

# Internationalisation: an agent of change and development (the case of EAIE)

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## Abstract

Internationalisation of higher education started out as a satellite activity in most universities, something very peripheral with its own agenda. In retrospect it is however very clear that the impact of this internationalization has touched many more areas than anticipated. University management has changed so has the role of the international offices and their management. The most important changes however can be seen in them multinational or global context. The Bologna declaration, the multinational cooperation programmes and the student and teacher exchanges. The most unexpected areas is however the development of international associations and organizations all over the world concerned with international education. They have today become important factors in policy making within the higher education area.

## Key-words

Internationalisation, Management, Global impact, Associations

## Europe

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Europe went through a period of profound change. New nation states came into existence, as well as new regions, and the European Union more than quadrupled its number of member states to 27. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 created a common market built on the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. Higher education and research were included in the European treaty stating that that *“the activities of the Community shall include: the promotion of research and technological development; and a contribution to education and training of quality* (European Union, 1992)

Against this background both the entire European Union and its neighbours started to develop and implement policies bringing together ideas and new initiatives to serve national needs as well as international ambitions.

## **New ways and new days**

International higher education has been boosted by a series of innovative programmes to encourage new ways of international co-operation. ERASMUS, now in its 23rd year, has proved to be a success, moving 2 million students to study at a foreign university in Europe. The program fostered exchanges beyond traditional partnerships, introduced international curriculum development and the seminal system of credit and grade transfer - the ECTS. It was followed by ERASMUS MUNDUS, a worldwide cooperation and mobility programme that aim to enhance quality in higher education and promote intercultural understanding.

International research in Europe was boosted by the EU Framework Programmes, currently in its 7th stage, with more money than ever before. And of course the Lisbon Strategy was launched with the objective of making the EU *“the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment* (European Union, 2000).

Reform and change also took place on the national level. Many countries reformed their national higher education and research systems, often as part of more general public sector reforms identified as New Public Management (NPM) (Bleiklie, et. al, 2000). The general objective was to make the higher education sector more responsive to demands and expectations from the broader society. NPM introduced an active state assuming responsibility for the efficiency of higher education, its organisation and quality of its services. International competition became more apparent and market forces entered the higher education sphere.

The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 and took university reform and internationalisation to a new level. A number of countries used the opportunity to re-structure their entire higher education system. Germany introduced a number of legal, financial and organisational measures to make their universities more responsive, notably the “excellence initiative “, an attempt at introducing a performance based allocation of resources. Comparable changes have taken place in countries as far apart as Finland, Denmark, France, Spain and Portugal, albeit different in detail. One of the outcomes so far are hybrid institutions, combining elements from the old systems as well as elements of a more contemporary nature, not least in terms of bring in outside experts with new perspectives on governance of the institutions (Schimank in Bleiklie et. al).

The university systems in Europe will need considerable time in order to adjust to Bologna and the university reforms. Time is a scarce resource for universities, since the financial situation, international competition and globalisation currently demand all their attention.

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## **The changed of role of the international officer**

The macro level developments percolated down through institutions to affect all senior leadership and management roles, including that of the senior international officer. In the mid eighties only large universities were equipped with a professional capacity in internationalisation. Internationalisation, identified as a separate activity requiring advanced level management and leadership skills, was conspicuously absent in most universities. “Internationalisation” was seen largely as the province of staff who were experienced international travellers with contacts abroad, often linked to their personal experiences.

By the mid eighties, at the time of the major national reforms, responsibilities for “internationalisation” were beginning to become professionalized. Smaller institutions may have had an “international person” (Hunter, 2009) having an acceptable command of English as a foreign language, ready to accommodate foreign visitors and students, and frequently being the recipient of all mail with foreign stamps on the envelope. This reflected the small scale, pre-programmatic approach to internationalisation. Larger institutions, particularly those with greater volumes of incoming students from U.S. institutions had an “Auslandsamt” (International Office) of some sort.

With the advent of European mobility programmes this changed dramatically and rapidly.

Firstly, academics became directly involved in the administration and implementation of exchanges. Mobility was no longer the sole responsibility of the individual student supported by university bureaucrats, but involved professors leading the way to partnerships with foreign universities and setting up the actual exchange. Secondly, curricula were reviewed, in some cases overhauled and re-designed, to meet accreditation requirements at partner universities. A growth of courses and programmes in English followed. Thirdly, the volume of institutionally organised mobility increased rapidly.

For the international officer, changes meant a shift from the relative stability and predictability of administration and management to quite dynamic collaborations schemes involving international programmes and projects. The international officer became a change agent and a manager co-ordinating people, funds and policies. With the Bologna Process, international officers are challenged on an even more comprehensive level. The question now is no longer just to take charge of change, but to take charge of reforms.

Moreover, the operational side of internationalisation could no longer be managed at the central level only. The sheer volume of paperwork and grant management of ERASMUS contributed decisively to delegation and differentiation of tasks, at least

within medium sized and larger institutions. Faculties and department were given a more prominent role. Some institutions even dismantled central international offices in order to decentralise funds and staff. Many governments, for their part, took action at the national level to established national agencies in countries that had been without such structures.

For institutions depending on tuition fees, notably in the UK, internationalisation had been an important source of income for many years. ERASMUS however was created from more idealistic visions and was never meant to be source of income. ERASMUS can nonetheless be considered a modernising influence that stimulated and enhanced the growth of demand for international education within Europe. A larger student mobility market was created.

In later years the introduction of tuition fees in other European countries has again lead to a change in the roles of the international officers. Marketing and recruitment has been brought to new levels. So has alumni activities. These elements have contributed to make the profile of the international officer even more complex and professional.

### **Impact on university management**

Two hierarchies have been identified pertaining to higher education institutions: the descending external hierarchy starting with the Ministry and descending towards the institution, and the ascending internal hierarchy starting at the ground level of the institutions, culminating in the institution's Rector (Neave 2009).

Within and between these vertical hierarchies changes have taken place in the form of new legal regulations, re-structuring, new budgeting's schemes, funding arrangements and internal reorganisations of universities, faculties and departments. Further developments and challenges for international education leadership will be embedded and played out along both the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

However, this view could be challenged. It is sometimes said that international education leadership is more about the horizontal not vertical. In Europe, international officers are rarely at home moving in the ascending or descending hierarchies, but tend to focus more on horizontal relations with partners abroad, organising mobility of incoming and outgoing students student and staff, initiating projects with fellow officers at home and abroad, and last but not least, - applying to international agencies for funding of their projects. This suggests that the current focus of leadership of internationalisation in Europe is directed horizontally.

The Communiqué from the Bologna Ministers meeting in Leuven in April 2009

sets goals for the next decade to 2020, emphasising the horizontal approach on at least two dimensions of particular importance to internationalisation: firstly, an emphasis on increasing the quantum (to at least 20% of the graduating cohort) and diversifying the types and scope of mobility and secondly encouraging the greater prevalence of joint degrees and programs (Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009).

The vertical hierarchies are not left out by the Ministers, but nonetheless their communiqué leaves the impression that universities in Europe must energise their efforts to meet demands for horizontal co-operation on all levels.

### **A third dimension**

Parallel to reforms on the national or international level, Europe has seen the growth of a supplementary structure of organisations, associations and networks serving the needs for efficient and professional co-operation in the field international higher education.

Networks like the Coimbra Group, the Utrecht network, the Compostela Group and several others have broadened the scope of collaboration between European universities. Europe has also seen new associations emerging. Mentioned should be ACA, the Academic Cooperation Association, the European Universities Association (EUA), and the European Association of International Education (EAIE) founded in 1989. From its modest beginnings, the EAIE has grown into a large learning organisation offering a comprehensive Profession Development Programme to its members now comprising training courses, one-day Executive Forums and a one-week Professional Development Modules offered in collaboration with European universities with the option to earn ECTS credits (Hunter 2009).

More recent developments such as the upcoming project on Transforming Universities in Europe (TRUE), funded by the European Science Foundation, will raise and address new issues. TRUE will bring together researchers from across Europe to undertake comparative research in eight European countries, aiming to clarify *“how steering and governance affect essential organisational characteristics of institutions and in turn how this affects the differentiation of the European higher education landscape”*. When it comes to emerging Europe based strategies for basic research itself; research will be integrated in internationalisation of higher education.

## The overall impact

It is becoming increasingly obvious that internationalisation has a much wider impact on higher education and its management than no one ever could imagine. The journey from a small satellite activity for a small group to have influences and representatives on all levels of university activities and management is indeed spectacular.

All over Europe and also on the global scale there are today a number of organisations and networks active in one aspect or another of international higher education and research. Regardless of whether they are based on individual or institutional memberships, they have become important factors in policy making in the field.

As a change factor internationalisation is one of the largest in the past 25 years. Its long-term effects will continue to appear and make their imprints. The opportunities for higher education worldwide are limitless.

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