Social change and scholarships:
The case of the long-term impacts of the MSP on the society of origin of the student

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meet the world

Summary

International scholarships that give the opportunity to young students to study in a foreign country have a long history that goes back to the 2nd after war, in which Western countries and Soviet governments need to maintain good and stable relationships with countries that freed themselves from the status of colonies or that were in the same political and economic sphere of influence (Tsvetkova, 2008). Their pursuits varied from increasing the soft power towards countries distant in political terms to the conscious selection of graduates to integrate into sectors lacking formed professionals. The underlying assumption of the "win-win" situation, both for the student and the donor country, was considered legitimate and this led to the increase in the demand of scholarships and other forms of grants (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2017).

Parallelly, not only the number of scholarships and funds devolved to the internationalization of education increased, but also the interest by policymakers and the same donor organizations to track the benefits not only for the country of origin of the student but also for the society in which the student had been educated context in financial, social and political terms (Martel, 2018).

The case for international scholarships as an effective tool for creating social change is at the core of academic and political debates. While the importance of an international education in training future leaders and creating the knowledge base for a social and economic development process is confirmed (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2017), a proper analysis on the impacts on social change that not only relies on the individual level, but also considers the interconnections between the individuals granted with a scholarship and the social context in which the student will reintegrate after its academic formation abroad still lacks a precise examination (Cuthbert, Smith, & Boey, 2008). Indeed, many studies traced the individual impact on the society, while the social interconnections existing before and after the experience are tackled as a constant variable, whose dynamics are studied only in terms of how and how much the student had an impact. Therefore, the social relations existing between

acquaintances, familiars and colleagues are the background of the research (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). Indeed, I stress the importance of measuring outcome beyond the individual level, measuring the impact of the scholarship in terms of influence in distinct levels of the society.

My focus will be on the MENA program, since it constitutes a scholarship system for professionals for short courses in the Netherlands, aimed at improving the professional skills and knowledge for individuals coming from the Middle East and North Africa countries. It is part of a wider and variegated system of grants offered by Nuffic, a Dutch organisation for internalisation in education that collaborates with the Dutch government, the European Union and third parties (Nuffic, 2020b, 2020c).

For all the before mentioned reasons, my research will focus on the assessment on a long-term perspective of the impacts of the professionals awarded with a MENA scholarship, majorly focusing on the social networks in which the student will reintegrate after the moment of the return to the home country. The focus of my research will be on the assessment of the impact of MENA Scholarship Programme, which has been running for more than 12 years -although in different formats-, which can be considered as an established program and an international policy tool, since it entails the collaboration between different parties and resembles the national effort to maintain good diplomatic relations (Technopolis, 2019).

Preface

In March 2019 I finished my bachelor's in International Sciences and Diplomatic Affairs at University of Bologna. When the time of choosing my future challenge came, I decided that I wanted to pursue my interests on migrants mobility and development, and the specialisation of Globalisation, Migration and Development of the master in Human Geography offered by Radboud University represented the perfect match. I had the chance to deepen my interests in international education as a development tool in my thesis, which led me to work in the most important grant organisation of the Netherlands, the Nuffic. This year faced me with many challenges, from adapting to the rigid weather to be able to keep up with lectures. Now, I can finally affirm that I overcame them all and that I enjoyed each lecture and each experience I made.

It goes without saying that this thesis would not have been possible without the openness and participation of my colleagues at Nuffic. In Nuffic, I found colleagues that welcomed me and replied to every question that popped in my mind. Birgitte Vos not only supervised my internship but also helped to make my move to The Hague as smooth as possible. Thank you Nuffic, it was an amazing pleasure to work with you.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Lothar Smith, for his guidance and support through each stage of my research. He patiently gave me the right suggestions when I needed them.

I am also deeply grateful to those who agreed to participate with my study, giving me their time and attention leading to unique insights. Without their generous contributions I would not have been able to write a thesis with such a wide variety of perspectives. Their views have expanded my knowledge on the complexities of international student mobility.

Finally, my last word of thanks goes out to some persons that I want to thank with all my heart. Daniele, who accompanies me every day, who cheered me when I succeeded and comforted me when I find some troubles on my way.

My parents, which from Italy supported me in every possible way. My little sisters, Benedetta and Giulia, who are my sunshine. You are all in my heart.

Happy reading.

Federica Stoppa

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ANT	Actor-Network Theory
DAM	Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, North-Africa and Middle East Department (DAM)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ISM	International Student Mobility
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSP	MENA Scholarship Programme
Norad	The Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development.
Nuffic	Nederlandse organisatie voor internationalisering in onderwijs
SNA	Social Network Approach
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TE	Tertiary Education

1 Introduction

'I believe that getting exposed to different nationalities, getting to know people from different part of the world and having that set of open-minded personality, knowing about different experience is important. For example, before going to the Netherlands, this is very important that I mention to you, the idea I had about Afghanistan and what was going there [was] *completely different, I imaged all women with the veil. I thought women were like that since that was what I could see from the news… I was already a graduate, I was an adult, but I had a specific perception about Afghanistan. Suddenly I met this girl* [from Afghanistan]*. She is like a fashionista, one of the leaders in her society, she is the leader of an organisation for women empowerment. I was shocked when I met her in the Netherlands. I asked her "Can you please tell me more about your country?" because what I could see from the TV was the opposite. We usually receive fraud calls from Nigeria and Ghana. The common perception is that they are criminals, this is the direct information. I met people from Nigeria and Ghana and my best friend is from Nigeria. He is the one that told me about the international summit that opened for me many doors. It is likely a change in the perceptions of what you think'* (Interview with Sarah from Oman, 15 May 2020).

Sarah is an Omanis woman who overcame many obstacles during her life and became one of the leaders of her society. She is a fulltime mother, and she also achieved significant accomplishments by participating in international summits abroad and taking part in an adventurous expedition, she thus stepped over the gender roles defined by her society. She participated in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) programme, promoted by Nuffic to provide learning opportunities in the Netherlands, and she identifies this experience as an indirect influence on the opening her views not only about gender bias in other countries but also about her own comprehension of other cultures. Sarah observed a modification in her social network as a consequence of her training in the Netherlands, as she changed her job and created meaningful friendships with her peers coming from other countries.

In this thesis, I challenge the comprehension of social change, of whom I scrutinise the minimum elements: the social networks. Besides, the dynamics and alterations of the social networks existing within a society will comprehend not only private or public institutions but also individuals and various social enclaves. For this reason, the scope of my research overcomes the dichotomous opposition of private and public institutions, collective and singular actors to expand to a balanced overview of the nodes and actors concerned.

The dynamics of social networks of the students who participated to a scholarship programme in the Netherlands are the focal point of my research since they enable the expansion of research from the simple academic training and linkages to the agency of national institution -both of the country of origin of the student and the Dutch public representatives-, local institutions, and, in greater detail, in the personal ties such as friendship and family. These elements will not be static and separated but explained and analysed in their social relationship and interplay, which can then create further links with new actors, solidify existing relationships or undo some ties in favour of fruitful ones.

Institutions and the transformation of their own inner values are here also tackled. Similarly to other movements for minority rights, which rebel against the consolidated racial discrimination inside public institutions and the judicial apparatus, also students -as the case of "Black Lives Matter" (Holroyd, 2015)-, as active citizens, contribute to change their society and institutions. Indeed, the extent to which organised social networks participate in the definition of social change is fundamental to understand the potential of students to enact social change in their community. Two issues arise here: which level of institutionalisation of these movements is needed to create a permanent and stable change in society? Moreover, what is the legitimacy of the institutions that are then crated or modified? As a fact, public institutions may be considered as the ultimate expression of consolidated social networks if "it represents a stable or recurrent pattern of behavioural interaction or exchange between individuals or organisations" (Ansell, 2008, p.1). This also implies their legitimacy, and it is

indeed inferred that social change occurs when public institutions are modified in their composition or social representation.

My main research question consists of assessing the long-term effects on the society of origin of the student awarded with a MENA scholarship by Nuffic in terms of "social change", utilizing the perceptions of the students as starting point of my elaboration. As a second step, these perceptions will be integrated with a congruent analysis and evaluated according to the typology of social relations existing between the subjects, to observe any existing variation and connect it to a general picture. At a later stage, the in-depth interviews create a richer picture on the lifepaths of some selected students, who draw their social networks along with an oral description of the reasons behind some alterations in their representation. During my internship at Nuffic, I was able to independently conduct my research whose aim was to establish a link between the singular experience of the student with the changes that happened in their social networks. Ultimately, I aim to bridge the study areas of the impact of international education on development issues with concrete and large dataset of the numerous editions of the MENA programme through the years.

Now a question may arise: why the MENA programme? Why focusing on a specific scholarship? This scholarship programme, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by Nuffic, indeed has a prominent scope to be a catalyst of social and democratic development in the country of origin of the students. The originality of this scholarship is that aims to enlarge professional opportunities to young professionals originating from countries of the Middle East and North Africa and, at the same time, open the potential for stable socio-economic development of the two areas.

I consider then the alterations in the student's social networks as a demonstration that social change happened because of the opportunity the student had in developing knowledge in a specific sector. This change is not only studied under the perspective of personal and professional development but

expanded into a broader net of social connections that students may have created with other actors or institutions.

How to target then progress, the sharing of knowledge, ideas and values by students to community members and peers without delimiting the social space? The principal novelty consists in the application of the Social Network Approach, which I tackled in its recent advancement, the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (John, 2009). Indeed, it represents not only the theoretical base, but also the methodological approach to the study of social change. This method in fact captures the significance of relationships the student has according to the student's opinion and, at the same time, leaves to the student the decision of which actors and nodes should be included. Therefore, the resulting picture grasps which actors the student engaged in the social change of the society of origin and how projects develop within recipients of the MENA scholarship and peers evolve.

My methodological choices follow the academic research on the impacts of scholarships. In fact, it follows the lead of the so-called "social networks pathway", delineated in "International Pathways to Social Change" (Dassin, 2017), whose publication represents the practical motive of this thesis. Indeed, he analysed specific scholarship programmes which considered alumni organisations and work-related associations as the main engine for social innovation. This objective was reached through linking the singular academic pursuits with broader resilient alterations in the society of origin of the student. In fact, scholarships programmes that are part of this classification target innovation and collaboration between colleagues as the main catalyst of social change, considered indeed as promoters of a deeper and more stable positive social and democratic enhancement of the society -according to the specific case of the MENA programme

As a consequence, the Actor-Network approach suits correctly the analysis of this typology of scholarships: it is based on relationships, which are the fundamental roots of social change, it allows the researcher to compare

different situations and infer the changes intercurred and it considers the perspective of the individual, who is engaged in a personal elaboration of the alterations as starting point of the construction of the social network, thus offering a first-hand enumeration of the actors and institutions involved. The linkages between individuals and institutions may vary in terms of scope, actors involved and regional influence, while I circumscribe in this thesis the social relationships investigated in six clusters: the community, the working environment, the family, friends and acquaintances, ties with the host country and alumni organisation.

Moreover, as Dassin's reflected (2017) on the methodological limitations of many reports and tracker studies which focuses solely on the micro-level (professional advancements, completion rate, accessibility…) and meso-level or on the macro-level, I aim to overcome this separation by applying a mixed-method approach to gain insight both in the meso and macro-level. For example, the intercultural disposition, generally studied as a proxy for personal and societal development, is further explored both through specific questions of the survey and in the in-depth interview.

1.1 Context

In the next section I picture the phenomena and dynamics which contextualise my research on the long-term effects of the MENA scholarship. In fact, it would be difficult for the reader to grasp the relevance of my study and to understand the implications without understanding why scholarship programmes are ideated, why the Dutch government devolves a consistent budget to Nuffic and why scholarships and other grants belong to development and aid projects.

I firstly study the nexus higher education- development to frame the logic of the MENA bursary, and then in §1.1.2 I analyse the international panorama of grant donors and recipients. Specifically, the logical connection between scholarships and social change is connected to the work of Dassin (2017), who reviewed the principal scholarships systems and opened the debate about the potential of alumni organisations for enacting a permanent and comprehensive

social change in the countries of origin. In §1.1.3 the phenomenon of migrants for education is analysed, while §1.1.4 and §1.1.5 the role of the Netherlands inside the global panorama of international education and its role as donor country helps framing the reasons behind the creation of the MENA scholarship and the creation of Nuffic as the Dutch organisation for the internationalisation in education.

1.1.1 Higher education and development

Although the idea that education leads to economic growth and development seems obvious, this logic has not always dominated the academic debate, and indeed many countries have started to provide resources to schools as engines for future economic growth only recently, thinking of education as an investment for the economic future of the country. One of the reasons may be that "the relationship between education and growth may not be directly observable" (Vogel and Keen 2010, p. 384). Both "education" and "economic growth" are large, complex, and dynamic sets of structures and processes whose relationships resist any simple or reductive description (Tilly, 1984). Neither the theoretical nor the empirical literature on education and development has ever got much traction by establishing a correlation between an educational input that directs to a clear economic output (Bills, 2016). Modernisation theory (Inkeles, 1969) and human capital theory assumed that education influences economic development primarily by creating a change on the student who later will be the change-maker at a societal level (Bills, 2016).

The nexus between higher education and development is considered an essential tool for society and economic development. Castells (1994, p.14) defined higher education as the "engine of development in the new world economy" and this assumption is testified by the report "Higher Education in Developing countries: Peril and Promise" (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000), where the issue for developing countries of educating the young generations to a higher standard of tertiary education (TE) and academic research is tackled. Not only technological advancements but also the urgency of increasing the quality of

research, including up-to-date lectures and of training students to flexibility and innovation are a suggested pathway to the socio-economic development of the region. Also, academics and think-thanks support the concept of enforcing the quality of higher education to create the conditions for a positive social change, stressing various positive correlations between higher standards of tertiary education and human and gender development indexes and life expectancy (Tilak, 2003). Nevertheless, as it can be noted in the Millennium Goals, the interest for the nexus higher education-development had slowly decreased in the last years in favour of a focus on primary education (Kruss, McGrath, Petersen, & Gastrow, 2015). This decline was included in a broader disinterest in the long-term impacts of education (Oketch, McCowan, & Schendel, 2014) and on a reduction of financial support for this field of research by governments in the global North (Kruss, McGrath, Petersen, & Gastrow, 2015).

However, this trend recently changed, and many southern governments have invested in higher education for the economic development and an increased number of academics started to investigate the positive and negative externalities of tertiary education. In particular, the UK department for International Education stressed the positive outcome of higher education programmes on multiple levels, from strictly individual positive gains (improved capabilities in areas of health, political participation) to positive institutional changes (democratisation, environmental enhancements), the latter being the more under-researched area (Roberts, Day, Jenkins, & Geddes, 2012).

1.1.2 Scholarships for social change and international student mobility

Despite the recognition given to higher education for the socio-economic development of a region, the role of scholarships in enabling more comprehensive access to higher education is often neglected and under-researched (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2017). International scholarships play a fundamental role in shaping local policies, personal skills and institutional capacity by developing the response to development processes both at the local

and national level and, according to Boeren (2018, p. 44), they represent "the oldest form of development cooperation in higher education".

Scholarship programmes can be employed as aid tools or to establish diplomatic and economic relations with a foreign country, under the perspective of a "win-win" situation for both the student, its home country and the host country (Marsh, 2018). While the basic design remains more or less the same - a student is granted fund after a selection process and then supported financially through their studies -, eligibility criteria, funders, levels and topic of study determines the social and individual effects of the scholarship programme (Kent, 2018).

The role of scholarships as a tool for socio-economic development is questioned in "*International Scholarships in Higher Education: pathways to Social change*" (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2017) and it will be the common thread in this thesis. In this manual, various ways in which scholarship recipients can disrupt the pre-established social environment and foster a positive social change are listed, but I will focus on the "social network pathway", where networks formed by students and alumni organisations create a social change through collective action and by means of their relationships with each other.

The activities of Nuffic can be framed into a broader landscape of activities and funds devolved to the promotion of international student mobility. International student mobility (ISM) has become a widespread phenomenon in recent decades not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of diversity of actors interested both in the country of origin of the student and destination, testifying the global scale of this phenomenon. The global flux of mobility for educational purposes had been estimated at around 5.3 million in 2019 (Project Atlas, 2019). This is compounded with a wide variety in the directions of the flux, in fact, there is no corresponding asymmetry in the countries of origin and the country of destination since students seeking higher education are headed to different countries. While the top destinations countries in 2019 were United States, United Kingdom and China, almost 53% of enrolled students worldwide

are Asian, and the majority is Chinese, Indian and Korean (De Wit, Ferencz, & Rumbley, 2013).

While most national governments have increased the funds devolved to tertiary education, in some countries the demand is higher than the actual offer of courses and scholarships. Furthermore, since developing countries witnessed a higher household income, more students have the necessary fund to economically support the fee of a foreign university degree (Verbik & Lesanowski, 2007). The limited capacity to respond to the demand of among existing academic institutions has, in turn, led to consistent participation of private institutions to the provision of education (World Bank, 2017; Shizha & Kariwo, 2012). Additionally, international students are becoming an attractive investment for both short-term and long-term benefits, both from an economic point of view and more societal one. The fee from oversea students enables the university institution indeed to diversify their income and do not rely on the sole national funds to education. For this reason, many countries invested in international attractiveness and outlook (Verbik & Lasanovski, 2007).

1.1.3 Migrants for education in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has one of the largest amounts of international students enrolled in tertiary education among the OECD countries, with an 11% share. Additionally, this trend is reflected in the population composition of the immigrant youth, since about 16% have a non-western immigrant background (OECD, 2020). The countries of origin of students in higher education are Germany (23,022 graduated students), followed by Italy (5,563), China (4,697), Belgium (3,952) and Bulgaria and Romania. In particular, research universities score double number of international students than universities of applied sciences (Nuffic, 2020a). The evident student mobility is mirrored by a high stay rate, with almost 25% of the international students who studied in the Netherlands still living here five years after graduating (Nuffic, 2017).

At the policy level, the institutional organisations acknowledged the international and multicultural composition of students in every educational

level, both by educational and career support to students in vocational programmes, as well as to language courses and other universal and targeted measures to improve the academic results of immigrant students (Shewbridge, Kim, Wurzburg, & Hostens, 2010). Moreover, since 2007, students can stay in the Netherlands for a year after the completion of their studies to find a job. This initiative, together with the possibility of having tax incentives for knowledge migrants and returning ex-pats, may be an explanation of the external attractiveness of this country from both a European and international perspective (De Wit, 2011).

At a political level, the topic of the integration of international students and skilled migrants is a critical issue in the Netherlands, partly as a response to the rise of nationalist discourses and the consequent anti-immigration policies. The colonial past of the Netherlands still defines many migratory patterns, including mobility for educational purposes. As Jacobsen (2010) demonstrated, many Suriname students decide to attend university to the former colony for a "sense of familiarity" and for the presence of some family members in the country.

1.1.4 Nuffic: a mediator of global educational needs

The activities of Nuffic, an independent and no-profit organisation, are part of the Dutch educational system, since it cooperates with the Dutch Ministry of Education, of Culture and Science and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim is to support and foster international education and international student mobility through designed scholarships programmes, activities aimed at capacity building, intercultural exchanges. Precisely, the tailor-made modality in the Netherlands Fellowship Programmes aims at bridging the personal gains from the experience to more comprehensive socio-economic benefits in the home country of the scholarship recipient (Boeren, 2018).

The Nuffic organisation hosted my internship and provided me with the necessary data for my research, together with supervision in my daily research. I choose this organisation for its position of intermediator between local needs,

the Dutch educational system, embassies and institutions of the country of origin of students and Dutch institutions and diplomacies.

1.1.5 The MENA scholarship: capacity building and construction of alumni network

Among the different scholarship programmes by Nuffic, the MENA Scholarship Programme (or otherwise called "MSP") provides the contextual and empirical data source of my research. The MSP differentiates from other grants for its regional specificity (it is addressed to candidates residing in a country of the Middle East and North Africa[1]) and for the fact that professionals, instead of students, are the designated recipients of the scholarship. It consists of professional training instead of the more traditional academic course. It precisely targets specific sectors where capacity building is needed (fishing, water management, healthcare…) and offers short courses hosted in the Netherlands aimed at the capacity building within organisations (Nuffic, 2020b).

The principal aim, as it is stated in the official policy framework, is "to contribute to organisational capacity building in the participating countries by offering short training courses to mid-career professionals working in government, NGOs or in the private sector". The second objective is to intensify bilateral relationships through the construction and consolidation of the alumni network. In addition to being an instrument for capacity building in specific fields within which there is a need for knowledge, the MSP serves as an instrument for the posts to practice public diplomacy in their area of expertise. Relations with the countries concerned are strengthened in this way. Moreover, the experience of the fellows during training or courses in the Netherlands strengthens the image of the Netherlands as a knowledge country and

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[1] Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia. Applicants from Syria can apply only if they are residing and working in one of the other MSP countries listed.

contributes to a positive image of the Netherlands" (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2020).

1.2 Relevance

Several reasons make it relevant to both society and science to conduct the kind of research reported in this thesis. Although it is just a limited collection of insights to the problematic puzzle of the impacts of international student mobility, migration, development and social change, those reasons add up to my interest as a master's researcher and to the interest of Nuffic organisation.

1.2.1 Societal relevance

Many institutions, such as the British Council and the German Academic Exchange Service have increased the opportunities and the funds devolved to the promotion of the exchange of knowledge in higher education (Engberg, Glover, Rumbley, & Altbach, 2014), reaching a total of 3.3 million of students currently studying outside their own country. The expansion of the quantity of students participating in education and formation programmes abroad reflects an overall context of global mobility, both in terms of the number of countries participating and of the intensity of educational exchanges. Moreover, the traditional countries hosting international students, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, have been accompanied by developing countries desiring to expand the tools of foreign influence. For example, one objective of these countries is the creation of university linkages and the development of joint research programmes, with the prospect of sharing knowledge and build intellectual capital (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2017).

Although international scholarship programmes have a long history (Pietsch, 2011), the effects and externalities of this tool are often under-researched and only in the last decade the research on this topic has gained attention (Mawer, 2018). Nevertheless, the extension of international student mobility and of international scholarships are well documented. With the scenario of actors enlarging from only developed countries to including developing countries such as India, China, Egypt, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa and transformation

from sending countries to receiving countries which interested countries like China (Knight & De Wit, 2018), it is clear that a complete understanding of the dynamics of international student circulation and internationalisation of higher education in a global context is crucial for the assessment of programs and connected scholarships in higher education. Furthermore, also the reciprocal logic is valid: an assessment of the impacts of scholarships on the micro, meso and macro level is crucial to better understand the global extent of the phenomenon.

Secondly, the benefits of international education are considered essential not only for the socio-economic development of the locality of origin of the student but are interesting to study also for the migratory movement generated by this typology of migrants. Indeed, migration studies are concentrating their attention to the directions, stay rates and consequences of ISM on the country of origin and the host country (Samers & Collyers, 2016). Apart from the migratory movements of who already possesses high skills and education, migration studies for educational purposes focus on individuals who decide to migrate to acquire education (Brezis & Soueri, 2011). Nevertheless, student migration is a blind spot in the research of migration studies, partly for the common conception of what migrants are ("workers", "poor people", "refugees") and for the fact that they challenge the national boundaries by keeping the national identity (King & Christou, 2010). Indeed, despite the significance of the student migration in the total amount of migrant population, they remain the category which receives the least attention (Findlay, 2011). At the policy level, the importance of acquiring more knowledge of the nexus migration-international student mobility is amplified by the congruence between the major host countries for foreign students and the leading destination countries for skilled migrant workers, which testifies that internationalisation of policies is intertwined with a selection process of the "best migrant". Therefore, the implications of student migration are also shaped by the global job market and by national migration policies

(Guruz, 2011) with one of the effects of this process, the "brain drain", interesting also the Netherlands (Mohamoud, 2005).

Moreover, above the considerations connected to the effects of international student mobility in terms of funds, actors concerned, policies and migration studies, these dynamics are connected and shaped by the public debate and national policies enacted by the Dutch government and the Dutch population. As de Wit (2019) underlines, the Netherlands is not exempt from the nationalist and populist movements that characterised many governments in Europe. The drastic cuts to the budget of the Nuffic organisation shocked for the fact that Dutch higher education's effort focused on innovation, inclusion and comprehensive internationalisation of higher education, the government contribution to the Nuffic organisation only for the MSP was indeed of 441,000€ for the 2020 (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2020). This led to the closure of many offices abroad and the consequent decrease of talented foreign students coming to the Netherlands to pursue their education.

For the above-cited reason, I believe that the societal impact of my research, even if limited to a specific scholarship programme and with a precise temporal delimitation, could shed new lights into the research on the effects of scholarship programmes in a "social change" perspective and help to foster the public discussion about the role of international students in the future of the Netherlands.

1.2.2 Scientific relevance

Conversely, although the incidence and underpinnings of this phenomenon not only are tangible at global scale, but also implicate the collaboration of private, public and third sector actors, a general and confirmed academic opinion on the effects of the scholarship programs is not clear nor detailed. As Campbell (2016) asserts, there is little research both on whether and studying abroad has effects on home countries and on how the intrinsic characteristics of the home country can influence the outcome. At the micro-level (individual outcomes) the trend consists of over-estimating the effective accessibility and affordability of

international education, the relevance of the experience to employers, the facility to enter in the same workplace (Chesterfield & Dant, 2013). From the issue of "spill-over" impacts on the society to the analysis of socio-political and civic impacts, measuring the societal impacts from scholarship programmes had been quite a difficult job due the various variables and theoretical perspective that may be considered (Mawer, 2018). Therefore, the issue of long-term positive effects of the scholarship on society is still unclear and suffers from a methodological limitation.

Specifically, at the meso (organisational and institutional effects) and on the macro level (societal impacts), the assessment of the effects and externalities of scholarships is quite generic. Moreover, the focus is often on the concept of "human capital", which considers the total sum of contributions the individual may give to the home country (Perna, Orosz, Gopaul, Jumakulov, Ashirbekov, & Kishkentayeva, 2014), thus leaving the role of social networks in which the student is embedded unexplored. Research measuring the outcome at the individual level focuses mostly on scholarship completion and satisfaction (Zall Kusek & Rist, 2004), in the change of academic and professional skills (Agency of International Development, 2014) and changes in personal beliefs and open-mindedness (Krzaklewska & Krupnik, 2008).

The role of social networks is still deemed to a background inspection, since the role of social networks quite often appears in the academic literature as a variable on the participation to study abroad experiences (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). For this reason, I will deepen my research on the social networks to understand how students can apply their acquired knowledge over the long-run and to identify the links between this experience and changed dynamics in social networks, focusing predominantly on how alumni organisation may use their association to foster social change. In fact, alumni organisations importance had been stressed as essential to a stable socio-economic development of society (Campbell, 2016).

Besides the specific object of analysis, also the field of the evaluation of the scholarship programmes is moving the first steps towards a shared, objective, and comprehensive standard methodology of evaluation. The methodological difficulty consists of "aggregating up" from the level of individuals to a much broader societal level. Some researcher considered this analysis as too much audacious (Van der Aa, Willemsen, & Warmerdam, 2012), while others tried to divide the social enclaves and fields of the society (Mawer, 2014). Nevertheless, a general trend of focusing on the short-term benefits instead of holistic approach is evident. For this reason, I choose to focus on scholarship recipients who completed their training almost five years ago, in order to zoom out from specific changes of little importance to their life path, career changes and opportunities.

Lastly, the focus on "social change" in scholarship evaluation creates confusion among scholars on its definition. A serious attempt to assess it was tackled by the Institute of International Education (IIE) for the Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program, which focuses more on the link between higher education and social justice and the effect that higher education can have on marginalised populations and leadership (Coan & O'Malley, 2018). An analysis of several program evaluations illustrates how international scholarship programs measure evidence of social change and/or social impact by selecting proxy evidence of the program's societal impacts to underpin our argument that the social benefits of individual scholarships are more axiomatic or assumed than conclusively demonstrated, even in rigorous tracer studies (Dassin & Navarrete, 2018).

In conclusion, for the changing dynamics (progressively more students participating in courses abroad and more countries trying to attract foreign students) and the increased magnitude of the phenomenon, together with the pivotal role played by the Netherlands as top receiving countries, it is fundamental to enlarge the perspective from the generalist bias of the "win-win" situation to investigate not only the consequences of the educational opportunity

offered, but also the impacts on the social networks in which the student will create links with other peers and contribute to structural changes.

Indeed, I will try to give my contribution to the knowledge by focusing on the MSP, to whose continuity both the Nuffic organisation and the Dutch government have contributed, which entails diplomatic and economic cooperation between the Netherlands and the various governments of the Middle East and North Africa countries. Furthermore, the peculiarity of this project -it creates short courses for professionals and tailor-made courses for a group of professionals belonging to the same organisation- constitutes the ideal empirical base to explore the role of social networks in fostering social change.

1.3 Thesis structure

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework. It elaborates theoretical ideas about international student migration and its principal dynamics, effects of scholarship programmes and higher education and critique on the assessment of scholarship programmes. Moreover, the literature on social networks and its role on the socio-economic development are present and contextualised in the broader picture of the international student mobility phenomenon, where also the research objective and questions are included. They follow from the points made in the Chapter 1 and the prior paragraphs in Chapter 2. Next, in Chapter 3 it is explained how the research is conducted, what methods are used and why and the research material.

Consequently, the proper analysis is detailed out in Chapter 4 and 5, which respectively leave room for the assessment of the survey results and the in-depth interviews. Chapter 6 studies alumni organisations, their potential for social and the problems faced after the return to the country of origin. The final analysis is presented in Chapter 7, where two of the five in-depth interviews are compared and the level of centrality of the student is also studied. Finally, conclusions, reflections and recommendations for further research will be presented in the last chapter of this thesis, Chapter 8.

1.4 Research objective and research questions

My research aims to contribute to the further development of the academic debate on the long-term impacts in terms of "social change" on the society of origin of the student awarded with a scholarship by paying specific attention to the role and the dynamics of the social networks in which the student is embedded. Therefore, I formulated my research objective as follows:

To gain insights on the role and changing dynamics of social networks whom the student belongs to after the moment of the return of the student to his/her home country and society of origin.

Therefore, I formulated my research question:

What are the long-term impacts on the society of origin of the student awarded with a MENA scholarship in terms of "social change"?

To better frame my research, I will apply two sub-questions:

1- *Is it possible to distinguish a different degree of social change in the six social clusters (family, community, friends and acquaintances, working environment, ties with the host country and alumni organisation) the student belongs to?*

To achieve this aim, I will apply a social network approach (SNA) and I will look at the various forms of social clusters and how they are connected to understand why and how they change. Indeed, the social clusters not only are modified by the temporary absence of one individual, but also react when he/she returns home with his/her share of new knowledge and experience.

As second sub-question, I will utilise the concept of "centrality" as developed by the social network approach (Freeman, 1978) to understand if the role played by the student inside the social networks can be considered as "more central" after his/her experience (for example, for the new social connections created with the Dutch society), thus having a higher level of influence on other actors. Consequently, I will investigate:

2- *What are the implications on the status of the student inside his/her social network after his/her reintegration into the society of origin and what are the implications of this in terms of "social change"?*

2 Theorising social change and the effects of international scholarship programmes

In this chapter, an abstract of the relevant insights from the theoretical body of literature on international student mobility and migration for education is presented. As regards the results of my thesis, the aim is to connect these phenomena firstly with the changes in the personal social networks of the student and, lastly, to a wider assessment of the impacts of the MSP. The theories and theoretical framework can thus help to frame and explain the raw results. Especially the current scientific interest in the relationship between migration for education and development offers a reliable pair of shoulders for my theses to build on. Understanding the implications of this typology of short-term migration in terms of the specific impacts on the social clusters existing around the student- the family, the community, the work environment, friends and acquaintances, the ties with the host country and the alumni organisation- help to answer the research questions.

Moreover, an assessment of the theoretical base of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) will constitute the conceptual framework of my research. The chapter starts with a theoretical introduction to the nexus social change and development, where development theories are considered under a historical point of view. Additionally, my definition of social change is reported. In §2.2 the second nexus, the higher education and development, is presented in relation to the impacts of student tuitions funds and scholarships. In §2.3 a focus on scholarships for social change, in which the MSP is included, reflects on the theoretical implications of the two nexuses.

The migrant for educational purposes, who represents my units of analysis, is then described in according to the "grand" theories on migration, which are shortly put forward, on which eventually the social network theory is based (§ 2.4). Zooming in any further on these networks, we will have a closer theoretical look on the elements of those relational webs (§2.5). That is, the

migrants and their livelihood and culture – including the social links with the other people of the alleged networks. And, on the very "micro" level, the concept of "return migration" will be further explored concerning the problematic reintegration of the student in the society of the country of origin. In §2.6, the potential of Social Network approach and Actor-network Theory of assessing social change is investigated and notions and key elements of my theory are listed. The conceptual model, presented in this section, summarises the theoretical body which is applied to the empirical part of this research.
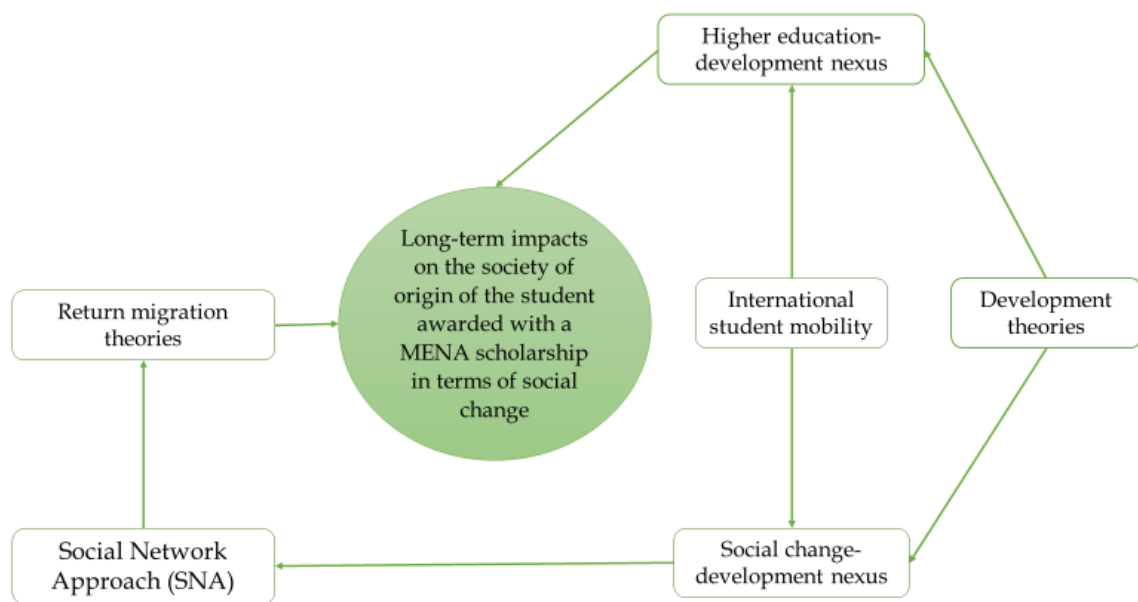
Figure 1 Conceptual framework (Author, 2020)

The conceptual framework starts with two principal "family" of theories, the Social Network Approach (SNA) and development theories. The SNA constitutes both my methodology and theoretical basis and, specifically, I integrated this approach with theories of return migration which tackles the social networks of the students as the core of their analysis. As concerns development theories, I focus on two nexuses: one relates development with higher education and the latter correlates development with social change theories. Additionally, these theories are contextualised in the international student mobility dynamics, of which the flux of return migration of MSP recipients to their home country is an

example. These are the theoretical premises for the creation of scholarship programmes, as the MSP one. The social change enacted by recipients is then the focus of my research, which derives from the concept of social change of SNA.

2.1 The social change-development nexus

Development studies and its connection with "social change" constitute the framework in which my assumptions and elaboration are contextualised, where other social, political and economic dynamics are intertwined. The diversity of theories prevalent in the literature on development necessitated the creation of an overarching conceptual framework that could be used to guide the reader on my selection of the relevant theories and concepts.

It is within this academic debate that the idea of scholarships in higher education as a pathway to social change and socio-economic development originated and evolved. Moreover, it is not by chance that in the political debate and academia, the terms "development" and "social change" often overlaps, with the first used to describe and examine the social dynamics in the society (Breuer, 2015). Nevertheless, the nexus between social change and development presumed many connotations and qualifications according to the concept of "development" taken into consideration.

Social change and development[2] are thus considered in a binary relationship, deeply intertwined, and reciprocally enforcing their meaning. Development theory has been characterised by the power-knowledge theories, which followed a relatively defined Enlightenment concept of progress and,

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[2] It is important to note that terms "economic growth" and "development" are often used interchangeably but are here treated as distinct concepts. Evidence of economic growth is understood to be measurable through per-capita GDP. Development, however, is assumed to include both economic and non-economic elements, including qualitative underpinnings instead of quantitative indexes (Oketch, McCowan, & Schendel, 2014).

sometimes, also civilisation. According to this perspective, development is thus a deeply rotted in a transformation of the society (Munck, 2018). Development theories have origin in the colonial era when European domination was understood as the only capable of bringing civilisation and welfare in the colonies.

From the 19th century, when the first studies on the development started to evolve, two main schools of thought evolved: one more philosophical, which understood development as an effort to improve humankind by knowledge building, technological advancements, the latter more practical, which was tackled as a social tool by governments to manage the social transformations, with the underlying idea that development consisted of regulating the adverse effects of industrialisation. This was connected to the reality of the colonial domination, when colonies were considered as under-developed and constantly needing European domination[3] (McMichael, 2016). Colonial development theories consider development as a more qualitative-based notion, with social classes, their unequal power distribution and the civilising mission of the empire and colonial powers concerning the "backward" people. It started to evolve from the mid-nineteen century and early mercantile imperialism (Munck, 2018).

Development studies frequently reflected the historical and regional context and political standpoints. A profound division between universalistic assumptions of development and more locally based, regional concepts is evident in the 20th-century effort to create an international organisation for the development. This is the logic frame of the United Nations' operations, whose efforts are concentrated in the development of the Third World (Breuer, 2015). In the post-war decolonisation era, the concept of "Third World" emerged, between the antagonism of the capitalist and communist sphere of influence. This discourse was part of a "new development project", a US-driven discourse which

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[3] This phenomenon assumed also normative connotations, called the "White men's burden" (by the poet Rudyard Kipling).

considered the decolonisation process as a freedom act towards an American vision of "brave new world" (Munck, 2018). The goal of "poverty reduction" was indeed aligned to a strengthening of the education efforts of specific development programmes, like in other project-based development efforts (Sumner & Tribe, 2008). The relationship between social change and development assumed a strong normative connotation in the post-modern approach insisted on the creation of the "Third World" and the associate idea of "underdevelopment" as functional to the legitimisation of the Western political, cultural and social dominance over the Third World (Sumner & Tribe, 2008). Post-development theories took a new turn in the 1950s, since the social change was no longer considered as something that simply happens, but a process that may be actively promoted by the US cultural, economic and political dominance over the "underdeveloped" countries. Leaving the dependency theory in Latin America aside, in Sub Sahara Africa, an unprecedented alliance evolved between national governments, foreign investors and the elite. On the contrary, in the post-development phase, numerous, unstable and permanently reconstructing identities involved in the development and social change process is finally recognised, which tries to destroy the singular construction by Western countries of a singular notion of development (Munck, 2018).

Here, as it is the case for the concept of "development", there are discrepancies in the definition of "social change". Social change study covers a broad range of fields and dynamics and depends on factors, such as technological advancements and social resources. The root question deepens the why and how social, economic and political systems developed and how it is currently changed. The theories of change disagree on the most explicative variable and differ from a systematic approach (Marx, North, Eisenstadt) to non-systematic explanations (geography, external events, technology, human factors…). Weinstein (2010) divides the components of change in three main domains (demographic component featuring population processes and transitions; the cultural component which includes values, religion and language; the social

component, which in turn considers the shift from primary to secondary and tertiary relations) and focuses on his theory on the cultural and social changes in terms of relationships, institutions, values, styles and other invisible elements. Nevertheless, I will focus on the social aspect of change since it better suits the scope of the MSP:

> "*The overall aim of the MSP is to contribute to the democratic transition in the participating countries. It also aims at building capacity within organisations, by enabling employees to take part in short courses in various fields of study*."
> (NUFFIC, 2020c)

> My definition of social change is thus the following: "*Social change, in sociology, the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterised by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organisations, or value systems…. Social change in the broadest sense is any change in social relations*" (Form & Wilterdink, 2019).

> Although the array and variety of development studies reflect the multitude of social, historical and economic context and it is the result of specific contextual characteristics, I will focus my attention on the contemporary approach on the academic thinking on development studies on education (which will receive more analysis in next chapter, §2.2).

2.2 The higher education-development nexus

Higher education had been defined as a "high level of a specialised form of human capital" (Tilak, p.3, 2003), "engine of development in the new world economy" (Castells, 1994, p.14). It is recognised how it is essential in the absorption and dissemination of knowledge, changes attitude, provides human resources and new skills and its contributes to the overall development of societies (Tilak, 2003). The logic and scope of most of scholarships programmes lie in the nexus higher education-development since it is assumed that education-related improvements in terms of quality and students involved lead to the socio-economic development of the society.

Highers standards of tertiary education are the pathway for developing countries to fully benefit from a global knowledge-based economy. Facing the current problematics of developing countries- under-qualified and poorly-rewarded professors, underdeveloped curricula, outmoded teaching methods, overcrowded classes, inadequate library and laboratory facilities, few student services distracting living conditions for students- , the catching up in knowledge and access to knowledge will correspond to a gap between industrial and developing countries in per capita income and standards of living (Task Force on Higher Education, 2000). An important milestone in the definition of a global agenda in this respect is the Millennium Development Goals, where education holds a prominent place in the architecture. MDG 2 focuses indeed on achieving universal primary education in a formal setting, while MDG 3 includes a target on achieving gender parity in formal settings for primary secondary and tertiary education (Unterhalter, 2014).

The so-called "public interest" is included within the benefits of higher education on society. Higher education is thought to raise wages, productivity and, encourage independence and initiative. Economic analysis -such as the rate-of-return- aside, equal access to higher education creates the base for the creation of a meritocratic society where disadvantaged groups gain the same opportunities as the elites do. Democratic values are thus reinforced by the critical and open debate originating from academia. Moreover, even privately originated the creation of research such as military secrecy or commercial investment has some positive spill-overs on the society (Task Force for Higher Education, 2000).

The international and institutional reflection of this approach is the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank, 2017), which created a theoretical framework for the explanation of the impact of higher education on development which includes external pressures such as growing demand for admission and growing demand of the knowledge economy. The World Bank's services are therefore divided into advisory and analytical services,

private sector investments and international coordination services such as exchanging lessons with experts in various regions covered by the agency of this organisation. Nevertheless, the Work Bank policies were deemed to have discouraged investment in higher education and to have used improper methodologies to assess its impact (Tilak, 2003).

The essential role played by education in increasing the human development is reported in tracker studies on scholarships' outcomes, such as Joint Japan and World Bank Graduate Scholarship Programme (World Bank Institute, 2010), where individual benefits are measured along with development targets. For example, many students affirmed to have sufficient accountability to change the socio-economic conditions of their country thanks to their connections with the alumni organisation. Moreover, the nexus development-higher education had been explored in terms of social capital and of economic development. On the same line of argumentation, an empirical study tackles the possible implications of development on education on the social and economic progress in Zimbabwe, where the concept of "human development" is derived from indexes such as literacy rate and life expectancy (Shizha & Kariwo, 2012).

While the academics agree on the positive correlation between higher education and development, the literature reports contrasting results on the effects on economic development. In this case, primary education and literacy are the first steps towards economic development, while higher education is not necessary. Moreover, while tertiary education seems to have a positive influence in the capacity to absorb foreign direct investments and other incoming capital flows (Sandar Kyaw & Macdonald, 2009), the negative impacts of the "brain drain" for the country of origin of the student had been challenged in the analysis of economic growth in Ghana (Nyarko, 2011). Moreover, the literature agrees on the positive impact on the personal earnings of graduates (Oketch, McCowan, & Schendel, 2014). Conversely, many indicators confirmed the impact of higher education on the social sphere, with Human Development Index, Poverty,

Gender Development index all scoring a high level of correlation with higher education (Tilak, 2003).

Nevertheless, the academic literature has changed opinion from the 1980s, when some contexts have addressed the issue of elite capture of the benefits of TE by charging students for tuition, room and board to the modern consideration of the advantages of higher education and scholarship programmes. The introduction of tuition fees can indeed contribute to increasing inequality, since only wealthy students may be able to access to higher education (Oketch, 2003). Conversely, need-based scholarships can have a positive outcome since they expand the proportion of the population that can access and, consequently, earn higher wages (McMahon, 2004). Since the 1990s, economic arguments reflected the changes in the production process associated with globalisation and the rise of the "knowledge economy". Specifically, the one assumption connected the economic growth, highly skilled employees and who can apply technological knowledge to their workplace (Lucas, 1988; Romer, 1986). Technological transfer, meanwhile, is assumed to increase the productivity and efficiency of the economy, leading to sustained economic growth.

A new concept, the partnership between educational and research institutions, has later been at the centre of the political debate. This concept classes a more equal and balanced distribution and exchange of knowledge, and this excludes a passivity of the Global South and, instead, it entails an active role in shaping the governance of international education (Downes, 2013).

2.3 Scholarships for development and social change

As regards the social change-development nexus, international higher education has played a fundamental role in educating leaders worldwide and in guiding broader development processes and there is wide research on research on the main benefits of international higher education mobility (British Council, 2014; IIE, 2016a; IIE ,2016b; UNESCO, 2016) and the benefits of international study both to individuals (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes, & Skeldon, 2012) and to wider society (Solimano 2008; Spilimbergo 2009; Stapleton, Mecea, & Beqiri, 2016).

The provision of international scholarships to individuals from developing countries is one of the oldest forms of development cooperation and often respond to a scarcity in terms of courses offered in STEM subjects. Scholarship offer indeed to students the possibility of advancing in and then collaborate with colleagues of the university of origin and share their knowledge acquired (Kritz, 2016). International scholarship programmes can be categorised into three typologies, following the classification of Boeren (2018): consolidation of the human resources needed for the development of the locality, foster diplomatic relations between the donor country and to improve the attractiveness the educational institutions in both the countries. Although most of the scholarships fall into this subdivision, every programme has specific aims that focus on specific objectives.

However, the role of scholarship programs in facilitating access to higher education and crafting pathways to social change—not only for individual students but for their societies as well— is less widely researched. Nevertheless, there is a consensus on the role of scholarships and study grants in developing local talent and local institutions and enforcing the political response to the problematics when they are part of more comprehensive international development agenda (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018a).

The "agent of change" is defined as the future leader for the development of his/her locality and often scholarships programme aims at shaping the characteristics of the future change-maker by providing him/her the managerial knowledge and soft skills. Sometimes, this is done through a wider training of members of the same organisation, who receive a common training on specific subjects to apply it to their job activities, of sharing it utilising lectures and refresher courses (as it is the case for the MSP).

The "agent of change" discourse is part of a contextual framework of capacity development. Capacity development targets individuals, organisations, and institutions without excluding an interplay between these actors. Nevertheless, typically scholarship programmes target individuals, while

cooperation projects target on institutions and organisation. However, many programmes utilise both modalities and involve both individuals and institutions. The underlying belief is that a permanent change can be implemented only if the actions of individuals are embedded in a wider societal contextualisation, where the actions and ideas of the individual find the expansion (Dassin, Marsh, & Mawer, 2018b). Inserting scholarships within institutional strengthening projects increases the chances of realising changes in organisations and subsequently generating long-term socio-economic impact. A notable contribution was offered by the European countries (Nuffic; Nohred by Norad; APPEAR; IUC; SPHEIR, DelPHE; EDULINK II, European Union), which distinguished itself for the long history of efforts in development cooperation and in the aim of making their education programs more attractive for foreign students (Boeren, 2018).

The MSP constitutes an example of this effort, since the Netherlands is one of the top donor countries evolved in international scholarships. It is indeed an incarnation of a scholarship embedded in a bilateral cooperation program since it is part of the Shiraka programme. Shiraka, a Netherlands-MENA Partnership, is a Dutch bilateral effort that supports a sustainable democratic transition in the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa) (Shiraka, 2020).

2.4 International student as migrants for education

With an increasing number of students attending foreign universities, International Student Mobility is changing the global higher education landscape. Nevertheless, the various actors involved have a different conceptualisation of what it is and what it entails, which complicates the work of researchers and policymakers. For example, according to the specific type of mobility taken into consideration, the academic research done differs vastly in terms of scope, relevance and quality of research. On the other hand, different understandings of the terminology initiate the exchange of ideas and stimulate discussion about what ISM entails.

The main concepts and research approaches in international student mobility available will be presented, as an exhaustive and detailed list of research approaches are not essential to the scope of understanding the implications of international student mobility and its effect in terms of social change to the country of origin of the students and the diversity of the definitions and concepts available.

2.5 Return migration, students' social networks and social change

The MSP envisages that the professional should return to work in his/her organisation or institution which has endorsed and confirmed the training experience of one of its employees. Therefore, the return in the country of origin is a mandatory step (Nuffic, 2020c) and represents the starting moment for the "giving back" to their office firstly and to the society of origin.

As a subprocess of international migration, return migration has been subject to various approaches that offer contrasting sets of conceptualisations from neoclassicism, the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism and social network theory. The neoclassical approach, based on the concept of wage differentials as the beginning of the migration process, delineates the decision of the return as a failure in their experience abroad (Todaro, 1969). The new economics of labour migration, on the other hand, understands the return as the outcome of a successful migration decision that has brought the expected results in terms of savings and a higher income. In this perspective, migration becomes something more than an act of desperation (Stark, 1996). A different conceptualisation is enacted by the structural approach, which considers crucial the moment of the return as it represents to transfer and share the knowledge and resources acquired during the migration period. The return does not represent a failure (Cerase, 1974). The structural approach is the first one to evidence how contextual variables of the society of origin of the migrant such as local power relations, traditions and values have a strong influence in the capacity to invest their capacities in the local social context (Cassarino, 2004).

Of special attention, the "adjustment process" is then considered in the factors that influence the outcome of the migration experience. A successful adjustment favours the changes by the migrant in his/her social networks and codetermines the inclusion in the old social context (Dumon, 1986).

Many academics have stressed the correlation between "social change" and return migration. Van Houte (2019) underlined the discrepancies between the interpretation of return migration between different theoretical frameworks. From a neoclassical point of view, which considers migrants as actors of change and development in their home country, to historical-structuralism, which evidences how migrants are again forced to adjust to local economic dynamics and power relations and how their reintegration depends on favourable local structure. The transnationalism and social network theories created a more pluralistic discourse since the results of migration depend on a dynamic interaction between individuals' agency with the structural environment and their return affects the social networks they are part of. Social network theory view returnees as migrants who maintained strong ties with their former locality. These linkages reflect an experience of migration that represents a positive plus effect on their decision to return home and not the direct outcome (Cassarino, 2004).

Moreover, social networks have also been studied to describe how students decide to study overseas and how they mobilise their social networks. Beech (2015) affirms that without certain support from friends and acquaintances, only a few students would choose to move in order to pursue higher education overseas. Social structures increase the availability of resources and information. Thus, the composition of networks, which consist of a multiplicity of social structures (Eccles & Nohria, 1992), as well as the configuration of linkages, is at the centre of the social network theory and to the Social Network Approach (SNA), which will be analysed in the next chapter (§2.6).

The work of Castells and Bruno Latour shaped the modern human geography thought by asserting that all individuals act and decide within a specific social network. As regards mobility, it is essential to note that social networks create and determine the mobility patterns and the choice to begin a migratory movement. Moreover, the social network approach focuses on the relationship and ties between individuals, groups or organisations (Beech, 2015). Indeed, as Cresswell (2006, 2011) suggests, in contrast to a tradition that focused on fixity, much recent work focuses on the interconnections between various mobile networks, which are conceptually and intellectually distinctive. These patterns intersect with social connections with places and actors which overcome geographical proximity (family members and relatives, friends and partners, employers and work colleagues, institutions and services) (Manderscheid, 2014).

Therefore, social networks have the double form of structure which frame and constrain actions and of the same result of these actions, permanently changing with the links changing. At the level of the individual, the nature of the network frames their mobility (Urry, 2003, 2007). Also, the same actor changes his/her social network through interaction with the surrounding world by means of travel or a simple small talk.

In case of international students, among which the recipients of the MSP are included, as Granovetter (2005) asserts, it is through such social networks that individuals learn about the accepted norms of behaviour in the world around them and how to act in different situations. In the case of international students, and those researched here in particular, the framing of their network has predisposed them towards overseas study.

2.6 The Social Network Approach and the centrality of the student

My main theoretical point of reference is the Social Network Approach (SNA), which can be considered as a combination of concepts from the structuralist network tradition, the concept of embeddedness and social capital perspectives (Kenis & Oerlemans, 2007). This approach aims to understand a community by mapping the relationships that connect them as a network and then trying to

extrapolate the key subjects, groups within the network. Moreover, it focuses on joint activities and exchanges between them in a social system to discover the recurrent pattern. In particular, the actors are considered as embedded within networks of relationships that both constrain and favour actions and exchanges. Specifically, the intrinsic capacity of social networks of building remarkable capabilities for the sharing of assets already present in a system, of sharing them and mobilising individuals and organisations (Plastrik & Taylor, 2006) suits my research on social change.

Furthermore, the profitability of a SNA had also been confirmed in the analysis of macrosocial change, since they are often implicated in large-scale social transformations (Erikson & Occhiuto, 2017). Many authors argued that the relationships between actors are an independent variable in many important social processes, which stresses the importance of distinguishing the social networks existing from the social structure in which they are present. Furthermore, they can be interesting coordinating mechanisms since they exist even outside a formal recognition by the authorities. In this sense, they can be considered as "proto-organisations" that act as origin and coordinators for social change (White, 1992).

The nodes can be represented by objects, institutions, regions as much as individuals and the primary attention is concentred on what connects them more than the single node (Kenis, & Oerlemans, 2007). In my research, the main nodes will be:

- The student or the group of colleagues taking part in a tailor-made course,
- The NUFFIC organisation and its representatives,
- The Dutch government and the Netherlands,
- The firm/institution/association of origin of the student,
- Family of the student,
- Neighbours, acquaintances,
- Municipality,
- Alumni organisations,

▪ The national government of the student.

An actor-network approach will be integrated since this conceptual framework emphasises the role of the singular individual. Besides, as John Law states, the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is more a methodology per se rather than a theory since its effort consists of describing how the networks are modified than why. Three authors write under the label of Actor-Network theory: Bruno Latour (1999), Michel Callon (1999) and John Law (2009). Law describes it as:

"…a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. Its studies explore and characterise the webs and the practices that carry them" (Law, 2009, p.2).

Nevertheless, SNA and ANT had been accused of not being able to consider the social change and being overly focused on a static idea of the society and do not contemplate the social constructs of racism, eurocentrism and oligarchy (Bloor, 1999). For this reason, I will question the social context by comparing two social landscapes: the one existing before the start of the experience and the one existing after the return of the student to the home country (at least after five years). As regards the second critique, I tackle these elements as an integral part of the social networks, since this approach expands the analysis beyond singular individuals to incorporate institutions and, where happens to be the case, cultural and political symbols and topics.

Finally, I here refer to the concept of "centrality" of a node within the social network of reference, which derives from the SNA. As (Freeman, 1978) affirms, the role played by the student inside the social networks can be considered as "more central" after his/her experience since it possesses more connections with other nodes and it thus have a higher level of influence on other actors.

Methodology

3 The relevance of understanding the effects on the society of origin of the student represents a complex phenomenon which entails the intertwined agency of international students, private and public agencies for development. Additionally, the social effects of scholarship programmes have proved to be quite abstract and indefinite and thus quite difficult to measure. Therefore, the empirical landscape of this research needs an appropriate methodology which is capable of framing and delimiting the social networks of the student analysed without compromising the accountability of the study.

In the previous chapter, I pictured the theoretical framework, while in this chapter relevant methodologies and research methods are discussed and the choice for the methodological approaches is explained. The methodology thus is the standing ground of my research, the base that empirically supports my findings and deductions.

Initially, the fieldwork should have consisted of three months of internship at the Nuffic office located in The Hague but, due to the disruption of the Covid-19 virus, online smart-working activities replaced all activities of the organisation. Nevertheless, thanks to the availability of a personal computer connected to an online server of Nuffic, I was able to continue my research without obstacles. Additionally, my internship supervisor (Birgitte Vos) and colleagues assisted me in managing my tasks using the software packages useful to shift my research from a daily office activity to a more flexible and online one.

To answer my principal research question, *"What are the long-term impacts on the society of origin of the student awarded with a MENA scholarship in terms of "social change"* and the sub-questions, a mixed-method approach is utilised. Specifically, a quantitative analysis was applied to the survey results, while a qualitative approach was used in the analysis of the in-depth interviews and the social networks' drawings obtained.

As regards the study of the survey, my research focuses are multiple. Firstly, I aim to analyse the perceived social change permuted in the six pre-defined social fields (family, working environment, friends and acquaintances, community, alumni organisation and ties with hot country) to isolate the effects of the MSP on these fields and the overall "social change" enacted by the student in the society of origin. Secondly, to answer to my second sub-question, I aim to define the level of an increased -perceived- "centrality" of the student within his/her social network (as it is intended in the Social Network Approach and the Actor-Network Theory). Thirdly, the correlation between the moment of the "return" to the home country will be investigated as a factor that could favour or impede social change. This result will be obtained through a statistical analysis of the results of the survey to create a single synthetic index that summarises the precedent indexes of the singular social fields.

Before I delve into the methodological choices, I want to emphasise that all the choices are made out of an ethical perspective and with informed consent. Research in the personal social enclaves posed some ethical dilemmas. To assure the privacy of the respondents, it was essential to ask the oral and written permission of the respondents. To reach this purpose, written consent was signed by the candidates to respect the specific wills and to protect the privacy of the respondents and informants. Secondly, I have not shared information about respondents with others. Thirdly, the data provided by Nuffic organisation is protected and not accessible for others. Finally, the trust and anonymity of the respondents are guaranteed. In this thesis, pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the respondents if the candidate decided not to be quoted or referred by name.

In the next paragraphs, the methodological choices are explained. The methodological choices and data selection are described and justified in §3.1. Subsequently, in section 3.1.2 the focus lies why and how I used the Social Network Approach in my thesis. Finally, there is some attention to the research population and sampling model in §3.2. In §3.3, the attention is on the actual

research strategy or design. In paragraph 3.4, the data processing is discussed: what kind of programs and tools have I used to analyse data and knowledge and why? In the final section (3.5), a reflection is offered to clarify the limitations of my data collection.

3.1 Methodological choices and data collection

3.1.1 Why the MENA programme?

As I mentioned in the introduction, the MSP offered by Nuffic is the starting point of my research. The effects of this programme are thereby explored concerning the respondents' perception of the social change that happened in their society of origin. To investigate this, primary data was collected and then analysed. Specifically, I had access to internal documents regarding the recipients of the MSP since 2008, the year in which the first format of the scholarship programme was launched, to 2015.

The choice of focusing on the MSP resulted from a congruence of research interests from my side and of Nuffic organisation, which suggested me to focus on this project. Practical considerations aside, Nuffic represents the principal scholarship provider in the Netherlands, which entails intensive bilateral relationships with the national government, the universities which offer the courses, the embassies and national governments of MENA countries and the organisation and institutions which the students work for. This implicates that I could extend the focus from the micro-level to the meso and macro-level (see §1). Moreover, the obligation imposed by this project on the continuity of the employment contract created the premise for a long-term analysis that could include the return of the student as an independent variable on the degree of social change enacted (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2020).

3.1.2 Why using the SNA?

In order to understand and contextualise the dynamics of the social networks around the student, the Social Network Approach (SNA) represents the

methodological choice that suits my research topic as it is able to contextualise relationships and define the meaning assigned by actors. Moreover, it offers a practical and replicable presentation of the community, a systematic understanding of the community issues and the relationships among the actors, it is thus an essential tool to understand specific local or national questions (Home Office of United Kingdom, 2016).

As mentioned before, the SNA represents both a theoretical framework and a methodological approach (Law, 2009), and thus it is the core of both my theoretical approach and of my methodology. Nevertheless, its recent advancement, the Actor-Network Theory helps to frame the changes in the social networks taking the perspective of the individual, in this case the student who participated to the MSP, thus considering the perspective of the *ego* as the origin of the meaning assigned to social ties (Boldrini, Toprak, Conti, & Passarella, 2018).

I adapted the core assumptions of the SNA and Actor-Network Theory to both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Indeed, in the survey I targeted my sub-questions to assess if it is possible to distinguish a different degree of impacts in the multiple forms of social clusters (family, working environment, acquaintances and friends, community, ties with the host country and alumni organisation). The questions were explicitly similar to exhaustively cover the meanings and level of intensity of the social ties of the student. Additionally, in the in-depth interview, I asked the respondent to draw the map of their social networks and to explain the changes that happened by comparing them.

The causality between the experience taken in consideration (the MSP training) and the changes permuted in the social network was inferred employing a specific formulation of the questions (for example, "*Do you feel more committed to contributing to social change in your own community because of the MENA/MSP experience?*").

A precise definition of many concepts that frequently appear in this thesis will follow. Firstly, I consider the social network of the student as "*a set of socially relevant nodes connected by one or more relations*" (Scott, & Carrington, 2011, p.11), while nodes (or *network members*) can be represented by objects, institutions, regions as much as individuals. The primary attention is concentred on what connects them more than the single node (Kenis, & Oerlemans, 2007).

In this case, defining which nodes were part of the social network and the meaning associated with them is the crucial question. As Social-Network Theory in its graphic design (i.e., a graph, that is, a set of vertices/nodes/units/points representing social actors or objects and a set of lines representing one or more social relations among them) originates from the graphic theory, I will utilise the concepts and graphic elements in the graphical representation of the social networks of the student. Still, a more detailed analysis is presented in §3.4.2.

Specifically, an online survey targeted the recipients of the scholarship, while in-depth interviews aimed at framing the perceptions of the five students and the administrator of one Alumni organisation in Lebanon who volunteered to participate. Although I was not able to contact each node present in the list (see §2.6), other nodes participate in the construction of the social network of the students, both through a mediated tie or direct social connection.

3.2 Research population and sampling method

As mentioned before, this research focuses on the recipients of the MSP offered by Nuffic. I concentrated my attention on this scholarship programme and, more extensively, on the Nuffic activities not only for the pivotal role played by this organisation in framing the Dutch national policies concerning international student mobility (see §1.1.4) but also for the broad geographical area covered by the MSP.

It is important to note that I will use interchangeably the definition of "students", "respondents" and "professionals" to refer to my research population, considering that they were both involved in a training course and they were already employed and working for an organisation. Moreover, I will

also interchangeably define the experience of the student as "training", "scholarship programme" or "experience". It is important to note that the delimitation of the sample derives from my personal research choices and from the conditions imposed by the programme itself for the application since only professionals aged up to 45 who are nationals and working in one of the selected countries invited to apply. Specifically, the countries of origin are: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Syria and Tunisia (to have more information on the characteristics of my sample, see §4.2).

As regards my research choices, I selected the students who finished their training at least 5 years ago. An internal document which listed the personal information of each student who successfully applied to the scholarship programme constituted the database of my research. Therefore, I applied a selection on the MSP recipients that I targeted. As I addressed each one with an email that included the link for the Survey Monkey website, I based my research on students that decided to fill the survey. Hence, the sample of the survey can be defined as *non-probability voluntary response*.

Conversely, in the second part of the research process, candidates who expressed their consent to be contacted at a later stage for an in-depth interview were the targeted sample. The *convenience sample*, as it is defined by Fricker (2008), occurs when it is left up to everyone to choose to participate. The in-depth interviews followed this approach as it required more effort from the participant in terms of time and information provided.

The GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) imposed to me extra caution on treating the personal data of my respondents. Nuffic organisation stored contacts and information of recipients of the scholarship, but from the moment of the entry into force of the regulation, the update of email addresses and other data was voluntary based, i.e. the student had to autonomously update his/her contacts through a link sent by Nuffic to their email address. Therefore, I could send the invitation email for the online survey only to students who updated their address.

As regards the semi-structured interview, I contacted the president of the association to obtain a clearer understanding of the creation and activities of the alumni organisation in Lebanon. Since it is the only Alumni organisation with a solid organisation, I did not apply any selection nor sampling criteria. Nonetheless, the interview offered me useful insights and information to continue my research (see §3.4.3 for more details).

3.3 Research strategy

My research strategy considered a limited timeframe of 3 months, and it based primarily on online activities. Specifically, I conducted my research at the Nuffic office located in The Hague in the department of Global Development. As previously mentioned, I had access to the internal database of the list of the recipients of the MSP from 2000 to 2015. Conversely, I worked with a personal computer connected remotely to Nuffic the rest of the weeks because of the closure of the office during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, I was obliged to change the physical location of my research, but this did not incisively affect my research activities.

The aim of capturing innovatively the long-term impacts of the MSP pushed me to utilise two different methodologies and approaches. My research strategy can thus be divided into two phases, to whom diverse sampling and structure correspond: an online survey and in-depth interviews and drawing of social networks. In a single case, the conversation of the president of the Alumni organisation, I opted for a semi-structured interview.

I organised my research in two chronologically and methodologically different steps:

1. Firstly, I created and sent an online survey to every recipient of the MSP scholarship. As the Nuffic was familiar with the use of Survey Monkey website, which helps the researcher to create and send surveys easily, I opted to follow this methodology. I created a specific question in the

online survey, which asked the candidate to leave his/her email address if they wanted to participate in an in-depth interview.

2. Secondly, I conducted in-depth interviews with students who explicitly expressed their willingness to be contacted. During this interview, I asked the candidate to draw two different drawings of their social networks which they are part of as they recall they were before and after the training experience in the Netherlands.

3. Parallelly, I conducted a semi-structured in-depth interview with the president of the Alumni organisation in Lebanon.

The privacy of the respondents was my main concern, as I sent a consent form to each candidate who expressed the willingness to participate in in-depth interviews (see Appendix 6 for the consent form sample).

3.3.1 Online survey

The term questionnaire refers to a variety of methods of data collection in which ask the candidate to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order (De Vaus, 2014). The questionnaire is one of the most widely used data collection method and it allows the collection of an extensive amount of information to pre-settled questions decided by the researcher and they are useful for analytical research or for other research that requires a large number of open-ended questions (Thornhill, Saunders, & Lewis, 2009). Therefore, the survey is a type of research through which the researcher tries to gain an overall picture of a phenomenon spread out over time and space. In particular, the survey proved to be a potent tool in geography for several decades since it quickly acquires information regarding the characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes of a population (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, 2016). Survey research has been able to address a variety of geographical issues and they were first applied to behavioural geography to examine people's perceptions and behaviour related to a specific environment. They are particularly useful to

collect opinions about social, political, and environmental issues, social behaviours and interactions (McLafferty, 2003).

The nature of the survey as internet-mediated is widely considered as a plus factor for a successful data collection (Madge, 2010). Due to the geographical distance between the office and the recipients of the MSP, an online survey resulted in the perfect method to have reliable data. The internet survey, which shares many similarities with the postal survey, aggregates advantages since they are inexpensive, provide access to geographically distant populations and they can reach physically immobile individuals (Madge, & O'connor, 2004). I overcame the difficult individualisation of the target population, which represents the negative effect of an online survey since I already possessed an official document with the personal information of my target population. Additionally, as the application for the MSP is conducted only by email and online platform, I was confident that each student already possessed the necessary internet skills and an online connection to be able to fill the online survey.

As regards the structure of the survey, I elaborated a survey constituted by a mix of open-ended responses and fixed-response questions, with the first providing detailed insights into recipients' opinions and additional comments and the latter offering specific information about personal perceptions which resulted easier to frame in a pre-settled format (see the survey sample in Appendix 1). Indeed, some specific fixed-response questions were based on a Likert scale, although this system allows capturing the shades and range of opinions, presenting a range of responses anchored by two extremes (Likert, 1932). Nevertheless, this could create difficulty in comparing results among respondents. To overcome this issue, I assigned fixed scores to distinct answers on the scale (for more details, see §3.4.1). Moreover, I created a clear set of instructions to guide individual responses, since, for its online nature, the questionnaire needs to be self-explanatory (Wolf & Lavrakas, 2008).

The information gathered in the survey will answer the first sub-question concerning the degree of social change enacted in each social clusters. Additionally, the last sub-question (*What are the implications on the status of the student inside his/her social network after his/her reintegration into the society of origin and what are the implications of this in terms of "social change"?*) will receive attention in a specific section of the survey and on the in-depth interview, especially referring to the concept of "centrality" as it is proper of the Social Network Approach.

3.3.2 In-depth interviews and drawing of social networks

Qualitative, in-depth interviewing allows social researchers to explore the range of activities a respondent (*ego*) is involved with, information about these connections (frequency, etc.) and the respondent's valuation of the activity. If researchers want to understand these activities in a social context, however, they need information about the respondent's acquaintances in the activity (Chamberlain, 2006). In this case, the student narrated in first person their life after they return to the home country and explained the effects they perceived to have had on their society of origin as they were drawing the social networks' maps. Before the start of the interview, I shared with the candidate a list of some basic guidelines regarding the drawing of their social network. The guidelines can then summarised as follows (see Appendix 2 for the original document):

- Draw two social networks' maps: one as it was before the start of the experience and one as it was after the return of the student to the home country;
- Draw nodes as representation of individuals and/or institutions present in your social network;
- Draw lines to connect the nodes, which represent the social relationships existing between the nodes and define the relationship existing between the nodes on the corresponding line (familiar, friendship, business/job…).

I then suggested some nodes reminding that the candidate was free to add or eliminate any according to his/her point of view (Nuffic, the Dutch government, firm/institution of origin of the student, family of the student, neighbours, acquaintances, municipality, alumni organisations…).

The in-depth interviews were conducted through Skype and, according to the case, the candidate already prepared some slides before our meeting or constructed them during the interview. In the latter case, I utilised the Google Slide Share or the function of screen mirroring of the software Skype to see the graphical progress of the social network's maps. The approximate duration of each interview was about one hour. Before the start of the interview, I orally informed the respondent on the fact that I recorded the conversation to revise the details at a later stage. I recorded the conversation by the specific tool of Skype when possible, but, due to the malfunctioning of it, sometimes I used my phone to record the conversation. Since every respondent agreed to it, I have stored every record.

The structure of the interview did not comprehend specific questions, nevertheless, I gave general suggestions on which actors to include, leaving up to the candidate the decision to include them or not. The principal social enclaves suggested were: family, friends and acquaintances, community, working environment, alumni organisation and ties with the host country (Netherlands). I then allowed the discussion to unfold in a conversational manner to offer participants the chance to explore and add actors they feel are important in their social network. At the end of the interview and during the interview, however, I checked my schedule to make sure that all the social spheres had been covered at some stage during the interview.

The *name generator* exercise was at the base of the graphic construction of the social network. Indeed, I asked the candidate to draw their social networks' maps according to their representation, and thus they had complete freedom in choosing which actors to include or not. This method is one of the most common for constructing an understanding of a social network and it poses questions to

the respondent that elicits the names of people or other entities to which the respondent has some connection (Burt, 1984). This approach shares similarities with the *personal network visualisation*. Indeed, this method elicits names of the network members from the respondent who evaluates a set of binary relationships present in order to create a representation of the structure (McCarty, Molina, Aguilar, & Rota, 2007). My ego-centric perspective required the freedom of the *name generator* technique and the evaluation of the binary relationships between the student and other nodes.

Depending on the propensity of the candidate, the questions I posed could be as simple as "who are your friends" or as specific as "list the organisation you had business relations with". However, if the candidate spontaneously listed the actors covering all the social spheres I suggested, my intervention during the interview was minimum. Additionally, I did not set a definite amount of questions that could be asked and neither I listed specific themes or topic that needed to be discussed, allowing for the candidate to freely direct the conversation flow according to their desire, in a freestyle drawing that captures the variability in the way respondents represent their network. Since I asked to draw two different maps, one representing their social network as it was before the training and one as it is at the present, the majority of the students decided to describe the changes from a chronological point of view.

3.3.3 Semi-structured interview

As previously mentioned, I utilised a semi-structured interview with the president of the Alumni organisation since I was interested in capturing specific relationships that the association has developed with other actors and institutions, while I was also interested in understanding other general information related to the organisation and its role in the Lebanese social and political context. As it is the case for the survey, also the semi-structured interview was conducted online through Skype software and has a duration of approximately 1 hour.

A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where the interviewer asks some predetermined question to a candidate to explore specific issues. This method easily follows the conversational lines and the talks of everyday and thus it adapts to informal and soft conversations (Longhurst, 2003). Interviews, explains Dunn (2005), are verbal interchanges where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person. Basically, there are three types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured, which can be placed along a continuum. Dunn (2005) explains that semi-structured interviews are in the middle of a fixed of structure (as it happens to be the case for structured ones) and total freedom of the respondent to direct the conversational flows as in the unstructured interviews such as oral histories. This form of interviewing has some degree of predetermined order but still, ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant.

This interview assumed many connotations of an expert interview, as the president of the Holland Alumni Network in Lebanon offered me useful insights not only on the activities of the organisation but on the relationships existing within other institutions and actors. For example, I asked her perception of the relationship the Alumni organisation has with Nuffic, the regional institutions and the singular student who participated in the MSP. The relevance of this interview results from the possibility of having an "insider" perception of the functioning of the Alumni programme and of Nuffic itself from a critic standpoint. Moreover, issues such as "return migration" were then further explored concerning the organisation's activities. Lastly, the issue of alumni organisation having a role in the social change of the region was addressed.

3.4 Data processing

The phase of the data processing required a mixture of appropriate tools that offer a complete overview of the construction and dynamics intercurred in the social networks of the student. As the effects of the MSP constate a wide and general effect to measure, I intertwined various qualitative and quantitative

deductions. The following sections will firstly describe the processing of the data derived from the survey and, secondly, define the interpretation and categorisation applied to the mapping of the social networks and the in-depth interviews.

3.4.1 Statistical and trend analysis and correlation

After receiving the result of the survey, I focused on the questions attaining – but not explicitly referring to – the degree of social change enacted by students in each of the following social clusters: community, working environment, friends and acquaintances, family, ties with the host country and alumni associations. Then, for each student, I derived a score for the level of social change achieved in each of these social clusters. Furthermore, I obtained an overall score across social clusters, which I refer to as "total impact score". Finally, I inferred the correlation between the following factors: the total impact score and the number of problematics concerning the return to the home country; the "alumni impact score" and gender; and gender and personal issues at return.

I here describe in detail how I operated a standardisation of the variables to have a "clearer" and quantifiable measures. I assigned a specific value from 0 to 1 to the answers to each question (for example, if the answer was "yes", 1 point was assigned). In the case of questions based on the Likert scale, a fractioned and incremental score was attributed (as the precedent case, from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1). In the case of questions that had multiple answers (more than yes/no), 1 point was assigned to each answer. However, if such question remained unanswered and was a specification of an aspect of a previous question whereby a positive answer was given, I still assigned a score of 1 to the affirmative respondent. I summed all the scores of each question in every social cluster and divided the score for the number of questions (normalisation of the score). I could then establish a value between 0 (minimum) to 1 (maximum) of the "social change" enacted by every student. As last step, I calculated a simple average across social clusters to derive the "total impact score".

3.4.2 Social Network drawing and in-depth interviews

As the focus is on the singular student, the research examines the social network and the data are on nodes that share chosen relation(s) with the ego and on relationships between these nodes. Moreover, it is essential to remind that the map of the social network is pictured according to the student's perspective and that also the interpretation of the social ties follows his/her assessment. Therefore, the drawing of the maps is different in terms of the number of nodes of included, level of detailed information given graphically and the number of connections made between the nodes. Lastly, the maps contained different logical separations, according to the student. Hence, I will fill the graphical gaps (if there are any) with the information provided by the respondent during the in-depth interview. My analysis is then divided into two main steps: the first one concentrated into the *structure* of the social network and the *key concepts* and the second one into the *process*. Specifically, I split the analysis process into four stages:

1. Firstly, I study the two maps separately. The key concepts present in their description are connected and the social relationships depicted and narrated by the student into the five social spheres: community, family, working environment, relationships with alumni organisation and ties with the host country. I annotate any absence of relationship in any field or the overlapping of two social spheres (if any). In the case some details or themes are missing, I considered the answers in the survey to that precise argument in order to obtain a wider perspective.

2. Secondly, I analyse the characteristics of each map: the number of ties present, how much the nodes are interconnected, how many nodes are present.

3. Thirdly, I compare the two maps and annotate the differences in terms of quantity of nodes and ties and the intensity of interrelation of these nodes. My focus is then on the *process* intercurred in the period before and after the experience.

4. In the last step, I concentrate on the concept of centrality: how many ties has the student? Are there differences in the level of centrality before and after the experience?

Therefore, the concept of *centrality* and the degree of social change enacted in the social clusters is expanded in this research section and included in a graphical comparison of the two maps, which will expand to a chronological and dynamic narrative of the changes intercurred in the life and society of the student. I indeed examine the difference between the two maps and explain them concerning the "story" narrated by the student. Specifically, the intensity of the connections, the quantity and the type of tie will receive attention to determine the level of social change intercurred after the return of the student to his/her home country. Other characteristics, such as the number of network members, the diversity of network members (e.g., different types of actors in the network), the number of clusters contribute to the broader assessment.

3.4.3 Expert interview

As it is the case for the in-depth interviews, also the expert interview explored the social networks around the Alumni organisation. Nevertheless, the focus and the analysis of the data follows a different approach as specific questions addressed the relationships with other actors instead of by the drawing of social networks' map. Therefore, I could elaborate on the additional information to have a clearer and more general picture. I then integrated this with the other information gained through the survey and in-depth interviews to reach a broader picture of the function of Alumni organisations inside the MSP.

3.5 Methodological reflections

Every research has its limitation, also this one. Some of these were foreseen, others not, like the outbreak of COVID-19. Nevertheless, I am convinced that this research still gives a valid and reliable answer to the research questions. Indeed, I could use a pc connected to the private server of Nuffic, which allowed me to conduct and examine the survey data and start the online interviews, from which

I obtained valuable data. Moreover, the students I interviewed enthusiastically helped me and offered their time, although the majority had difficulties in making use of a personal computer and internet connection. In this section, I will give more attention to the challenges and limits of my research from a methodological point of view.

3.5.1 Research on distance and the nature of internet-mediated research

Within the discipline of geography, there has been a growing number of projects utilising internet-mediated research (Kagawa, 2007; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009). Nevertheless, the use of internet-mediated research must be carefully considered. As Best and Krueger (2004, p. 85) suggest, attempting to undertake online data collection "is far easier than accomplishing it. For those who choose to perform it, they must do so deliberately and cautiously". Thus, the appearance of this tool as an affordable and fast method to acquire information should be cautiously examined and adapted to the situation. Moreover, most of the problems arising in traditional research methods still apply in online research (Smith, 1997; Dodd, 1998).

However, I consider the intermediation of the internet as one of the main factors that allowed me to obtain reliable data. Internet indeed helped me to overcome geographical distances and to connect with individuals that neither reside in the Netherlands neither had the possibility of moving from the country of origin. Lastly, and more importantly, I continued my research and finished my internship at Nuffic without significant problems as the outbreak of the pandemic only limited my face-to-face communication with my colleagues of Nuffic.

3.5.2 Non-response errors, boredom and private information

Considering the limitations imposed by the sampling, the research needs to take into consideration the value of the so-called "non-response errors". Indeed, they occur when data is not collected or either specific questions or respondents are missing (Fricker, 2008). Moreover, the employment of the survey may lead to

measurement error, which derives from a mismatch of the real opinion of the respondent who may not answer sensitive questions or from a misinterpretation or mistakes in answering questions. Nevertheless, I carefully phrased the questions survey with precise terms and avoided to ask confidential and private information. Furthermore, I created the space for additional and voluntary comments on the black boxes, so the candidate could autonomously decide which information to share.

Moreover, as it is frequent in purposive sampling as it is the case for the online survey, many respondents chose to ignore the invitation and not to participate. To alleviate this problem, I send a second email two weeks after the first email to remember the candidates to complete the survey and increase the number of data. As regards the "non-response errors", I will analyse the topic in §4.

3.5.3 Covid-19: new normality or a temporal obstacle?

I could not continue my analysis without tackling the role of the Covid-19 pandemic had on my research. As I do so, I want to reflect on what extent it impeded my data collection. As previously mentioned, the contextual status of emergency in the Netherlands did not incisively affect my research strategies. Nevertheless, many respondents testified that they had a very limited timeframe to reply to my survey and be interviewed as they had to share the computer with other family members or to take care of them. Therefore, I can suppose that if the pandemic did not occur, more candidates would have expressed the willingness to participate in the research.

However, I believe that, since Covid-19 pandemic has not yet concluded, this methodological approach, easily adaptable to both an online quantitative and qualitative analysis, has the potential to guide scholars who engage on the study of impacts of scholarship or other forms of grants, as it combines cost efficiency and permits to continue the research without incurring in health and safety concerns.

The MENA scholarship

4 In the following chapter, a focus on the role of Nuffic and the Netherlands in the panorama of international education is presented to contextualise the effects of the MSP successfully. The first section covers the activities of Nuffic in the development sector and describes the scope of the MSP within Nuffic activities: §4.1.1 explores the initiative of the Holland Alumni Network online platform in relation to its role of fostering alumni connections, while the second section, §4.1.2, describes the social network instated by the programme. Indeed, it is essential to analyse the donor organisation and the role of the Dutch government with whom the Nuffic works to understand why the programme was created, why it targets professionals and its role in the foreign policy of the Netherlands. Moreover, the networks instated by the management of the programme represents the first key element in the analysis of the networks created by the scholarship itself.

In §4.2, the key characteristics of the students who participated in the research are presented. These constitute the independent variables that can negatively or positively influence the level of social impact enacted, which return-related problematics concur together. I decided to include not only biographical data, but also personal perceptions related to personal problems faced and the individual propensity to participate in associations.

The empirical analysis and, thus, my contribution to the knowledge on the impacts of scholarship programmes constitute the main topic of chapters 5, 6 and 7 where my findings concerning the effects of the scholarship are analysed and contextualised. The results of the survey and in-depth interviews are integrated to establish a degree of impact on community, family, friends and acquaintances, working environment and ties with the host country. Moreover, the correlation between the answers given provides further insights into the interplay of the contextual factors. As previously mentioned, the survey helps to describe the averages and trend in the degree of social impact, while the in-depth interviews deepen on the single student's story and social network, thus zooming in the

changes occurred on the micro and meso level. Lastly, exciting and unexpected results are offered in this chapter in contrast with common presumptions on the effects of scholarship programmes.

Thereby one specific section Chapter 6 focuses on the role of alumni organisations on social change and, more broadly, of development.

4.1 Delving into the education-development nexus: the work of Nuffic for internationalisation of education and the scope of the MENA programme

The Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic) is the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. It is an independent, non-profit organisation based in The Hague, the Netherlands. Nuffic established many partnership programmes with the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Indeed, Nuffic plays a vital role in fostering international cooperation in education between the Netherlands and other countries (Deardorff, de Wit, Heyl, & Adams, 2012). This organisation plays a significant role not only in the Dutch national education field but also aims to support Dutch institutions in internationalisation activities. Indeed, while its focus lies in the Netherlands, its mission extends beyond that: it cooperates with foreign partners, institutions, and governments. The focus thus expands from the Dutch knowledge economy to comprehend capacity building and development efforts in developing countries.

The Nuffic organisation was created back in 1950' when the necessity of making the university courses in the Netherlands accessible to students coming from the former colonies became more and more urgent. This need was also reflected on the side of international relations, a field where the neutrality and isolationism experienced during the Second World War set the path for a more international way of thinking. Nuffic was thus conceived to transform this idea into action (Dijk,1985).

The MSP focuses on the Middle East and North Africa countries. As the fact of being included in a policy framework of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs demonstrates, this scholarship involves academic relations and knowledge-transfer relations as much as diplomatic and development ones (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2020). Precisely, as regards the 2020 edition of the programme, the policy framework forms the guideline for the assessment of applications for a subsidy in the Shiraka and establishes that the MENA Scholarship Program (MSP) is part of the Shiraka Program. Indeed, since 2016 the MSP is financed through the Shiraka programme. This Dutch bilateral effort supports sustainable transition in the MENA region, while before was part of the Matra South programme (Technopolis, 2019).

The main goal of the Shiraka Program is the sustainable transition in the Arab region. As its translation in Arab suggests (*Shiraka* stands for "partnership" in Arabic), it aims to increase pluralism "in which cultural and religious differences are accepted and where there is a degree of inclusivity" (Government Gazette, 2020, p.3); a rule of law that protects citizenship, human rights and minorities and favourable conditions for the creation of economic growth and employment.

It is essential to note that the MSP was not explicitly designed to support the Dutch contribution to the sustainable transition in the MENA region. However, it was tailored to be aligned with the overall Shiraka objectives for this region. Indeed, the goal of facilitating the democratic transition in the Arab countries was not part of the first edition of the scholarship programme (Technopolis, 2019).

Through the MSP, participants have access to a wide variety of good quality courses that provide practical applicability and support to fill a lack of training and life-long learning opportunities in organisations in the MENA countries. While there is not an exact correspondence in terms of the demands of the locality of origin of the student and the technical skills, the student in the

motivation letter has to explain why and to what extent the organisation where he/she is employed could benefit from the training the student will receive (Techopolis, 2019).

Picture 1 Alumni event in Jordan in 2017 (Nuffic, 2020)

4.1.1 The Holland Alumni Network

The last format of the programme added to the list of goals the expansion of the network of alumni organisations. Indeed, Nuffic recognised the value of alumni organisations in the MSP, although the absence of a specific alumni policy leaves a grey zone in the actual management. The online platform of the Holland Alumni network, an initiative funded by the Dutch government, aims to facilitate an international network of Holland Alumni, future alumni, Netherlands Alumni Associations, Dutch higher education institutions, Dutch embassies and relevant organisations. Indeed, this platform connects any alumnus who did a study, research or work experience in the Netherlands or with a study experience provided by a Dutch education institution abroad. In this platform, members can send messages with other alumni, find other alumni from the same country or with the same field of study, share and find job vacancies and set job alerts.

Nevertheless, probably the most essential tool is that alumni can join online communities based on their country of residence or area of expertise. Also, the relations with the Dutch institutions are helped by the subscription to this platform, thus fostering the social relations not only within the student community, but also with Dutch embassies and universities (Holland Alumni Network, 2020).

This platform also constitutes the national platform of all Dutch alumni which Nuffic has managed since 2009. Nuffic insisted on establishing a network that could be both active online with this digital platform and offline with events and activities that are organised in the Netherlands and worldwide by Nuffic, its offices, local Netherlands Alumni Associations and other partners (Holland Alumni Network, 2020).

Picture 2 Banner used by Nuffic during alumni events (Nuffic, 2020).

4.1.2 The social network of MSP

I here delineate a social network of the institutions involved in the management of the MENA programme. Although it does not directly relate with the students' social networks, it is a first glimpse of the network of institutions, national and more locally based, which participate to the organisational and management of

the project. At the same time, the description will guide the reader in the understanding of the national and international dynamics involved in scholarship mobility and organisation.
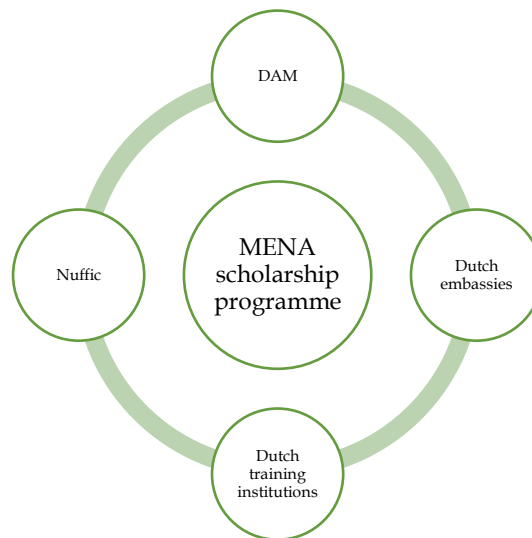
Figure 2 The social network of the MSP (Author, 2020)

As Figure 2 illustrates, Specifically, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, North-Africa and Middle East Department (DAM) finances the MSP and decides on strategic directions for the programme. Conversely, Nuffic administrates and manages the programme and reports directly to DAM on an annual basis, providing an overview of the outputs of the programme and feedback on its strategic orientation. Besides, Nuffic selects the candidate for the scholarship and it is the intermediator between Dutch Embassies and the Dutch training institutions. Moreover, Nuffic takes care of the organisation of alumni events with its specific team.

Instead, Dutch Embassies are engaged in the management and implementation of the programme at a country level and they contact employers to understand the eligibility of candidates, although they have a limited role in the decision-making regarding the programme's strategic orientation. As regards the Dutch training Institutions, they provide and organise the training for the students, they promote each MSP deadline, (listing the courses that are eligible for the programme, together with the option for applying for an MSP

scholarship) and do a first suitability check of applicants before elaborating a shortlist of chosen candidates (Technopolis, 2019).

In summary, the interplay of Dutch institutional actors (Dutch embassy, DAM) together with the academic staff of Dutch universities creates a social network where Nuffic organisation forms the logical intermediary between local development needs (technical skills in water management, management skills, industrial wastewater treatment, fisheries governance …), academic knowledge offered by Dutch institutions and the needs of the organisations where the applicants are employed at the moment.

4.1.3 Nuffic's Theory of change: coherence and contrast with the concept of social change

Nuffic developed a specific theory of change for the organisation of all the scholarship programme and academic exchanges it manages. A MSP specific "Theory of Change" does not exist and the programme follows the general "Theory of Change" of Nuffic. Nevertheless, it is interesting to compare the principal assumptions and goals with the concept of "social change" taken as the starting point of my research.

"Contribute to sustainable and inclusive development through the strengthening of organisations key to sectoral development in partner countries. This will be achieved by developing the capacity, knowledge and quality of individuals as well as organisations both in the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education (TVET/HE) and in other fields related to the priority themes in the OKP partner countries" (Nuffic, 2018).

On Nuffic's theory of change, a central role is assigned to the increase of human capital defined as "…as all acquired characteristics of workers that make them more productive. Human capital is acquired through formal education prior to entrance in the labour market (initial schooling), and after the entrance in the labour market via on-the-job training, learning by doing or courses and/or experience" (Nuffic, 2018, p.2). Indeed, the stress is in on the knowledge and experiences obtained during a lifetime. Besides, reciprocity, considered by Nuffic

as long-term collaborations with partners, shares underlying commonalities with the concept of social change utilised in this research. Indeed, relationships between institutions and individuals are considered as the promoters of social change as far as this relationship brings mutual gains.

Interestingly, an external evaluator Technopolis (2019) organised a workshop with members of the evaluation reference group from Nuffic. During the workshop participants engaged in identifying the intended impacts and outcomes of the MSP. The result of this workshop evidenced that, beyond the enunciated goals of the project, the side of social connections would improve since students would be able to connect to and set up relations with Dutch organisations. It was also implied that these relations could help improve public diplomacy. Firstly, the overall sustainable transition is indirectly obtained through the strengthened individuals and organisations which will be able to better contribute to the public debate and will have increased economic opportunities. Thereby the empowerment of these individuals and organisations will, over time lead to a freer communication between citizens and the State. Secondly, the relations between the Netherlands and the MENA countries will be improved, which will also contribute to a sustainable democratic transition in these countries.

In summary, the Theory of Change of Nuffic shares some commonalities with my approach to social change. Firstly, the focus is on the relationship and the dynamic interplay within actors and institutions. Secondly, a long-term perspective is tackled instead of attention to initial positive effects of the scholarship at the individual level. Lastly, alumni organisation are the more promising actors of social change for their combination of consolidate relationships within members and the institutions existing in the locality, at the national level and belonging to the Dutch world. At the opposite, the focus on human capital leads to a different approach to the measure of the positive effects of the scholarship, since knowledge and skills are valued more than the actual transfer to other peers and, more broadly, to the society of origin of the student.

4.2 Biographical data: the starting point of my research

As previously mentioned, I sent an online survey to each student who participated in the MSP from 2000 to 2015. My sample comprehends 123 students who replied to all my questions of the survey. In this section, I stress not solely the biographical traits of my respondents, but their potential correlation within factors concurring to a higher level of social impact. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of the statistical correlation between the independent variables of gender and personal problems faced after the return with the degree of social change is present in §6.2 and §6.4.2, as I hypothesised that these factors can partly contribute to an explanation.

I consider biographical data and about the problematics connected with the moment of the return as independent variables. The majority of students did the course entirely in the Netherlands, attending different training institutes, while a minority (10%) did it partly or fully elsewhere. This is the case of Syrian students, which held their training in a safer area. As previously mentioned, the MSP is available for mid-career professionals. An age limit of 45 years for participants was introduced to the programme in 2014, to specifically target mid-career professionals that can act as change agents within the organisations, and that have years ahead of them to share and implement the acquired knowledge and skills. Indeed, as Figure 3 shows, the most common age range was between 35-40, followed by 40-45.
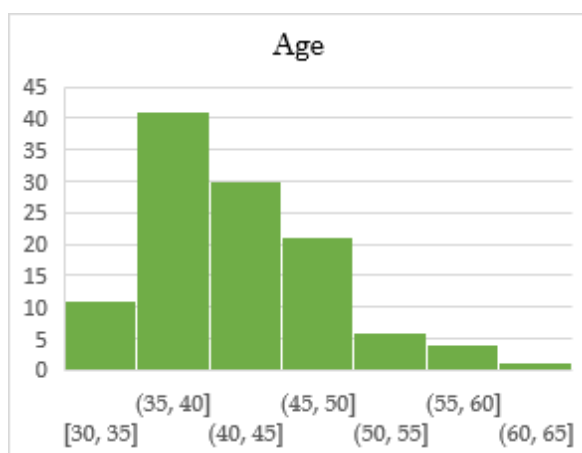
Figure 3 Age
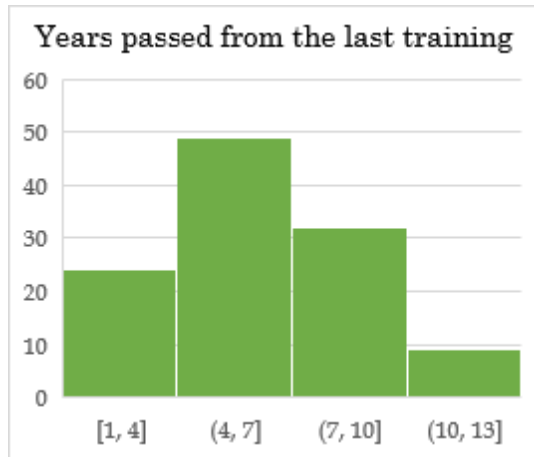
Figure 4 Years passed from the last training

Moreover, to isolate the effects of the MSP, I asked to refer to the last scholarship they received (in case of multiple scholarships received). As Figure 4 demonstrates, the majority did the training 4-7 years ago, followed by 7 to 10. Only a minority did the training quite recently (1 to 4 years ago) or more than 10 years ago[4]. Nevertheless, I decided to consider students that finished the training no less than five years ago (2015) in order also to study the effects of the last grants on an adequate period.

While the MSP tries to reach equity in the gender distribution (50% of the places are reserved to female candidates), I observed a disparity in terms of men and women who received the scholarship (see Appendix 3). A partial explanation of this result is that although the gender parity is desirable (if the number of applications by female candidates is not sufficient, the remaining places are assigned to male candidates), respondents of the survey indicated that just one-third of the students are women, while the vast majority are men. However, this does not necessarily contradict overall participation to Nuffic schemes and may indicate that women responded less than men to the survey.

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[4] In the Appendix 4 present the statistical correlation between the timespan intercurred between the training and the degree of social change enacted, i.e. if a longer-time span created more possibilities for the student to enact a certain degree of social change.

As regards the job specialisation of respondents, I evidenced a predominance of employment in governmental organisations at the local or national level. At the opposite, no one is self-employed. Indeed, one of the prerequisites for the candidacy to the grant included the professional is employed in an organisation (except for the case of organisations that has its means of staff development) (Nuffic, 2020b). About 12% of students worked in an education or training institute, while only 20% of them worked for a non-governmental organisation or in a private enterprise. Surprisingly, only 1.5% of students worked in an international or intergovernmental organisation[5]. It is here essential to recall one of the eligibility criteria of the scholarship: "The scholarships are awarded in a competitive selection to highly motivated professionals who are in a position to introduce the newly-acquired skills and knowledge into their employing organisation" (Nuffic, 2020c).

Indeed, the propensity of generating an internal change inside the organisation may appear stronger in the eyes of Nuffic in candidates who work in a governmental organisation. At the opposite, another causal explanation may lie in the facility of the student to deal with the bureaucratic phases of the application since they already work in a governmental institute (i.e. obtaining the government statement which allows the student to participate to the programme).

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[5] Concerning the differences between international and supranational organizations, an intergovernmental organization or international governmental organisation (IGO) is an organization composed primarily of sovereign states (referred to as member states), or of other intergovernmental organizations. International organisations comprehend international organisations, although that term may also include international non-governmental organisation such as international non-profit ones or multinational corporations (Author).

Furthermore, most applicants also work for the same organisation (75%) and only 7 students are currently unemployed. The social impact enacted in the working environment can be then fostered by a more extended period of employment and building of relationships with colleagues.
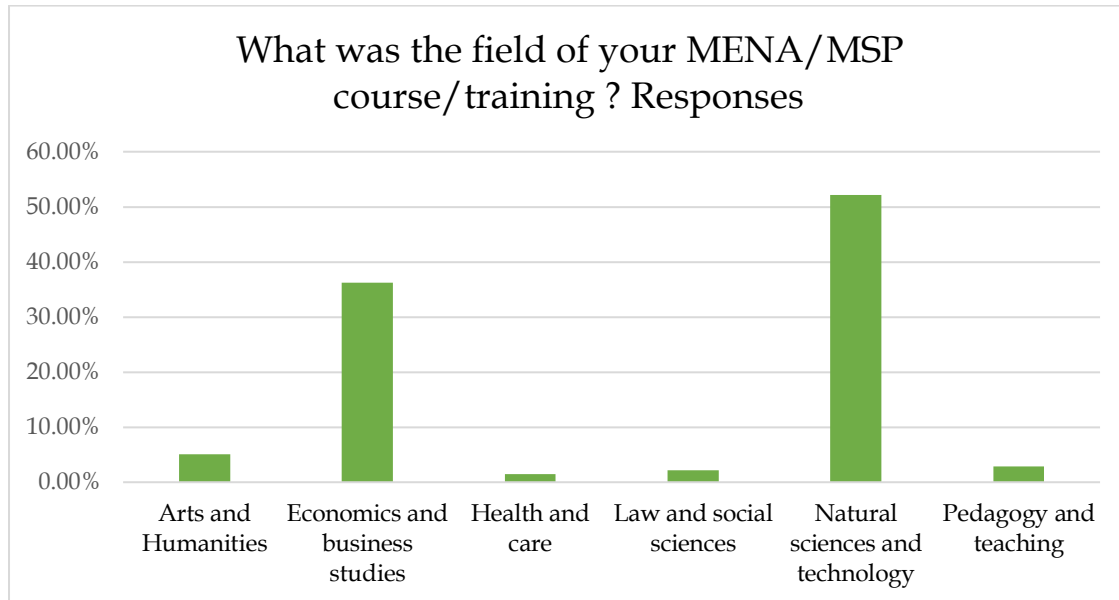
Figure 5 What was the field of your MSP course/training?

As previously mentioned, the subject of trainings offered by the MSP follows the specific request of applicants and of the organisation where they are employed instead of specific country-focused tailored programmes (Nuffic delineates only a focus area for each country). As Figure 5 shows, the prevalence of trainings was in the field of natural sciences and technology (56%), while economics and business studies account for 31% of the total. Health and care and pedagogy and training represent in sum the least favoured sectors.

4.3 Chapter summary

❖ The Nuffic organisation, ideated in the 1950s, aims at supporting the internationalisation of education by cooperating with external partners and institutions. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides the finance, the Dutch embassies implement and manage the implementation at a county level, while Dutch training institutions provide the trainings and the academic staff and offer of courses.

- ❖ The MSP is encapsulated in the Shiraka Programme and it was later tailored to be compatible with the scope of Shiraka, whose main goal is the democratic transition of the Arab region. The MSP focuses principally on capacity building according to local development needs.

- ❖ The Holland Alumni network is a pivotal tool of the MSP, as it aims to connect alumni who studied in the Netherlands. However, a tailored alumni policy for alumni management still does not exist.

- ❖ The Theory of Change of Nuffic focuses on the increase in the human capital of students, who later apply their knowledge to their working environment. Alumni organisations are the more promising actors of social change and, for their associate constitution, they promote the exchange of skills and ideas both inside and outside the organisation

- ❖ Mid-career professionals were my target sample, composed of males in the majority. Most students work in governmental organisations and their field expertise is, in predominance, economics and business studies and natural sciences and technology.

Social change in six clusters

5

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"

Margaret Mead, American anthropologist, 1901-1978

The Social Network Approach (SNA) aims to understand a given community by mapping the relationships that connect them as a network and then trying to extrapolate the key subjects, groups within the network (Butts, 2008). Actors are considered as embedded within networks of relationships that both constrain and favour concrete actions and exchanges. Precisely, the intrinsic capacity of sharing of assets already present in a system, of sharing them and mobilising individuals and organisations (Plastrik & Taylor, 2006) suits my research on social change.

In section 5.1 I investigate the social networks of the student who received a MENA bursary, considering three of the six social clusters: family, the working environment and the community of origin. On the hand, the interviews enrich the quantitative analysis with insights into the narration of the life path of the student before and after the MSP experience. On the other hand, they provide a useful understanding of the effects of the programme on the level of "centrality" of the student within his/her social network. In §5.2, the social connections the student possesses with the community members is tackled, while, in order to grasp also the international ties, a specific focus on the relationships with the Netherlands and Dutch institutions is offered in §5.3. As previously mentioned, the last social cluster, the alumni organisations, are studied in §6.

The common characteristic of the research into these six social clusters (family, working environment, community, friends and acquaintances, ties with the host country and alumni organisation) is that not only direct connections such as friendship ties are explored, but also the indirect sharing of values, ideas and projects are investigated (see §2.6). Leadership role and commitment to the enhancement of living conditions are tackled as a proxy for the dedication of social change. In contrast, the quality of the social relationship (are they more

direct, personal than before?) and the awareness of the student of the problems existing inside the reference social cluster is part of the definition and description of the social change happened in the network of the student. The centrality of the student within the network of belonging is then evaluated, starting from the idea that the more central an actor is, the higher is the level of influence that he/she may be able to exercise.

I split the research into six social spheres and the final and overall result consists of the delineation of six indexes that frame the effects of the MSP. I describe the similarities and the differences to suggest improvements and evidence discrepancies in the formulation of the scholarship programme. The insights on the relation between some "precondition variables" and the degree of social change expand the focus to include external factors which contribute to the intertwined accumulation of effects of the MSP on the society of origin of the student.

5.1 Family, work environment and friends and acquaintances: where values, new ideas and projects are shared

The micro and meso level refer to the family, work and community, which comprehend relationships formed in the daily and usual activities as much as volunteer work and involvement in institutional development programs. At the micro-level (individual outcomes) I overcome the standard questions on the accessibility and affordability of international education or the satisfaction of employers or regarding the increased "human capital" of the student (Perna, Orosz, Gopaul, Jumakulov, Ashirbekov, & Kishkentayeva, 2014). Specifically, my effort is to tackle specific aspects at the meso (organisational and institutional effects) and on the macro-level (societal impacts) to assess the implications and externalities of scholarships. My analysis will firstly focus on familial ties, then on the working environment and lastly on the community.

5.1.1 The family

"I am the oldest of my family. And our values impose the respect and the concertation with the oldest son. Besides, I have total responsibility of the kids" (Student 68, male student from Morocco, survey).

The family may assume connotations according to each student. As the case for student 68, it may represent a constraint or additional responsibility or, otherwise, a support system on which the student relies. Negative parental attitude and other family issues have been found to constrain the participation of specific multicultural groups in study abroad, both in terms of financial help and family responsibilities towards sons and spouses (Murray Brux & Fry, 2010). On the opposite, financial support from the family represents a stimulating push factor in the decision to study abroad (Whatley, 2017). However, in this research, I tackle the family social network as the sum of the significative relations with in-laws and family members from the student's perspective. Therefore, whether the family supported or not the student is outside the research topic. Conversely, I want to study the dynamics of familiar ties and why they have changed after the period of study abroad.

Half of the students reported observing a general improvement in the relationship with family members because of the MSP training. Precisely, they suggested that family members now rely more on their skills and ask for their competencies (51 respondents) and they ask for their advice more often (88% of the respondents). In family-related problems, they also became more a reference point to discuss a new or innovative idea. This is also reflected by the common perception of covering a more "central" role within the social network, which is to be able to influence the thoughts and actions of other individuals and of the organisations to whom they belong.

As regards the sharing of information learned during the MSP, almost 70% professional affirmed that the scholarship enabled them to share knowledge and skills with family members. Cultural values were also shared with family members, as most of the students started a brief chat on the topic of cultural

values and the 40% engaged in discussions trying to convince them about the rightfulness of some cultural values/point of view of the Dutch culture over their traditional one. Additionally, the core values of Dutch societies are reported to be directly applied in the family context in 40% of respondents.

For instance, Aysha, who hails from Jordan, treasured her MSP by encouraging many members of her family to apply for a scholarship and be part of Dutch institutions present in Jordan:

"…*My daughter studies engineer, she is part of an association supported by the Dutch embassy in Jordan, all of my family members became members of this association for my influence*" (Interview, 4 May 2020).

In her case, not only her experience pushed other family members to apply for jobs or scholarship in the Dutch world, but also encouraged them to apply for a scholarship in other countries as she is familiar with the scholarship and VISA application processes. Nevertheless, other interviewed did not report significant involvement of family members or, as it is the case for Hassan (one of the interviewees), whose family members are used to see him leave to other countries and do not participate in his projects.

In summary, the general picture of the family dynamics in terms of social change shows a positive enhancement in terms of social interconnections which assumes more significance and brings more exchanges in terms of ideas, skills, and information. More important, the MSP experience contributed to a common perception that the student now is more important, trustworthy, and reliable. The increased centrality of the student thus attributes to the social ties of the student a significant power of influencing decisions and the cultural values of the family.

5.1.2 Friends and acquaintances

This social cluster groups together all the acquaintances with whom the student considers having established a friendship. While many studies focused on the processes of intercultural friendship formation and how different values underly in the success of this process (Gareis, 2012) and on how the success in intercultural friendship improves the personal adaptation to the new educational

context during exchange periods (Rienties & Nolan, 2014), my interest is on how these friendship ties are permuted after the return of the student to his/her country. While international friendship formed during the training are studied in section §5.3, here I focus on friends and acquaintances living in the locality of origin of the student.

70% of respondents witnessed a general enhancement of friendship relationships. Students not only have more friends than previously the start of the training (93%), but they have deepened these relationships (93%), they have an extended network of friends and acquaintances when they need advice (91%) or when they want to discuss an idea (92%). Moreover, they feel to be more included in their friends' personal decisions (95%) and their reflections over a particular matter have more importance than before (93.75%). The importance of the student within his/her friendship network has thus enhanced, as 64% of students affirmed. Not only the magnitude and the quality of social connections improved but also the transmission of the information and skills learnt during the MSP training (75%). The students also transmitted new cultural values absorbed during the training. Most of them briefly chatted about the new cultural context they experienced and only a minority (35%) tried to apply them with friends and acquaintances.

The overall picture shows that friendship ties were considerably modified by the experience of the student. This is translated into Dutch values being discussed with friends, although only on the profundity of a simple chat between friends. However, the student became more important within his/her friends and thus improved the potential of influencing their opinions and values (see §2.6).

5.1.3 Work environment

"I benefited from the training course in the Netherlands in my field and the Netherlands's experience and international reputation, all of this led to an increase in my experience, which led to transferring this knowledge to my colleagues." (Respondent 156, male student from Iraq, survey).

The precondition for the application to the MSP is to be employed in an organisation and to obtain the formal permission of the employer to be absent for the duration of the training while receiving the salary. The benefits for the institution and all union of employees derive from the updated knowledge and skills gained during the training. Assuming the perspective of the student, I measured how and to what extent the relationship with the employer and other colleagues improved or carried meanings beyond the purely work-related one. This evaluation thus encompasses economic-alike concepts such as rate of return or employability benefits for the students, while prominently concentrating on the improvement of relationships with colleagues and with the superior.

Most of the students (almost 90%) perceived that their relationship with colleagues improved as a direct consequence of their MSP training. Colleagues rely more on their competencies and their advice and they are more likely to discuss with them new ideas and projects. Moreover, 76% of students reported that also the relationship with their direct superior improved thanks to the MSP, since he/she relies on the student's competencies and skills more often, gave more responsibilities and more likely discussed new ideas with them. Students also now have more autonomy in conducting daily tasks and they have more leadership in working groups.

Additionally, also the number of linkages with other colleagues grow numerically, as students report to know more colleagues after the experience because of the MSP programme. Not solely with colleagues, but also the relationship with the overall union of employees of the organisation where they work enhanced as a consequence of the training (74% of students), and in some cases, they expanded to englobe partners in foreign countries. Students can now rely on an extended network to discuss a new idea or when they need advice and have deepened the relationship with some colleagues at a personal level, having the change to meet some of them also outside the working environment. They generally feel more included in general meetings, and their reflection over a particular matter has more importance than before.

Almost all the respondents shared information and skills learned during the program with colleagues, and the majority (61%) of respondents think that the personal contacts between them and colleagues are more direct and personal than before. Positive results are also recorded on the exchange of cultural values, as almost 90% of students shared new cultural values absorbed during the training. They engaged in brief chat as in the application of the new cultural values in the working environment and tried to convince other colleagues about the rightfulness of some cultural values of the Dutch culture over their home country's one. Because of the experience, students also became more aware of the working environment issues (85%).

The interview demonstrated similar results, as the comparison of the ties connected with the work appear stronger and more numerous. For example, Aysha started as a simple employee in the Organization of Water Authority in Jordan to become the head of the Water Supply Department. Thanks to this position, she was able to create good relations with other colleagues, both private and business-related. Before the experience, she was in contact with many NGOs in the field of local development and she shared their projects to the ministry. In contrast, after the experience, she directly managed important projects supported by NGOs. Additionally, she expanded her network of colleagues working in the same department to knowing several employees of various ministries in Jordan.

Another consequence reported is the consequent possibility of changing not only the position held inside the organisation, but also enlarging the scope of the institution itself by constructing new offices or selecting new goals for the organisation. In this regard, Ahmed from Morocco reports:

"…*First, being the beneficiary has rated my profile, I have raised my profile a lot of skills and this also had an impact on my institution. I was in charge of a career centre here, that was a structuring process for our university, we did not have a career centre. We had to build a career centre which is tailored to our science, to the nature of our education and the nature of our employers. It was a huge success after five years and had*

a tremendous impact on the students, on the graduates and the university in general… I found my passion in this centre".(Interview, 23rd April).

A contrasting experience is the one of Aharon, a student from Lebanon, who stated that his organisation benefited from his skills but not from the network of colleagues he created in the Netherland during his training. Nevertheless, this remains an isolated case and does not compromise the general enhancement of the social network of colleagues.

In conclusion, the social sphere of the working environment results positively affected by the direct consequences of the MSP. Firstly, it improved in terms of the magnitude of connections since student reports to have expanded the network more co-workers outside the national boundaries. Secondly, the social tie already present enhanced in terms of significance, and exchanges of skills, knowledge, and cultural values. In some case, students were able to transform purely professional connections into personal linkages and collaboration opportunities for shared projects.

5.2 The community: where values, new ideas and projects meet local institutions and actors

While the family and the working environment cover a meso focus on the impacts of scholarship programmes, the societal impacts and the involvement of the institutions present in the locality cover the so-called meso-level of impact. Indeed, I consider the meso and macro level of impact as equally crucial to obtain a complete assessment of the impact of the scholarship programmes. Moreover, while friendship and family ties seldom overcome national boundaries, institutions and local organisation may involve the national government as well as international agencies for development and governmental actors such as firm and corporate interest.

To avoid confusion and overcome subjective definitions of community, in the survey I gave my definition: *"union of individuals living in an area/region where culture, social norms, traditions and identity are being shared"*. I thus connected the

concept of community with precise territorial connotation and cultural identification [6].

My first interest relied on the participation of students to organisation and associations to understand the profundity of the impact of the student in the locality. Unfortunately, 61% of respondents do not participate in activities designed to foster international cooperation or educational exchanges, such as scholarships, academic exchanges, and international volunteerism. I recorded the same results for the membership of any local association of voluntarism, political activism, or community service. Nonetheless, 40% of students who are members contributed to their community in various ways: as Figure 6 shows, scientific and research application was the pivotal contribution, together with environmental protection. Students affirm to be directly involved in projects for the improvement of conditions of disadvantaged communities. As the answer were not mutually exclusive, the statistical correlation across the answers can be examined to deduct how students divide their contribution to their community (although I do not include here a discussion of statistical significance of each correlation coefficient) .

Firstly, a combined effort to improve the conditions of disadvantaged communities was reached also by contributing to an increase in rural productivity, with a correlation coefficient (ρ) of 0.49. Secondly, the contributions to the environment protection often came together with the increase in agricultural productivity ($\rho=0.58$). The involvement in the delivery of quality education often was accompanied by research and scientific applications ($\rho=0.45$) and contribution to jobs creation in their community ($\rho=0.4$). Finally, the commitment to health is compounded with one in the quantity and quality of education ($\rho=0.41$).

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[6] Transnational communities are excluded from my research, as I consider the transfer of skills, ideas and values as starting after the return of the student to the country of origin

My second interest relied on the actors and institutions which participate and contribute to the social change in the locality. First, the working environment is the primary participant of social change, together with national and regional institutions operating in the area. On the opposite, friends and acquaintances and the neighbours are the actors less engaged by students on these projects. Many students reported that their current job position opened contacts with external international institution as they are considered now "experts" in specific countries or institutions (such as the European Union).

What is the contribution you perceive to have had on your community?

Legend:
- I have actively taken part in projects for the improvement of the conditions of disadvantaged communities
- I have contributed to the conflict resolution and/or humanitarian assistance
- I have improved the physical infrastructure of my locality
- I am involved in international relations
- I have contributed to an increase in the agricultural/rural productivity
- I have contributed to job creation
- I have contributed to the scientific and research applications
- I am actively involved in the reduction of social inequalities and enhancement of human rights
- I have actively contributed to poverty reduction
- I have actively contributed to environment protection
- I have actively contributed to health improvement
- I have actively contributed to the quantity and quality of education
- I am actively involved in the governance and politics of my locality/neighbourhood/municipality

Figure 6 What is the contribution you perceive to have had on your community?

In order to investigate to what degree students feel personally committed to assume a prominent role in the social change of their community, I asked if they think to cover a leadership role in their community and if they feel to be more committed to social change as a consequence of the MSP. 60% of respondents declared to be in a leadership position, while 93% of respondents related to

feeling committed to contributing to social change in their community. The same result appears in the perceived increased level of centrality within the community's social network, as students now feel to have an increased number of ties which, besides, result in being qualitatively more significant for the student. The same associate professor (respondent 88, male student from Syria, survey) asserts that:

"*Because I work for three universities (Damascus University, Al Kalamoon University, Al Sham private University), I have many students, friends and communities, for that, I interact with many people and of course for the war in our country we have more social and educational responsibilities than before*".

Other students reported to be able to create stable and long-term relationships with many foreign partners: for other scholarship providers such as the Fulbright Programme or with Erasmus + Programme. They expanded their network to the USA and other African universities interested in exchange programmes. Moreover, several students affirmed to have created new relationships with the community members due to the soft skills learned during the programme (improved communication, increased acceptance of other people's opinion) and to the ability to engage with different actors:

"*As a director of agriculture extension in Soleimani governance, I fell that MENA scholarship improved my ability to manage the agriculture project and enhance the communication between my office and the farmer in rural areas or village. Despite that, directing the agriculture extension agents was improved due to more discussion with them and take their idea and opinion in our decisions*" (Respondent 120, male student from Iraq, survey).

"*I have high communication with stakeholders and rural areas communities via my office even by phone or personality with high respect and trust; as conducting contracts for renting wells different usage (drinking, irrigation, industrial) and stakeholders of the private sector: get license approval of water well drilling companies, get the approval of customs clearance for importing pumps, water diggers and their spare-parts. On the other hand, I have high communication with directors and employees at water*

government utilities to implement plans, strategies, projects" (Aysha from Jordan, survey).

All students noted a general improvement of the relationships with community members because of the MSP. Community members now indeed rely more on their competencies and skills (89%), and it is more probable that they discuss a new idea with them (89%). They are more often invited to community gatherings (80%), they have more responsibilities as regards the community's problem management. Moreover, community members are more likely to let them lead the community in 65% of the cases.

Information and skills gained during the training are easily transmitted to community members by almost all students (98%). In this topic, my interest also relied on the tool utilised to communicate at the community level new ideas. As Figure 7 demonstrates, conferences and meetings (76%) followed by cultural and social gatherings (57%) and local government meetings (50%) are the principal events in which the promotion of new ideas is immediate. Other candidates suggested other instruments they used to share their skills: from seminars and workshops, a dedicated session with the team to share their experience and learnings, to the delivery of trainings on Monitoring and Evaluation in their company, as well as also coaching and "groundwork". In some cases, the skills were transmitted through papers and publications: "*I participated to the publication of an article about utilisation of by-products, to preparing an official report to Minister of Agriculture, preparing questionnaire about food losses and sharing the materials and information which I gained in the training to my colleagues*" (Respondent 76, female student from Egypt, survey).

Figure 7 How did you share information/skills you learnt during the MSP training?

A relatively neutral result relates to the increased directness of contacts between the student and the community members, as only a slight majority (53%) thinks that the contacts are more direct and personal because of the MSP. Some student attributes this to personal grown self-confidence and organisation, which in turn make it easier to them to speak up. Moreover, they now are more able to communicate with community members and to confront different opinions. Lastly, many community members turned to them to ask about the application process or to explore the future chance of collaboration in academic research.

"*The chosen attendance in the course we were from more than 10 different countries with different background and characters working together as team and* [being a] *group member enhanced the spirit of personal contact with other team members. In addition to that, the learnt material strengthened the confidence in solving the daily problems like solving a project. They increased the trust in me on the personal level*" (Respondent 81, male student from Syria, survey).

Cultural values are easily shared with the community as the vast majority shared them by trying to convince community members about the rightfulness of some cultural values of the Dutch culture over their home country's one. In the

community, the highest percentage decided not only briefly chat or discuss the values but tried to explicitly evidence their agreement with some Dutch values in front of some community members. Likewise, most students (71%) feel to be more aware of their community's political, economic, or social problems.

"*Training for Impact*" *allowed me to better understand the educational and skill development within my community. I got to know a lot of people who are either specialised/work in the training/education fields, or who have training/education needs and need help*"(Respondent 106, male student from Oman, survey).

Moreover, also academic cooperation has a positive spillover effect of the MSP, which enhanced both collaborations with institutions present in the locality of origin of the student and centre of research abroad:

"*The scholarship allowed me to spend time in Maastricht and encounter first-hand some exciting new work and theories that were important influences on my later research. This has provided me with the opportunity to work with the many talented and inspiring researchers. Overall, this scholarship enriched both my academic and personal creative pursuits and gave me the opportunity to not only live as a Syrian for 3 months, but to concentrate completely on my relations in around. For instance, before I honour this scholarship, I rarely attended conferences and now I share the outcomes of my lab internationally with my colleagues*" (student 108, male student from Syria, survey)

This is a positive result taking into consideration the fact that the aim of the scholarship programme is not immediately linked to social change nor the general enhancement of the living conditions of the area. Indeed, while the MSP programme is encapsulated in the policy framework of the Shiraka project (whose aim is the democratic transition of the Middle East and North Africa countries), the content of the courses offered by the training institution does not concerns social and economic development nor the student needs to demonstrate how the scholarship could help them fostering social change in their region. On the opposite, capacity building in the organisation and coherence with the content of the courses offered are prioritised.

5.3 The international aspect of social change: ties with the Netherlands

In this section, I explore the social change enacted in social relations with Dutch institutions and citizens. Even though the MSP offers trainings of short duration with the aim of the return of the student to the country of origin, the new social ties created during the training influence the network of the student also after he/she departed from the Netherlands. This network often overlaps with the friendship and working environment ones and it provides useful insights on how social ties expand, assume new meanings for actors and catalyse fundamental societal dynamics. I thus studied the variety of professional linkages, collaboration projects and friendship born during the training with Dutch nationals and Dutch institutions. This is then expanded by the interview, which provides additional information on the story of friendships.

Most students still have contacts with people they met in the host country and they maintain these relationships with blogs and social media (50%) and email (24%). While face-to-face meetings such as cultural meetings, conferences and local government meetings characterise the minority of social encounters, it is still a positive result that the ties are strong even nowadays. As regards professional linkages, only a slight majority still have continuing professional linkages with associates of the host organisation. This negative trend is also reflected in the partnership with the host organisation since only a third of students have it. The same picture appears when I ask if they had the chance to visit the host country once again after the end of the experience, to which a third of the students replied yes.

However, if the general opinion on the relationships with Dutch actors is questioned, several students state to have positive and active relationships with them (93%). Peers and colleagues of the training and Dutch public institutions (embassies, universities…) catalyse the more intense social ties, while Nuffic in 40% of the cases. Conversely, Alumni organisation scores comparatively positive results: almost half of the candidates have active connections with the Holland

Alumni Association present in their country and Alumni organisation of the Dutch education institution that provided the training only for 26%. The relation with alumni organisations and the dynamics of their impact on the society of origin is further explored in §6.

5.4 Chapter summary

❖ Students, once returned home, positively affected the clusters of family, friends and acquaintances and the work environment. The last cluster is particularly valuable on the light of the aim of the MSP, since it develops capacity building needed in an institution or firm that interact in a locality with specific development needs.

❖ Also, the community of origin are highly impacted by the experience of the student, as students are participants of local associations, take part in volunteering and contributed to their society in disparate ways, from contributing to the application of new technologies to updating educational methodologies.

❖ Thanks to the scholarship, students now feel more prone to enact a social change by also assuming a prominent role in their community, exploiting their enhanced influence and connection to other members of the community.

❖ The tie with the donor organisation, the Netherlands, appears to be still strong and meaningful for most of the students. This is translated in collaboration projects with peers of the training, new friendship born and still maintained. Alumni organisations catalyse many of these interactions since they function as an online platform to connect students and maintain open the dialogue with Nuffic.

6 Alumni organisations, the social impact score and the return to the country of origin

"It's a great opportunity for an alumnus to keep in touch under the organisation that established their initial gathering. International students with various backgrounds and different cultures get to meet and explore new experiences. In addition to the exchange of knowledge, technology, ways of tackling challenges and so many other possibilities" (Sarah from Oman, interview, 15th May 2020).

Picture 3 Lebanese Alumni meeting (Nuffic, 2019)

I decided to expand the discussion on Alumni organisations as I believe they contribute to the key issues of MSP and all the other institutional collaborations of Nuffic, whose Picture 3 shows a meeting in Lebanon. As the literature on alumni organisations agrees on the potential of alumni to create stable and resourceful collaboration not only with members but also with other institutions and actors external to the organisation (see §1.2.2), I here want to give my contribution to the "social networks pathway" delineated by Dassin (2017), as I investigate the impact the alumnus had on the association and how much ideas and projects are shared within members of alumni organisations.

The limits and success factors of the MSP alumni activities is explored in §6.1, with an insight into the role that gender plays in the decision of participating in alumni activities. In the second section (§6.2) of this chapter, the final result of the quantitative analysis will define the level of social impact in the six social clusters: family, working environment, community, friends and acquaintances, ties with the host country and alumni organisations. Finally, in §6.3 the problematics connected with return migration are tackled and the results of the correlation between private problems encountered after the return to the home country and the total social impact score are presented.

6.1 Alumni organisations as a promoter of change: limits and success factors of an institutionalised organisation

In this section I decided to amplify the discussion on alumni organisations for their incremental valued importance to Nuffic projects programmes and since they can be considered as an "institutionalised form of social network", whose internal and external connections involve both private and public actors. As the only Alumni organisation with a stable internal organisation is the Lebanese one, I will integrate the insights from the interview of its president Safaa Mourad with the results of the survey.

The fundamental dynamics of this success story are utilised to demonstrate how social relationships are entangled in broader societal dynamics, how they are catalysed by an institution which fosters in a long-term perspective the social change while maintaining the communication with the Dutch counterpart, the Nuffic organisation. The problems and challenges for the future of this institution and all Nuffic alumni activities will be discussed in §8, where the conclusions are presented.

Alumni organisation are the more promising actors of social change for their combination of consolidate relationships within members and the institutions existing in the locality, at the national level and belonging to the Dutch world. Alumni associations link individual recipients' scholarly pursuits to the establishment and nurturing of prosperous and resilient social networks

as who seeks to enact social change may seek to establish new networks among like-minded -and similarly trained- individuals.

The MSP programme facilitates social networks by funding many individuals from a single organisation and country to undertake advanced study, creating a critical mass for innovation and mutual support. The underlying assumption is that an affiliated union of individuals can foster social change more profoundly than dispersed individual change agents. While Nuffic does not select students in an (expected) leadership position, it is expected from the student to share their newly acquired skills with colleagues of their organisation. Alumni organisations come into play as instruments for the long-term involvement of ex-recipients of the scholarship, of communication of ideas and projects and the sharing of job opportunities both from Nuffic and from other institutions.

The result of the survey showed an overall positive picture of the functioning of alumni activities and associations. Almost two-thirds of students still keep a regular contact with other alumni they had the training with, whilst 60% of students is a member of the Holland Alumni Network (HAN) or of the alumni organisation of the institution that hosted the training. The student 81 (male student from Syria, survey) commented that:

"I have regular meeting with a colleague from my home country and keep in touch with some colleagues out of my country through different ways, including visiting some of them in their country".

However, only a minority (34%) asserts to be a member of the Holland Alumni Network, hence compromising the connections between Nuffic and the recipients of the MSP and the potential of the social change of the student, who lacks then other peers with whom ideate projects and share ideas and skills. Half of the students were able to share ideas and skills with members of their alumni organisations and almost the same amount (44%) has participated in alumni activities after returning home. As regards who is a member of an alumni organisation, almost 64% of recipients think to cover a more important and

central role for the members of the alumni organisation because of the training they had.

The relevant social connections existing between the MSP recipients describe a trend of social media and other online tools as the principal tool of communication. In fact, exception made for who benefit from the presence of an established alumni organisation in their country, other MSP recipients keep in contact mainly by email, social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn and occasionally exchanges online greetings in particular occasions. Many students witness a decrease in the regularity of contacts, regretting not to be able to meet face-to-face their colleagues.

"Not really, I bumped into one or two from time to time through social media... but usually I am in contact with any of alumni I had training with... too bad though! I loved Maastricht I would love to go back" (student 126, female student from Syria, survey)

"In the beginning, I kept regular contact with a majority of them, but I kept contact till today only with 3 of them (one Moroccan, one South African and one Jordanian)" (student 59, female student from Morocco, survey).

The overall picture shows a positive outcome as concerns the interconnection of MSP recipients, although this connection is maintained mainly employing social media. The likelihood that projects and ideas are shared is not favoured by a large membership to the HAN and by the fact that only half of the students participated in any kind alumni activities after returning home. These results are counterbalanced by the common opinion (87%) that Alumni organisations are a fundamental tool for the social change and enhancement of the international cooperation between their region and other countries.

When asked about how this may happen, many students mentioned that they are useful to keep students informed and share new projects by Nuffic, to increase the academic knowledge exchanges in fields of environment and scientific research, to enhance the international cooperation on specific topics, to launch volunteering programs, and share "success stories" and know-how:

"Technical information and training materials were exchanged with another trainee in another field, for example, developing of a small hydropower" (Student 61, male student from Iraq, survey).

"They are a channel for continued improvements and impact in our local communities by allowing strong linkages with members of similar interest" (Student 106, male student from Oman, survey).

"…I am just recently reminding myself of reactivating my relationship with the network and officially become member. I believe it is a fundamental tool for the enhancement of the international cooperation if it structured in task forces devoted to specific topics. By doing so, it will become easier to reach out (by geographic region) to peers working in the same field of activity and exchange experiences with them. There should be then a platform (or events) to support this networking." (Student 13, male student from Morocco, survey).

Moreover, many student beliefs that alumni information exchanges and international cooperation are at the core of the societal development of their country.
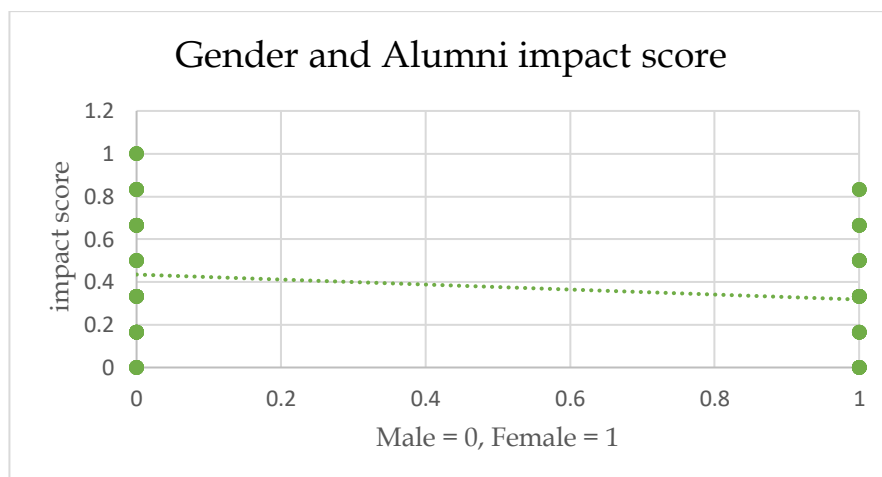

Figure 8 Gender and alumni impact score

However, as Figure 8 Gender and alumni impact score shows, if the distribution of alumni impact score scores by gender is studied (a thorough analysis on the social impact score per social cluster is presented in §6.2), men have, on average, a higher social impact score on alumni organisation. This

means that women are less likely to share ideas and to feel more influential in their alumni organisation than men.

6.2.1 The Lebanese experience: a successful story

I here dive into the potential of alumni organisation for social change, tackling the interview with Safaa Mourad, the president of the Lebanese alumni association, as the demonstration of an institution that combines regional, local and national social dynamics with the personal experience of the creation and management of the organisation from its origin to today.

Lebanese students present a different situation, as they benefit from the presence of alumni organisations which has a good internal organisation and collaborates with other local and national organisations. I had the chance to interview Safaa Mourad, the chief of the cabinet of the organisation, while the board is composed of other eight members. The association is relatively young, as on 26 December 2019 the association was registered (it is the only one officially registered) and in January the election for the members took place. She is at present and legal represantant. To grasp the social linkages existing between the organisation and other actors, I focused on the ties with Nuffic, the Dutch government, with institutions present in the locality, with the institutions in which the student works and with the student coming from Lebanon and participating to the MSP.

The student association works in a position of balanced independence from Nuffic, even if it originated from one of their scholarships and she defines the relationship stable and fertile. In fact, they applied for funds for starting their activities, but are independent in the internal organisation and Nuffic asks them only to write reports and follow some guidelines. They are currently involved in an OKP (Orange Knowledge Programme) programme evaluator and plan to apply for the refresher course and tailor-made program offered by Nuffic. As regards the ties with the Dutch embassy in Lebanon, she had to write directly to the ambassador of the Netherlands in Lebanon (although another official replied

to her). However, she confirmed that there are no economic relations with the Dutch embassy.

The social relationships with the student belonging to the association or with the ex-recipients of the scholarship are relatively low, as the participation and personal motivation of students are generally at a low level. She sent many emails surprised for the low response rate, but she attributes this mainly for the limitations imposed by the employers that hardly permit to an employee to leave for a period while assuring retribution.

As regards the connection with the institutions existing in the locality, as the organisation is quite young, the principal effort consists of absorbing the initial cost for the first months of life. Some local institutions offered to provide the spaces for the meetings, although the association hopes to establish more profound and fruitful collaborations in the future. At least, the president recognised that the public institutions did not impede their activities. As the organisation is relatively small and the management regards a specific geographic area, the ties with the locality are quite substantial as the municipality helped them with the official registration. However, in the next future, they plan to decentralise the association as many students come from various areas of Lebanon. Students help in spreading information about the opportunity of MSP and bring new ideas to the organisation and they are connected through mobile apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

Nevertheless, the participation and personal motivation of students is generally at a low level. These poor results need to be contextualised in the short timeframe in which the association developed, moreover, as previously mentioned, this is the first experiment of the creation of an alumni organisation with a self-governing and bureaucratic structure. Also "after return" activities, such as the occasions organised for sharing personal experiences, are absent and students communicate their experiences mainly with their friends and acquaintances. When I asked to Safaa if she perceives that social change already happened in Lebanon may be connected with the impacts of the MSP program,

she stated that students are not impacted at the level of personal core beliefs, but their personal experience and social skills developed thanks to the scholarship program are indeed applied in their working environment.

The general picture is that of an organisation which has the complete potential of impacting society both by involving more students and local actors. Considering that this alumni association is young, it has already created the premise for the consolidation of already existing ties between Lebanese students and Nuffic, as the "mother" organisation, may help the managers to ampliated their network of contacts by providing economic funds for the activities and by consolidating the ties with Dutch organisations. While nowadays the social change interests the working environment of MSP recipients, there is space and opportunities for a higher degree of impact when the association will include more members and will enhance the relationship with local institutions.

6.2 The social impact score: taking a long-term perspective to measure the effects of MSP
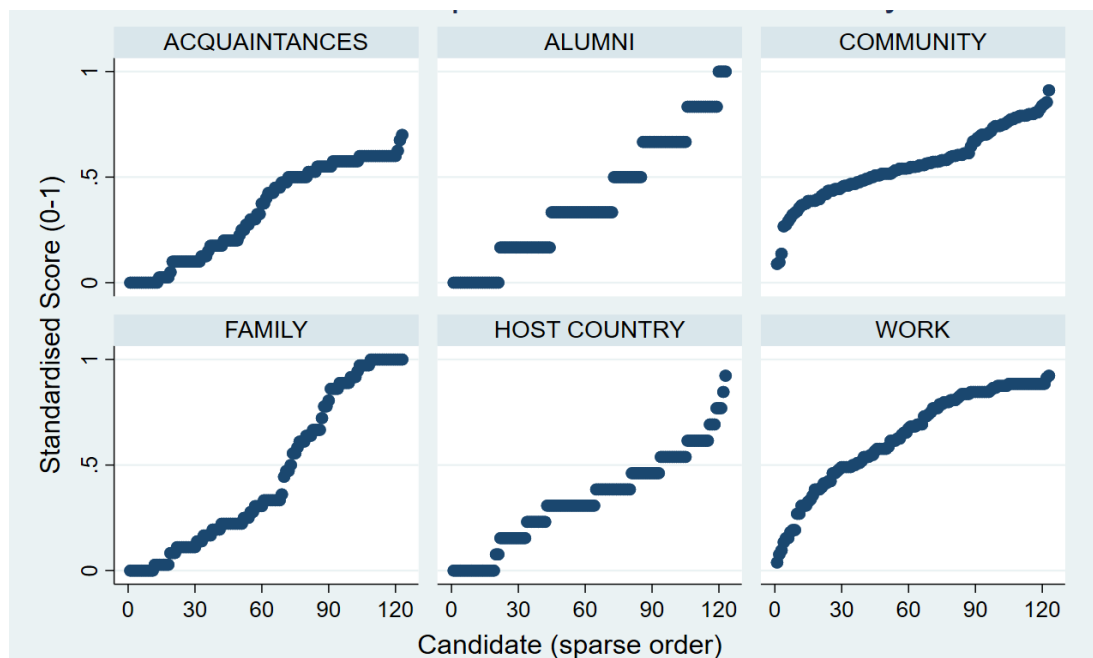

Figure 9 Candidate social impact scores distributed by social cluster

The social impact scores represent the final quantitative evaluation of the degree of social impact enacted in the six social clusters, which are computed for every

single social cluster. Figure 9 allows for a visual comparison of the effects of the MSP on the society of origin of the student scholarship taking a long-term perspective. The candidates in each graph are positioned according to the score obtained (standardised between 0 and 1), so the first candidate is the one with the lower score, whilst the last achieved the highest score. Therefore, as an example, student number 1 in the family cluster does not necessarily correspond to student number 1 in the alumni cluster.

The working environment reports the most successful outcome, as only a minority (the first 30 candidates) scored an average result of 0.5 and the majority scored a range from 0.5 to 1. In fact, as section §5.1.3 reports, most of the students were able to share skills, information and values with their colleagues, their direct superior and the rest of the institution. They now perceive to have more connections and be more influential within employees. Therefore, the social ties that constitute the working environment are largely impacted and changed by the experience of the student.

A similar pattern results in the social cluster of community, where many students reached positive results, thus without hugely increasing after the level of 0.5 as it is the case for the work environment, although the average score across students is lower. As §5.2 proves, students impacted their community in two levels: by enhancing the conditions of scientific and technological conditions of the community and by increasing their social involvement. Approximately all students felt to be inclined to the social change because of the training they had, they have shared information and skills with their community members in a variety of occasions and situations and more than half of students are in a leadership position in their community for the general enhancement of the living conditions. They believe to be more aware of their community's social, economic and political problems and they have a more positive relationship with their community members because of the MSP training.

In the family cluster, the most neutral results emerge: about half of the respondents scored below 0.5. However, at the contrary of the community

cluster, a minority (about 15 students) reached the maximum level of the social impact. In fact, only half of the students perceived to have an impact on their family and in-laws. Moreover, while information and skills were easily shared with family members in 70% of the cases, only 40% shared also cultural values. Half of the students reported observing a general improvement in the relationship with family members because of the MSP training. This is also reflected by the common perception of covering a more "central" role within the social network. Additionally, the core values of Dutch societies are reported to be directly applied in the family context in 40% of respondents.

Turning to friends and acquaintances, as §5.1.2 explains, students not only have more friends than before the start of the training, but they also have deepened these relationships. The magnitude and the quality of social connections improved, together with the transmission of the information and skills learnt during the MSP training. The importance of the student within his/her friendship network has thus enhanced and students also transmitted new cultural values absorbed during the training. Most of them briefly chatted about the new cultural context they experienced but only a minority tried to apply them with friends and acquaintances.

The overall picture shows that friendship ties were considerably modified by the experience of the student. This is translated into Dutch values being discussed with friends, although only on the profundity of a simple chat between friends. However, the student became more important within his/her friends and thus improved the potential of influencing their opinions and values. Although all of the above has been evidenced, each student, on average, has enacted a lower range of these benefits in the cluster of acquaintances in comparison to the other clusters. Indeed, most students has not reached a social impact score of 0.5 in the cluster, and only about 30 students overcome this level. Moreover, no one reached a maximum of 1.

Alumni associations were positively impacted by the scholarship programme, although this outcome should be partially weighted with the fact

that the alumni activities constitute a major part in the goal of the MSP and thus it should represent the most successful results. Taking this into consideration, while the outcomes are positive, the result is not largely different from the ties with the host country. As previously described (§6.1), only a minority participates to the Holland Alumni Network and the communications between alumni occurs mainly by social media instead of gatherings or events and less than half of them participated to alumni activities after returning home. In contrast, the majority thinks to be more central and important for their network of alumni coming from their country of origin. This is the explanation of why, while the alumni associations scored positive results, they are not the social group more impacted by the scholarship. The line is discontinuous simply for the lower quantity of questions present in the survey, which in turn creates a narrow range of variations in the scores reached.

The social cluster that assembles the ties with the host country (Nuffic and other Dutch institutions) scores the lowest results, although it is still a positive outcome. The vast majority (90%) has continuing contacts with people he/she met in the host country, although mainly by blogs and social media. Only 35% has established a professional link with an organisation of the host country and just 53% has continuing professional linkages and contacts with members of the host organisation. Therefore, about 100 students scored a social impact score below 0,5 and only 20 students went beyond that line. The line is discontinuous for the same reason as above.

6.3 The return: a factor of impediment or a stimulator of social change?

This section tackles the problematics connected with the return of the student to the society of origin. As previously mentioned, one of the preconditions of the MSP is that student return to their workplace and implement the newly acquired knowledge to the working environment. Return problematics may impede to the student to enact the desired enhancement of the society (for theories of return migration, see §2.6). Firstly, insight into the variety of problems is offered,

evidencing which one is the most perceived. Secondly, in §6.2, the implications for the total impact score is analysed to gain knowledge on the intertwined dynamics of return migration and social impact. This part will contribute to the literature about return migration by defining various concurring factors which may undermine a successful return migration.

6.3.1 A matter of private problematics

Figure 10 illustrate the chart titled "Have you experienced these personal problems when you returned home from your stay abroad?" with categories:
- Increased expectations by family members and acquaintances as regards economic support
- Family/marriage problems
- Exclusion by local members from the local community
- Perceived diminished sense of belonging to the locality
- Difficulties in reaching out family members and/or acquaintances
- Difficult adjustment with your vision of life/mindset with the local one

Legend: Yes, No

Figure 10 Have you experienced these personal problems when you returned home from your stay abroad?

The transnationalism and social network theories created a pluralistic discourse where the results of migration depend on a dynamic interaction between individuals' agency with the structural environment and their return affects the social networks they are part of. As Figure 10 illustrates, I thus divided the problematics linked with the moment of the return into six categories cornering private relations with the locality, family, personal perception of a diminished sense of "belonging" or difficulties in adjusting to the local mindset. I aim to assess to what extent these problems stopped the actions of the students after returning home. The moment of the return is considered from a chronological point of view as occurring before any impact or consequence the student may

have had on the society. In other words, the moment of the return represents a divide between the experience lived by the student during the training and the reintegration in the society of origin.

Many students experienced a difficult adjustment with their vision of life with the local one (28% students). Another frequent problem concerns the increased expectations by family members and acquaintances in terms of economic support (about 19% of students). Other students reported a sense of "being a foreigner":

"My family members were positively influenced by me and I am a reference for a lot of things, but some of the relatives excluded me and my family from some social events affirming "you are foreign", but never mind, because we decide to develop ourselves, community, country, and the world" (Aysha from Jordan, survey).

"Whatever is different is seen as a threat!" (Student 126, female student from Oman, survey).

This idea is also reflected by students who admitted perceiving a diminished sense of belonging to the locality. Conversely, the least common problem is family and marriage-related ones, probably for the fact that the continuity of salary for the duration of the experience and the relatively short duration of the training (12 to 90 days) do not destabilise the family equilibrium. However, none of the problems singularly considered interested most students and several students did not experience problems connected with their return to their society of origin.

Here the reader might be confused by the positive results of the social change in the family cluster (see §5.1.1) and the perceived problematics encountered by students with family members listed in the previous graph (Figure 10). 34% of students perceived to have problems with family members, but this data does not necessarily contradict the positive result of the family cluster, as the questions refer broadly to friends, acquaintances and family members.

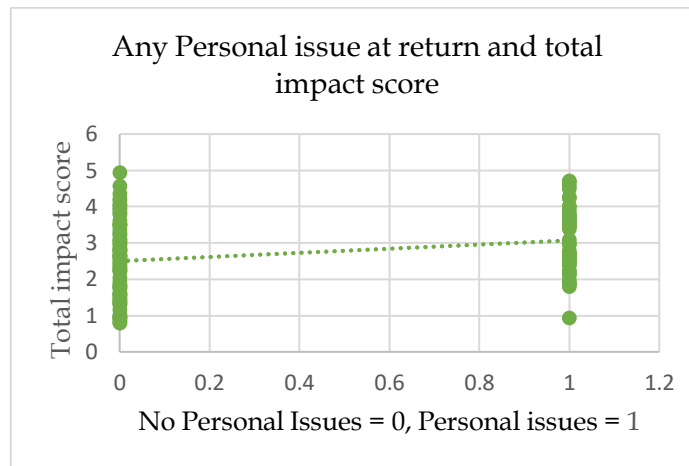## 6.3.2 Understanding the implications for the social impact

Figure 11 Any Personal issue at return and total impact score

Figure 12 Sum of personal issues at return and total impact score

While the problems did not interest most of the students, I here demonstrate that there is a connection with the degree of social impact enacted. Studying the distribution of the impact score by the number of personal issues at return, surprising results invert the common thinking regarding return migration[7]. If students (Figure 11) are divided into who did not experience any personal problems (0) and who experienced them (1), regardless of the quantity, the student who did not have problems also had on average a lower level of social

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[7] The green line represents the overall trend across categories

impact compare with students who experienced problems who enacted on average a higher level of social impact. Conversely, if students are divided according to the numbers of personal issues faced (from 0 to a maximum of 6), as **Error! Reference source not found.** Figure 12 demonstrates, the result is counterintuitive as the more the categories where a participant experienced personal issues at return, the higher is the score on average. In the second case, the correlation is stronger than the previous case, and this suggests that personal troubles may partially contribute to an increased determination in improving the society of origin.
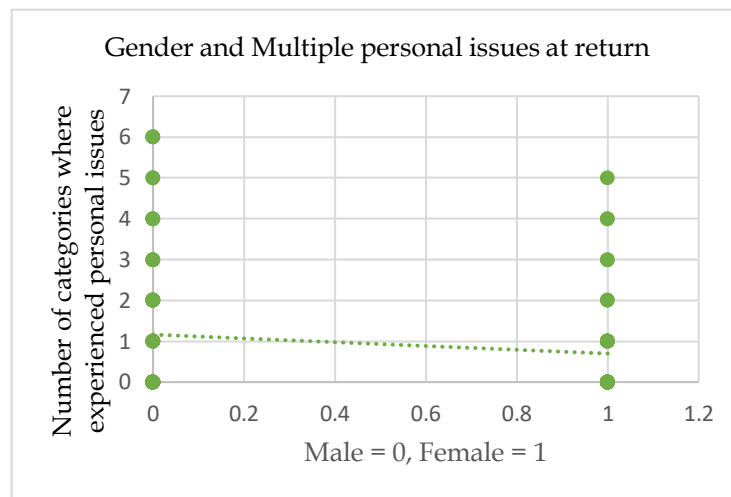

Figure 13 Gender and Multiple personal issues at return

To further dive into the characteristics of problematics concerned with the return migration, I studied the contribution of gender to the definition of the problematics. As Figure 13 shows, there is a slight discrepancy between male and female students as women experienced on average fewer personal problems than men.

Overall, the deduction hints that the fact of facing problematics did not stop the student, but instead contribute to the positive outcome of the social impact. This phenomenon had almost homogeneous complications between the genders, as the difference is not significative. However, it is not possible to establish a causal link in this typology of statistical correlation and there is high

variability across each group (those who had issues and those who had not), meaning that average results have to be interpreted with caution.

6.4 Chapter summary

- ❖ Alumni organisations serve the purpose of maintaining vivid the involvement of ex-students, keeping the dialogue within alumni and Nuffic and sharing new opportunities with recipients. While several students maintain the membership to the alumni associations of the institute where they did the training, the average of students enrolled in the Holland Alumni Network is just one third. Therefore, this area needs improvements as regards the rate of participation. However, alumni activities organised in the countries of origin score a higher ration of participants and are considered as crucial moments for networking.

- ❖ Gender is a part of an explanation about the contribution to alumni associations. Indeed, men have, on average, a higher social impact score than women.

- ❖ The Lebanese alumni association is the concrete actualisation of the scope of the MSP, as it is registered, has an internal organisation and dialogue with other actors and institutions present in the country. Although it is quite young, it set the premises for the future development of the alumni programme, as it demonstrates the impediments and success factors of this project.

- ❖ The social impact score (calculated with an average of the social impact score of each social cluster analysed) shows the differences and similarities in how students have impacted their social environments. While the more striking and positive results are registered in the working environment and community clusters, on the opposite, family and friends were, on average, less impacted by the experience of the student. The ties with the Netherlands still are impacted by the MSP training, although only a few students reached outstanding outcomes. The ties with alumni associations still demonstrate that students transmitted values and ideas with other

alumni, but it is not, on average, the social cluster more impacted by the experience.

❖ The return of the student to the country of origin has multiple facets and implications. Students affirm to have experienced personal problematics such as difficult adjustment with the local mindset and increased expectations by family members as regards economic support. Nevertheless, I demonstrated that having multiple personal problems contribute to a higher level of social impact score.

7 The individual narrative: taking the perspective of five students

"It's a great opportunity for alumnus to keep in touch under the organisation that established their initial gathering. International students with various backgrounds and different cultures get to meet and explore new experiences. In addition to the exchange of knowledge, technology, ways of tackling challenges and so many other possibilities are offered." (Sarah from Oman, interview, 15 May 2020).

In this chapter, two stories and social networks of five recipients of the MSP are investigated. The six social clusters (family, working environment, community, friends and acquaintances, ties with the host country and alumni organisations) are still central in the examination. However, the student was free in the determination of which cluster was more critical and which actors needed to be included and integrated into a broader narration of the story of the student. Moreover, these students work in a different organisation, cover a broad range of responsibilities, and come from different countries and they also differ in the field of expertise. The MSP experience thus contributed in unique ways to the enhancement of their social networks and created diverse outcomes. They accepted my invitation to have an in-depth interview where they could share their experience and narrate the changes intercurred in their social network after the return to their country of origin, comparing it to as it was before the experience.

In order to have a general assessment, I first described the main traits of the maps of the social networks tackling each experience and process at a time in §7.1. Although a complete overview of all the interviews is presented in Appendix 5, I firstly concentrate on two of the five interviews, Ahmed[8] and Aysha. Nevertheless, their experience produced diverse outcomes in their community and involved disparate actors.

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[8] A pseudonym is used

Secondly, in §7.1.2, I focus on the recurring patterns intercurred in the five stories narrated. This step comprises the fundamental point which enriches the results already discussed (see §5 and 6) with an insight into the personal experience of the student. I assembled the relations and ties which share similar features and life-turning points, which represents the same meaning from the student's perspective (more friends, improvements in the working environment, experience in the private sector…) to evidence similar patterns of improvement in the social networks of the student. In §7.2, a final analysis of the level of the *centrality* of the student enriches the picture delineated by the social impact scores and constitutes the final step of the analysis.

7.1 More relations and interconnections: a general evaluation

The dynamics in the social network of the five students present a common characteristic which pops out at first glance: they expanded both from the number of actors involved and the number of ties created. This is probably the most evident phenomenon (visually speaking) which compromises implicit and overarching events which originate from the MSP experience and other concurring events. Firstly, the numbers of actors and institutions increased in all cases and the variety of social enclaves which they belong to. Typically, the trend before the start of the programme included familiar, friendship ties and the acquaintances from the working environment and of the college. At the opposite, students experience more acquaintances in various fields and coming from a broader range of countries and they can rely on an extended network of colleagues and experts, whom they collaborate and share knowledge with.

While it was not always possible to quantify the exact number of actors present in the social network, my approximation is centred on the actors which the student listed following specific categories (my friends of the college, my in-laws, my colleagues from my previous job…) and I considered these groups regardless of the number of actors present.

The most successful example is Aysha, who had expanded her social networks in all fields, by starting long-term friendships with students from Egypt

and by creating new opportunities for collaboration between her government department and experts based in foreign countries.

Not only the number of ties increased but also the social cluster which comprehends the new actors expanded to include diverse typologies. For example, while students report possessing stable relations with friends and family members living in their locality, they also reported having established meaningful relationships with friends coming from abroad, with experts of the same discipline working in other universities and with international NGOs. This is the case for Aharon, who, from his job in the reforestation plan of Lebanon, collaborated with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP) and USAID.

7.1.1 The process

I here concentrate on the stories narrated by Aysha, a woman from Jordan working in the government, and by Ahmed, a man from Morocco involved in many projects in the university where he works. In this section, I indeed examine the difference between the two maps and explain them concerning the "story" narrated by the student. Specifically, the intensity of the connections, the quantity and the type of tie will receive attention to determine the level of social change intercurred after the return of the student to his/her home country. Other characteristics, such as the number of network members, the diversity of network members (e.g., different types of actors in the network), the number of clusters contribute to the broader assessment.
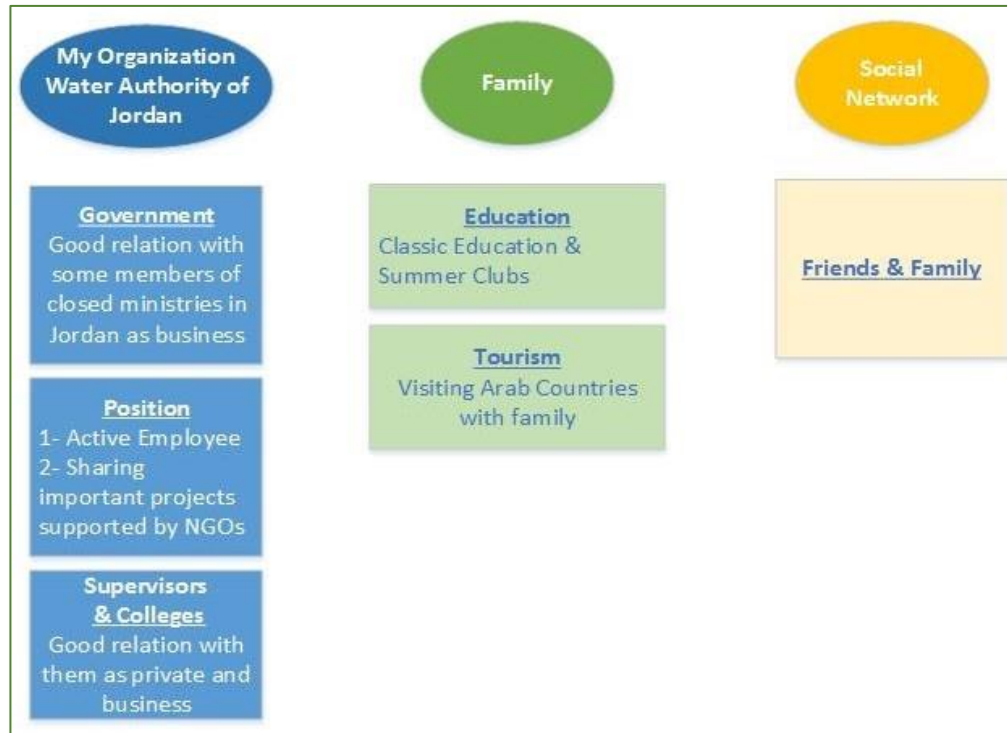
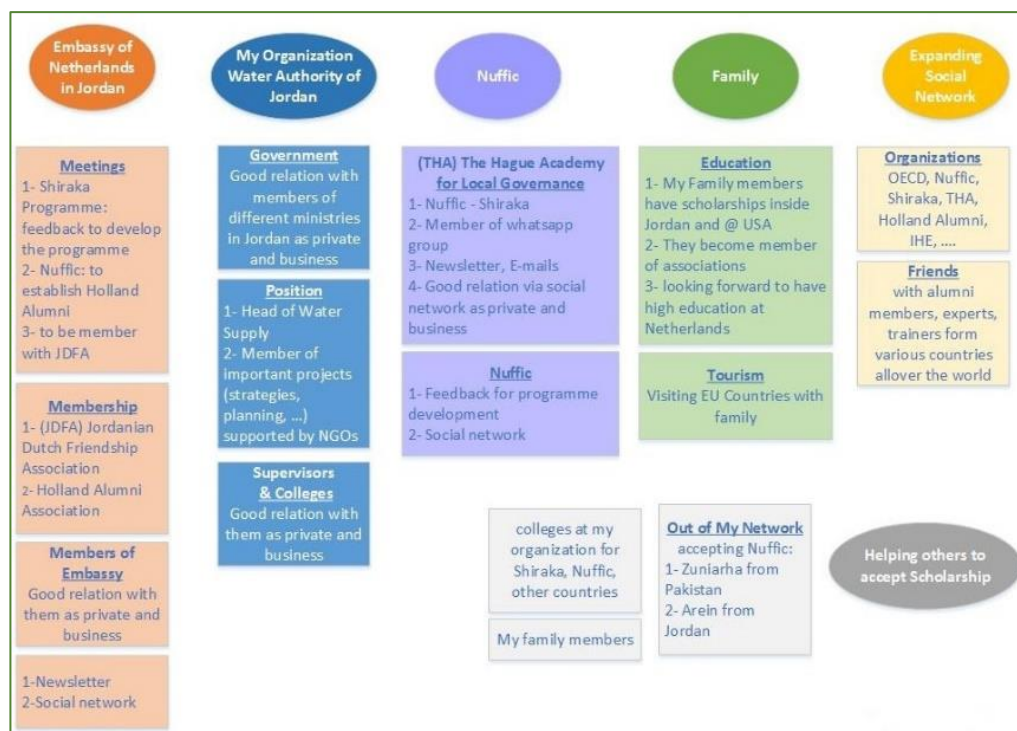*Figure 14 The "before" map of Aysha's social network*

Figure 15 The "after" map of Aysha's social network

In Aysha's social network, the social impact is characterised by a twofold change: firstly, Aysha expanded her social network from three main clusters to comprehend international organisations and Dutch institutions and, secondly,

also the social clusters already present in her network comprehended more actors and social connections. While before her experience (Figure 14) the family members had no ties with other cluster and thus remained an isolated field, after her training many family members became members of many associations and applied for many scholarships, following her example. She reports that her nephew had a scholarship in the USA also thanks to her support, and she is looking forward to studying engineer and climate change in the Netherlands. Likewise, while before Aysha had business relations with other employees of the minister where she was employed, she then could benefit from relationships which became private and extended to other departments of the government. Indeed, she helped her colleagues to apply for the scholarship by providing information about the Dutch culture and the visa process.

In this last matter, the connections between Aysha and her more direct acquaintances assume more significance and creates opportunities for sharing information and skills helpful to apply for scholarships and, to a more considerable extent, expand the mindset of the actors, as they became curious and open to study in a foreign country. Additionally, the ties with the Netherlands have particular importance as regards the application of new projects in her country. She applied the results of six reports written by exports of local governance she met in the Hague during her training. She contributed to the future of the diplomatic relations between Jordan and the Netherlands by participating to the alumni organisations held in Jordan by Nuffic, by sharing on social media the news of the local institution of the Jordanian-Dutch Friendship.
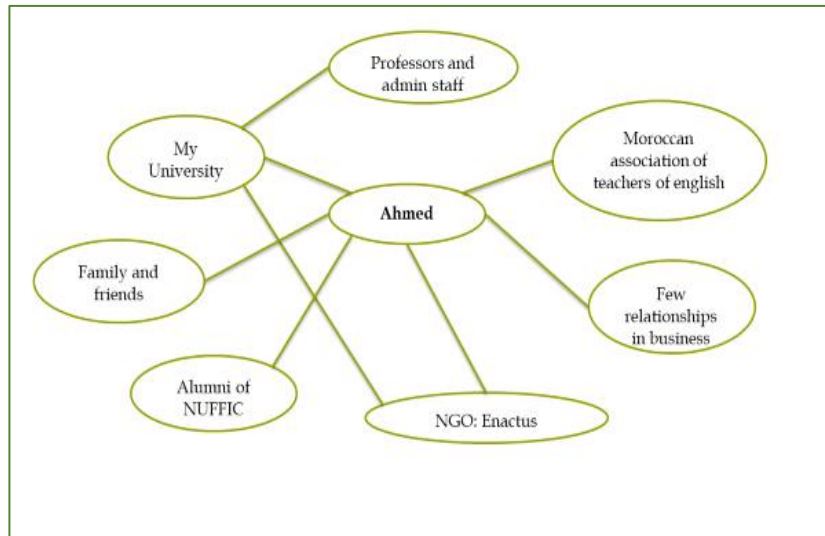
Figure 16 The "before" map of Ahmed's social network
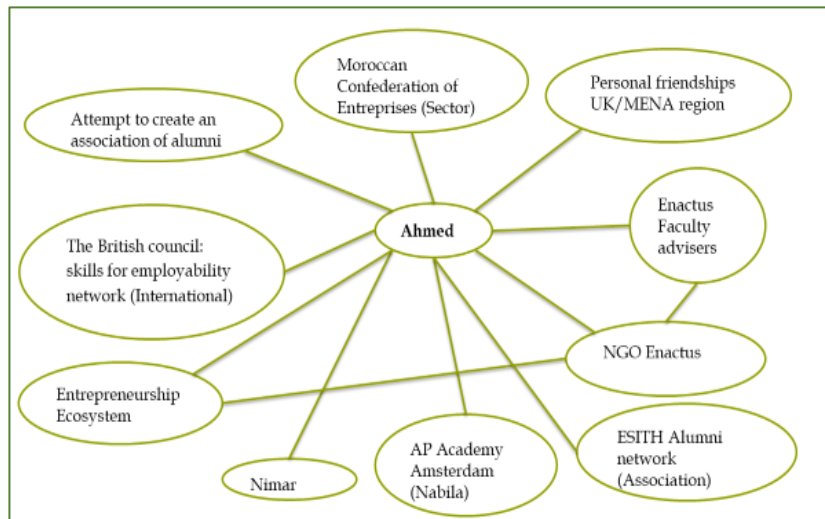
Figure 17 The "after" map of Ahmed's social network

Ahmed's social networks follow the same dynamics of the other interviewees, as the five social clusters present (family, friends, Alumni of Nuffic, working environment/university, volunteer work/associations) remained about the same number but more actors now belong to them (Figure 16, Figure 17). Ahmed, indeed, before the training was a member of Enactus, a Ngo where he met many people interested in corporate social responsibility and solidarity and social entrepreneurship. *"It was passion more than something professional or income-generating activity"*, he affirms (interview, 23rd April). Because of the training, he had more responsibilities in his job as an English professor and managed the

Esith Alumni network, which gathers all the graduates of his university. As he had more responsibilities in stakeholder management in his university, he decided to join the Moroccan Confederation of Enterprises, where he represented his university inside the commission and expanded the network in the business sector. His job was also the reason behind his partnership with the British Council, where he met many professionals of education especially from the United Kingdom and the MENA region.

From the analysis of the dynamics, the origin of certain decision that Ahmed took during the years cannot immediately be linked to the MSP experience, although indirect causal connections and contextual factors contributed to this outcome. He affirms that *"maybe I would not have been able to do it if I would not have had the chance to go for this study in Holland, I have understood the system very well. My career has changed… I always wanted to take a senior responsibility at the university where I work and apply the knowledge learn during this scholarship and put it at the service of the university and of the students"* (Interview, 23rd April). He contacted the AP Academy in Amsterdam to start a collaboration in academic exchanges and contributed to the creation of an Erasmus+ project with an English partner university. Likewise, also the propensity of establishing relations with Dutch institutions derivers partly from the fact that he spent a period in the country and his desire to create a Moroccan alumni organisation originates in the positive experience of the training and in his effort of impacting his society of origin with an alumni organisation.

7.1.2 The recurring patterns

Some patterns and dynamics recur in similar patterns in the stories narrated by the students. The working environment, the community, as well as the ties with the host country and with friends and relatives are modified by broader changes in the mindset of the student and the actors belonging to their social network. By studying the narration of each candidate, I found some recurring pattern which resembles similar life-changing events or specific dynamics, which often happens in couple with another one:

- Overlapping of friends' and colleagues' clusters,

- Collaboration with Dutch actors and institutions,

- Developing a long-term friendship with peers of the training,

- Increased communication with community members and NGOs,

- More collaboration/projects with colleagues in foreign countries,

- Opening of new career opportunities.

One of the more common underlying dynamics is the tendency of overlapping the cluster of colleagues with one of the friends and to create friendships with peers of the training, which overcomes the national boundaries in most of the times. This is also supported by the results of the survey (see §5.3), indeed many students created more personal relationships with other peers of the training, who became a support system for many students even after their return to the home country. This is the case for Sarah, who consider some of her colleagues as the most profound friends she has or as Aharon, who mixed friendships and business relations in his involvement in the Lebanese alumni association.

Not only the friendship but also the career of the students is characterised by recurring patterns. Together with the collaboration with experts of the same field in transnational projects, the experience opened new carrier opportunities for most of the interviewees. As the skills and practical knowledge of the student grew, the co-workers and their superior increasingly appreciated them. This led to a higher position covered in the institution, which in turn opened the dialogue with local and national actors. As the Social Network Approach (SNA) affirms (see §2.6), these actors thus expanded the degree of social change that the student can enact, as the student now owns more connections with an increased number of nodes.

7.2 The centrality of the student in the social network

The concept of *centrality* and the degree of social change enacted in the social clusters are expanded in this research section and included in a graphical comparison of the two maps, which expand to a chronological and dynamic

narrative the changes intercurred in the life and society of the student. To answer the second sub-question, i.e. w*hat are the implications on the status of the student inside his/her social network after his/her reintegration into the society of origin and what are the implications of this in terms of "social change"*, the centrality of the student within the network of belonging is then evaluated, starting from the idea that the more central an actor is, the higher is the level of influence that he/she may be able to exercise (see §2.6).

The centrality of the student is derived from a graphic analysis of the maps of the social networks of Ahmed's and Aysha's interviews (Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16,Figure 17) and the maps of the other three interviewees (Aharon, Sarah and Hassan) (see Appendix 5) and of the results of the survey concerning the perceived level of centrality by the student. As concerns the latter, a homogeneous perception of an increased level of centrality emerges, although with a different degree, within the social clusters of the community's, the family, friends and acquaintances, working environment and of the alumni organisation, as students now feel to have an increased number of ties which, besides, result in being qualitatively more significant for the student.

Looking at the maps of the five interviewees, in all cases, the student now possesses more ties with other actors and institutions. This is translated in connections with actors outside the national boundaries, such as other peers and Dutch institutions and professors, and they act as the link with many organisations which operate locally. Therefore, they have the potential to influence, according to the case, both foreign, national and local actors. In conclusion, to answer one of my research questions, "*what are the implications on the status of the student inside his/her social network after his/her reintegration into the society of origin and what are the implications of this in terms of "social change?"*, a final assessment confirms that the student did not solely positively impacted the social networks which he/she belongs to, but also changed his/her position within the social network by becoming an influential actor which possesses a higher potential of social change than other actors active in the locality.

Conclusions, recommendations and reflections

8 I deepened my research on the social networks to understand how students can apply their acquired knowledge over the long-run and to identify the links between this experience and changed dynamics in social networks, focusing predominantly on how alumni organisation may use their association to foster social change. In fact, alumni organisations importance had been stressed as essential to a stable socio-economic development of society. Therefore, I expended the discussion on the effects of scholarship programmes from the generalist bias of the "win-win" to investigate not only the consequences of the educational opportunity offered, but also the impacts on the social networks in which the student will create links with other peers and contribute to structural changes.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the results and finally an answer to the main research question (§8.1). Following this, the limitations of my research are delineated (§8.2), and some recommendations are made for future research (§8.3). Finally, the last section (§8.4) provides a critical reflection on this research.

8.1 Conclusions

The long-term impacts on the society of origin of the student involve intertwined phenomena such as international student mobility, local and global development needs and priorities and return migration patterns. By bridging theories of social change and development with the effects of higher education on development, I contributed to the research on how scholarships craft pathways to social change. As development and social change often appear as interchangeable concepts, I focused on the social aspect of change and its relation to education. In fact, the logic and scope of most of scholarships programmes lie in the nexus higher education-development since it is assumed that education-related improvements in terms of quality and students involved lead to the socio-economic development of the society.

I therefore here evidence the main outcomes of my research: the increased social capital of the MSP in the six social clusters, the value of scholarships in an increasingly global world of exchanges and the creation of a resilient network of the alumni network, whose the Lebanese alumni association is the first actualisation. Lastly, I describe how the SNA helped me to cover the meso and macro-level of analysis of social change. Lastly, the positive nexus private problems- social change is encapsulated in broader academic debates around migration for education purposes and the interaction between the migrant and the social structure around him/her.

8.1.1 The social capital of the MENA scholarship

To answer to my first subquestion, *"Is it possible to distinguish a different degree of social change in the six social clusters (family, community, friends and acquaintances, working environment, ties with the host country and alumni organisation) the student belongs to?"*, this research demonstrates that the consequences of the training of the student positively affect six social clusters, namely family, community, working environment, friends and acquaintances, ties with the host country and alumni organisation, considered in the analysis, although not homogeneously. The working environment, the family and community are the most influenced by the training experience of the student. In contrast, the other clusters, while scoring positive results, are influenced on a shorter extent. The Mena recipients can share ideas and opinions as well as projects with other members of the community, thus enabling an exchange of knowledge between the Netherlands and the countries of origin of students. Moreover, I demonstrated that social change is influenced by contextual factors, namely return migration patterns and gender-based differences, although they are not direct causes. Moreover, it exemplifies how the enhancement of society can be fostered by the thoughts and actions of a single student who shares the newly acquired competencies and ideas to other community members.

To answer my second subquestion, "*what are the implications on the status of the student inside his/her social network after his/her reintegration into the society of origin and what are the implications of this in terms of "social change"?*", I determined that students did not solely positively impacted the social networks which they belong to, but also changed their position within the social network by becoming influential actors which possess a higher potential of social change than other actors active in the locality.

8.1.2 The value of scholarship programmes in a global context of exchanges

I stress the pivotal role of scholarship programmes as a tool for the development of communities which can benefit from the transfer of knowledge on disparate subjects which is needed in that area, thus confirming the thesis of Dassin, Marsh and Mawer, (2018a). The transfer is not limited to other peers employed in their restitution, but the student engaged in discussions with in-laws, friends and other locals. It is an example of the extraordinary potential of social change that each student possesses and of the efficacy of scholarship programmes and exchanges to foster social change in developing countries. Scholarships contribute to the continued exchange of new ideas and values in an increasingly connected global world of exchanges, and I thus reconfirmed their validity as an instrument to respond to local development needs.

8.1.3 The creation of a resilient network of alumni

The case of the alumni associations and other activities of Nuffic, such as funds devolved to alumni gatherings and refresher programmes, was investigated to study the potential of alumni to act as "catalysator of social change". Alumni organisations are thereby treated as the principal institutional actor for the enhancement of living conditions and the free flow of new ideas and projects in society, following Campbell's (2016) stress on the potential alumni associations for the stable socio-economic development of society. The case of the Lebanese alumni organisation, by offering me the empirical substantiation, illustrates the

pathway for other alumni organisations in how to establish and maintain an open dialogue with local actors and other international institutions.

8.1.4 A Social Network Approach for the analysis of institutional effects and societal impacts

The research offers an insight into the meso and macro-level, comprehending the relationship with community members as well as the presence of national and local institutions, which operates in the locality of origin of the student and with whom the student established a relationship. The approach utilised, the Social-Network Approach, in its recent development, the Actor-Network Approach (ANT), framed my research by focusing on the social relationships that the student creates, modifies or ends. It covered the knowledge gap into the relationship dynamics (see §1.2.2) and contributed to the creation of a new road for the study of the impacts of scholarship programmes. As the comprehension of the effects of scholarships at the meso (organisational and institutional effects) and macro-level (societal impacts) is quite generic, my contributions consist on the application of the SNA to cover these aspects which are often ignored. Indeed, this research connects the actions and ideas of the student (micro-level) to expand to his/her interaction with institutions and other actors (meso-level) which define together the broader social change. The Social Network Approach thus enabled for a comprehensive understanding of the long-term consequences of the scholarship on the society of origin of the student.

The SNA captured the organisation of the Lebanese alumni organisation, which is the only alumni organisation derived from the MSP with a stable and internal organisation and which operates in Lebanon from 2019. This approach does not only understand the relationship within its members and the internal organisation but can evidence how this association dialogues with local institutions, other associations, and actors. Therefore, an SNA has the potential to contribute to future research since it enables an expansion of the focus from the impacts of scholarship at the individual level to comprehend a long-term

perspective and the mechanism of knowledge sharing after the completion of the experience through an analysis of the impact on larger social networks.

8.1.5 The positive nexus private problems- social change

One of the things that emerge from my findings as somewhat unexpected is the fact that students who faced more challenges in the private sphere after the return are more likely to enact a higher level of social change. Since the statistical correlation only establishes an influence between the variables, the causes remain unexplored. A possible explanation may rely on the personality of students, more inclined to "rebel" and react positively to the challenges encountered. However, this is outside my research focus. The underpinnings of this outcome relate to two spheres: it brings new insights into the dynamics of migration for education and adds more details on how students interact with the social structure which they are part of after their return to the country of origin.

The importance of determining how the student, once returned to the country of origin, interacts with the social network and the overall structure in which he/she is embedded and, eventually, overcomes obstacles posed by the socioeconomic structure, shades new light into migration for education, which is the category which receives the least attention in migration studies (Findlay, 2011). Moreover, it has significative underpinnings at the policy level since policies based on a selection process of the "best migrant" often overlaps with policies for the internationalisation of education.

Returnees can indeed be seen as migrants who maintained strong ties with their former locality, favoured by the fact that the training is of relatively short duration (see §2.4). As previously mentioned (see §2.6), the results of migration depend on a dynamic interaction between individuals' agency with the structural environment and the return affects the social networks they are part of (Cassarino, 2004). Many students perceived a sense of unfamiliarity and exclusion by some in-laws or community members but in most of the cases, although they faced private matters, they succeeded in sharing with other

community members and co-workers the skills and knowledge gained and participate to local associations and be active members of their society.

Therefore, I overcome the limitations of the structuralist thinking academics on considering the obstacles posed by the structural forces the student face when returning to the community by also confronting the local values and ideas (Van Houte, 2019). Indeed, I analysed the extent of transmission of ideas and values in each social cluster to obtain a general picture of the level of receptibility of the community of origin of the student (although from the student's point of view).

8.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

As every research does, the findings of this study have to be seen in light of my methodological and *a priori* choices. First of all, my research was concentrated in three months of internship, during which I tried to make the best of suggestions of my colleagues in Nuffic and the tool the organisation possessed that I could employ for my research. Secondly, although the majority of alumni filled my survey, still I did not receive the answers from every recipient of the scholarship in the selected timespan. Additionally, the data of the survey and interview are self-reported information, so I had to rely on the affirmation of the students at face value. For example, interviewees may have selected unconsciously to report only specific events or decided to eliminate unpleasant memories connected with the experience. Moreover, they may have overestimated or embellished their contribution specific to one's agency and attributed adverse events and outcomes to external forces.

Thirdly, perhaps the most evident limitation of my research derives from the impossibility of establishing causal connections between phenomena and variables I took into consideration. For example, I could not affirm that gender determines at least at a minimum level the participation to alumni activities, but, as I applied the statistical analysis of correlation, that the two variables influence one another.

Lastly, while I focused more on the limitations derived from my choice of the sampling and methodology in §3.2, I here wanted to acknowledge the limits imposed by the concurrent crisis due to the Covid-19. While it did not directly affect my research, many candidates replied to me that they could not be interviewed because they shared the computer and Wi-Fi connection with other family members or because they had to take care of relatives in need. Moreover, the lack of a private space may have compromised the privacy of sharing their experience. Therefore, my sampling suffered from an external narrowing, and I can deduct that my sampling could have been more representative of the opinions of MSP recipients.

8.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to further academic and scientific research on specific topics. First of all, I suggest an improvement of the cornerstone of the MSP, the Holland Alumni Network platform, with special stress on the enhancement of the capillarity of the platform. Secondly, I suggest future research on the spill-over effects of the MSP on the donor country, the Netherlands, and I claim for higher attention on the impacts of scholarship programmes and other forms of grants on the international education, taking also in consideration local development and capacity-building agenda.

8.3.1 The Holland Alumni Network: area of improvement

This area represents the keystone for the future improvement of the scholarship programme. As previously mentioned (see §1.2.2 and §6), alumni organisations are the pillar of long-term positive impact on the institutions and governance of developing countries. The Dutch government followed the example of "historic" donor countries in the importance assigned to the founding of alumni activities in all programmes managed by Nuffic. In the current version of the project, MSP I, alumni organisations are acknowledged as future ambassadors for the Netherlands abroad since they can play a role in strengthening Dutch relations with the targeted MENA countries. This approach is reflected not only in the

creation of the Holland Alumni Network (see §6) but also on the founding of alumni activities to facilitate knowledge and expertise exchanges between the alumni and Netherlands, to strengthen the network of the "alumni ambassadors", (Nuffic, 2020), to enhance the knowledge on relevant Dutch themes as determined by the Dutch embassies in the respective countries.

I was confidentially informed that Nuffic elaborated a new alumni policy for the upcoming relaunch of MSP, but the constant budget cuts may compromise the number of activities funded. My suggestions would be to create a specific policy which encapsulates the activities of the alumni organisations in a broader political agenda of local development. As I consider the transition from a focus merely related to the provision of funding for international students to a broader long-term partnership with the countries of origin of students as a more complicated matter, I assert that this could lead to a more profitable continuation of alumni activities in the long-run, to an increased attachment to the donor country also after years after the completion of the training.

As previously mentioned, a specific logical link can be inferred between the aim of MSP and the Shiraka programme, on which the Mena programme is encapsulated. It assumes that quickly responding to political and social changes and situations through collaboration with governments and civil society can play a facilitator role in the region. This transition derives from the changing relationship between the State and its citizens. Indeed, Shiraka interventions are aimed at supporting active citizenship and inclusivity, taking into consideration the position of women and youth, through giving more voice to civil societies, to improve the quality of central and local governance. However, I suggest clarifying the logical connection between the enhanced diplomatic relations and the democratic transition, as it appears quite blurred and vague since a sort of "spillover" effect seems the only explanation for the influence of Dutch institutions on the local ones.

8.3.2 The MSP: a profitable investment for both parts? A claim for more compelling evidence on the effects of scholarship and study grants

In this thesis I demonstrated the positive "spillover" resulting from the Mena scholarship on the life of the student and his/her social network. Although the level of social change varies not only between one cluster and the other one, also actors belonging to the same cluster (ex. all the friends of a student) may be differently influenced in their thoughts and opinion by the experience of the student, it is possible to affirm that each actor is, at least at a minimum level, influenced by the experience. Additionally, I demonstrated that processes such as the creation of associations, new career paths, and construction of collaboration projects, which usually need a longer timespan for the final actualisation, are the direct outcome or are favoured by the experience of the training. Consequently, the wider discussion about scholarships as effective aid tools can be the natural evolution of this debate. In fact, as I proved the effectiveness for the social change of the society, the question here consists on determining to what extent this scholarship is a profitable economic investment for the actors that stipulate this agreement in the first instance, the organisation where the student is employed and the Dutch government, remains open and needs further research. The answer to this question is contextualised and made urgent by the ongoing political discussions on cuts made to the funds of Nuffic by the Dutch government and addresses the national government and local institutions which work on the field of international education.

For the longer term, a community of academics and practitioners on the field of international education must join forces to provide more and better evidence demonstrating the unique benefits of international scholarships in their myriad forms, in particular, through a commitment to longitudinal studies that can improve programming, scholar support and post-graduation social impacts.

8.4 Reflections

8.4.1 Working in a pandemic and online Social Network Analysis

During my internship at Nuffic, the Covid-19 pandemic also reached the Netherlands, affecting all daily activities and my research. Because of the closure of the office, I transferred my research to my accommodation and worked online. On this occasion, I had the chance to apply and test online research techniques and make the best of communication services like Skype. While the interviews sometimes suffered from a poor Internet connection, I obtained reliable data and a complete depiction of the social networks of students. Although my initial plan already considered to conduct online-based research, I realised on a later stage the extreme profitability of the application of this methodology, as indeed it is quite flexible to serve online-based survey and in-depth interviews.

I, therefore, affirm that the insights on the application of the Social Network Approach may help future researchers who will face the limitations of an undergoing pandemic. Indeed, the scientific and academic research need to tackle also the limitations posed by this historical circumstance. For example, research on the field may be geographically limited as travel and stay may be denied for safety reasons by the government, or it would be unsafe to keep a close physical distance from the interviewee. The online-based research thus can provide insights and data that would not be possible otherwise to collect and its utilisation may provide new paths for the research on human geography. Conversely, it is less suitable for untraceable or hidden populations or if respondents do not possess private spaces and access to an internet connection.

Additionally, I here also want to evidence the "relational" aspect of the Social Network approach based in the online format. Indeed, I managed to create human interactions with some candidates that I did not expect. Speaking with a stranger helped many interviewees overcoming the initial embarrassment of communicating personal problems to a stranger. I could thus establish personal

relationships with some candidates that I would probably never be able to create if I would have conducted my interviews face-to-face.

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