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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Felder, A., & Tamtik, M. (2023). Federal Servants of Inclusion? The Governance of Student Mobility in Canada and the EU. *Politics and Governance*, 11(3), 251-263. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i3.6815>

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Article

Federal Servants of Inclusion? The Governance of Student Mobility in Canada and the EU

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Submitted: 14 February 2023 | Accepted: 20 July 2023 | Published: 27 September 2023

Abstract

Student mobility constitutes a core pillar of higher education internationalisation. Reflecting wider global trends, Canada and the EU have increasingly prioritised equity and inclusion in their student mobility programmes. Canada’s Global Skills Opportunity programme, launched in 2021, provides federal funding specifically to low-income students, students with disabilities, and Indigenous students. The EU’s Erasmus Programme has a long-standing tradition of community-building through inclusive student mobility. This article traces the principle of inclusion as a mobility rationale and analyses the role of the federal government in Canada and the European Commission in the EU supporting it. Using a policy framing lens, this study compares problem definitions, policy rationales, and solutions for federal/supranational involvement in student mobility. Findings show that inclusiveness has been an underlying silent value, yet it has mostly supported larger political and economic goals in both contexts.

Keywords

Canada; Erasmus; European Union; Global Skills Opportunity; higher education; regionalisation; student mobility

Issue

This article is part of the issue “United in Uniqueness? Lessons From Canadian Politics for European Union Studies” edited by Johannes Müller Gómez (Université de Montréal / Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), Lori Thorlakson (University of Alberta), and Alexander Hoppe (Utrecht University).

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1. Introduction: Macro-Regional Policies for Higher Education Internationalisation

Student mobility programmes are at the core of higher education (HE) systems globally, serving various goals ranging from institutional revenue generation to training skilled labour and assisting governments with foreign policy objectives (Sabzalieva et al., 2022; Trilokekar, 2022). At the same time, meaningful educational experiences are an individual right that helps to secure one’s academic, social, and personal success in life (Preston, 2008). The ability to participate in student mobility programmes is linked to one’s socio-demographic background, so minoritised students with limited financial opportunities are often excluded. This, in turn, impacts these students’ cultural adaptability, language skills, and employ-

ability (Di Pietro, 2020; Roy et al., 2019). For internationalisation to be inclusive and not elitist, it must address issues of access and equity (H. de Wit & Jones, 2018). Consequently, barrier-free access to student mobility has become a significant policy problem for governments (Cairns, 2019). Not only have issues of social justice been largely absent from institutional strategies of internationalisation (Buckner et al., 2020), but a global perspective is also lacking in equity research in international education (Özturgut, 2017). This article contributes to this aspect of research, offering a comparative perspective on student mobility policies by analysing macro-governmental support for outgoing student mobility in Canada and the EU.

This article asks how Canadian and EU student mobility approaches compare from an inclusion perspective.

Zooming in on the role of inclusion in macro-regional student mobility programmes contributes to a better understanding of HE internationalisation, which is a highly political endeavour pursued by countries, institutions, and individuals. In this politicised context, central governments (Helms et al., 2015) and macro-regional structures play an important role in engaging with market-driven competition dynamics (Buckner & Stein, 2020). These public stakeholders do not only set an overall vision and direction for student mobility programmes at large but also engage in efforts to build common mobility areas through means such as funding instruments (Chou & Ravinet, 2016). Since a central purpose of federal/macro-regional governance is cohesion, we can expect that macro-regional policies for HE internationalisation reflect this task. In this context, inclusion may be defined as governmental policies and practices that aim to provide barrier-free opportunities for the participation of all in student mobility programmes. To reveal the role of inclusion in developing and governing student mobility programmes in Canada and the EU, we draw from the HE regionalisation literature and apply a strategic policy-framing perspective. The article particularly focuses on the underlying policy problems, rationales, and instruments of federal/supranational student mobility approaches. We aim to answer the following research questions: How have the federal/supranational approaches to student mobility and the corresponding policies developed over time? What role has the principle of inclusion played in federal/supranational policies for student mobility in the Canadian/EU context?

There are two ways to conceptualise inclusion in student mobility (Janebova & Johnstone, 2020). One approach views inclusion in student mobility as a public good, providing widened access to mobile citizens who get employed and can contribute to economic growth. The second approach views inclusion as an ideology that critically addresses social justice disparities resulting from student mobility. Thus, inclusion can be a strategy that supports the expansion of the societal benefits of internationalisation or it can be an ideology that purposefully addresses unfair inequitable practices, focusing on systemic change. The idea of social inclusiveness as a tool for the public good has been central in the Bologna Process and the construction of a “Europe of knowledge” as enshrined in the EU’s Lisbon Strategy (e.g., Powell & Finger, 2013). In this narrative, social cohesion is promoted as a solution to Europe’s lack of global competitiveness, so that EU macro-regional governance aims to unite economic and social objectives (e.g., Beerkens, 2008). In the Canadian context, social justice and inclusion ideals have been present as an important ideological aspect of Canada’s broader foreign policy agenda around equity, guided by significant development aid distributed over the years globally. Trilokekar and Kizilbash (2013, p. 2) noted that Canada’s approach to foreign policy has been characterised as “anti-imperial power committed to supporting a just and equitable world order.” This

goal speaks to inclusion as an ideological equity issue, reflected in the ways inclusion is addressed in student mobility programmes. Yet, similarly to the EU, there is notable criticism around ethical issues and systemic injustices associated with Canada’s approach to international education (Brunner, 2022).

Subsequently, we outline how approaching HE regionalisation from a policy-framing perspective is useful for analysing the development of federal/supranational policies for student mobility over time. After introducing our empirical strategy, the results of our analysis are first presented for the case of Canada, followed by the case of the EU. We show how social justice and inclusion have been values underlying student mobility in both jurisdictions yet primarily supporting larger political and economic goals. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and future research avenues.

2. A Policy Framing Perspective on Higher Education Regionalisation

Theoretically, we situate student mobility programmes within the larger context of political regionalisation. HE regionalism is defined as “a political project of region creation” that involves certain levels of state authority (national, supranational, international) and guides activities in the HE policy sector (Chou & Ravinet, 2016, p. 4). This concept applies to both Canada and the EU, where a multitude of education systems governed by provinces and member states ought to contribute to joint federal/supranational strategies such as increasing student mobility. Accordingly, the “building [of] connections and relationships among [HE] actors and systems in a region” (Knight, 2012a, p. 17) is referred to as HE regionalisation. In the Canadian context of federalism, there has been a move towards horizontal governance in (higher) education where hierarchies are less visible and collaboration is apparent across governmental actors (e.g., Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). In the EU, there is an interplay between national and supranational actors that has been shaping student mobility and/or HE policies for reasons of guarding (i.e., member states) or increasing (i.e., European Commission [EC], European Court of Justice) their competencies (e.g., Beerkens, 2008).

To examine the change in the role of the federal/supranational government in fostering student mobility, we consider the three components of a policy that follow from framing approaches to (supranational) policy analysis (Buckner et al., 2020; Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Elken et al., 2022; Rhinard, 2018) and combine them with Knight’s (2012a) theorisation around HE regionalisation (see Table 1). Rhinard (2018, p. 309) defined strategic framing as:

The deployment of certain ideas about policy change—including the depiction of a policy problem, a rationale for action, and a set of “appropriate” solutions—in order to reshape the existing

ideas, actors and institutions inside a particular policy domain.

Consequently, in our analysis we distinguish between different HE regionalisation approaches, on the one hand, and problems, rationales, and solutions of federal/supranational student mobility policies, on the other hand.

We draw on Knight's (2012a) framework of functional, organisational, and political approaches to HE regionalisation (see Table 1) to derive problem definitions and policy solutions of supranational/federal student mobility policy, while secondary literature on HE internationalisation has provided us with policy rationales. When following a functional approach, HE regionalisation serves the purpose of practical alignment of national/sub-regional HE systems. This alignment is achieved through bringing HE institutions and their students and staff together by funding mobility and/or joint study programmes. For the functional approach, the corresponding problems lie in different types and levels of barriers (individual/institutional/systemic) to student mobility. In turn, the organisational approach to HE regionalisation relies on the building of bureaucratic structures among (non)governmental bodies and professional organisations, which provide structural support for cross-regional study and mobility programmes. When approaching HE regionalisation politically, student mobility is translated into the political will to make it a priority for the HE sector and thus is reflected in intergovernmental agreements. These agreements may either remain at the level of declaring joint interests, such as increasing the quality of HE, and/or include detailed provisions such as for harmonising study cycles. As follows, organisational HE regionalisation is supposed to mitigate gaps

in (supra)national coordination and coherence, and from a political HE regionalisation perspective, the core problems result from regional and/or global interdependence that may only be resolved through macro-regional cooperation. In sum, HE regionalisation always aims to build and strengthen HE systems, yet the approaches through which this is achieved differ.

Student mobility may have an educational, cultural, economic, social, or political rationale (Elken et al., 2022; Knight, 2012b). The educational rationale places the exchange of ideas either through returning outgoing students or incoming international students at the centre. From a cultural rationale, student mobility ought to enhance intercultural skills such as the acquisition of languages. Economically speaking, student mobility is considered an investment for long-term economic growth and short-term direct benefits such as tuition fees. The social rationale considers systemic barriers to individual access in student mobility. Finally, for the political rationale, student mobility serves as a dimension of foreign policy and contributes to soft power and strategic alliances. The manifestations of these rationales vary across actors and levels and thus for the respective HE regionalisation approaches. Since functional HE regionalisation ought to align national/sub-regional HE systems, the rationales for action relate to the levels of individuals such as students, HE institutions, and the state. When regionalisation is approached politically, again all four rationales may apply, yet they primarily manifest themselves at the national and regional levels. The organisational approach towards HE regionalisation puts coordination tasks at the centre and adds the organisational layer to functional and political regionalisation, so that we may find individual, institutional, and systemic-level interpretations of the rationales. The economic rationale,

Table 1. Problem definitions, rationales, and solutions in student mobility policies.

		Supranational/federal student mobility policy		
		Problem definition	Preferred policy solution	Rationales for action
Approach to HE regionalisation	Functional	Individual/institutional/systemic barriers to student mobility	Funding schemes for HE institutions and individuals	<i>Educational:</i> Academic exchange and quality of education
			Joint study programmes	<i>Cultural:</i> Intercultural skills
			Credit transfer system	<i>Economic:</i> Competitiveness (national economy) and/or revenues (HE institutions)
	Organisational	Lack of (supra)national coordination and coherence	Networks among various actors in a HE system for implementing functional and political HE regionalisation	<i>Social:</i> Individual access, considering systemic barriers
	Political	Community/global interdependence	Intergovernmental agreements	<i>Political:</i> Policy objectives at the institutional/national level

Source: Authors' work based on Elken et al. (2022), Knight (2012a, 2012b), and Rhinard (2018).

for example, has a different meaning at the individual (returns to education), institutional (income generation), national (human resources development), and regional levels (economic competitiveness).

Ultimately, combining the HE regionalisation framework with a policy framing approach is not only useful for accounting for the development of federal/supranational approaches to student mobility over time but has also served to bring forward the role of inclusion in federal/supranational student mobility policy. So far, there do not exist analyses of HE regionalisation that incorporate the issue of inclusion. Our analysis will reveal whether, in the two compared contexts, inclusion is defined as a problem and/or whether inclusion is at the core of a proposed policy solution and, thus, is a rationale guiding supranational/federal student mobility policy.

3. Case Selection, Methodological Approach, and Data

Our rationale for comparing Canada and the EU is three-fold. While we recognise that Canada and the EU are different in many respects, there are parallels that allow for useful comparison. First, both operate in a decentralised system (federalism in Canada and treaty-based union of independent member states in the EU), allowing examination of federal/supranational activities of political region-building in a sensitive policy area. Second, both jurisdictions prioritise inclusion and diversity, protecting groups within diverse ethnic and cultural settings. Social cohesion has been an important aspect in building a sense of community for both the EU and Canada. This aspect of social awareness allows us to examine the specific nuances and impacting factors that shape the ideals of inclusion and social justice across these jurisdictions. Third, international student mobility drives their economies and is a source of immigration. With increasing federal and supranational stakes in internationalisation policies, the two cases allow us to compare the strategic framings associated with inclusion and student mobility from a pragmatic point of view. Our analysis specifically focuses on the role of the federal government in the case of Canada and on the role of the EC in the case of the EU.

To answer the research questions, we conducted qualitative policy analysis using primary data relevant to student mobility including white papers, federal/supranational internationalisation strategies, and programmatic documents of the two central student mobility programmes (the Erasmus Programme and Canada's Global Skills Opportunity programme). We selected documents from 1970 to 2022 based on public availability, focusing on student mobility and references to inclusion. In both Canada and the EU, the issue of increasing the mobility of students emerged strategically during the 1970s first in the form of cooperative projects among HE institutions and was subsequently strengthened both in terms of political commitment and in terms of allocated resources. To overcome the limitations of a policy analy-

sis based on official and publicly available documents, we were mindful to pay attention to both what was said and what was not said in the documents. We also consulted historical scholarship for data triangulation.

In the data analysis, we applied deductive categorisation using existing literature to identify the policy problems, rationales, and solutions. However, we also allowed for inductive exploration of the data when it related to the concept of inclusion. For the categorisation of policy problems, we differentiated between references to individual/institutional/systemic barriers, (supra)national coordination, and international interdependence. Concerning policy solutions, we distinguished between references to funding, institutional partnerships, and HE system alignment and mentions of coordination, for example, in the provision of funding and political goals in areas such as foreign policy. Regarding policy rationales, we decided whether the mentioned purposes of student mobility would qualify as educational, cultural, economic, social, or political. Table 2 presents how our data analysis categories were applied to the example of the Council decision adopting the Erasmus Programme in 1987. The table shows that this document problematises the need to increase student mobility against the backdrop of regional and global interdependencies. The solutions to increase student mobility include functional and organisational HE regionalisation elements. The analysis of the programme shows that its underlying rationales were not only political but also economic in combination with cultural and educational rationales.

4. Analysis: The Case of Canada

Canada's engagement with international student mobility has been characterised by shifting national priorities and peripheral governments' support. A functional approach towards student mobility has been present across three different eras: (a) social justice agenda supporting foreign policy goals (1970–1990), (b) dominance of economic goals with silence on social justice (1991–2019), and (c) social justice for skilled labour needs (2020 onwards). Federally, Canada is regarded as a latecomer in developing a national vision for international education—Canada introduced its first internationalisation strategy only in 2014, developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. In 2019 this document was updated for another five years. Global Affairs Canada (International Education Division) has the primary responsibility for international education within the federal government. Yet, other players such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada also play a role in policy development, as international education is linked to skilled labour, immigration, and research cooperation (Viczo & Tascón, 2016). International students are an important source of Canada's skilled labour market. Choi et al. (2021) reported that 31% of international students

Table 2. Application of data analysis categories at the example of the Erasmus Programme decision in 1987.

Problem definition	Policy solution	Rationales for action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Supra)national coordination: “The <i>competitiveness of the Community</i> in world markets depends on ensuring that the entire <i>intellectual resources of the universities in the member states</i> are harnessed to provide top quality levels of training for the benefit of the Community as a whole.” • Community/global interdependence: “The further <i>development of the Community depends</i> to a large extent on its being able to draw on a large number of <i>graduates</i> who have had <i>direct experience of studying and living in another member state.</i>” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional HE regionalisation: “The Community will introduce a <i>European network for university cooperation...</i>[and] a scheme for the <i>direct financial support of students at universities...</i>carrying out a period of study in another member state”; “the Community will...through cooperation with the competent authorities in the member states...promote mobility through the <i>academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study</i> acquired in another member state.” • Organisational HE regionalisation: “The...programme shall be implemented by the Commission....In performing this task, the <i>Commission shall be assisted by a committee</i> composed of two representatives per member state.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and social: “The objectives of the Erasmus Programme shall be...to...increase...the number of students...spending an integrated period of study in another member state, in order that the Community may draw upon an <i>adequate pool of manpower</i> with first hand <i>experience of economic and social aspects of other member states.</i>” • Educational and economic: “To harness the full <i>intellectual potential</i> of the universities in the Community...thereby improving the <i>quality of the education...</i>with a view to securing the <i>competitiveness</i> of the Community in the world market.” • Political: “To strengthen the <i>interaction between citizens...</i>with a view to consolidating the concept of a <i>People’s Europe.</i>”

Source: Authors’ work quoting from Council Decision of 15 June 1987 (1987).

remained in the country after graduation. International students are also crucial for institutional income revenue, making up for shortfalls from the federal-provincial governments, paying substantially higher tuition fees compared to domestic students (McCartney, 2021). Outgoing student mobility was not formally prioritised by the government until 2021. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2016) reported that only 2.3% of Canadian students engage in outward student mobility, primarily through institutional exchanges with limited financial support. Recognising the limited interest towards outgoing student mobility as a barrier to the public good, the government launched a new student mobility programme (Global Skills Opportunity) in 2021. The core emphasis is on inclusivity, aiming to bridge socioeconomic divides among student groups, with significant financial support attached to the programme.

4.1. Social Justice Agenda Supporting Foreign Policy Goals (1970–1990)

This era was characterised by a political approach that framed inclusion as a social justice issue that would support Canada’s foreign policy objectives. The rationale was that helping other countries would secure peace internationally, benefitting Canada politically and economically. The corresponding policy solution was to pro-

vide development aid, including support for student mobility programmes. In the post-war decades, a narrative of “Canadians as internationalists” was created with the federal government’s leading role in peacekeeping activities, development aid, and cultural connections (Department of External Affairs, 1970, p. 6). Canada had historically placed considerable emphasis on the provision of technical assistance to developing countries (particularly in Latin America) as a means of transferring knowledge and expertise. The document *Foreign Policy for Canadians* noted: “In this way, the total resources and experience of Canadian organisations can be used to establish and support similar institutions in the developing countries” (Department of External Affairs, 1970, p. 15). Under the technical assistance programme, students were brought to Canada with scholarships for enrolment in Canadian universities, technical schools, or special industrial courses. Social justice ideals were put into practice with particular attention to race conflict and national security in places where the government feared race conflict might lead to “violent disturbances” (Department of External Affairs, 1970, p. 30). In 1974, the Academic Relations Section within the Department of External Affairs of the federal government was created to govern student mobility programmes (Brooks, 2019). This structural arrangement further attested to student mobility being part of foreign policy when this

unit started to administer and oversee the Canadian Studies Abroad programme, the largest student mobility programme of that period. Linguistic and cultural diversity was embedded in the mandate of the programme as part of its inclusion criteria. Special attention was given to areas such as human rights, civil liberties, aboriginal rights, arctic sovereignty, and women's studies (Symons, 1975, pp. 83, 123). Trilokekar (2010) noted that federal government spending on international cultural relations peaked in the mid-1980s with approximately \$20 million of operational funds. In the 1980s, gradual concerns were expressed that Canadian spending was unequal, with some countries (the US and Europe in particular) benefitting more than others. It was suggested that scholarship opportunities to study in Canada should be broadened, so that "Canada's increasing interest and relationship with other nations be reflected" (Canadian International Development Agency, 1986, p. 270). At the end of this era, concerns over equity were tied to national interests through the claim that the selectiveness of countries for student mobility was becoming a barrier to foreign policy.

4.2. Economic Goals With Silence on Social Justice (1991–2019)

This period marked the government's emphasis on a knowledge-based economy, characterised by the decline of financial investment in and the overall importance of government-supported study abroad programmes in Canada. The era depicts a functional approach with economic rationales dominating incoming student mobility as a policy solution. As such, the corresponding answer to the problem of boosting economic growth was the marketisation of Canada as an attractive study destination with aggressive recruitment of international students. The Canadian Studies Abroad programme was closed in 2012 (Brooks, 2019) as an unnecessary expense. In 1992, Canada hosted around 37,000 students with estimated contributions to the Canadian economy of C\$472 million (Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013). The Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs was created in 1990 as the unit overseeing international education programmes, framing student mobility as a tradable commodity. The 2005 evaluation of the Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs' International Academic Relations Programs referred to the need for a results-oriented culture in academic mobility (Brooks, 2019). C\$1 million of the federal budget was allocated to develop Edu-Canada as a marketing brand for student export (Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013). In 2014, Canada announced its first International Education Strategy that focused heavily on the marketing of Canadian HE abroad, recruiting fee-paying international students to ensure Canadian economic wealth. An advisory document noted that a "clear long-term strategy is needed to ensure that Canada maintains and increases its market share of the best and brightest international stu-

dents and researchers" (Government of Canada, 2012, p. ix). Inclusion or social justice concerns were hardly mentioned. One exception was the evaluation report of the federal University Partnership programme, which mentioned a best-practice project in Brazil with university involvement, emphasising the inclusion of civil society groups and women in building capacity in the country and stating that "the project is having a major impact on the inclusion of groups formerly regarded as pariahs within the society" (Canadian International Development Agency, 2007, p. 15). Diversity was viewed primarily from the geographical perspectives of new recruits who could bring social and cultural benefits and add diversity to smaller communities in Canada. The federal advisory report on international education mentions inclusivity as an economic consideration: "International education strategy should be inclusive of all sectors (K12 through PhD)" (Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy, 2010, p. 2). This was to be achieved by undergraduate recruitment, international research collaboration, relaxed visa policies, and opportunities for Canadian students to study abroad. Yet, Canadians' studying abroad was encouraged without deeper considerations of the inclusion or equity issues that prohibited some students from participating. The International Education Strategy was renewed in 2019, with the lead unit Employment and Social Development Canada. It was with this shift that the social focus, driven by the need for qualified workers, came back to student mobility in the 2020s.

4.3. Equitable Access for Skilled Labour Needs (2020 Onwards)

This era has continued to take a functional approach in which inclusion is framed as a policy problem on its own. Limited access to student mobility has been considered to create barriers to diverse student groups developing their global skills and competencies. This is where Canada's policy narrative of inclusion has turned from a social justice agenda to concerns over public good through equitable access to student mobility. The preferred policy solution has been the introduction of a new student mobility programme with significant financial support from the federal government. In 2020, the Canadian federal government launched the Global Skills Opportunity programme with \$95 million in funding over five years (Universities Canada, n.d.). It was the first time that the federal government allocated specific attention with significant financial support to an outgoing student mobility programme. Furthermore, never before had the Canadian government paid attention to the financial, social, and logistical barriers that prevented many students from participating in global study and work opportunities. The programme overview stated that the programme "will build strong international networks and partnerships, equip the next generation of Canadians with in-demand

workplace skills, and serve as a social equaliser that bridges socioeconomic divides” (Universities Canada, 2021). According to the programme guidelines, 50% of student funding goes to study/work abroad opportunities for low-income students, students with disabilities, and Indigenous students; 40% of funding is to prioritise activity in non-traditional countries (i.e., countries other than the US, UK, France, and Australia); and 10% of funding is to be used to support innovative organisational approaches to reducing barriers to outbound student mobility in Canada. The programme was referred to as “ambitious” and “ground-breaking” in its aim to remove barriers for various student groups (“RDP’s new Global Skills Opportunity program to help students gain international study and work abroad experience,” 2023). The programme has a decentralised governance structure whereby projects are proposed, implemented, and managed by universities, colleges, and institutes across the country. This decentralised and locally driven structure is intended to allow post-secondary institutions to create projects that best serve the needs of their students. The programme is expected to cater to more than 16,000 college and undergraduate-level university students by 2025 (Universities Canada, n.d.). The programme is primarily focused on enhancing transferable skills that would be attractive to future employers such as problem-solving, communication, digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability to adjust to changes and new demands in the workplace. It taps into a demographic that has been overlooked—the increasing number of Indigenous youth who will benefit the Canadian labour force in the near future.

5. Analysis: The Case of the EU

From the outset of supporting student mobility in the European Community, all three approaches towards HE regionalisation have been pursued. Next to developing inter-university cooperation programmes and providing financial support for student and staff mobility (functional HE regionalisation), the Community action to increase student mobility has also been guided by recognition issues (political HE regionalisation). To put the supranational support for student mobility into practice, systematic guidance and capacities (organisational HE regionalisation) have been guaranteed through means such as a decentral implementation system. EU student mobility policy has a strong political backing and organisational basis. Not only has the system to implement EU support for student mobility been refined over time (Blitz, 2003) but also the networking among HE policy actors has steadily increased (Vukasovic et al., 2018).

There are two reasons why, despite HE policy not being an EU competence, student mobility policy has been able to be established and broadened in scope over time. First, the EC traditionally has encouraged cooperation between HE institutions, since “mobility and networking [are] areas in which the EU can act without

infringing the core education policies and responsibilities of member states” (K. de Wit & Verhoeven, 2001, p. 201). Second, the first European Community action programme for education had already foreseen “EC supported educational activity [to] support...the EC’s larger policies” (Corbett, 2003, p. 327). In successfully coupling educational issues with the core objectives of European integration, EU action has mattered to aspects of HE such as student mobility. This process has been supported by both an entrepreneurial EC and sectoral actors such as HE institution associations (Beerens, 2008).

The interrelationship between the objectives of European integration more broadly and the support of student mobility is reflected in the identified phases during which the issue of inclusion has (not) played a role in the EU’s actions related to student mobility. Similar to Canada, the EU has had three phases during which the issue of inclusion has played different roles in student mobility. In the first phase (1976–1990), inclusion primarily meant equal access for different genders. In 1991–2013, inclusion was primarily understood in terms of participating countries and types of education for economic purposes, so social inclusion was not a central concern. From 2014 onwards, provisions related to social inclusion have not only become more elaborate but also have been made a clear priority next to the economic and cultural objectives of the EU mobility programmes.

5.1. Mobility Programmes for a Mobile Elite (1976–1990)

In this era, all three approaches to HE regionalisation—functional, organisational, and political—were present. Originating from the European Community’s action programme for education in 1976, the Joint Studies Program provided financial support to HE institutions and individuals to increase student mobility. Running until 1986, the programme laid the grounds for the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) launched in 1987. The Erasmus Programme aimed to support not only the creation of the single market but also the development of the “People’s Europe” (Blitz, 2003; Papatsiba, 2005). While the idea of shaping citizens of Europe was the ideological force of the programme, the fostering of student mobility was clearly connected to economic problem formulations such as a lack of competitiveness. The *Adonnino Report* from 1989, which introduced the “People’s Europe” concept, also included the proposal to establish a European credit transfer system, or ECTS (European Commission, 1985, p. 18), which is an instrument of a political approach to HE regionalisation. Aimed at the “training of European-minded professionals” (Papatsiba, 2005, p. 175), the Erasmus Programme interwove economic, political, social, and cultural rationales for student mobility. The programme was aimed to develop a “pool of graduates...for intensified economic

and social co-cooperation in the Community” (Council Decision of 15 June 1987, 1987, Art. 2(v)). Given the financial constraints associated with the programme, this initial pool of graduates contained only a small group of students and, thus, constituted a mobile elite. The Economic and Social Committee expressed concerns that not only did regional imbalances in participating institutions need to be monitored, but also that “no member state’s students should be discouraged for financial reasons” (Economic and Social Committee, 1986, p. 2). Following these concerns, the Commission proposed a corrective mechanism to address equity in participation, adopted by the Council in 1989 (Council Decision of 14 December 1989, 1989). It, however, only secured participation across study disciplines and did not address issues of financial need.

5.2. The Expansion of Programmes for Economic Growth and Social Inclusion (1991–2013)

From 1991 to 2013, the functional and political aspects of HE regionalisation in Europe were further strengthened. Not only was the geographic territory eligible for supranational support expanded but also the EU’s mobility programmes were broadened to other education sectors such as vocational schools. To strengthen economic ties within wider Europe, the Tempus Programme aimed to support the restructuring of HE systems in Central and Eastern European countries along market economy logics. Moreover, agreements on the participation of European Free Trade Association countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland) and prospective member states (Austria, Finland, Sweden, UK) in the Erasmus Programme were established in 1991. The core problems during this period, as they were formulated in the Erasmus Mundus Programme launched in 2004, were the quality and accessibility of European HE. The programme was meant to increase cooperation in HE beyond Europe albeit with a clear economic rationale. Already throughout the 1980s and 1990s “education was viewed as a crucial instrument in the political and economic relaunch of Europe” (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p. 135), yet with the new millennium, the connection between student mobility and economic competitiveness became even stronger. As such, increasing student mobility numbers remained one of the major objectives of the Bologna Process (Powell & Finger, 2013), which since 1999 has been the central EU-supported intergovernmental cooperation framework in HE. With the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and its follow-up of the Europe 2020 strategy, the creation of a European Area for HE became further guided by a competitiveness rationale.

It has been argued that the knowledge economy paradigm has weakened the social aspects of education (Nicaise, 2012). However, issues of equity and social inclusion nevertheless found their explicit entrance into EU student mobility policy with the Erasmus Mundus, Socrates II, and Tempus II programmes. The respective

programmes not only entailed provisions for guaranteeing access to participants regardless of their gender or cultural and social backgrounds but they also were meant to “contribute to achieving the aims of Community policy in the areas of equality, equal opportunities for women and men and promotion of social inclusion” (Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 January 2000, 2000). While, before, inclusion was only formulated as a problem for student mobility, it was now also formulated as an objective of student mobility. The notion of supranational education programmes serving the economic and social objectives of European integration was strengthened even further with the second Erasmus Mundus programme (2009–2013) and the transformation of Socrates into the Lifelong Learning programme (2007–2013). The horizontal policies of the latter programme did not only include an equality of access clause but also referred to “combat[ing] racism, prejudice and xenophobia [and to] making provision for learners with special needs” (Decision No of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006, 2006). These two elements for ensuring social inclusion were already part of the first Socrates decision in 1995, albeit in the preamble and not serving as horizontal policies across member states.

5.3. Erasmus for All? (2014 Onwards)

Having consolidated the functional and political approaches to HE regionalisation in the service of the quality of HE in the EU and, thus, the competitiveness of European HE, the period from 2014 onwards has been characterised by a turn towards prioritising social issues. When the next EU education and youth mobility programme was announced in 2011, it was labelled as “Erasmus for All.” This title reflected the programme’s undivided focus on inclusiveness (Nicaise, 2012). The Erasmus+ Programme (2014–2020) further emphasised access, promoting “social inclusion and the participation of people with special needs or with fewer opportunities” (Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013, 2013, Art. 23). Since the “low levels of participation among people with fewer opportunities stem from different causes and depend on different contexts” (Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021, 2021, p. 4), the regulation for the programme period until 2020 proposed to develop inclusion action plans for each of its member states. The more recent and stronger uptake of diversity, equity, and social inclusion issues in EU student mobility reflects a wider political debate at the EU level centring on these issues. As such, in 2021, the European Council concluded that equity and inclusion in education and training mattered to promoting educational success for all (Council conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training, 2021). This was a strong plea for better reconciling social fairness with the EU’s competitiveness objectives.

6. Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

By comparing Canadian and EU student mobility policies, this article has served to systematise the development of macro-regional approaches towards inclusion in student mobility and explain their underlying problem definitions, rationales, and policy solutions. Overall, the two contexts have suggested different perspectives on inclusion. Concerning functional HE regionalisation, Canada and the EU share many similarities whereby the federal/supranational approach to increase student mobility has been achieved through the support of HE institutions in the establishment of joint study programmes and the funding of mobility schemes. Regarding organisational regionalisation, the networking within the HE system appears to be stronger in the EU context than in the Canadian context, where the networking is confined

to the HE institutions themselves. This connects to the pursued political approaches of HE regionalisation. In the case of the EU, the role of student mobility has always been strongly tied to pursuing the political project of EU economic and social integration, whereas in Canada international education on its own standing has entered the federal policy agenda more recently.

In answering the question of how the issue of inclusion has been featured, our analysis yields that the EU's approach to inclusion has been consistently focused on mobility serving the public good, while Canada has been promoting inclusion as a matter of its social justice agenda while largely using it to serve other purposes such as foreign policy or immigration (see Table 3). However, the primary rationales towards HE regionalisation remain functional and organisational. Accordingly, in both the Canadian and EU contexts, inclusion entered

Table 3. The development of macro-regional student mobility and the role of inclusion in the EU and Canada.

	Period 1		Period 2		Period 3	
	Canada	EU	Canada	EU	Canada	EU
	1970–1990	1976–1990	1991–2019	1991–2014	Since 2020	Since 2014
Problem definition	Unequal global opportunities; Race conflicts	Individual/ institutional/ systemic barriers to student mobility	Decline of government funding	Quality and accessibility of European HE	Inclusion for all	Educational success for all citizens
Rationale for action	Political and economic: Foreign policy goals supporting economic agenda supporting	Economic: Competitiveness of single market; Cultural and educational: European identity	Economic: Competitiveness of Canadian HE	Economic: Competitiveness of European HE Cultural, educational and political: Enlargement	Economic and political: Need for skilled labour for economic growth	Economic and political: Reconciliation of competitiveness and social cohesion
Policy solution(s)	Development aid (cultural and academic exchanges); Financial support for programmes	Financial support (HE institutions, individuals); Networking of HE system actors (credit transfer)	Aggressive recruitment; Marketization; Policy support	Financial support; Networking of HE system actors; Intergovernmental agreements (Bologna Process)	Financial, logistical, and programmatic support (HE institutions, individuals)	Financial support; Networking of HE system actors; Intergovernmental agreements
Inclusion	Inclusion as a social justice issue	Equal participation across disciplines	Geographic diversity; Inclusion not a priority	Equality of access; Programme area expansion; European integration objective	Inclusion for public good; Equitable access for under- represented groups	Reconciliation with competitiveness (national inclusion action plans)

the agenda of federal/supranational student mobility policy through functional instruments such as student mobility programmes. To ensure compliance with the provisions for equality of access and participation in these programmes, the organisational HE regionalisation component, i.e., the actors responsible for implementing mobility funding and joint study programmes, has also been concerned with issues of inclusion. Our analysis reveals that, even though in the two compared contexts inclusion has been defined as a problem, it has not necessarily been at the core of policy solutions and, thus, has not played the role of a stand-alone rationale guiding supranational/federal student mobility policy. While Canada's Global Skills Opportunity directly addresses the issue of social equity, the programme still supports federal immigration interests.

When explaining why and how the issue of inclusion has (not) played a role in supranational/federal student mobility policy, it is useful to consider the aspects of national/provincial sensitivity, on the one hand, and of student mobility policy supporting wider supranational/federal policy objectives, on the other hand. When shaping student mobility policy, the supranational and federal levels have always needed to accommodate member states, provinces, or HE institutions themselves and their interests in programme financing and implementation. EU action is dependent on member state agreement, whereby inclusion has only found an entrance into supranational student mobility concerns when it has been positioned as fostering European integration more generally. As such, supranational action in education traditionally has served other objectives of European integration, primarily economic and political. With regards to Canada, the federal government cannot overstep its lack of jurisdiction over education, which is a provincial responsibility. Thus, the federal role in student mobility has been less related to regional integration but more strongly to a pan-Canadian skilled labour and immigration agenda. As shown above, prior to launching the Global Skills Opportunity programme, inclusion was subsumed under foreign and economic policy considerations.

Even though we identified a continuous and gradually increasing emphasis on inclusion in the assessed policy documents, studies have shown that this does not necessarily translate into programme implementation (e.g., Cairns, 2019). This reflects our finding that inclusion has not been a federal/supranational policy priority of its own standing until recently but instead has functioned as a silent, supportive idea in the economic and political realms of student mobility. With regard to conflicting goals, future research may further investigate the complex task of enacting student mobility programmes at the institutional level. This is particularly relevant given that, while macro-regional stakeholders such as the federal government in Canada and the EC can provide overall direction for internationalisation, there is an ever-growing horizontal cross-stakeholder impact from groups situated outside of the central authority.

While the purpose of this article has been to compare the development of supranational/federal student mobility objectives in Canada and the EU, its insights may also feed into future analyses of tensions between different levels, actors, competencies, and resources in the making of macro-regional policies. In particular, the tension between inclusion-related and economic factors as adhered to in our analysis can be illuminated in greater detail for the case of student mobility and for further policies that may also be characterised by shifts from market building to social policy. By accounting for problem formulations, rationales for action, and proposed appropriate solutions separately, one can first ask if the identified problems are faced by each sub-unit, such as a member state or province, or by the state/federation as a whole. One can furthermore determine whether the federal/supranational level pursues objectives that the subunits have agreed upon, or whether the federal/supranational level pursues its own objectives. Finally, one can inquire whether the proposed appropriate solutions involve sub-unit action and/or federal/supranational action. For this exercise, additional data would be required that go beyond the official discourse in documents. Expert and/or stakeholder interviews would be insightful sources, as they have the capacity to reveal underlying tensions between policymakers who, due to their location at different levels, are backed by different legal provisions and are equipped with different financial and political resources.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the editors of the issue "United in Uniqueness? Lessons From Canadian Politics for European Union Studies" and the participants of the corresponding panel at the EUSA Biennial Conference 2023 in Pittsburgh, in particular our discussant Amy Verdun, for their constructive feedback on our work. The publication costs were subsidized by the Cologne Monnet Association for EU Studies (COMOS) as part of its Jean Monnet project DAFEUS, which was funded by the European Commission.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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