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The Importance of Internationalization at Home

In a Time of Political Tensions

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Internationalization is a key **driver** in modern higher education, in the developed world and in emerging economies. From a rather marginal and fragmented issue in most countries and institutions of higher education until the end of the 1980s, it has evolved over the past 30 years to become a mainstream and central component of policies and practices in higher education, at the international, regional, national, and institutional levels. An increasing number of institutions of higher education around the world have an internationalization policy and/or have integrated internationalization in their mission and vision. More and more, national governments develop strategies and policies for the internationalization of their

> **How can we overcome these misconceptions and challenges?**

higher education systems. The global knowledge economy requires universities, cities, and nations to be key competitors for students, faculty, research funding, and strategic partnerships, and to prepare their graduates to be global professionals, scholars, and citizens. Excellence programs, rankings, accreditation agencies, are all indicators, and drivers, of internationalization of higher education.

This increased attention for internationalization is positive news and brings many opportunities, but it also creates many challenges for the sector. Two major challenges are the importance of rankings as main drivers for institutional and national policies for internationalization, and the changing political climate in Europe, the United States of America, and elsewhere, a nationalist reaction to the increased globalization of our economies and societies. This contribution deals with those challenges, in particular with misconceptions concerning internationalization of higher education that have contributed to this inward-looking trend around the world. How is it possible to overcome these misconceptions and challenges to internationalization and create a sustainable and comprehensive internationalization for all students and faculty, focusing less on internationalization abroad and more strongly on internationalization at home?

Rankings as Drivers

Rankings, at the national, regional, and international levels,

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are a relatively recent phenomenon in higher education, but they have become an enormous impact factor in the sector, in particular on national policies and institutional strategies for internationalization. This is particularly the case of international and regional rankings, which influence national policies for excellence programs in higher education, for scholarship schemes, for recruitment policies of international students and scholars, as well as research and research dissemination policies.

Their impact on internationalization is both direct and indirect. The direct impact comes from the three key international indicators in the rankings: the number of international students, the number of international scholars, and the number of internationally coauthored publications in peer-reviewed journals. Although together these three indicators only account for 15 percent on the position of a university in the rankings, governments and institutions let themselves be driven by those indicators and adopt them as key strategies for internationalization.

The influence of rankings on student and faculty mobility is manifold. In non-English speaking countries, it leads to a stronger focus on teaching in English, an increasing dependence on the use of agents and other forms of commercial entities, and more corruption and fraud. It increases the global competition for international students and scholars, and results into unrealistic expectations, a focus on quantity instead of quality, and a dependence on inflows at a time when the market is both uncertain and unpredictable. Many state universities and smaller private colleges and universities in the United States have become dependent on international students, as a result of reduced state funding and local demographic factors. The travel ban and generally unwelcoming policy of the Trump administration, as well as high tuition costs, make these institutions vulnerable. Other examples are the economic crisis in Brazil and policy changes in Saudi Arabia, which have resulted in a drastic decrease in scholarships from these two countries. This has negatively affected universities and colleges receiving large numbers of Brazilian and Saudi students.

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ization policies. Governments limit their scholarship programs to top-ranked host universities. Universities ignore the importance of investing in internationalization of the curriculum and teaching, and in the quality of academic and administrative staff. In their strive for partnerships or to join networks, they focus exclusively—and with little success—on top-ranked universities, while collaborating with institutions in their league is much more effective.

In essence, the main risk of rankings is that quality and internationalization strategies are not defined by a university's own context, mission, and vision, but by the rankings' indicators.

An Alternative Approach

Twenty-five years ago, the focus of internationalization policies was nearly exclusively on the mobility of students for credits—the Erasmus program. At the end of the 1990s, a reaction emerged in Europe, calling for more attention to the 95 percent of students that were not mobile: "Internationalization at Home." At the same time, in Australia and the United Kingdom, where there was a strong focus on recruiting international degree students, internationalizing the curriculum received greater consideration. Internationalization of the curriculum and Internationalization at Home, two strongly intertwined approaches, have become part of the agenda of the European Commission, and of national governments and institutions of higher education around the world. Implementation, however, is still quite challenging.

A main misconception is that internationalization means "abroad." The nearly exclusive focus, in most national and institutional strategies, on the mobility of students and faculty (for credit or degree, for short-term revenue or long-term soft policy) is elitist in that it concerns a small minority of students and faculty, worldwide only around 1 to 2 percent, with exceptions in Europe (between 15 and 25 percent) and the United States (up to 10 percent). Internationalization needs to be for all and thereby *at home*. The leitmotiv of the "Internationalization at Home" movement in Europe at

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the end of last century, "what about the other 98 percent?" is still most relevant.

The rationale is that all graduates will live and work in an increasingly interconnected globalised world as professionals—economic actors—and as citizens—social and human beings. The need by the labor market for global professionals and by society for global citizens cannot be addressed solely by mobility. International, intercultural, and global learning outcomes are important elements of a modern curriculum.

Responsible global citizenship implies the need to develop social consciousness and a sense of belonging to a global community; cognitive justice; and support to faculty and teachers in developing responsible global citizenship. Education needs to develop a more inclusive understanding of knowledge in order to build capacity to find solutions to complex problems in local and global contexts. It requires curriculum development and content that engages with multiple and global sources of knowledge in which students explore how knowledge is produced, distributed, exchanged, and utilized globally. (de Wit and Leask, 2017)

Misconceptions

In 2011, Uwe Brandenburg and I wrote an essay with the provocative title "The End of Internationalization" (Brandenburg and de Wit, 2011). We spoke about our concerns for an increasingly more instrumentalist approach, a devaluation of its meaning, a lack of innovation, and warned that we should no longer take things for granted, but reinvent internationalization for the future. We made an appeal based on four points:

a. We have to move away from dogmatic and idealistic concepts of internationalization and globalization;

b. We have to understand these concepts not as goals in themselves, but rather as means to an end;

c. We have to ask ourselves: why do we do certain things, and how do they help achieve the goal of quality of education and research in a globalized knowledge society?

d. We should carefully reconsider our preoccupation with

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instruments and means and rather invest more time in questions of rationales and outcomes.

In our view, though, the most important was "to rethink and redefine the way we look at the internationalization of higher education in the present time." In the same year, I wrote about Misconceptions of Internationalization (de Wit, 2011). I noted that the approach toward internationalization was still predominantly activity-oriented, even instrumental. I mentioned nine misconceptions, where internationalization was regarded as synonymous with a specific programmatic or organizational strategy to promote internationalization, in other words: where the means appeared to have become the goal—the main misconception. The other eight misconceptions were: more teaching in English; adding an international subject to the program is sufficient; more recruitment of international students; more study abroad; more partnerships; little assessment of international and intercultural learning outcomes; all for the sake of output and quantitative targets; while failing to focus on impact and outcomes. These two essays contributed to the start of a discussion by the International Association of Universities on rethinking internationalization. There were eight reasons for this (De Wit, 2013):

1. The discourse on internationalization does not always match reality in that, for too many universities, internationalization means merely a collection of fragmented and unrelated activities, rather than a comprehensive process;

2. Increasing globalization and commodification of higher education and the development of a global knowledge society and economy, have resulted in a new range of forms, providers, and products, and new, sometimes conflicting dimensions, views, and elements in the discourse of internationalization;

3. The international higher education context is rapidly changing. "Internationalization"—like "international education"—was until recently predominantly a western phenomenon, in which developing countries only played a reactive role. Nowadays, emerging economies and higher education communities in other parts of the world are altering the landscape of internationalization. This shift away from a western, neocolonial concept (as "internationalization" is perceived by several educators) means incorporating other, emerging views;

4. The discourse on internationalization is often dominated by a small group of stakeholders: higher education leaders, governments, and international bodies. The voices of other stakeholders, such as employers, faculty, and students, are heard far less often, with the result that the discourse is insufficiently influenced by those who should benefit the most from its implementation;

5. Too much of the discourse is oriented toward the national and institutional levels, with little attention to

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programs. Research, the curriculum, and teaching and learning processes, which should be at the core of internationalization (as expressed by movements such as "Internationalization at Home"), often receive little attention;

6. Too often, internationalization is evaluated quantitatively, in terms of numbers or in terms of inputs and outputs, instead qualitatively, following an approach based on outcomes and on measuring the impact of internationalization initiatives;

7. To date, there has been insufficient attention to norms, values, and ethics in the practice of internationalization. With some notable exceptions, the approach has been pragmatically oriented toward reaching targets, without any debate on potential risks and ethical consequences;

8. There is an increased awareness that the notion of "internationalization" is not only a question of relations between nations, but even more of relations between cultures and between "global" and "local."

This rethinking process has resulted in a document by the International Association of Universities in April 2012, "Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action" (International Association of Universities, 2012). Yet, in national and institutional strategies, I continue to observe a focus on most of the misconceptions identified in 2011 (de Wit, 2016).

Challenges for the Future

Over the past years, an intense, stimulating, and sometimes provocative debate about the future of internationalization has taken place. The changing political and economic climate in the world, in particular in Europe, where nationalism seems to become more dominant than Europeanism or globalism, and in the United States under the Trump Administration, with its "America First" nationalism, is no solid foundation for more internationalization (Altbach and de Wit, 2017). New challenges, which were not so clear until now, have come to the forefront. These confront us with the need to look even more critically at our misconceptions

and try to create opportunities out of these challenges (see de Wit, 2017). What impact will the new political climate have on the obsessive focus on rankings and economic rationales? Most likely, the antiglobal and anti-immigration policies of Trump in the United States and May in the United Kingdom will have a serious effect on the recruitment of international students in those countries. The budget cuts proposed by Trump on research and financial aid will have a negative impact on the quality of US research and education. (Altbach and de Wit, 2017)

Over the past 40 years, internationalization, as a concept and a strategy, has evolved from a minor, fragmented, and marginal theme to a major, central agenda item for governments and higher education institutions all over the world. But, although we use labels like "comprehensive internationalization" and "global citizenship" as if our approach were systematic and qualitative, the reality is that "internationalization" has become a very broad term, used for a great variety of (mostly economic) agendas. Whether the changing geographic landscape of higher education will also result in different agendas remains to be seen.

Some major misconceptions in the coming years will deal with:

- Internationalization being equal to "global" and ignoring "local";
- Internationalization being a risk for national and cultural identities;
- Western values and concepts as the sole models for internationalization; and
- Internationalization unfolding worldwide without any regard for, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations.

For those students and faculty who want and/or need to be mobile, governments and institutions need to facilitate their project, but it should not take the focus away from internationalizing the curriculum and the creation of responsible global citizenship. Higher education institutions have an important role to play in ensuring a sustainable future for the world while also meeting their obligations to local com-

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munities, and to develop responsible global citizens who understand the relationship between local and global and are committed to new pathways for human development and wellbeing. To achieve this, it is important to broaden the knowledge base of the curriculum beyond the European canon and limited Western views and help students develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes associated with responsible global citizenship (Leask and de Wit, GUNI, 2016).

The following definition of internationalization—an update of an original definition by Jane Knight in 2008, developed in a Delphi Panel exercise as part of a study for the European Parliament—reflects this imperative adequately:

> [Internationalization is] "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society." (de Wit et al, 2015)

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