

Abstract: We identify factors influencing young scientists' plans for research stays abroad by embedding theories of social inequality, educational decision making, and migration into a life course framework.

We test the developed model of international academic mobility using data from an online survey of scientists employed at German universities below the rank of full professor (WiNbus). This survey placed special emphasis on the international orientation and mobility of young scientists and therefore allows us to adequately operationalise our theoretical constructs.

We test our theoretical model by calculating a structural equation model (SEM). In contrast to conventional regression procedures, an SEM allows us to easily observe both the direct and indirect effects of certain variables and to estimate their total effect on the likelihood of planning a research stay abroad. It additionally allows us to examine how well our theoretical model fits the examined survey data. This method thus permits us to test the developed life course model of international academic mobility on the whole.

Our results show that that earlier international mobility mobilises scientists to plan a research stay abroad. This turns out to be a potential channel of social inequality reproduction, as individuals from a high social origin in particular spend time abroad in their early life course. Moreover, scientists' research contexts play a vital role: Internationalised institutional environments and academic disciplines as well as the embeddedness in personal international networks create opportunity structures that ease research stays abroad. Similarly, the current social context matters: Parenthood decreases the likelihood of plans for international mobility among female scientists. This may entail long-lasting gender inequalities. Finally, young scientists striving for an academic career are more likely to plan a research stay abroad than those with exit plans.

On a broader theoretical level, our results back the view that the decision to become internationally mobile is the consequence of a succession of events and decisions over time rather than the outcome of a conscious deliberation at a single point in time. Beyond the current context, both past life events and future life goals shape scientists' decisions about international mobility.

Keywords: International academic mobility, Life course, Social inequality, Decision making, Migration, Structural equation model