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## Internationalisation of higher education: drivers, rationales, priorities, values and impacts — Source link <a> ☑</a>

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# Internationalisation of Higher Education: drivers, rationales, priorities, values and impacts

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This special issue follows on from a special call for contributions to the ECER 2016 conference in Dublin on the need to rethink and reconceptualise internationalisation in higher education (HE). The papers in this special issue contribute to a critically reflective interdisciplinary discussion on the phenomena of internationalisation in terms of the evolution of the structures, systems, and functions of HE institutions. They critique the phenomena from social, educational and spatial perspectives, highlighting the complexity of this field and a common concern regarding the effects of predominantly economic drivers for internationalisation. The papers provide insights into some of the drivers and rationales for internationalisation and the ways in which policies and power relationships steer the direction and development of internationalisation at an institutional, programme or personal level. They illustrate the complex and interdependent nature of the positive and less positive dimensions of internationalisation experiences.

#### Keywords

Internationalisation, higher education, culture, values, policy and power

Internationalisation has become an agenda of growing strategic importance to Higher Education (HE) institutions across the world, driven by the influences of globalisation. HE institutions are changing rapidly in response to increasing geopolitical and economic imperatives, to 'become international' (Robson, 2016). Research led institutions in particular have reviewed their core missions in the struggle to be entrepreneurial and market-relevant (Pusser and Marginson, 2013). A prestige culture has arisen, influencing whether universities

are perceived to be 'excellent' or 'world class' in terms of research, teaching and the student experience (Blackmore et al., 2017; Knobel et al, 2015).

Internationalisation is thus generally positioned as a positive and important element in the development of HE (Marmolejo, 2010; Noorda, 2013). It is frequently associated with success in terms of research funding, international staff and student recruitment, and co-authorship with international research partners, which help to determine the position of HE institutions in influential global university rankings, (e.g. QS and the Times Higher Education World rankings). In the European context, internationalisation has become a key aspect of HE policy debates (Matei et al., 2015; Gürüz, 2008) related to meeting the requirements of the European labour market and to increasing European innovation capacity (Ritzen and Marconi, 2011). The Council of Europe urges member states to foster 'an international culture' by enrolling students from third countries, by fostering exchange and mobility of students and staff, projects and knowledge, and by engaging in academic and research cooperation.

## 1. Policy influences steering the development of internationalisation in HE

The implementation of the Bologna Process (BP) based on 'loose policy mechanisms', steered by soft law through the open method of coordination (OMC), has impacted on the development of internationalisation in and of HE in Europe (Sin & Saunders, 2014). Some critics contend that 'the OMC has not been very efficient in ensuring actual coordination and convergence' (in Sin & Saunders, 2014, p. 529, with reference to Veiga and Amaral, 2006). Very few empirical studies have taken a critical stance to investigate the qualitative impacts of the BP on HE in Europe (Wihlborg, forthcoming; Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014; Teelken & Wihlborg, 2010). Voices have been raised concerning governments' strategic use of the BP as a golden opportunity to justify reforms (Veiga & Amaral, 2008). Some countries continue to face challenges and tensions, as they adapt and adjust according to the 'soft policy' intentions (Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014). Policy as text (such as the BP), and the variations that have occurred in relation to the implementation of the BP intentions in various HE contexts need to be further investigated, in order to make conceptual variations visible (Sin, 2014a; 2014b; Sin & Saunders, 2014, referring to Ball, 1994, cf. Ball, 2012). A critical discourse on the matter would shed light on what is missing or undesirable in this ongoing process (Knight, 2015; Wihlborg, forthcoming) and address the lack of conceptual clarity regarding what internationalisation is all about (Matei et al., 2015). The neoliberal discourse, emphasizing new public management and performativity in measurable outputs, should not diminish open professional and intellectual enquiry and academic debate (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Roberts & Peters, 2008; Morley, Marginson & Blackmore, 2014). 'While competition has always been a force in academe and can help produce excellence, it can also contribute to a decline in a sense of academic community, mission and traditional values' (Altbach et al., 2009, p.iv).

More than ever the purposes and processes of internationalisation are being debated in relation to the changing political map, for instance Brexit (Scott, 2017; Marginson, 2017), the displacement of refugees and the desire for relocation, integration and access to HE (European Students Union, 2016). The social role of HE is being re-examined (Musselin, 2014; Gürüz, 2008) with a call to re-assert the public good and the role of HE in relation to the global challenges that threaten our futures (Goddard and Hazelkorn, 2016). There is a mounting critique of the rationales for, and approaches to internationalisation that underpin particular HE strategies and policies, initiatives and programmes, priorities and targets (de Wit, 2010, p.6; Yemini and Sagie, 2016) for example the continued hegemony of English to the neglect of local languages in market-driven approaches to internationalisation (Santos and Guimarães-Iosif, 2013; Choi, 2010; Le Ha, 2013). More values-based approaches to HE internationalisation are called for (Andreotti and Sousa, 2013) that develop global citizenship skills and intercultural understanding. (Leask and de Wit, 2016; Young et al, 2016).

Against this background, the intention with this special issue is to consider the implications of moving outside the purely instrumental and transmission-based view of education that has informed many internationalisation strategies to date and instead to view the phenomena through the lens of becoming knowledgeable in a globalised world. Internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality of HE (De Wit and Hunter, 2015). From this perspective, to focus primarily on economic imperatives is to lose the unique opportunities internationalisation can offer, to enrich the educational and research experiences of students and staff and catalyse meaningful contributions of HE to global society. Importantly, there is also a need to readjust our research approaches to address new types of challenges, and their implications for internationalisation strategies. To bring about systemic change in the internationalisation of HE, the ways we conceptualise knowledge, research and teaching need to be reconsidered through a more holistic, crossdisciplinary and transversal approach.

## 2. Internationalisation in HE – a multifaceted palette of opportunities

This special issue follows on from a special call for contributions to the ECER 2016 conference in Dublin (Wihlborg and Robson), on the need to rethink and reconceptualise internationalisation in HE. It reflects some of the significant impacts of internationalisation in HE, as well as pointing to choices which lie ahead of us. Contributions cover a range of key dimensions of internationalisation: mobility of students and staff, internationalisation at home, doctoral supervision, university partnerships, internationalisation policies and priorities. The selected papers contribute to a critically reflective interdisciplinary discussion which combines social, educational and spatial perspectives, highlighting the complexity of this field and a common concern regarding the effects of predominantly economic drivers for internationalisation, and the equity and power relationships in transnational exchanges. They suggest that particular models of internationalisation develop because of the source and type of funding that is available and that, therefore, more comprehensive heuristic instruments should be developed for the systematic critique of the decisions made regarding the funding of internationalisation. What is funded, and by whom; how are the funds utilised, and how this influences - sometimes in subtle ways- the overall direction of the internationalisation process (Matei et al., 2015). This brings into question the motivations for particular internationalisation policies and activities in some countries, and the ethical and power issues underpinning those decisions and directions.

Our intention with this special issue is to contribute towards rethinking what the process of internationalising the university can entail, and what further benefits might be achieved through an ongoing dialogue on the drivers, rationales, priorities, values and impacts of internationalisation. The papers jointly reflect the need for a deep-reaching systemic change in the core missions of HE to enable the generation, adaptation and diffusion of knowledge; to enhance the quality of interpersonal relationships in cross-cultural encounters (Young et al., 2016) and to develop 'participating and emancipated citizens' (Santos and Guimarães-Iosif, ibid:15-16). They propose new approaches to research that explore internationalisation as a multidimensional, dynamic and potentially transformative process (Robson, 2011) in HE.

## 3. Introduction to the papers in this special issue

Many European universities have sought to enhance the quality of their offer by focusing on transnational mobility. Richardson (2015) reminds us that human interactions are the ultimate expression of globalisations, but it is not essential to be mobile in order to engage with those who are different from ourselves. Studies that relate internationalisation to intercultural learning experiences for all staff and students (not only those involved in mobility) enhance campus internationalisation by aspiring to create inclusive, collaborative learning communities (Wihlborg and Friberg, 2016; Wihlborg, Friberg, Rose, and Eastham; forthcoming). Robson et al. (this issue) focus specifically on internationalisation at home (IaH), to foreground the importance of offering social, intercultural and global learning experiences to the non-mobile majority of students and staff. Their paper responds to the need to readjust our research approaches, to consider what internationalisation is and how various aspects of internationalisation are achieved. In their investigation of IaH practices at two institutions, one in Portugal and the other in the UK, Robson et al. found a strong focus on the economic imperatives for internationalisation, with both institutions competing in a scenario of global interconnectedness. While the geo-political scope of internationalisation differed for each institution, both are research intensive universities and strongly associate internationalisation with globally excellent research and research performance indicators. Although unsurprising, findings indicate a preoccupation with the instrumental side of internationalisation. Despite recognition of the importance of IaH and some developments in both institutions, IaH is yet to become part of a coherent narrative of the overarching philosophy, mission and curricula in either of the institutions. In proposing mechanisms for institutional review and development of IaH practices, the paper addresses Key Priority Area 2 of the European Commission's Communication on European Higher Education in the World: 'Promoting internationalisation at home' (2013) and the goals of the EU's strategy for internationalising European HE (EACEA, 2016). This is timely not only because international and intercultural experiences are key elements of employability skills for the globalized workplace (Beelen and Jones, 2015b). They are also important enablers of democratic and socially responsible participation in culturally diverse societies.

Hellstén and Ucker Perotto, (this issue) re-think internationalisation as social curriculum in a conceptual and dialogic approach. They research issues on curriculum, pedagogy and the generative use of postgraduate supervision in international HE. Their paper articulates by way of a narrative case example, a re-thinking of traditional conceptions of internationalisation for reconfiguring curriculum practices. The paper is motivated by a recent shift in consensus within the global research communities on international education, towards

curriculum renewal of shared knowledge within the field (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hellstén & Reid, 2008, Leask, 2015; Marginson & Sawir, 2011; Ninnes & Hellstén, 2005). Concurrently, international education as a social process is in need of regeneration and rearticulation (Knight, 2015; Robson, 2011; Trahar et. al., 2016) at the boundary of a dominant internationalization imaginary (Andreotti et. al., 2016). This dominant imaginary recognises the strains caused by globalization upon the HE sector, calling for a collective reconfiguration of the international pedagogical space in order to sustain the field.

The paper re-imagines pedagogical approaches for internationalizing HE curriculum through creative and innovative knowledge sharing focused on the supervision exchange across national and disciplinary borders. Its methodology is adapted from narrative inquiry (Trahar, 2011) to explore auto-ethnographic academic research accounts about geographical displacement, the subjectivities produced in international scholarly spaces and their new epistemological imprints on the international student transition experience. It presents implications for reconfiguring international curricular practices socially and culturally in the context of postgraduate supervision. It is envisaged that this form of conducting and disseminating research contributes to thinking on alternative ways to bring about transformation and renewal from the actuality of international HE to the possibility of a future internationalized curriculum. The paper offers regenerative curriculum insights that combine interdisciplinary methods through which to feasibly implement novel pedagogical strategies for renewal of internationalized curriculum beyond times of educational crises.

Ng and Nyland (this issue) investigate the challenges and implications of internationalisation of a cross border collaborative articulation program (CAP) between an Australian and a Chinese university. The perspectives of key stakeholders are sought on the nature and aims of the partnership and the challenges it faced. It becomes clear that the motivations of the two institutions differ. For the Chinese university, a key motivation was the desire to align with government policy by driving up quality through entering a capacity-building partnership. Stakeholder perceptions suggest that the Australian institution entered the partnership for primarily financial motivations (to be achieved through international student enrolments) and to enhance the institution's global profile. Ng and Nyland's paper notes the challenges of developing a curriculum for early childhood teacher education, matching content and program structure, managing differing standards and expectations and navigating language exchange and cultural understandings. It contributes to an emerging literature on the internationalisation of early childhood education. However, the key messages may well apply to a range of cross border collaborative programs. They include the

need for a clear vision and strong leadership to ensure that challenges are addressed, that relationships are built and consolidated, and that reciprocal benefits for both the institutions and their students ensue from such a collaboration. These challenges have a potentially negative impact on the drive for increased internationalisation but they also create greater awareness of its importance in developing a meaningful response (de Wit and Hunter, 2015, p58).

Akdag and Swanson (this issue) explore the ethics and power issues influencing how internationalisation is enacted in policy and practice in two Scottish universities where the internationalisation discourses are noted to be predominantly managerial and corporate. Adopting a Foucauldian (1977) poststructural perspective, they offer theoretical insights into the dynamics of power and the various 'discursive manoeuvrings' that occur in relation to internationalisation at these institutions. The paper critiques the phenomena that the value and extent of the internationalisation of HE is often defined in terms of scale. Universities are often ranked on the impact of their internationalisation strategies by data-driven approaches, looking at the proportions of international staff, students, and research papers published with a co-author from another country (Bothwell, 2016). The analysis of these two HE institutions within the broader national picture suggests the significant influence of neoliberalisation (Andreotti, 2013, de Sousa Santos, 2014). Concerned that HE has become a terrain for marketisation agendas as a means to generate income (Swanson, 2011), Akdag and Swanson speak of the ethical effects of such power in its investments in global equality, injustice and oppression. They reflect conceptualisations of internationalization not as a goal in itself, or as a primarily economic-driven imperative, or as a positioning statement about the HE institution as 'an international university,' based on numbers of international students, staff and research collaborations. Rather internationalisation is regarded as an influential process and, therefore, as a means to enhance the quality of HE (de Wit and Hunter, 2015).

International cooperation has become 'almost a mandatory practice for any individual, research group or country that would seek visibility on the science and technology scene' (Knobel et al., 2013). The benefits of mobility include capacity building, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and access to facilities that may not be available in the home institution (Knobel et al., ibid). Groves, Montes and Carvalho (this issue) investigate the impact of international mobility as experienced by 30 Spanish university teachers who spent time abroad in important research centres before returning to Spain. Their objective is to discern how these academics, who now occupy senior professional posts, and have long and consolidated academic careers, evaluate their mobility experiences both personally and

professionally. Themes emerging from the interviews indicate a general evaluation of the period of mobility; impact on academic careers; and impact on the home institution.

The many positive aspects of the mobility experience were found to clash with academic reality, once the researchers returned to their home institution. The lack of funds, facilities and especially support from colleagues and superiors was perceived to substantially limit the participants' ability to implement new research, management procedures or teaching techniques. These negative aspects related to academics' (re)integration were not identified previously in the literature, and are important to better understand the effects of cultural specificities and of the maturity of the scientific system on the perceived impact of academics' mobility. This raises the question of what steps can be taken to improve the reintegration of academics in order to maximise the benefits of international mobility schemes for scientific research. It seems that for mobility processes to be successful, in terms of both longer term development and satisfaction of the participant, and the benefits to their institution, more attention needs to be given to reintegration at the home institution, to maximise the potential benefits of the mobility experience. Groves, Montes and Carvalho consider the internationalisation of HE as a political objective, as evidenced in European policies such as the Erasmus program and the 'Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area' which is considered a model for good practice, in terms of both student- and staff- mobility (Teichler, 2009).

Courtois (this issue) also critiques mobility as a strategic objective of internationalisation. The paper examines current practices of Irish universities in their efforts to increase student participation in international exchange programmes. She considers the stratification of student mobility programmes and the consequent implications for equality in the Irish HE context. The paper draws on data from a qualitative questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with students on exchange or returning from exchange and with administrative and academic staff involved in organising and managing exchange schemes across six sites. This is supplemented by a critical reading of national and institutional strategies and statistical analysis of university partnerships and student flows. Courtois suggests that the expansion of access to credit mobility comes with an increased stratification within credit mobility, echoing Marginson's (2016) observation that the expansion of HE tends to worsen social inequality in access to the most valuable positional opportunities, as systems become more stratified. She argues that increased participation, while a positive outcome, obscures a growing differentiation in the types of exchange programmes and destinations. As student mobility is a key area of the internationalisation strategies of many

HE institutions, the paper is of relevance to HE in a range of other cultural contexts. Courtois suggests that the tiers identified by other researchers in relation to degree mobility may be identified, on a smaller scale within credit mobility. Irish HE institutions, rather than equalising access to credit mobility, are in fact producing stratification within the relatively narrow space of credit mobility. A conceptual framework to understand the different forms taken by credit mobility in Irish institutions, is differentiated according to level of academic and programme integration.

## 4. Reflections concerning internationalisation and some further thoughts

What lessons can be learned from the accounts and perspectives presented in the papers, to inform the development and implementation of more ethical and values-driven internationalisation strategies and practices in both national and institutional contexts? To bring about systemic change in the internationalisation of HE, the ways we conceptualise 'excellent' and 'world class' knowledge, research and teaching need to be reconsidered through a more holistic, cross-disciplinary and transversal approach. The importance that teaching, learning and assessment strategies accommodate to different ways of knowing and different cultural expectations is emphasized, to ensure the relevance of curriculum content and modes of delivery to students from a range of contexts. The quality of interpersonal relationships and cross-cultural encounters in HE contribute to the construction and negotiation of meanings and intercultural understanding (Avery and Wihlborg, 2013). As Trahar (2013, 301) suggested: 'The university is a space within which the multi-layered complexities of a variety of values, cultures and academic traditions can be illuminated and critiqued.' However, the sector is challenged by increasingly profound social, economic and cultural issues, such as the financial crisis, unfavourable demographic trends, immigration and ethnic and religious tensions. Marginson's (ibid, p.9) reflections on the importance of HE in the context of the recent political changes in the US and the UK remind us that 'more than 50 per cent of the current cohort of school leavers in the UK, Europe and North America will attend university during their lifetimes. This is an unprecedented level of inclusion and social reach'. Internationalisation of the experiences of future cohorts of HE students (and staff) should not be overlooked or undervalued aspect of debates about the role of HE. The personal and professional transitions of individuals and communities are essential to achieve the transformative potential of internationalization for individuals, HE institutions, and the societies they serve (Robson, 2011). HE 'can be understood as a process of social

formation....and for the student as a process of self-formation, or rather, socially nested self-formation' (Marginson, 2017). 'Academic mobility has been and will continue to be an important aspect of the process of self-formation. However, as Gürüz (2008, p.3) points out, any attempt to study academic mobility should consider the phenomena in terms of the evolution of institutions, structures, systems, functions, governance, administration, and financing of HE and the complex and interdependent nature of the positive and less positive dimensions of internationalisation.

### Disclosure statement

No conflict of interest was reported by any of the authors.

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