

## **The Bologna Process and the wider world of higher education: the cooperation competition paradox**

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The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration, of 1999, is nowadays implemented in 48 states, which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Internationalization has always been at the core of the Bologna Process. Additionally, internationalization is one of the five priorities highlighted in the EC Modernization Agenda. A EU Parliament study (de Wit et al, 2015) on Internationalization of Higher Education shows that nowadays institutional and national policies must address challenges, such as digital and blended learning, demographic changes in the student population, immigration, financial crisis or ethnic and religious tensions. An increased nationalist inward looking trend, as for instance expressed in the UK through Brexit, is another recent phenomenon that impacts on almost all aspects of internationalization, which involved stakeholders need to take into account. Internationalization is faced with an increasing paradox between cooperation and competition in a complex political and economic environment.

From a rather marginal and fragmented issue in most countries and institutions of higher education until the end of the 1980s, internationalization in higher education 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 national governments develop strategies and policies for the internationalization of their 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. (de Wit, 2017b)

This increased attention for internationalization is positive news and brings many opportunities, but it also creates many challenges for the sector. The changing political climate in Europe, the United States of America, and elsewhere, are a nationalist reaction to the increased globalization of our economies and societies.

This introduction to the theme: The Bologna Process and the wider world of higher education, deals with those challenges, in particular with the paradox between collaboration and competition and with resulting 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 paradoxes to internationalization and create a sustainable and comprehensive internationalization for all students and faculty?

### **The Bologna Process and the wider world**

The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999, is one of the major reforms in higher education, and in addition to harmonization and modernization, Europeanization and internationalization are driving rationales for this reform. This is not the place to describe and analyse at length the process and the opportunities and challenges of its implementation over the past 18 years. Together with the European programs for research (Horizon 2020 and its predecessors) and education (Erasmus+ and its predecessors), the Bologna Process has contributed substantively to the internationalization in higher education, as well has travelled around the world, as analysed in the contribution by Woldegiorgis (2017).

Intended as a reform to harmonize higher education systems and structures in Europe, and to enhance intra-European collaboration and global competitiveness, Evans (2017) in her contribution perceives it as a neoliberal process, and Bisschof in his analysis of the effects of the Bologna Process on quality assurance regimes in the Post-Soviet space, concludes that there is more diversity than convergence.

The paradox between collaboration and competition as driving motives for internationalization is manifest in the Bologna Process. That paradox is manifesting itself in the different contributions to this thematic section.

### **Rethinking internationalization**

A main misconception is that internationalization in higher education 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 the end of last century, “what about the other 98 percent?” is still most relevant.

Twenty-five years ago, the focus of internationalization policies was nearly exclusively on the mobility of students for credits—, in Europe primarily the Erasmus program. At the end of the 1990s, a reaction emerged in Europe, calling for more attention to the large majority 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. (de Wit, 2017b)

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 labour 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).

Ten years ago, the approach toward internationalization was also still predominantly activity-oriented, even instrumental. De Wit (2011) mentions 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.

In reaction to the dominant focus on mobility and fragmentation in internationalization policies, a need emerged to rethink internationalization for the following reasons:

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 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.” (de Wit, 2013)

This rethinking process was manifested 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, most of the misconceptions are still prevalent (de Wit, 2016).

### **The paradox between collaborative and competitive approaches**

Over the past years, an intense, stimulating, and sometimes provocative debate about the future of internationalization has taken place. De Wit and Rumbley (2017) observe though that there is an increasing disconnect between this notion of the relevance of internationalization, within and for the sector, and recent trends in society toward greater inward focus, manifested by anti-global and anti-international tendencies. They speak of paradoxes between internationalization as a collaborative endeavour and internationalization as a competitive approach; between internationalization as a key trend in higher education trend around the world and nationalization as a rising social phenomenon globally.

As de Wit and Rumbley (2017) observe, “Internationalization is still primarily driven by dynamics at the institutional level. National policies are often fragmented and tend to be focused on the mobility side and on matters of competition and competitive advantage, while institutional policies tend to be more coordinated and integrated, and appear to strive to combine the dimensions of “internationalization abroad” and “internationalization at home” more intentionally.” As also Craciun (2017) in her contribution observes, national attention in all of these countries seems to be more focused toward the competitive end. In comparison, at the institutional level, references are more regularly made to matters of internationalization at home and to global citizenship development—although, as de Wit and Rumbley (2017) state, “even at the institutional level, rhetoric around these ideas is still much more clearly in evidence than strategic and sustained action.”

The contributions to this thematic session illustrate that, under the broad concept of the Bologna Process and internationalization, there is great variety in—as well as disconnect between—national and institutional policies and strategies, and between competition and collaboration.

Crăciun (2017) in her analysis of national policies calls for internationalization as active engagement and policy making, and comes to the conclusion that national policies for internationalization are still limited in number, mainly a European and developed world phenomenon, stimulated by active inbound mobility of international students. This seems to imply that competition is more driving the national agendas than collaboration.

Perez-Encinas (2017) makes in her contribution a strong appeal for a collaborative approach that fosters community engagement and integration between students and staff members, while Fit and Gologan (2017) call for a stronger influence of student perspectives of internationalization, more support systems for students and better information and communication channels.

Denisova-Schmidt (2017) illustrates that corruption, lack of academic integrity and other ethical issues are prevalent in the Bologna signature countries, and calls for more attention and specific measures to address these concerns.

These papers make clear that the focus is still more on competition than on collaboration, something that is in line with Evans’ (2017) argument that the European Higher Education Area is essentially a neoliberal

higher education area. The calls for a more collaborative (Perez-Encinas) and student oriented (Fit and Gologan) approach to internationalization as well as the concern by Denisova-Schmidt to address ethics and academic integrity in the European Higher Education Area, align with Evans' analysis that the neoliberal university is coming to its end and needs a reshape of academic professionalism, as well as with the call for rethinking internationalization in higher education as described above. The paradox also manifests itself in the internationalization of the Bologna Process itself, as Woldegiorgis (2017) in his contribution describes: the policy travel of the Bologna Process to Africa and its sub-regions. This travel can be perceived either as advantageous and by that collaborative, or as an instrument of neo-colonialism and by that competitive. As he makes clear, context is essential and simple transfer is not possible.

Altbach and de Wit (2017) are less optimistic than Evans that the neoliberal university is coming to an end. They expect that in the current global political climate the commercial side of internationalization will continue to thrive for some time, while internationalization at home will encounter more opposition and will depend even more on institutions than on governments for development and support. 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, 2017a).

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. (de Wit, 2017b)

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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