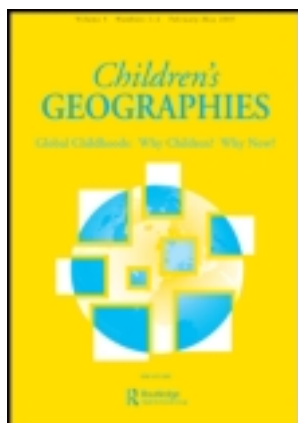


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Youth migration and spaces of education

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Youth migration and spaces of education

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Introduction

More than ever, young people move. Over the past few decades, political, economic, social and demographic changes in many parts of the world have uprooted many people and stimulated migration to cities and abroad. (UNFPA 2006, v)

This special theme on youth migration, a key strand of the broader phenomenon of the population movements of young people and which the above quote suggests is increasing globally, emanates from three sessions on Youth Migration and Mobility at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference (London, August 2011). Tellingly, our call for contributions on youth migration yielded a diverse set of papers for the sessions that were, unintentionally, united by the common theme of education-induced youth migration. This link between youth migration and education forms the core of this special theme, with the main aim to explore how, why and where education-related factors shape contemporary forms of youth migration, and vice versa.

There is a well-established scholarship on young persons (i.e. school pupils, college and university students) migrating across local, regional and national boundaries to increasingly 'consume' school and college (e.g. Smith and Higley 2012), national higher education (HE) (e.g. Hinton 2011) and international HE (e.g. Waters, Brooks, and Helena Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Also important here, although less researched, are the movements of individuals (e.g. teachers, academics, managers/administrators, agencies) and institutions (Waters and Leung, this theme) to produce, manage and deliver education for young people in highly competitive education labour markets and market places (e.g. J  ns 2009; Kim 2009).

The focus of the theme therefore connects with this wide scholarly interest with under-researched young migrant populations, and the unfolding processes that are shaping the new ways in which more and more young people move within and between nations (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Findlay et al. 2006). This is typified by calls to progress more fully the understandings of the migrant agency of both children (e.g. Dobson 2009; Ni Laoire 2011; Tyrrell et al. 2013) and youths (e.g. Brooks and Waters 2010; Geisen 2010), and how migration is implicated in the formation of contemporary childhood and youth identities and experiences. As Barker et al. (2009, 7) assert, for example, there is a need to 'develop multiple understandings of how, when, why and where younger age and mobilities are co-constitutive' (Skelton 2009; Holt and Costello 2010; Skelton and Gough 2013).

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Arguably, one of the key reasons for the rising attention to youth migration is the growing empirical evidence of the higher magnitude and wider scale of youth migration in the Global North (e.g. Cairns 2010; Fielding 2013) and South (e.g. Porter et al. 2011; Yeoh et al. 2012). Emblematic of this trend is the recent United Nations International Youth Day (12 August 2013) – marked by the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) flagship event on the migration of young people. Specifically focussing on the 27 million young people that migrate internationally, the ILO notes the lack of research findings in this area and poses a series of pressing questions about international youth migration, albeit with a labour-motivated lens of enquiry (Table 1).

Such issues have resonance to current internal, sub-national migration research agendas, where understandings of diverse and new forms of youth migration tied to moves for study, work, and familial and other factors urgently need to be advanced. For example, Kong (2013) recently describes the ‘*unprecedented mobilities* generated by and through HE, prompting reflections about identity, citizenship and cosmopolitanism’ (emphases added). In the UK context, studies of studentification (Smith and Holt 2007) are important here pointing to the need for more research on the various complexions of migrant youth populations moving within the UK to study HE in different regions (Hubbard 2008).

In conjunction with the overall increased rates and flows of youth migration, both sub-nationally and internationally, it is important to acknowledge that patterns of youth migration are highly uneven, with particular sending and receiving towns and cities, regions and countries having higher propensities for attracting, losing and retaining youth migrants (Bailey 2009). At the same time, prominent axes of social difference, such as age, social class, culture, gender and ethnicity, often intersect to give rise to differential rates and flows of migration between different young adult social groups (Holloway et al. 2010). It would be beneficial to capture the more socially and culturally specific processes and outcomes that are tied to both sub-national and international youth migration, such as emotions, well-being, quality-of-life and proximity to family and friends (Tse and Waters 2013 for discussion of ‘geographical sensibilities’, for example). A gamut of these themes are examined, in tandem with economic-led factors, in the following articles that include case studies from the Global North (Europe: Germany, the Netherlands, UK and Switzerland), and two articles from the Global South on South Korea and Hong Kong, respectively.

The collection thus includes contributions that explore the diverse connections between youth migration and education, encompassing a range of spatial scales, contexts, temporalities, methods and meanings of migration. The first three articles deal with various temporary, international moves that are generally reversible (e.g. short-term), undertaken to realise opportunities for: international high school exchange programmes (Weichbrodt), international student work placements

Table 1. Key questions on youth migration (International Labour Organisation 2013).

What motivates a young person to migrate?
What factors affect the decision to migrate for work?
Do educated young migrants find better opportunities abroad?
What jobs do young migrant workers do?
How did young migrants fare during the economic crisis?
What are the benefits of migration for destination countries?
What are the negative effects of migration for destination countries?
What are the benefits of migration for origin countries?
What are the negative effects of migration for origin countries?
What can host and origin countries do to maximise the benefits and reduce the risks of international labour migration?

(Deakin) and the uptake of teaching-English abroad posts (Collins). In the fourth article, mobility relates to transnational education programmes (TNE) moving to Hong Kong, and the education of local 'non-elite' students (Waters and Leung). The following three articles focus on the internal, longer-term, regional migration of young adults within a country. Two articles explore return migration to a rural region after a period of study at university in an urban centre (Rérat; Haartsen and Thissen), and the last article analyses inter-regional internal migration flows at the scale of England and Wales (Smith and Sage).

A structurationist reading of youth migration?

One of the key nodes of coalescence between the articles in this special theme is the accelerated rate of some forms of youth migration; interpreted as a response to changing opportunities and constraints triggered by dynamic, structural conditions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Weichbrodt asserts, for instance, that 'mobility patterns are to a high degree influenced by national institutions like the school system'. Similarly, Deakin contends that 'mobility is very much encouraged and sustained by processes of neoliberalisation in HE'.

Within this fluid current context of youth migration, it is vital to pose important questions about the capacity and power of youth migrant agency to create/reproduce, and become embroiled in both new and traditional forms of youth migration. This resonates with broader well-defined social science scholarship over the last decade that shows, for instance, how migration is a strategic, agency-led practice of some individuals to shape personal and collective socio-cultural identities, often theorised by the 'individualisation thesis'. This is reflected in Collins' contribution to this theme, which notes the 'tensions between the capacity for young people to chart their own trajectories and the influence of broader structural processes'. Indeed, Rérat argues that it is important to recognise that 'migrants are not the mere subjects of external forces', and that 'internal migrations are far from being the sole consequence of labour market conditions'.

Therefore, unfolding complex inter-relationships between structure and migrant agency are integral to many of the articles on youth migration in this special theme; all of which endeavour to make sense of various contemporary flows of youth migration in the context of changing systems of education and multiple transitions between schooling, HE and labour markets.

With this challenge in mind, and in line with other strands of migration studies scholarship [for example family migration: Halfacree (1995) and Smith (2004)], structurationist readings are valuable to grapple with the dualities of structure and agency within youth migration processes and outcomes, and to consider the ways in which migrant agency can be both reproductive and/or transformative of structural conditions. Indeed, it is useful to consider if contemporary forms of youth migration are simply perpetuating longstanding processes and patterns of youth migration, and/or, yet, at the same time, leading to the formation of new youth migration patterns and processes, and, in turn, possibly reconfiguring structural conditions and normative social practices. Central to the majority of the following articles are discussions of the mediating practices of institutional actors and organisations embroiled in the commodification of education and migration, and how changing structures of education would appear to provide new opportunities for some young people to move within and across national boundaries.

Weichbrodt's opening article addresses the, arguably, under-researched theme of international high school exchange (Carlson 2013). Weichbrodt reveals that this form of youth migration is now growing in popularity in Germany, particularly for younger people from the education-oriented middle class (2.5% of 16-year-olds go abroad for 6–12 months). It is shown that these mobility programmes draw a specific geography (80% of the students go to an English-speaking country), and enable teenagers to 'learn international mobility' at an early phase, which have longer-term impacts on higher migration propensities of this social group in the future.

Weichbrodt argues that these education-related migration experiences play an important role in the normalisation of the transnationalisation of societies (Cairns and Smythe 2011). Further international experience is, indeed, rather the rule and many participants assign a high importance to this educational-led experience. Even a long time after the exchange, it is revealed that transnational contacts form part of their lives (exchange with the host family, visits, etc.), which leads to a more cosmopolitan worldview in general. Overall, Weichbrodt's article may importantly point to the trickling down to the school level and earlier phases of the youth lifecourse of a general ethos for young people to migrate for prized education experiences; a trend that is clearly increasingly penetrating into HE systems, as epitomised by other articles in this theme.

Perhaps most notably, Deakin exposes the increasing connections between HE and migration in her analyses of Erasmus work placement mobility of British students, who spend 3–12 months in an enterprise or organisation in another European country. The key drivers of this form of education-led mobility are shown to be interlinked and rarely act in isolation: employability, the economic downturn and subsequent failure to secure a placement in the UK, language, financial factors (grant, salary) and personal factors. Deakin asserts that these drivers have to be put in the perspective of the neoliberalisation of HE (Holloway et al. 2010). An increased emphasis is put on the notion of graduate employability, and education is seen as a private good and not a public responsibility. This can be found in graduates' strategy of 'standing out', of 'boosting their curriculum vitae' in order to be able to return to work in the UK as desired by most of them. Deakin's article is particularly important given aspirations of many HE establishments to enhance graduate employability through the promotion of work placements, as well as study abroad placements, which can involve a temporary relocation to another region or country, during the period of study. It is likely that such forms of migration will be on the rise during the next decade, and will intensify the rates of youth migration in the developed world.

Collins' investigation of recent graduates from English-speaking countries, who teach English languages in South Korea, highlights the significance of both structure and action in the engagement of young adults in mobility and the multidimensional character of their decision-making processes. For Collins, mobility is viewed as part of a life phase where individuals learn about the wider world and, as a result, learn about themselves. Travel, mobility and exploration are central features of a so-called process of individualisation that allows individuals to conform to expected practices of middle-class educated youth (Rutten and Verstappen 2013). Yet, the choice to work in South Korea is also a response to various economic circumstances (debts, difficulty of finding a stable job in the home country, etc.), and this is clearly structured by the local context of HE outcomes and financing. Collins' article is valuable in drawing attention to some of the possible new ways that some young, post-students may delay their transition into depressed labour markets, and, in doing so, enhance their future employability (e.g. volunteering) and skills.

Waters and Leung's article examines the relationship between young people's transitions to HE in Hong Kong and the opportunities afforded by TNE organised by universities from English-speaking countries for non-elite students. Waters and Leung stress that many young people (particularly outside the 'West') do not follow conventional paths through education into employment, but in fact lead 'complex lives'. In Hong Kong, this is especially applicable to those who have failed to access domestic HE directly. It is shown that these non-elite social groups have to negotiate the shifting terrains of educational provision in an era where credentials are seen as 'everything' – and have therefore been forced into pursuing 'continuing education' and using TNE as a stepping-stone to local universities. A key contribution of Waters and Leung's article is to remind us that not all young people have the same opportunities and aspirations to realise education-related youth migration, and that axes of social difference and inequalities can result in relatively immobile youth populations, and/or can influence the temporalities and scale and distance of youth migration.

Rérat addresses the motivations of young university graduates returning to their rural home region in Switzerland (Ní Laoire 2011). The necessity to transcend traditional explanations of internal migration is suggested, with Rérat arguing for a focus on migrants' self-reported motives. It is revealed that return migration can be regarded as resulting from a conjunction of factors related to social and personal life, living environment and the labour market (while strictly economic aspects are clearly less important). The combination of these factors varies among individuals but no specific tradeoffs are found with the exception of the choice of the employment sector for some graduates (e.g. teaching makes a return more likely). Other adaptation strategies (such as underemployment, overqualification and long-distance commuting) exist but they do not appear more frequently among young graduates in a rural region than elsewhere in Switzerland. Rérat's article is useful to draw attention to the movements of post-students and the transitions from education to labour markets, particularly at a time when these transitions are being reconfigured in many developed world contexts. For example, in the UK context, Sage et al. (2013) have recently found the increase of post-students moving back to parental home, as current depressed labour markets (i.e. less employment opportunities; Scarpetta, Sonnet, and Manfredi 2010) and economic burdens accrued from HE (i.e. higher levels of student debt) do not allow entry into the housing market.

Haartsen and Thissen also explore the motives of young adults returning to their rural home region in the Netherlands. This article makes an original contribution to debates of internal return migration by raising questions about 'what mobility means'. Intriguingly in some cases, return migration could actually be interpreted as staying in the home region; since it is shown that many young adult returnees had not mentally left the region while studying at a HE institution in an urban centre. Indeed, it is revealed that some migrants still even view the parental home as their home, during their residence in their 'temporary' place of destination. Return migration appears to be more complex than the traditional economic success-failure argument (hypothesis of the failure returnees). It relates to more than one motive and refers to four orientations: the social, family, functional (or related to a job) and partner orientation. The various combinations of these orientations confirm the notion of non-linear transitions of 'becoming' an adult, and, are in tandem, with other recent commentaries of changing transitions between youth and adulthood.

Smith and Sage analyse the internal migration of young adults (16–24-year-olds) in England and Wales between 2002 and 2008. They argue that long-distance movement(s) of young adults is a leading constituent of demographic and population changes in society. In the UK context, Smith and Sage provide empirical evidence that young adults are indeed a highly mobile group and represent an increasing proportion of regional migrants. Moreover, the flows of youth migrants do not adhere to the recent trend of declining propensity of internal migration for other social groups in the developed world (Cooke 2013). Moreover, Smith and Sage reveal that the migration flows of young adults are uneven, and major regional differences are observed. It is argued that these findings are apt given the potential reconfiguration of regional migration flows in the UK ignited by the effects of the economic recession and shifting socio-economic conditions (e.g. the recent introduction of higher tuition fees, unemployment level) on the capacity of young people to move for education and/or work.

Conclusion: the 'exclusivity' of education-related youth migration

Overall, this special theme stresses how contemporary national and international spaces of education are prominent anchors, essential markers of social and cultural identity and training grounds for the future social and spatial mobilities in the lives and aspirations of many young people. The articles show that educational experiences are increasingly being manufactured, delivered and realised in such a way that the movement of some young people is triggered to

realise new opportunities for prized, educational experiences, both within and across (inter) national boundaries. These extended spatial expressions of youth migration are fuelled by the neoliberalisation of school and HE systems within competitive national and global market places, the ever-increasing diffusion of commodified (transnational) education credentials and qualifications, and the high value that is ascribed to inter-cultural experiences, albeit within different regional and national educational contexts to enhance personal development, cultural capital and employability in exclusive labour markets.

In this sense, education spaces and experiences can be viewed as a platform for some young people to become ‘apprentice migrants’ at a range of spatial scales and temporalities, in a changing world where migration and mobility becomes a more normative, taken-for-granted social practice, which can be adopted by individuals and institutions to reproduce privilege and advantage in later phases of their lifecourses (Smith and Jöns, forthcoming). The work of Frandberg (2009) is important in this context, suggesting that: ‘The mobility of youth and children is of interest in this context, not least since the period under study represents a phase of life when habits, and much of what is later on taken for granted, are often established’ (650). In a similar vein, Weichbrodt reveals in this special theme that ‘mobility reproduces itself’, with those engaged in high school exchange ‘learning international mobility’, and becoming embedded in ‘a normalisation of transnational social practices’. Likewise, Collins describes ‘the growing normalisation of international mobility’. What this special theme therefore points to is the need for more integrative studies of youth and adult migration, which ultimately seek to weave together how distinctive phases of the lifecourse are inter-connected to understand more fully how and why particular individuals have different propensities to migrate or stay-put. This begs important questions about the ‘most spatially mobile groups of tomorrow’, perhaps suggesting that these are more likely to map on to the most mobile youth populations within the current context, such as youth populations moving across regions and national boundaries for education.

Of course, such a simplistic representation of adult migration being pre-ordained by youth migration masks the considerable diversity of youth migration processes and outcomes. As this special theme has served to demonstrate, there are a range of different educational contexts and training grounds for (youth) migrants that involve combinations of transient, short-term (Frandberg 2009, 2013) and longer-term moves, sub-national or international moves, non-return or return relocations, and a diversity of motivations and aspirations for moving. Within this wide arena of youth migration, we would argue that the broader opportunities and constraints for education-related migration is a key divider between distinct social groups that are included and excluded in contemporary societies and labour markets.

This process of exclusive, education-led migration can be viewed as forming part of Bynner’s (2005, 380) wider interpretation of changes to youth lifestyles and identities, whereby: ‘emerging adults have available, at least in principle, a more extended set of opportunities than at any other time’. The articles in this theme clearly reveal the unfolding impacts of changing systems of school (Weichbrodt), HE (Deakin, Waters and Leung) and post-graduation (Collins, Rérat, Haartsen and Thissen, Smith and Sage) that is arguably bound-up within processes of globalisation, internationalisation and neoliberal configurations of education. Crucially, the articles point to a process whereby education-related migration is expressive of choice and preference, as opposed to a forced decision; the decision to move is intentional and often viewed in a positive way, particularly at the pre-migration phase of the decision-making process.

However, and importantly, Bynner (2005) adds that: ‘we need to recognise that the traditional routes to adulthood, with far fewer of its emergent signs of its emergent status, are still very much in place’ (ibid). The articles included in this special theme suggest that entrenched axes of social difference would appear to an integral explanatory factor in understanding the social differentiation of opportunities and constraints which are reproducing and transforming youth migration processes

and outcomes. Equally important are the links between education and non-migration, and the factors that constrain some young people from moving to realise opportunities for education experiences. The articles in this special theme suggest the culture, class, ethnicity, gender and other factors cross-cut in inclusionary and exclusionary ways to influence who moves and who stays put to access specific educational experiences tied to migration. In other words, in addition to the external structures mentioned above (i.e. neoliberalisation of education, inflation of education credentials), the role of internal constraints such as gender, social class background, ethnicity and their varying socialisation are major influential factors on social and spatial mobility (Holdsworth 2006, 2009).

To conclude, this special theme shows a pressing need to take more seriously how structural changes and ruptures in school, college and HE systems enable and constrain young people to move to acquire capitals and credentials to succeed in competitive global labour markets in the future, and how such youth migrants can define strategies to take advantage from these opportunities. Moreover, such practices of youth migration and the inter-linked opportunities to learn and 'become migrants' may be an important factor in more fully understanding divisions between privileged and disadvantaged social groups in the unfolding decades of the twenty-first century.

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