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DIALOGUE OF CULTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract:

Internationalisation of higher education is not a new phenomenon. It has existed since the foundation of universities due to the international character of knowledge and the intent to be involved in the educational processes in the world. For decades, with the rise of globalisation the internationalisation of universities has been of growing importance and in consequence Hungarian institutions must face the challenges when foreign students are found in several courses, Hungarian students go abroad to widen their knowledge and outgoing and incoming professors and lecturers can be seen at universities. It means that several cultures can be found at institutions and cross-cultural issues are a key factor. This paper puts the examination in context by outlining the historical background of internationalisation of universities in Hungary, and then it describes the present situation focusing on the regulations determining the international process. This paper looks at intercultural interaction issues and then summarises the differences in behaviour, attitudes and norms. Attitudes of individuals with different cultural backgrounds are of critical importance to the outcomes of the interaction and are a basis for the relationship we form with others. These attitudes of individuals or groups of individuals are shaped, in large part, by prior experiences, and the socialization process, i.e. by culture. The findings of this study prove that culture also influences people's way of thinking and behaving and result in different understanding toward vision and purposes of universities.

Keywords:

internationalisation of universities, trends over time, measures, cultural diversity

JEL Classification: M14, I20, I23

Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education can be interpreted in multiple ways due to the international character of knowledge. It has existed since the foundation of universities and has always played an important role in the life of a country. For decades, with the rise of globalisation the internationalisation of universities has been of growing importance also in Hungary and in consequence Hungarian institutions must elaborate an internationalisation strategy in response to increasing incoming foreign students. Nowadays students with several cultures can be found at institutions and cross-cultural issues are a key factor.

Internationalisation in higher education might not be examined in an isolated way because the space where universities are located influences how and in what extent universities act internationally (Rechnitzer et al. 2016). In 1992 Scott explained that internationalisation is a key strategic element for universities, and he highlighted that the increasing competition in economy, the presence of foreign companies in the countries, the multicultural character of nations and the influence of international commerce contribute to the internationalisation of universities.

This purpose of this paper is to look at the processes of internationalisation, especially as they impact higher education in Hungary. After presenting briefly the history of Hungarian universities, then as an example, Széchenyi István University's internationalisation strategy is described. Finally, the paper aims to address the intercultural issues as well because in today's global world an understanding of what happens when people from different cultures meet, work and/or study together is quite essential for educators and leaders of universities.

The concept of internationalisation

Universities have always been affected by international trends and to a certain degree operated within a broader international community of academic institution, scholars, and research (Altbach et al. 2009). Most people think of universities as particularly stable organisations that have changed little over the centuries but it is not correct (Kerr 2001).

Universities worldwide have always promoted internationalisation, but there is no simple or all-encompassing definition of internationalisation. Different interpretations are offered by a variety of researchers and associations in the higher education sector. People are using the same term with very different definitions (Knight 1997). For some, internationalisation is seen as an extension of the traditional commitment of universities to learning, and as an exchange of knowledge (Yang 2002). Windham (1996) thinks that the term internationalisation has been changed due to external marketing opportunities.

Most of the researchers (e.g. Kerr 2001; Konczosné et al. 2016; Szőke et al. 2017) agree that internationalisation of higher education is not a new phenomenon. It has

existed since the foundation of universities due to the intent to be involved in the educational processes in the world. In the Middle Ages internationalisation for schools was not a challenge because the mixture of culture was a usual phenomenon for them. That's the reason that nowadays it is better to talk about the re-internationalisation of higher education.

Internationalisation has always had the potential to create more equitable relations but we must highlight that internationalisation and globalisation are not only most interchangeably used in academic circles, but they are often confused in the practical word (Yang 2002).

Considering the definitions of internationalisation, Qiang (2003) came to the conclusion that authors often refer to 'approaches' adopted by persons in leadership positions towards the promotion and implementation of programs aimed at internationalisation. Qiang (2003) classified these approaches into four groups:

- activity approach, which promotes activities such as curriculum, student/faculty exchange, technical assistance, and international students;
- competency approach, which emphasises the development of intercultural skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in students, faculty and staff;
- ethos approach, which emphasises the establishment of a culture or climate that values and supports international/intercultural perspectives and initiatives;
- process approach, which stresses the integration or infusion of an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures.

There are international organisations that are promoting internationalisation of universities. As for an example, the European University Association (EUA)¹ is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries and it has been actively contributing to the development of European internationalisation at both institutional and policy levels. Every year conferences² are organised to discuss universities' pivotal role in generating knowledge, developing intercultural understanding, suggesting common internationalisation strategy particularly with regards to the development of partnerships, the outgoing student mobility, the attraction of international students and the development of staff mobility.

A brief history of higher education in Hungary

The history of higher education³ dates back to 1367 (after foundation attempts in the 13th century) when Louis the Great initiated the establishment of a university (with the faculties of law and medicine) in the episcopal city of Pécs. Pope Urban V, in his Bull

¹See: www.eua.be

²Last conference: 6-8 April 2018, Zurich, Switzerland, 'Engaged and responsible universities shaping Europe'

³http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/letolt/english/highereducation2_1.pdf

of Endorsement, ordained that this university shall last for ever, yet the political environment meant that it only survived for a decade.

In 1435 another university was started in Óbuda with four faculties, which likewise, ran only for a quarter of a century. King Mathias had also planned to constitute a university, though his plan was unsuccessful. The next new foundation took place a century later in Transylvania (today: Romania) where Prince Báthory István established a university. Besides universities, the operating colleges and academies also contributed to an increase in the number of scholars, as did the traditional habit of attending universities abroad.

The foundation of the University in Nagyszombat (today: Trnava, Slovakia) in 1635 brought a change. It was Bishop Pázmány Péter who reorganised the Jesuit College into a university, starting with faculties of theology and philosophy. This university has operated continually since its foundation, but in 1784 it was moved to Pest. In line with the demands of the era, Engineering Institute was opened at the university in 1782, which later became a part of the Technical University.

The bourgeois-democratic revolution required an educated middle class, which promoted the development of Hungarian higher education, as did the fact that ministers of public education and religion were aware of the need of intellectuals and acted accordingly for the sake of the cause. A notably important figure was Eötvös József, who already during his first term (in 1848) dealt with the statutes of the university and defined the requirements of academic freedom. In 1870 he introduces a bill to establish the József Nádor Technical University, the first technical institution in the world to be called University.

The foundation of the University of Kolozsvár (today: Cluj-Napoca, Romania) was proclaimed in Act XIX of 1872 under the ministry of Trefort Ágoston. In 1912 an act declared the foundation of the universities in Debrecen and Pozsony (Bratislava). The number of university students had significantly increased: in 1866 there had risen 4,955 students; by 1913 this number was raised to 18,899. Due to the Peace Treaty of Trianon, the universities of Kolozsvár and Pozsony needed to be saved for Hungary. The one in Kolozsvár was moved to Szeged and the one in Pozsony to Pécs.

In the period between the two world wars, the standard of university education was that of the general quality of Europe. After 1949 Hungarian universities had to witness series of reforms aiming to eliminate academic freedom. The strict central governance eliminated the autonomy of the universities. Due to the needs of the communist economy, new universities were founded: the University of Economy in 1948, the Heavy-Industry and Technical University of Miskolc in 1949, the University of Transport based in Szeged, (later in Szolnok) in 1951. In the same year, the medical universities were transformed into individual institutions. An executive order of 1950 declared the separation of theology faculties from the organisation of universities. The

political changes in 1949 produced lack of tension and a decline of values at the universities. This also contributed to the fact that university students played an initiative and significant part in the revolution of 1956.

The undeniable turning-point, as in other areas of life, was brought by the change of the political regime (1989). Principles of the autonomous university and academic freedom have once again become acknowledged. New institutions were founded and the old ones were extended by new faculties. Of particular importance have been the establishments of Pázmány Péter Catholic University and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in 1993. Finally, after debate, Act 52 of 1999 was concluded, which reflects the result of integration, outlines the structure of Hungarian higher education and leads academic training into the next millennium.

At present higher education in Hungary is governed by the Ministry of Human Resources and it develops educational policies and strategies, supervises implementation of the Law on Higher Education and the relevant legislative acts and documents, therefore defines the regulation for the establishment, restructuring of higher educational institutions.

Internationalisation strategy at Széchenyi István University

The Széchenyi István University is situated in two cities (Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár) in the centre of Central Europe's golden triangle: halfway between the capital of Hungary, Austria and Slovakia, along the highway E75 and at the river Danube.

The University provides education, as well as pursuing research work in the fields of engineering – especially for the automotive industry –, IT, architecture, pedagogy, economics, international relations, sociology, law and administration, social work, medicine and health, musical arts, agriculture and teacher training. Széchenyi István University's quality is reflected not only in the national marketplace but also at the international level, as many multinational companies hire the graduates and work with the university (Barabás et al. 2017). Its activities encompass training at all levels, from the vocational courses through the BSc and MSc to the doctoral training and further training.

The university offers unique training and research in the region, which serves primarily the engineering focused production activities, building on the North-Transdanubian economy and its social and institutional environment. Its educational activities provide students with high-level, valuable, professional, and practical education, in addition to the ability and willingness to adapt to any situation.

As for the internationalisation strategy at Széchenyi István University, it has been planned to offer 22 English-taught major study programmes from September 2019. It has to be highlighted that prospective students from the 65 partner countries who are eligible for these study programmes may apply for Stipendium Hungaricum funding via

the Tempus Public Foundation. Therefore, the internationalisation is supported and promoted by other scholarship programmes (e.g. Erasmus, Ceepus, Young Christians, etc.) which help increase the number of international students (full-time and/or part-time) at the university.

The key-question in the future: *'What can be improved at institutional level to stimulate and support internationalisation?'* As for the answers it is suggested that:

- more classes should be offered in English (or in other foreign languages);
- teaching staff and students should be given an opportunity to improve their language skills;
- more funds should be needed to support students and staff mobility and international projects and
- more comprehensive and systematic approach should be needed to internationalisation.

Emphasizing the continuous efforts of the management of Széchenyi University to extend the internationalization process to all aspects of academic life, it has to be mentioned the establishment of an international branch of the Students' Union as well as the international facilities offered by the University's state-of-the-art library. The continual renewal and expansion of the institution's infrastructure and the high-quality Halls of Residence (in which all foreign students are guaranteed a room on-campus) will probably attract even more international students.

Discussion and further research

Higher education institutions permanently interact with their environment and internationalisation in higher education, of course, has its advantages and disadvantages. One of its main benefits is the dialogue between cultures.

The last decade saw growing interest in culture-related aspects of internationalisation among Hungarian researchers. Dozens of investigations have been carried out focusing on the intercultural challenges due to the internationalisation of workplaces (e.g. Ablonczyné 2013; Ablonczy-Mihályka 2015; Ablonczyné Mihályka – Tompos 2012; Tompos 2014; Tompos 2017; Tompos – Ablonczy-Mihályka 2018; Szőke 2013).

Culture and culture related issues now seem to have several implications for everyone who works in multicultural context and considerable debate still exists as to the best assessment criteria regarding culture in multicultural environment. It is obvious that the word *culture* often brings up more problems than it solves (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 138). The author of this paper agrees with Joynt & Warner (1966:3) that *'Culture is the pattern of taken-for-granted assumptions about how a given collection of people should think, act, and feel as they go about their daily affairs'*.

In higher education we need to be able to understand what processes come into play when people with different cultural backgrounds interact with one another. It is obvious that intercultural interaction as an everyday experience requires special competence to manage anxiety caused by cultural differences in interaction with people who see the world from perspectives which may be different or even in conflict with one's own personal values and beliefs (Némethová 2016). It is important that at universities being in the process of internationalisation a special attention should be devoted to the communication among people with different cultural backgrounds because communicative behaviour is believed to be strongly influenced by cultural value systems. Samovar and Porter (1991:108) claim that '*in the study of human interaction, it is important to look at cultural values, but in the study of intercultural communication it is crucial*'. As it is stated by Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005: 404): '*in multicultural situations, the various cultures of the interactants interact with and influence encounters, which, in turn, influence the nature of discourse*'.

The next step of our research in-progress is a qualitative research: foreign students and lecturers will be interviewed focusing on questions as follows: *What expectations did you have when you started to work and/or study with foreigners? What were these expectations based on? What do you think explains the foreigner interactional partner's unexpected behaviour? What strategy did you employ to sort out a conflict? What kind of advice would you give the Hungarian people if they wanted to do interactions with foreign people? Can you mention some absolute do's and don'ts for other cultures?*

Culturally-specific behaviour can be explained on the basis of cultural standards. This can aid in understanding what would otherwise be irritating, unusual and strange events. This knowledge is therefore an important basis for constructive cooperation between members of different cultures in and out the universities as well.

Conclusion

Internationalisation and globalisation are quite different in their approach as are the consequences for higher education. It is important to realise that nowadays the re-internationalisation process can be observed in higher education. The term re-internationalisation covers different things and activities for universities depending on the location and the economic and social environment. For universities in Hungary (especially for Széchenyi István University) it means to develop a strategy to be able to attract more students from abroad (an 'international environment' for home-students), to provide the home-students with more opportunities to have learning experience outside the country, to develop strategic partnerships with other institutions regarding teaching and learning and to improve the position in national and international rankings.

The author of this paper thinks that the growing trend to find students with different cultural backgrounds at Hungarian universities provokes new challenges (positive and/or negative) and institutions in higher education need to be ready to spend resources on managing cultural diversity. If they do it helps them to attract and keep more foreign (and domestic) students.

Re-internationalisation of universities is considered worth further investigations and hopefully Hungarian university leaders accept that re-internationalisation is a long process but it is necessary to survive.

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