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## Exploring Academic Mobility Experiences of Russian University Faculty Members

### Introduction

Internationalization of higher education (IHE) shapes the worldwide academic context and provides the conceptual grounding for this paper. The internationalization process has been deliberated upon at the national, sectoral, and institutional echelons. It has been conceptualized and defined in many ways, one of the generally accepted definitions describes it as "the integration of an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p.2). Hence, IHE is present in the holistic system of higher education, but primarily is integrated in the triangle of the core missions of higher education which is teaching, research and community service and is motivated by academic, socio-cultural, political and economic categories of rationales (de Witt, 1998; Hudzik, 2011).

Higher education institutions' internationalization efforts may be grounded in more rationales, such as competitiveness in the globalized markets, wider social engagement, education quality assurance, requirements of labor markets and world demographic trends, and others (OECD, 2008, Zha, 2003). Nevertheless, researchers' views are different in terms of relative importance of these rationales. For instance, while many prioritize the economic dimension and approach to IHE as to a response to globalization in the economic perspective, Marmolejo (2012) argues that the most important motivations for internationalization efforts of tertiary education institutions are, in the order of importance, improvement of student preparedness, internationalization of the curriculum, enhancement of the international profiles of the institutions, strengthening the research and knowledge generation, and diversity of the HEI faculty and staff.

Some definitions of IHE support this complex perspective and integrate more human-related dimensions of IHE, such as enhancement of the quality of research and education for the main university stakeholders that are students and faculty (de Wit, 2015), or prioritize the mobility of students, academic staff and educational programs (Albatch & Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2006). In the recent decade, the nexus and balance between the external direction of IHE, such as academic mobility and internally directed processes, such as internationalization at home are underscored in the literature (Hunter et al., 2022; de Wit, 2020). Hence, domestic internationalization, including internationalization of the curriculum becomes one of the major strategies to raise the quality of education and university competitiveness, but it is also an opportunity to develop intercultural competences of students and staff (Buckner, 2019). From this perspective, IHE can be conceptualized as integrating international and intercultural aspects into the planning, execution, and results of educational programs, with a specific emphasis on the teaching and learning processes (Leask, 2009). This notion also acknowledges students and academic staff as the principal stakeholders in the internationalization process and conceptualizes teaching and learning as an important dimension of inter- and intra-institutional efforts. The important role of individuals in IHE was also emphasized by Altbach and Knight (2007). On a similar note, academic mobility of students and staff as an essential part of internationalization effort of the universities can be defined in multiple ways; most of the definitions of faculty mobility imply relocation to the host institution, mainly abroad, for a variety of activities including teaching, research, engagement in other academic activities and professional development (Hoffman, 2009, Mendoza, 2010). All forms of academic mobility, such as short-term teaching or training visits, sabbaticals, long-term professional visits, or employment in HEIs abroad, are regarded as a valuable contribution to internationalization. These types of mobility maintain and even strengthen the scholarly cooperation among institutions and their units at the macro- and meso-levels of the university ecosystem, but also at the micro-level (cf. Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå &

Mårtensson, 2012), since individuals gain international experiences through which they may advance as internationally competent scholars (Altbach & de Witt, 2020; OECD, 2008).

Roxå and Mårtensson (2012) describe the complexity of the university ecosystem by using a multilayer approach that includes micro-, meso- and macro-levels, which is also helpful when we explore the systems where mobility experiences are embedded and the organizational dynamics that support or hinder staff mobility. These three levels are discussed from various perspectives. For instance, Renc-Roe and Roxå (2014) use these to capture global, national and local practices of educational internationalization, whereas others regard the micro-level as individuals, meso as internal social structures and networks, and macro as the whole educational institution and its management (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Simmons, 2020; Dorner & Mårtensson, 2021).

In this paper we will refer to individual faculty members as providing the micro-level perspective, meaning that through their lived experiences we will also inquire into their interaction with other formal structures within the institution. In so doing, we will aim to explore their insights about organizational dynamics that are at the intersection of micro- and meso-levels. Their larger context, namely, the educational institution represents the macro-level, that is, they reflect on it as a system which shapes processes occurring at the micro- and meso-level.

Researchers (Craciun, 2018; Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017; Lannert & Derenyi, 2020; Matei et al., 2018) have studied national policies and university internationalization efforts in Eastern Europe, but research on the Russian context is particularly meagre. Our data had been collected before the Ukraine-Russia conflict, nevertheless, findings may reflect individual faculty members' conceptualizations, which should provide further perspectives to the complex dynamics of internationalization in current times. As strategies of internationalization in Russian higher education were primarily anchored in revenue generation and in the increase of the global competitiveness and visibility through university rankings (Rozenkova & Rust, 2018), supported by the top-down approach to planning, controlling and governing internationalization in the country (Shenderova, 2018), academic mobility of students and staff seems overlooked and underprioritized. While full-degree student mobility is still regarded as a part of a revenue-generating strategy (Krasnova & Polushkina, 2020), mobility of faculty and non-academic staff as a part of the internationalization effort of the university is barely discussed in the literature. Hence, the contribution of this empirical paper (even if results reflect a small sample) should be relevant to the international scholarship.

### **Faculty mobility: a review of literature**

This study is anchored in the notion that academic mobility is a tangible dimension of ongoing internationalization efforts (OECD, 2014). Accordingly, we use the term 'academic mobility' as it was used by the Council of Europe (Recommendation No. R (95) 8) to describe "a period of study, teaching and research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence (henceforth referred to as the "home country"). This period is of limited duration. It is envisaged that the student or staff member return to his or her home country upon completion of the designated period" (p. 2).

Academic mobility is a fundamental aspect of internationalization initiatives of educational institutions, though research on faculty mobility still needs to be explored while student mobility is much more explored (Rostan & Hohle, 2014; Shen et al., 2022). Various studies define different objectives of academic staff mobility, starting from the teaching-aimed activities that are most common for higher education institutions, research-related mobility, which is less widely spread and is often combined with teaching duties in the hosting institutions, and the most recent type of the mobility aimed at training, academic and professional development of the faculty (Kratz et al., 2021). Faculty mobility motivations and outcomes, hindering and fostering factors, quality assurance, and career and professional impacts of the mobility experiences are also under consideration in the European context (Ball, 2019; Horváth et al., 2020; Klimkina & Sharma, 2022; Racke, 2013; Smeby & Trondal, 2005).

The international mobility outcomes (referring to the European context) are relatively positive, as studies reveal that faculty engaged in European mobility programs show more creativity and innovation in teaching, better research performance and scientific productivity, higher ICT proficiency, higher engagement in academic cooperation, enhanced reflexivity and critical thinking ability, self-growth as more culturally-sensitive and socially-skilled professionals (Alemu, 2020; Ball, 2019; Vlad, 2021; European Commission, 2019; Horta, 2013; Horváth et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2022.). Some of the mobility effects are specifically inherent to the faculty members engaged in research activities, such as enrichment of their research repertoire with explicit and tacit knowledge and practices acquired at the host institution, ability to navigate between different socio-cultural and disciplinary contexts, and development of cosmopolitanism (Coey, 2018; Jons, 2007). Benefits and outcomes of academic mobility on the global level such as enhancement of knowledge transfer and circulation across borders, boosting of international research cooperation, development of transnational academic networks and communities of practice, as well as non-academic outcomes such as building cross-cultural sensitivity, tolerance, and understanding are also a matter of discussion (Coey, 2018; Marginson, 2007; Shen et al., 2022).

### **The Russian context**

The European context is unique when discussing economic, political, social, or cultural dimensions and rationales for internationalization. Western Europe, in this sense, will visibly differ from Central and Eastern Europe, where some of the countries belong to the "former Soviet bloc" and some to the "former Eastern bloc" that determine their strategies (Orosz & Perna, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to briefly explain the context of Russia as a former Soviet country that, until recently, and at the time of data collection, shared European values and strived for the Eurasian identity (Pogorelskaya, 2023) in education, as far as academic mobility is discussed. At the end of the 20th Century, while European universities were actively discussing the IHE and including it in their agenda and strategies, Russia stood aside from the global internationalization process for quite a long time due to geographical, political, and historical reasons; the country started active participation in the ongoing educational integration process only in the early 2000th after joining the Bologna Process (Kortunov, 2019).

Faculty mobility is part of institutional internationalization that is very context-sensitive and is embedded in the national educational realities; in fact, Ryazantsev et al. (2019) claim that academic mobility in the Russian internationalization policies is vaguely defined and is more in the spotlight of immigration legislation rather than that of higher education. At the moment of data collection, most research exploring in- and outbound faculty mobility in Russia must be updated (Petriakova, 2015). In particular, the mobility efforts of universities were described as unsystematic; for instance, many needed an internationalization strategy or clear internationally directed institutional policies. On the institutional level, they do not collect and analyze data on the mobility of their students and staff (e.g., access to mobility, motivation to participate, research, and teaching outcomes) and do not integrate internationalization into the core missions of the organization (Zagvyazinskiy et al., 2020; Martynenko & Zhukova, 2008; Fatkhullina & Guryanova, 2014).

Thus, Russia is a unique example of internationalization practices because internationalization is not considered a grassroots initiative of higher education institutions. It is neither driven by national academia nor initiated by universities themselves; instead, it is guided and regulated by the state (Shenderova, 2018). Hence, academic mobility is not that much of a priority for the leadership of the universities, and it is not much perceived as a benefit for the faculty members, not being considered an essential component of their professional development and academic engagement; therefore, they may not even be aware of the advantages of participation in the mobility programs (Petriakova, 2015) or have no or limited access to information about mobility opportunities (Krasnova & Syulkova, 2014). Insights from faculty with mobility experience refine this understanding and add more clarity to this issue.

### **Research design and methodology**

This small-scale research explores the international mobility experiences of faculty members (N = 10) of Russian universities based in regions outside of the country's capital in 4 different universities. The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of academics' conceptualization of mobility and explore their lived experiences in the context of international mobility programs. Our research questions are as follows:

- How do interviewees perceive their lived experiences of academic mobility abroad – particularly their motivations, expectations, and outcomes of mobility?
- How do interviewees reflect on the academic mobility experience in the complex multilayer structure of educational institutions?

We inquired about the process of academic mobility in its entirety; that is, it was an overarching process with multiple phases. The lived experiences were reflected by the faculty member on a personal level. However, perspectives on the different levels of the university ecosystem (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2012) were also included. As this perspective is embedded in the complex dynamics of stakeholders and settings, the research requires a constructivist approach that strongly emphasizes the social and structural context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Data collection and analysis**

We used semi-structured interviews, that is, the topic of the interviews was predetermined, which provided the researchers with flexibility in terms of adjusting the questions and discussion during the interview (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, it also allowed for discovering the personal attitudes, ideas, and assumptions of the interviewees (Kvale, 2007).

The interview included 14 questions on three dimensions of the academic mobility experience. Namely, personal motivation to participate and expected results explored the experiences on the micro-level of the university ecosystem, reflecting on the institutional support and barriers from both the sending and receiving institutions, including the meso-level dynamics, mobility outcomes that affected professional performance in research and teaching and interactions with international and mobile students of the respondents' home institution reflected both levels of the ecosystem.

Ten faculty members from four regional public universities were interviewed in December 2021. We used purposive sampling and aimed to involve participants with predetermined characteristics: being employed at a regional university as academic staff, having participated in an international academic mobility program at least once, and residing in Russia. Nine participants were female and one male; all interviewees had full-time faculty positions engaged in teaching and research activities at the universities. At the time of the first mobility, 3 participants were 22-25 years old, 3 participants were 26-35 years old, and four were 36-42 years old. At the time of the interview, three were 25-35 years old, three belonged to the 36-45 age group, and others were 45-57. The academic experience depended on the participant's age as they all worked as university faculty members since the beginning of their career paths. The demographic data is provided only to describe the sample, as we did not observe any significant relations between the gender and age groups of the participants and their reflections on their mobility experiences.

The interviews were conducted online, which allowed the interviewer to screen both verbal and nonverbal communications in a similar way to face-to-face interviews (Salmons, 2010). They were recorded and transcribed.

We used thematic analysis (Patton, 2002) with a deductive approach to the interview analysis (Kvale, 2007; Patton, 2002; Brown & Clark, 2006). This means that we created a thematic matrix (based on reviewed literature) that enabled us to extract meaningful patterns and construct deductive conclusions, but also allowed themes to emerge, which were primarily implied by the interviews.

The themes included academic staff motivation for participation in academic mobility, support, and barriers they experienced in their home and host institutions, personal constraints like foreign language competencies or fears, cultural issues in educational organizations, informal ways of teacher

training, integration of the academic mobility experiences to their professional life. The key themes can be divided into three main groups, namely:

- Personal motivations of the faculty on the micro-level.
- Experiences connected with home and hosting institutions on the meso-level.
- Outcomes that the academics managed to integrate into their professional performance and career.

This research received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the ELTE Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology (ID 2023/173). Participants were guaranteed confidentiality of data, and they confirmed their volunteer participation by signing the informed consent form.

## Results

### *Motivations to participate in international mobility programs*

The motivation to participate was triggered by personal reasons, not necessarily related to professional activities; however, opportunities for self-development in academia, communication, networking, and immersion into a different academic environment mattered to interviewees. However, most of them acknowledged that the decision to participate in a particular mobility program is based on something other than their choice since that program is often the only option that academics know of. As found, lack of available information is often an impediment, although the universities where the interviewees are based have international relations offices. Still, the information on the available academic mobility opportunities only sometimes reached academic staff. Russia's current geopolitical situation has made this isolation even more intensive and resulted in a lack of opportunities caused by the exit of Russia from the Bologna system, the cancellation of international cooperation agreements, visa and flight restrictions, as well as a lack of funding (termination of Erasmus, DAAD and other European mobility programs). These changes, however, were not anticipated at the time of data collection, that is, three months before the crisis.

Interviewees also reported that academic mobility is still not a common practice in their immediate contexts, as also confirmed by studies conducted in the context of Russia (Petriakova, 2015), meaning that faculty members do not search for mobility opportunities until they receive some basic information from their colleagues or international offices of their institutions. Lack of funding is also reported as a constraint as only mobilities with institutional financial support are considered opportunities. Further, participation is not necessarily incentivized by their home institutions, neither at the macro- nor meso-level of the university ecosystem. However, it is conceived of as a personally rewarding experience driven mostly by internal motivation, such as the opportunity to travel, familiarize myself with a new culture, practice a foreign language, or network (Table 1). Nevertheless, in some cases, the home institution fosters participation in academic mobility programs, usually connected to university obligations within the framework of international cooperation agreements or joint international projects with partner institutions.

**Table 1.** *Motivation for academic mobility*

Themes	Sample Quotes
Personal reasons	
Curiosity	<p>"...the reason is as banal as trivial human curiosity. I wanted to see what is over there [in a foreign country], and how is it there, and what is being done there" (Participant 4)</p> <p>"...my main motivation was to see how they were living and doing." (Participant 9)</p>
Opportunities to travel	"...it was difficult for me to afford any long-distance trips abroad, and academic mobility allowed to get such an opportunity for free" (Participant 1)
Experiencing culture	"...it gives a fuller sense of interaction with culture" (Participant 10)

	“...to see how other people live, in the other country. For example, I compare myself now and before: before I, for example, wore suits [at work], and now I wear jeans and sneakers.” (Participant 4)
Professional reasons	
Academic development	“...developing myself is more important to me. That’s why I chose a mobility” (Participant 5) “...trying to lecture in English was my personal challenge. But I knew that if I try, it would be a great step forward” (Participant 8)
Learning new professional practices	“...started preparing for the lecture, you become aware that you will lecture abroad not in the same way as you do at home” (Participant 2) “...if we want to join international research agenda, we need to learn methods and instruments that our foreign colleagues apply” (Participant 3)
Academic networking	“...when contacts are established, these people got included in the organizing committees of conferences, and so on...” (Participant 4)
Foreign language improvement	“...this was a sort of my primary goal: since I work as an English teacher, I need to improve my language accordingly” (Participant 1) “...aside of other goals I expected my English level improvement” (Participant 3)

### Support for academic mobility

On the institutional structures level, which is referred to here as the meso-level of the university ecosystem, faculty felt supported by the international offices. For instance, academics were provided visa support or help with other travel arrangements (Table 2). However, international officers lacked the skills and competencies needed to provide more strategic guidance or support for career development.

The interviewees also revealed that in most cases, faculty mobility from Russian universities is supported financially by host institutions or international organizations, though recently, this has dramatically changed. Faculty members reflected on the importance of such support as it enables them to collaborate, access different lab equipment, resources, and facilities unavailable in their home institutions, and explore advanced research and teaching methods.

**Table 2.** *Institutional support of academic mobility*

Themes	Sample Quotes
Support from the home institutions	
Financial support	“...both sending and hosting parties supported me, my institution covered some expenses too, for instance, they paid my flight” (Participant 2) “...my university did not participate in mobility funding anyway...” (Participant 8) “...[my mobility] was arranged as a business-trip. The employer did not cover my travel costs, but kept paying the teaching salary, and I did not have to take a leave for this travel” (Participant 4)
Administrative support	“...the university had a prearranged procedure for all professors, a kind of “green corridor” for arranging visas and invitations” (Participant 2) “...I did not have to do anything, and my Erasmus+ mobility was fully arranged by the university” (Participant 9)
Informational support	“...I did not have any information. But I used every opportunity that I could find myself” (Participant 7)
Support from the host institution	
Financial support	“...the hosts provided us with dormitories and gave lunch vouchers for the canteen, we appreciated it” (Participant 4). “...all funding was provided by the host university” (Participant 1)
Administrative support	“...[in the host institution] I had mentors, and an advisor who guided me through all legal procedures” (Participant 5)

“...they [the hosts] arranged everything – a working place, access to internet and the university library, all that I needed” (Participant 3)

### Perceived success of academic mobility

The perceived success of the mobility experience was related to the type of mobility and academic activities they were engaged in. Faculty mobility may differ depending on the institutional internationalization practices, participants' roles at their universities, and their interests. For instance, it may depend on the type of engagement, that is, engagement in research, teaching, and administrative activities and the related objectives of the mobility; and aligned to these activities, it may vary according to its duration (short- or long-term) (Rostan & Höhle, 2014). Further, interviewees who referred to themselves primarily as researchers and associated their goals during the mobility with research activities reported professional accomplishment and reflected on their mobility period as being able to finally devote themselves entirely to their research (Table 3). Perceived success, therefore, meant efficiently using research time and progress. The research environment, access to resources, the professional attitude of the host institution's academic staff, and the opportunity to join international research groups on-site contributed to the perceived success of the mobility experience.

Academics who conceptualized themselves as teachers and performed teaching activities on mobility reflected on their interaction with students and colleagues as exciting but also challenging due to language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of awareness about academic cultures and practices of the host institutions. However, feeling engaged in the academic environment, appreciated as teachers by the hosting institutions' students and academic staff, and comfortable in these interactions have contributed to their self-perceived success and self-awareness. Further, interviewees referred to themselves as active learners during the mobility period, which was not so much connected to foreign language communication but to informal professional development. In particular, they reflected on their learning in the workplace setting, that is, attending courses, workshops, or talks and experiencing informal learning in their interactions with students and faculty at the host institution. The role of teachers in a given national context was also one of the topics that interviewees reflected upon. In particular, they highlighted the differences in teacher-student relations in local (national) contexts and the emerging need to develop teachers capable of teaching both domestic and international students.

Steadily navigating through the institutional culture of the host institution was also mentioned as an essential contribution to feeling successful as a visiting faculty member. In particular, this perspective was mentioned in connection with differences in teaching and research approaches (Table 3), e.g., the policies that regulate teaching and research, the classrooms as a physical space, teaching strategies used, student workload, and assessment. The institutional culture was also described as unfamiliar to the participants. Thus, the experience of academic mobility was likely to broaden participants' boundaries in terms of using their cultural competencies and, in so doing, providing new insights and lived experiences as teachers. It may be integrated into one's inventory at the home institution after the mobility period completion, which is one of the goals of the internationalization of higher education.

**Table 3.** *Perceived success of academic mobility*

Themes	Sample Quotes
Researchers' perspective on mobility success	
Research engagement	“...I left the students for three months, left my family, and was engaged in science fully. I have done a tremendous amount of work. Thanks to mobility, I made a huge contribution to my doctoral thesis.” (Participant 4)
Academic networking	“...the experience greatly influenced my job – now we're having a joint project with my hosting professor, and another project is under development, and the foreign colleagues are waiting for us to participate” (Participant 3)

	“...We have joint publications. These are not world-class discoveries, this is clear, but at least the material was collected for good publications that got into the citation databases of SCOPUS, Web of Science and so on.” (Participant 6)
Engagement with the international research agenda	“...academic mobility in terms of science is very useful for us, I mean, for the Russian researchers, as it shows how we compare to international colleagues” (Participant 4) “...participation in research, those joint scientific projects with the Institute of [city]for instance – it was more than I could expect” (Participant 3)
Teachers’ perspective on mobility success	
Teaching practices	“...I observed how those teachers do it, how they teach... For this purpose, I also signed up for language courses as a student.” (Participant 1)
Formal and informal learning	“...it was not that much about formal sharing of the knowledge, but enriching interaction that allowed changing the perspective. Mutually enriching” (Participant 10) “..you are not only learning, you get enriched with cultural knowledge as well – about that country, people, their way of working, both professional and personal” (Participant 7)
Feedback from colleagues/students	“...I felt the feedback, communication, we exchanged information with students, and they were interested. I also felt I am achieving my professional ambitions.” (Participant 5)

### Disciplinary and teaching in English

Those interviewees who reflected on themselves as researchers highlighted the importance of participation in transnational research collaborations. They stressed that it is an obligation and one of the main objectives of participation in scientific collaboration to follow the international research agenda and to be able to advance as researchers. In so doing, they referred to the importance of this bridge between their agenda as well as their disciplinary community, hence, the perspective of interconnecting micro- and meso-levels (Table 3). Nevertheless, some faculty referred to themselves as teachers, focusing on the importance of sharing teaching practices and stressing the bilateral nature of this exchange. However, much attention was paid to preparing and practicing teaching in English, which was quite a unique experience for most faculty members as English is not a language of instruction in their home institutions. Being successful in facilitating a class in their discipline in English affected their self-perception and contributed to the feeling of professional integrity and growth. They also added that in so doing, they experienced appreciation by the hosting academic community and the students, which positively impacted their work motivation, engagement in international academic events, and internationalization of the curricula back at their home institutions. Another important insight was the opportunity to stay updated in teaching practices, as the interviewees found considerably different teaching methods and strategies, which enriched their academic repertoire.

### Discussion

#### *Faculty mobility experience across vertical and horizontal axes*

The decision to embark on faculty mobility is not a spontaneous process based on personal assumptions but underpinned by information from colleagues and international officers. It reflects the importance and usefulness of collegial conversations at the meso-level of the institution and expands the engagement of academic and non-academic staff in this dialogue. The high degree of trust among faculty members that affects this decision-making process is often anchored in strongly connected smaller academic communities, which show similarities with microcultures, as their members share specific professional values and internal trust (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2013).

Similarly, international cooperation officers may participate in collegial conversations on mobility opportunities and experiences. These contribute to the horizontality of such knowledge sharing at the meso-level. Nevertheless, as Bartell (2003) explains, such a horizontal connection needs to be more evident, and the difference in professional roles and aims between professors and administrative staff may impede this communication. In our study, interviewees also expressed the need for more skilled support for strategic career guidance and administrative support. Nevertheless, this could imply the need for researcher development (Evans, 2011) and holistic academic development (Sutherland, 2018), which are sporadically or unavailable in Russian universities.

Further, our findings point towards the misalignment between university leadership and faculty in terms of perceptions of the importance of mobility for the individual teachers and researchers and the organization. In particular, our results confirmed Petriakova's (2015) claim that faculty did not expect career advancement or benefits from their university management due to their mobility. The interviewees recollected that university leadership generally appreciated their mobility initiatives but neither initiated nor promoted mobility opportunities. However, the engagement of committed leaders on the vertical axis, such as deans, department chairs, faculty coordinators, and international officers, is imperative for moving towards comprehensive internationalization, a basic goal of academic mobility (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). In the European context, faculty perspectives align with our empirical results, namely, faculty efforts toward academic mobility are not appreciated enough by the university management, or the appreciation is not explicitly expressed by compensations, awards, or career promotion (Engel, 2010; Horvath et al., 2020).

In the Russian context, these conclusions are also confirmed by Teplyakov's (2018) analysis showing that faculty mobility is only sometimes regarded as an essential contribution to complex university internationalization, which also is indirectly evidenced by the university management's lack of encouragement of faculty mobility. In other words, personal commitment and self-initiated efforts of faculty to participate in mobility programs may be appreciated by the leaders but not much supported by the home institutions. In Russian universities, international cooperation agreements are sufficient evidence of internationalization, and so is incoming student mobility, which is regarded as an export of education or revenue generation (Ryazantsev et al., 2019). Hence, faculty mobility is not a priority at the institutional level (Teplyakov & Teplyakova, 2018; Shenderova, 2018).

To sum, university internationalization is formally acknowledged on the macro-level, and the administrative support of faculty mobility is provided on the meso-level, but the initiative followed by action towards participation in mobility emerges primarily on the micro-level. This misalignment or fractured dynamic across the various levels suggests that faculty mobility is not integrated, neither conceptually nor operationally, in the university ecosystem, which also indicates that researcher or academic development would be needed to provide streamlined support at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels.

### **Integrating (or not) mobility experiences**

Reported integration of experiences and practices acquired during the mobility differ depending on self-conceptualization of the faculty as teachers or researchers and on the main activities they are engaged in in their home institutions. Interviewees who identified themselves more as researchers highlighted concrete, 'measurable' outcomes which they described as evidence of successful mobility. They mentioned accomplished doctoral research, engagement in international research projects, or publications in indexed journals. Academics who described themselves as teachers or educators, although discussed changes in their teaching practices, expressed personal fulfillment and professional accomplishment, did not necessarily relate these to career enhancement nor identified them as concrete substantial outputs of the mobility experience. Implications of this difference in perceptions of accomplishments during the mobility period are twofold. First, it implies the divide between teaching and research. Particularly, the notion that in the context of faculty mobility, too, the clearly identifiable artefacts are those that remain tangible from a performative perspective, albeit the claims

that this binary is problematic as it inadequately describes the complexities of academic work and identities (cf. McAlpine & Åkerlind, 2010). Second, it also indicates that the intellectual and reflective post hoc groundwork may be lacking. Hence, structured opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment, which may result in integrating lessons learned in the post-mobility academic work are missing. This is partially explained by universities not recognizing mobility as career development (Ball, 2019; Horvath et al., 2020) as well as by the lack of its integration in institutional career progression systems (Racke, 2013), which is also the case in Russia.

### Limitations

The study is affected by methodological, theoretical, and more general constraints (cf. Price & Murnan, 2004). The methodological issues relate to empirical data collection, namely, to sampling and generalizability of the results. The sampling was purposive as the research focuses on the predetermined national context. However, in the Russian context, internationalization differs from region to region and institution by institution due to the large territory. Different levels of access to international cooperation characterize it. Also, the national focus of academic mobility shifts from east to west across the country, affecting both motivations for and outcomes of mobility. Similarly, the context and the period of the study constitute a significant limitation as data collection barely preceded the Ukrainian-Russian war, which has radically shifted the framing of this research.

### Conclusions

Faculty mobility is widely acknowledged as an essential indicator of internationalization in higher education; however, in some higher educational systems, for instance, in Russia, faculty mobility is neither regarded as a priority nor recognized as an essential constituent of internationalization success (Shenderova, 2018). Hence, faculty mobility from Russian universities is self-induced and driven by personal rather than external motivations. In the university ecosystem (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2012), opportunities for faculty mobility are rarely provided or promoted on the macro level and induced by the university management, even though the institutions have resources and capacity to provide this support, mobility is initiated on the micro level by individual academics. Hence, participation in mobility is not regarded as a part of the internationalization efforts by the university management and, hence, not valued (Petriakova, 2015). Nevertheless, personal incentives are generally supported at the macro level but are not likely to result in any reward or career advancement (Teplyakov & Teplyakova, 2018). Administrative support is provided on the meso level and is embedded in horizontal communications among groups of academics and administrative colleagues; however, the lack of trust and partnership between these groups inhibits support and circulation of information about mobility opportunities across institutions. Opportunities for career advising and self-reflection preceding and following the mobility experience as a part of mobility strategic planning are also lacking, which could potentially have longer-term effects on the micro as well as meso-level, such as fostering internationalization at home (cf. Teekens, 2007) or enhancing the culture of teaching and learning (cf. Trowler & Cooper, 2002). Although anchored in a specific setting and small in scale, these findings may contribute to the scholarly discussion on university internationalization and provide further insights into specific contextual dynamics.

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