The Future of Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe

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Internationalization of higher education (IoHE) is a relatively new phenomenon but, as a concept, it is one that is both broad and varied. Over the last 30 years, the European programs for research and education—in particular the ERASMUS program but also research programs like the Marie Curie Fellowships—have been the motor for a broader and more strategic approach to internationalization in higher education in Europe and have set an example for institutions, nations, and regions in other parts of the world. The internationalization of higher education has been influenced by the globalization of our economies and societies and the increased importance of knowledge. It is driven by a dynamic and constantly evolving combination of political, economic, sociocultural, and academic rationales. These rationales take different forms and dimensions in the different regions and countries, and in institutions and their programs. There is no one model that fits all. Regional and national differences are varied and constantly evolving, and the same is true within the institutions themselves.

In a study for the European Parliament—a project of the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI) at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in partnership with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the European Association for International Education (EAIE)—which includes 17 country reports (ten from Europe and seven from the rest of the world), we identify key trends in current national strategies and for the future of internationalization in Europe.

Ten key developments for Europe and the rest of the world can be identified:

1. The growing importance of internationalization at all levels (encompassing a broader range of activities, more strategic approaches, and emerging national strategies and ambitions);

2. An increase in institutional strategies for internationalization—with accompanying risks, such as homogenization, and limitations, such as a focus on quantitative results only;

3. The challenge of funding, everywhere;

4. A trend toward increased privatization in IoHE, through revenue generation;

5. The effects of the competitive pressures of globalization, with increasing convergence of aspirations, if not yet actions;

6. An evident shift from (only) cooperation to (more) competition;

7. Emerging regionalization, with Europe often seen as an example for other world regions;

8. Rising numbers of stakeholders and participants involved in internationalization everywhere, with the resulting challenge of quantity versus quality;

9. A lack of sufficient data for comparative analysis and decision-making;

10. Notable emerging areas of focus, in particular internationalization of the curriculum, transnational education, and digital learning.

In Europe, it is apparent that internationalization as a strategic process began with ERASMUS. The program created common understandings and drivers for internationalization in most countries, and this was further reinforced by the Bologna Process. Internationalization is now becoming mainstream at the national and institutional levels in most countries of the world, and in particular in Europe. The rhetoric speaks of more comprehensive and strategic policies for internationalization, but in reality there is still a long way to go in most cases. Even in Europe, seen around the world as a best-practice case for internationalization, there is still much to be done, and there is an uneven degree of accomplishment across the different countries, with significant challenges in Southern and, in particular, Central and Eastern Europe.

Two surveys on internationalization in Europe and the world, one by IAU and one by EAIE, draw a highly encouraging picture for Europe. Moreover, the IAU survey showed that Europe is the region most often prioritized in institutional internationalization activities in other parts of the world.

A Scenario for the Future

A Delphi Panel exercise among key experts in international higher education around the world confirmed this picture and resulted in a scenario for the future of internationalization of higher education in Europe. This scenario sees IoHE as a continually evolving response to globalization driven by a dynamic range of rationales and a growing number of stakeholders. While it expects mobility and cross-border delivery to continue to grow, it calls for a stronger focus on the curriculum and learning outcomes to ensure internationalization for all, and not just for the mobile few. It identifies

partnerships and alliances in varying forms as becoming increasingly important for both education and research and recognizes the key role of the European Commission in supporting IoHE development.

Inevitably, there are barriers to be overcome, linked mainly to funding and regulatory constraints, but also to institutional issues of language proficiency and the nature of academic engagement and reward. Equally, there are enablers such as technology, stronger (and more equal) collaboration, a greater focus on qualitative outcomes, the fostering of public-private initiatives, and greater alignment between education and research as well as between different levels of education.

Internationalization as "the *intentional* process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, *in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society."*

The scenario envisages that, if the barriers are removed and the enablers activated, a European higher education will emerge whose graduates will be able to contribute meaningfully as global citizens and global professionals in a Europe that is better placed not only to compete but also to cooperate.

Redefining Internationalization

As an outcome of this Delphi Panel exercise, this study has revised Jane Knight's commonly accepted working definition for internationalization as "the *intentional* process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, *in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society."*

This definition reflects the increased awareness that internationalization has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes. The "abroad" component (mobility) needs to become an integral part of the internationalized curriculum to ensure internationalization for all, not only the mobile minority. It reemphasizes that internationalization is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance quality, and that it should not focus solely on economic rationales.

Most national strategies, including in Europe, are still predominantly focused on mobility, short-term and/or long-term economic gains, recruitment and/or training of talented students and scholars, and international reputation and visibility. This implies that far greater efforts are still needed to incorporate these approaches into more comprehensive strategies, in which internationalization of the curriculum and learning outcomes as a means to enhance the quality of education and research receives more attention. The inclusion of "internationalization at home," as a third pillar in the internationalization strategy of the European Commission—*European Higher Education* in the World—as well as in several national strategies, is a good starting point, but it will require more concrete actions at the European, national, and, in particular, the institutional level for it to become reality.

The importance of the role of the European Union and the Bologna Process in the development of IoHE in Europe, but also around the globe, is undeniable and has to be built on even further. In this process, however, it is essential to focus on partnerships and collaboration that recognize and respect the differences in contexts, needs, goals, partner interests, and prevailing economic and cultural conditions. Europe can only be an example if it is willing to acknowledge that it can also learn from elsewhere; it offers an important model but not the only one for the modernization of higher education.

Summing up, we can say that the future of IoHE in Europe looks potentially bright, but its further positive development and impact will only take place if the various stakeholders and participants maintain an open dialogue about rationales, benefits, means, opportunities, and obstacles in this ongoing process of change. We cannot ignore the fact that IoHE is also being challenged by increasingly profound social, economic, and cultural issues, such as the financial crisis, unfavorable demographic trends, immigration, and ethnic and religious tensions. While these challenges represent a threat, they also foster awareness of the importance of IoHE in developing a meaningful response. ■