Purposeful Internationalization: A Common-Good Approach of Global Engagement

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Introduction

Within higher education, internationalization is commonly defined as a process that integrates "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" (de Wit, Hunter, and Egron-Polak 2015, 29). Higher education institutions (HEIs) have altered the way they position themselves in the global landscape through their internationalization strategies (Stensaker et al. 2018). The current understanding of a *successful* internationalization model has been pushed globally toward mainstream structures that follow an Anglo-American model resulting in the establishment of a global educational regime (Zapp and Ramirez 2019) or imaginary (Stein et al. 2016). Under this imaginary, internationalization of higher education, specially at Anglo-American institutions, is not neutral and has the potential of "expanding American economic influence and cultural superiority abroad" (Suspitsyna 2015, 24). This model highlights the attraction of international students for revenue or prestige (Stein and Andreotti 2016), the establishment of a presence abroad to deliver education (Johnson 2017), and an overall self-presentation of universities abroad as "enterprises that will benefit (in revenues and prestige) from internationalization" (Rhoades et al. 2019, 525).

This model of Anglo-American internationalization, has been described as 'comprehensive' or 'pervasive' (APLU 2017; Hudzik 2015; Olson, Green, and Hill 2005) given its embeddedness in all the substantive functions of HEIs. This comprehensiveness implies breadth, which although important, lacks (or at least omits to highlight) direction. Using de Wit's et al (2015) aforementioned definition, it seems like the process of internationalization has been focusing more on its 'functions and delivery' than on its 'purpose and meaningful contribution'. Beyond internationalization's comprehensiveness, literature and practice need to focus on a common thread that aligns all those diverse international activities with the quintessence of each institution's mission. When such leitmotif is also consciously oriented towards a greater common good, beyond the individual gains for the enablers and participants of internationalization programs, then the international strategy becomes more relevant to the institutional mission. I use the term *purposeful internationalization* to refer to the *conscious* alignment of an institution's internationalization strategy with the common good component of its specific mission.

The objective of this study is understanding whether or not, how, and to what extent, are some universities using their internationalization strategy as a means to pursue the higher purpose stated in their own mission. It will do so by analyzing how two HEIs in a country from the Global South (Mexico) are enacting purposeful internationalization strategies that contest the Anglo-American mainstream conception of internationalization. Is there a pattern among some HEIs that resembles or differs from such conception? Can market-like behaviors of internationalization coexist with the idea of seeking the greater common-good? To answer these salient questions, I am conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis of internationalization initiatives at two institutions in Mexico. One program related to an

institution's strategy to position itself internationally through its physical presence abroad; and another based on an institution's strategy to foster and develop student mobility as a means to instill values such as intercultural awareness.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This study is framed as a multiple case study (Stake 2006) analyzing different internationalization strategies that two HEIs in Mexico implement, and how these contrast with the mainstream Anglo-American idea of successful internationalization. The design for this study was constructed borrowing from an institutional ethnography approach (Smith 2001). Therefore, the focus is not only on the policies/discourses, nor is it just in the actors, but rather in how the former are enacted in the everyday life by individuals and collectivities at the institution.

Two cases were purposefully selected based on the following characteristics: 1) institutions that are recognized as national leaders in internationalization; 2) institutions with a program that clearly contrasts with the mainstream Anglo-America approach to internationalization; and 3) the selected programs must be related to the core functions of internationalization such as mobility, engagement/presence abroad, and international collaborations. Within these institutions, a purposeful selection of individuals, followed by a snowball sampling, was used as a sample for in-depth interviewing. The sample was comprised of people at top leadership positions (president, provosts), as well as from the internationalization office and the academy. Overall 20 individuals are being interviewed. The study also relies on other qualitative techniques of inquiry like observations and document analysis to contrast the institutions' public self-presentation (Rhoades et al. 2019) with the day-to-day execution of their internationalization strategy.

The framework for analyzing collected data was constructed based on Marginson and Rhoades' (2002) *glonacal agency heuristic*. To address some of the heuristic's shortcomings, the framework was expanded using an inhabited institutionalism approach (Hallett and Ventresca 2006) to understand how the *glonacal* environment, the organizations themselves and the people within them, can create an internationalization approach that might challenge the current global imaginary and its Anglo-American construct of internationalization.

The study's design is limited in several ways. First, regarding the sample size, these case studies do not represent a model for all non-Western countries to follow, it is not even a representation of Mexican internationalization. The main objective behind a small purposeful sample is to understand how and why do particular individuals or organizations behave, as opposed to understanding central tendencies (Palys 2018). Also, this study is limited since it contests a mainstream 'Anglo-American', 'Westernized', and 'capitalistic' approach toward the internationalization of higher education but it is framed from the perspective of a single country whose neoliberal policies and closeness to the US puts it in a not-so-deWesternized nor an 'anti-capitalistic' position. So, rather than exploring an internationalization approach that is fully ''à la Mexicana', it only identifies practices that can successfully address some shortcomings of a more utilitarian approach like the 'Anglo-American' model of internationalization. These case studies were selected to showcase organizational attempts to define and uphold and institution's common-good mission through its internationalization strategy and global engagement.

Significance and Implications

This study is significant since it contributes to the literature by means of showing alternative internationalization strategies that defy the mainstream Anglo-American imaginary. Particularly institutions in the Global South implement their strategies in contexts where internationalization is not necessarily a priority, thus, they face an uphill battle for resources and legitimacy. But still, institutions in this context are implementing successful strategies that bring benefits to the institutions themselves, the students and faculty inside them, and more important, the larger communities they

serve. These cases represent an example of how we can reimagine internationalization and reorient it toward a greater public good.

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