The Internationalization of Higher Education – a Change of Paradigm for European Universities

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Internationalization

Coincides with the development of political and economic globalization
Internationalization

Why do universities want to be international?

• Students need to be educated for the international labour market

• Education has become a commodity
A change of paradigm?

• Economy vs. knowledge based notion of education

• Education for economic vs. social benefit
Social benefits:

According to Wilhelm von Humboldt’s ideal, education has a social dimension and dedication:

By means of learning the individual is supposed to become incorporated into the social structures of society
Economic benefits:

“Higher education is a commodity”.

It brings accountable economic benefits for the individual and the educational institution, can be traded across borders, exchanged, and used for competition
Concepts of internationalization

1. Emphasis on statistics:
   • International experience of professors, young scholars, and administrators
   • International professors and young scholars,
   • International research networks
   • International publications
   • Knowledge of foreign languages of teachers and administrators
   • Number of English language BA und MA programmes
   • International university partnerships and participation in international networks
   • Student mobility
   • Number of international students and of persons taking care of them
Criticism

• High numbers of foreign students (Change Agents) and of partner universities as well as international visibility (Branding) do not automatically prove internationalization.
• International reputation does not automatically mean high quality.
• A high number of international contacts does not automatically safeguard positive mutual perceptions and successful cooperation.
Concepts of internationalization

2. Emphasis on interaction

„Internationalization of higher education is the process of creating an international/ intercultural environment in research, in teaching and in studying with the aim of supporting the international/intercultural interactivity of involved individuals in all above mentioned fields.“

Rainer Lenz, Carol Steinhaus: Internationalization of Universities as Internationalization of Bildung. 9/2010; http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/26626/
3. Emphasis on integration:
focus on the intercultural encounter and its qualities:
• Frequency of contacts
• Intensity of contacts between internationals and locals
• Degree of personal disclosure
• Motivation for communication and cooperation
The case of Germany

In the context of German higher education, internationalization translates as the integration of international students and faculty.
Failing integration?

Integration deficits cause international students to
• drop out of school
• be less successful in achieving their academic goals
• isolate themselves from their German environment
• fail in establishing an emotional affiliation to their German Alma Mater
• fail in their role as multipliers of German education
Internationalization strategy of German universities

The driving force is the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK), ("Conference of University Presidents"), the representative body of German universities.

In 2008 the HRK

- requested the universities to become main agents and promoters in the internationalization process
- presented a plan for a national strategy
Main Actors

In 2009 the HRK provided the backbone for the internationalization strategy:

“National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students at German Universities”
National Code of Conduct on Foreign Students

The signatory universities pledged to provide international students with

- a hospitable and friendly environment that promotes integration into the university and into German society,
- orientation for studying and for living in Germany,
- courses for the improvement of German language skills,
- integration programmes with advice in social matters,
- special counselling with regard to students’ cultural background,
- support for housing, health insurance, residence permits etc.
Fields of activity

The National Code lists several fields of academic, language, and social support:

• Orientation for studying and living in Germany
• Courses for the improvement of German language skills
• Integration programmes, advice in social matters and special counselling with regard to cultural background
• Housing
• Bureaucracy support: registration, residence permits, health insurance, etc.
• Career services
Expected Results

International students should
• feel welcome at their German university
• receive additional language support
• be coached by their academic teachers with an understanding of their cultural heritage and academic background
• have advice and counselling for their specific needs
• be offered possibilities to socialize with German students
• be supported when looking for housing, and
• feel well in Germany and at their Alma Mater
Ambitious goals and tasks

The focus on the internationalization of higher education as integration of international students sets high standards for German universities.
Progress is slow

- Many international students still feel isolated from their German environment, sometimes even create negative feelings,
- are not well integrated with their German mates,
- socialize mostly with their co-nationals or other internationals,
- lack language skills for the high academic level of teaching, and
- need extra help in their academic work.
A positive outlook

• Recognition of the importance of internationalization

• Beginning changes in attitudes and structures

• Process of „intercultural openness“ initiated