

## WHOSE INTEREST SERVE THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION?

**Tanja Potočnik Mesarić**  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia  
tanja.potocnik@uni-lj.si

### **Abstract:**

We live in a world where globalisation and internationalisation affect the whole of society. Higher education is not an exception. The effects of internationalisation in higher education are reflected in the increased number of international projects, student exchanges, cooperation of academic staff with colleagues from other countries, (re) designing curricula (Bologna) and finally the formation of joint study programmes. Clearly defined motives for internationalisation are very important, because without them the process of internationalisation is lost in the many available international opportunities. Motives are the driving force of a country, region or institution that invests into internationalisation. As international competition grows, institutions give increasing attention to marketing and growing international reputations. At the institutional level, the emphasis is given to the international recognition, competition and the desire for a reputation abroad. Institutions have been competing to achieve the academic standards for years, but not in this way. Now, they compete in the commercial sector for international students to pay for tuition. Current events in higher education (international accreditation, ranking of universities, the Bologna process) will be critically analysed through the prism of (economic) time, supported by primary and secondary sources.

*Keywords: internationalisation, higher education, Bologna process, motives.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper researches the reforms of higher education in terms of the economical and political interest of the internationalisation of higher education. The phenomena are the result of time and related subjects, but such a complex process such as the internationalisation of higher education is, it can hardly be understood, only by certain interests.

The theme is interesting in many aspects. Utilitarian interests of the internationalisation have an great impact on higher education: from the changes in funding for higher education institutions to the employability of graduates “produced” by higher education institutions. The broader context is an important topic in terms of institutional as well as national planning internationalisation of higher education. The applied part will be researched by primary and secondary sources.

## 2. GLOBALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Globalisation is a term traced at every step, but it is often mixed with a similar term, internationalisation. Svetličič (1996, p. 74) noted that the definitions of globalisation are usually very loose. They mix factors and manifestations of globalisation, or are only single-disciplined, while globalisation is, by definition, multidisciplinary.

UNESCO (2004, p. 6) concerning the relationship between globalisation and internationalisation of higher education gives the following explanation:

*»Globalisation is a process that affects the change in the performance of an individual society, the economy and the labour market; and also affects the changes in the functioning of higher education institutions. The effects of globalisation have created a need for the universities to respond with the internationalisation of educational programmes. For universities this means not only changes in the financing and quality of education, but also that universities because of social and economic changes, and changes that are happening in the labour market, have begun to increasingly seek to create educational programmes adapted to international students and educational programmes to be implemented in other countries«.*

UNESCO (2003, p. 6) also believes that it is impossible to talk about the globalisation of higher education without having to touch the internationalisation. Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 290) agrees: »Globalisation and internationalisation are related, but they don't have the same meaning«.

In terms of higher education the internationalisation it is often defined as a concept and a process of integration of international links in teaching, research and service functions of the institutions. Internationalisation to someone means international activities, such as mobility of students and academic staff, international partnerships, projects and joint study programmes. To others it means the transfer of education in the broad sense of scale: the total education of two or more institutions in the domestic or foreign country, a branch of the institutions (franchised) operating in another country, the institutions, that offer distance education (Knight 2005, p. 2). »Internationalisation of higher education can be understood as a response to globalisation,« argues Jane Knight (2005, p. 6).

Globalisation which is part of the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, therefore represents the current context of economic and academic trends. In response to globalisation internationalisation includes policies and functioning of education systems and institutions to cope with the global academic environment.

## 2.1. Motives for the internationalisation of higher education

Clearly defined motives for internationalisation are very important, because without them the process of internationalisation is lost in the many available international opportunities. Motives, arranged and classified, are a driving force of a country, region or institution that invests in internationalisation. They are reflected in specific policies and programmes implemented in one country or institution. According to Knight (2007, p. 216) there are four groups of subjects, which represent the fundamentals levers of the internationalisation of higher education: socio-cultural, political, economic and academic. Groups of subjects are shown in Table 1 and briefly explained.

**Table 1:** Motives for the internationalisation of higher education

Motives	Existing motives within groups	Motives with rising importance
Social-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nationl - cultural identity,</li> <li>- intercultural understanding,</li> <li>- development of citizens,</li> <li>- development of society and the community.</li> </ul>	National level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of human resources,</li> <li>- strategic alliances,</li> <li>- economic and commercial development,</li> <li>- social and institutional development,</li> <li>- socio-cultural development,</li> <li>- mutual understanding.</li> </ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foreign policy,</li> <li>- national security,</li> <li>- peace and mutual understanding,</li> <li>- national and regional identity.</li> </ul>	Institutional level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase international visibility and reputation,</li> <li>- improving quality,</li> <li>- international standards,</li> <li>- profit,</li> <li>- development of students and staff,</li> <li>- strategic alliances,</li> <li>- production of knowledge.</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic growth and competition,</li> <li>- labour market,</li> <li>- financial incentives.</li> </ul>	
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expand academic horizons,</li> <li>- institution building,</li> <li>- improving quality,</li> <li>- international academic standards,</li> <li>- international dimension of research and teaching.</li> </ul>	

Source: Knight, 2007, p. 216.

The first column of Table 1 presents the four main reasons that remain relevant, but recently it is the increasing importance of the relationship between them. Existing motives (still) do not distinguish between national and institutional level motives, so the distinction is becoming increasingly important - for the implementation of higher education across borders are necessary well-expressed institutional, not just national motives. In the third column of Table 1 there are also clearly presented various motives for the national and institutional level of higher education (Knight, 2005, p. 216).

Changes in the universities and the academic area are present and has always been, and will always be accompanied by a number of tensions between the academic community (professions, disciplines, and sometimes with students, sometimes without them) and the management of universities on the one hand and between the university and universities' environment (government, local community, economy), on the other hand. Even the latest changes in globalisation, which tend toward the internationalisation of universities, are increasing at the same time classic and introduced a series of new tensions between academic actors and their increased cross-border environment. In other words, the internationalisation of higher education may have been forced, but is an essential process for institutions of higher education, which nowhere not take place smoothly and without conflicts between different actors in this process. In this process, which is supported by a trend towards the liberalisation of markets and even by the public sector, has in many ways, changed the traditional principles and forms of national academic culture. Universities as holders of traditional cultural academic privileges, protected by the regulation of the public sector very slow and difficult adapt to new, more market-liberal conditions imposed by international comparisons, and the adjustment pressures. The point where globalisation, including liberalisation is, depends on the particular theoretical perspective, what is the purpose of higher education (today) and the practical expectations of various actors and users (of knowledge) of academic space.

### 3. APPLICATIVE PART

The applicative part will argue the economic motives for the internationalisation of higher education on the three cases. International accreditation, ranking of universities, the Bologna process are the result of strong economic motives for the internationalisation of higher education.

#### 3.1. International accreditation

Accreditation is an established system of quality assurance of study programmes. With the internationalisation of higher education has come topical a international accreditation, "brand prestige" that ensures the international comparability of study programmes. As van Ginkel explains (2011, p. 25): "Universities are trying to illustrate their "quality" by seeking access to the most prestigious international networks possible in their fields of academic activity; the most prestigious and useful they are to be admitted to."

International accreditation universities not only ensure international comparability, but also increase reputation in the international arena, increas eexchanges of students and professors, "but also (mens) more funds, or at least different routes to obtaining funds" (Štrbac 2011, p. 61).

For Hämäläinen et al., a central question was "Why has accreditation become a central issue?" They gave three answers (Hämäläinen et al. 2001, as cited in Schwarz and Westerheijden 2007, p. 33):

- 'Trust and accountability' i.e. the New Public Agenda (due to the introduction of market mechanisms in public administration);
- 'A common labour market and student mobility requirements', i.e. the Bologna agenda;
- 'Borderless markets of higher education', i.e. the globalisation agenda, leading to a 'proliferation of accreditation systems'.

International accreditation as a result of internationalisation can be classified under economic reasons, because the universities seek international accreditation more because of "brand prestige" and with this related resources than because increasing a quality of study programme.

### **3.2. Ranking of universities**

The ranking of universities is a characteristic product of the popularization of higher education as well as the result of opening national higher education systems to the international or global space; it is therefore part of the globalisation process (Miklavčič, 2011, p. 38).

Universities of the 21st century must compete for students. As I already mentioned, they do so with international accreditation, and increasingly with the classification on the scale of rankings of universities. Universities compete for status and ranking, and generally for funding from governmental or private sources. While competition has always been a force in academia and can help produce excellence, it can also contribute to a decline in a sense of academic community, mission and traditional values (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009, p. iv).

While all of the existing rankings contain methodological problems, they are nonetheless widely used, influential, and show no signs of disappearing. (Altbach, Reisberg, Rumbley 2009, p. 12) Despite methodological shortcomings, ranking means the economic success of research activities of universities and its profitability in the global market.

Classification on the scale is an important commercial advantage for the profitable industry of transnational education. Striving for inclusion on the scale stimulates the market behaviour of providers and, for the successful, brings the reputation that is needed to enter new markets (Miklavčič, 2011, p. 38).

Dale (2010, as cited in Miklavčič, 2011) is critical about ranking universities. He considers that the scale encourages universities to take key performance indicators and quality criteria and thus potentially shifting the mission of higher education.

Given that the ranking means in particular a factor of attractiveness for resources, we can conclude that ranking universities in terms of the internationalisation of higher education as well as international accreditation are led by economic-liberal interests.

### **3.3. Bologna reform**

A substantially risky, uncertain, institutional and very decisive step towards the internationalisation of higher education to obtain faster and more practical knowledge at the university level in Europe made the Bologna Declaration<sup>1</sup>. Higher education institutions across the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) in 2000 were renovating their study

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bologna Declaration was signed by European ministers responsible for education in Bologna 19th June 1999, which established a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA, European Higher Education Area). "The Sorbonne declaration of 25th May 1998, highlighting the central role of universities in developing European cultural dimensions. The creation of a European Higher Education Area is identified as a major route leading to the establishment of citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development" (Ministry, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, 1999).

programmes in terms of the Bologna "practical and rapidly employable" spirit. Fast and efficient knowledge flow is essential to promote the common good, or as the University of Ljubljana writes on its web page: "The purpose of the Bologna Process is through working together, building up an open and competitive European Higher Education Area, which will enable European students and graduates free movement and employability, and which will be attractive to non-European students. "The aim of the Lisbon strategy<sup>2</sup> was that by 2010, Europe would be "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world"(EUR-Lex). Knowledge must be able to flow across Europe in the most standardized and transparent way.

The labour force of a country should therefore be (constantly) able to quickly adapt to new technologies and demands of work. The basic mission of the education system is therefore to rapidly adapt to new technologies and new demands of work. This fact also aware the European Union; it therefore decided to intervene in the sphere of education. In fact, it became aware that the potential for economic growth lies in its human resources.

Specifically in the case of Bologna: European (political) integration began and continued for economic reasons only. It began with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty of Paris in 1951 and continued through the Treaty of Rome in 1957, when they were established in the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or. EURATOM) and the European Economic Community (EEC). Economic interests eventually led to a growing need for political harmonization (Treaty of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Treaty of Nice (2001)).

Americans (Adelman, 2009) see also the emphasis on mobility and internationalisation as a European response to American superiority as a global player. They feel that Europe with the Bologna Process is looking beyond borders in five ways:

- wants to do a competent EHEA on the world stage (U.S.),
- wants to make the EHEA more attractive to non-European students,
- wants to increase mobility within Europe,
- aims to increase cross-border flows of temporary work forces and
- wants to strengthen cooperation between European higher education institutions across borders in curriculum development, joint programmes and quality assurance.

Efforts to increase their attractiveness is an important lever for improving the European higher education systems from within, as well as the creation of the EHEA itself. Zgaga (Adelman, 2009) explains the situation. Internal competence is an essential element of the European institutions to become more attractive on one hand and sharing experiences in key points of Bologna in national systems help to cope with similar challenges on the other hand.

After all, we can conclude that motives for the Bologna process are a economic and partly political nature (according to Knight, 2007). So the Bologna process is also connected to the applied type of economic motives for the internationalisation of higher education.

---

<sup>2</sup> Heads of EU governments who are at the top of the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 agreed on a new strategic goal for the European Union, until 2010, becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. (EUR-Lex)



#### 4. BUT THERE ARE NOT THE ONLY ECONOMIC INTERESTS...

However, the internationalisation of higher education does not bring market mechanisms into higher education only. By expanding the internationalisation they are also expanding its positive effects. »In this ever more interconnected world, human beings, individuals and their “knowledge”, are and will be the major resource for future social, cultural and economic development. Here participation also mean sharing, access to new knowledge and innovations, new applications that can benefit all humankind,« argued van Ginkel (2011, pp. 8–9). New discoveries are wide spread around the world in that way and it would be selfish even if e.g.. the discovery of new antibiotics would not be shared. The exchange of good practices improve the education system, expand horizons to students and enrich the body of knowledge. So, in the background, there are also academic and socio - cultural motives.

Moreover, the internationalisation of higher education is not an invention of modern times (Braček, 2007). The claim that higher education is internationalising or ought to internationalise is somewhat surprising because universities have long been considered one of society’s most international institutions (Teichler, 2004, p. 8). In the 12th century, the internationalisation manifested through Christianization and the migration of people, because the students and academics spread Christianity in particular. Later internationalisation served primarily for colonization. (Siaya & Hayward, 2003 as cited in Altbach and Knight 2007, p. 293). For example, there are estimates that intra-European students mobility, now possibly on the level of two or three percent, had been on the level of ten percent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Neave 2002, p. 181 as cited in Teichler, 2004, pp. 8–9).

In conjunction with the internationalisation of higher education often the question arises whether the universities with global integration are moving away from their roots, their functions and roles in society.

Van Ginkel (2011, pp. 11–12) considers that the general public does not understand the mission of most universities. “In general terms, universities are presented as being responsible for the “development, transfer and preservation of knowledge”... All of this is true, but at the same time it obscures a clear view of the most crucial tasks of universities as centres of knowledge and culture.” After van Ginkel these crucial roles include:

1. sustaining and developing the intellectual base of society itself, the basis for all future development and growth;
2. promoting human development and security while helping to preserve the cultural identity of society in the age of globalisation;
3. giving inspiration and justified pride to citizens regarding the achievements over time of their own society; and
4. as promoting dialogue and understanding to appreciate and respect cultural diversity.

Strengthening internationalisation in higher education is a prerequisite for success in all these roles. The internationalisation of higher education is not a new phenomenon and not only a value-added. As van Ginkel argued (2011, p. 9):

*“It has been both a tradition and an ambition of all true universities throughout history, with the exception of the age of the “anomaly of national universities”. This is roughly the century between 1870 and 1970 in Europe,... when the European Union started its higher education policies with a view to create added value by internationalizing higher education institutions and promoting their co-operation in*

*both teaching and research so as to strengthen “Europe” and its member states and people.”*

## 5. CONCLUSION

Nobody denies that the new situation requires a different higher education. Universities aware that they need to perform their traditional and other role too: it must also address unemployment, economic development and be in the service of the Lisbon strategy to promote the growth of the European economy (what is required by politicians).

Štrbac (2011, p. 56) thinks that is difficult to speak of more or less “pure” or “fair” motives, although it may be possible to generalize them in this way. However, the strategy for this area must take into account the particular motives that are directed towards higher quality, academic networking, exchange of scientific research and other findings, best practices, experiences and cultural characteristics. On the other hand, of course, the economic motives that often arise from the increasing costs of education and the proportionally smaller budgets dedicated to this area must also be understood; however the danger of internationalisation becoming merely a tool for obtaining funds on other “markets”, at the cost of quality, must be taken into account.

It is surprising to note how much the debate on global phenomena in higher education suddenly focuses on marketisation, competition and management in higher education. Other terms, such as knowledge society, global village, global understanding or global learning, are hardly taken into consideration (Teichler, 2004, p. 23).

Let the motives for the internationalisation of higher education be economic and political or academic and socio-cultural, as the van Ginkel says (2011, pp. 8–9): “Internationalisation is more than a tradition and an ambition: it is a necessity!” Higher education has been internationalized long before the current controversy, the only difference is that today it is internationalized in different social (economic) conditions. Internationalisation of higher education itself brings more or less positive effects, while these effects are lost in the modern market light during the hard race of liberal strategies of the internationalisation of universities.

The motives for internationalisation of higher education are not really important. But it is important that the positive effects of internationalisation (knowledge transfer) will outweigh the negative, by-product of our time. The positive effects will be strengthened only by expanding the internationalisation of higher education - hopefully in time more and more for academic and socio-cultural reasons.



## REFERENCE LIST

1. Adelman, C. (2009). *The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes: Re-learning Higher Education in the Age of Convergence*. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/EYESFINAL.pdf>
2. Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley L. E. (2009). *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution; A Report Prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/developpement/shared/developpement/cours/E759/Altbach,%20Reisberg,%20Rumbley%20Tracking%20an%20Academic%20Revolution,%20UNESCO%202009.pdf>
3. Altbach, P. G., & Knight J. (2007). The Internationalization of Higher Education; Motivations and Realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4). Retrieved from <http://jsi.sagepub.com/content/11/3-4/290.full.pdf+html>
4. Braček, A. (2007). *Internacionalizacija visokega šolstva v Sloveniji: magistrsko delo*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.
5. Von Ginkel, H. (2011). *More than a tradition and ambition: Internatiolisation of higher education*. In K. Miklavčič (Ed.). *Paths to internatiolisation* (pp. 8–27). Ljubljana, Cmepius.
6. Knight, J. (2005). An Internationalization Model: Responding to New Realities and Challenges. In H. De Witt, I. C. Jaramillo, J. Gacel-Ávila & J. Knight (Eds.) *Higher Education in Latin America* (pp. 1–38). Retrieved from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTLACREGTOPEUCATION/Resources/Higher\\_Ed\\_in\\_LAC\\_Intnal\\_Dimension.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTLACREGTOPEUCATION/Resources/Higher_Ed_in_LAC_Intnal_Dimension.pdf) (20. julij 2011).
7. Knight, J. (2007). Internationalization: concepts, complexities and challenges. *Springer International Handbooks of Education*, 18 (I). (pp. 207–227). Retrieved from <http://www.springerlink.com/index/k50353365125258m.pdf>
8. Miklavčič, K. (2011). Globalisation and internationalisation: crossroads of ideas on the future of the higher education. In K. Miklavčič (Ed.). *Paths to internatiolisation* (pp. 28–50). Ljubljana, Cmepius.
9. Schwarz, S., & Westerheijden, D. F. (2007). *Accreditation and Evaluation in the European Higher Education Area*. Dordrecht: Springer. Retrieved from <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q72g567864255v04/fulltext.pdf>
10. Svetličič, M. (1996). *Svetovno podjetje; izzivi mednarodne proizvodnje*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče.
11. Štrbac, J. (2011). Raising the quality or the invasion of market mechanisms in higher education. In K. Miklavčič (Ed.). *Paths to internatiolisation* (pp. 51–68). Ljubljana, Cmepius.
12. Teichler, U. (2004). The Changing Debate on Internationalisation of Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 48(1), (pp. 5–26). Retrieved from <http://www.springerlink.com/index/w62716g2q2v5u384.pdf>
13. UNESCO. (2004). *Higher Education in a Globalized Society*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001362/136247e.pdf>
14. *University of Ljubljana*. (2011, January 16) Retrieved from <http://www.uni-lj.si>