumption" (Urry, 1995, p. 200), although it is important to note that such rights do not globally extend to all communities or societies, given the prohibitive costs associated with the use of such technologies. Nonetheless, the fact that some societies have yet to partake in such a right of unlimited mobility, due to the associated costs of the enabling technologies, the most appropriate term would be *privilege* rather than *right*, as characterized by Tomlinson (1999).

Globalization, through media and increased cultural contact, makes nations more open to each other. The availability of numeral sources of information makes connectivity and travel easy for individuals in the current globalized world. Pretravel arrangements are easily made by accessing numerous Internet resources that provide information about travel destinations. Apart from Internet websites, other sources of information include, TV programs, printed media—newspapers, magazines, flyers, and the like. These sources of information make connectivity easy for the 21st-century individual.

Globalization has, in no uncertain terms, assured continuous prosperity even for rich and powerful countries. Industrialized economies are not absolved from economic instabilities that characterize capitalism. In a *Newsweek* magazine article, Sharkov (2015) elucidated such impermanence as applied to job losses and economic stress and strains in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom partially induced by the trade sanctions imposed on Russia by Western governments using the political conflict in Ukraine as justification. Once again, it testifies to the interconnectedness of the modern world.

Mobility has always been a sign of progress and literacy. Isolation and immobility are characteristics of social life before the modern era, typical of, for instance, small rural communities (Tomlinson, 1999). However, even in faraway times, there existed a small, but more mobile literate elite. Beginning in the ninth century, a semblance of prosperity became manifest as a product of mobility. Long-distance trading facilitated the establishment of cultural and economic links between the Christian and Muslim worlds. Citing Morris, Tomlinson (1999) explained the economic prosperity enjoyed by such mercantile cities as Venice, Genoa, or Constantinople resulting from trade that was accelerated by connectivity.

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