

Introduction to the Special Issue Military Conflict and Internationalization of Higher Education: Lessons from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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Two years have passed since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The invasion has started a new era in the development of international relations and in the transformation of the dependent states formed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Millions of people have been affected in Ukraine and Russia itself. Thousands of civilians and soldiers have died on both sides of the conflict and over a million have had to leave their home countries or have been internally displaced. The military conflict has transformed the production and supply channels throughout the larger Europe-Asia region, and broader regional and global economic effects are still unfolding.

On a less visible level, the invasion has produced ripple effects on the ethnic and national identities of the former Soviet peoples, the corresponding countries' ideologies, and, inevitably, on education and ways of thinking about its purposes, content, methods, and structure. There are emerging discussions of decoloniality and reconceptualization of the Soviet past, of the fate of the Russian language, and the future relations with the West on the one hand, and China and its neighbors on the other. Considerations of alternative pathways, inspirations, and models of educational reform are also part of this discourse.

The idea of this special issue was prompted by the predictable changes in the process of internationalization of higher education and in patterns of international mobility because of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Internationalization has been a prominent mechanism of educational transformation in the post-Soviet area since the collapse of the USSR.

Received 09/01/23; Revised 12/01/23; Accepted 04/01/24.

Over the more than thirty years of their independence, many republics of the former Soviet Union have relied on models and ideas from abroad in search of existing solutions to emerging educational issues; increasingly, republics are comparing their performance on education-related indicators with their counterparts in other regions of the world, joining a variety of international competitiveness indices and rankings; they have sent cadres of professors and researchers abroad for training and have engaged in partnerships with institutions in Asia and the West, trying to supplement limited domestic resources, expertise and access to facilities; additionally, they have consulted with international experts from around the world to assist with introducing teaching innovations and research capacity building. Some countries, such as Kazakhstan, have invested in the creation of international universities and regional education hubs. The key question of this special issue is this: *How has the Russian invasion of Ukraine affected internationalization processes at higher education institutions in the region and beyond?*

The team of contributors to this special issue explore changes in the process of internationalization and in patterns of international mobility, which are taking place far beyond the borders of the two countries involved in the conflict. Some of the authors follow Ukrainian students, who left their own country prior or during the war, to see how their lives are affected by the conflict and how they are adjusting in Canada and Germany, while others analyze the exodus of Russian students and academics from their home country and the experiences of Russian scholars in exile. One team engages with an online community of Indian students, who were studying in Ukraine and faced the choice of continuing their education in a conflict zone or withdrawing from their Ukrainian host universities; some of these displaced Indian students experienced discrimination and significant challenges in the process of evacuation and transition to new host universities outside Ukraine. Three articles in the issue explore how the invasion affected the aspirations for international mobility of Kazakhstani faculty and students, revealing their disillusionment and increasing questioning of the value of the Russian language, education, and research collaboration. Two pieces analyze the broader effects of the conflict on internationalization in a given country. One of these pieces focuses on novel challenges and innovative approaches to internationalization in Ukraine, while the other explores changing patterns of student and faculty mobility, plans for opening of branch campuses, and the development of international partnerships in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, one of the authors analyzes the broader effects of the conflict on internationalization in the entire post-Soviet region.

This special issue provides a comprehensive investigation of the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on higher education and the patterns of internationalization in the post-Soviet region and beyond. This collection of timely articles might offer important insights into understanding future trends and potential issues that should be considered by scholars of educational reform and internationalization in the region, as well as higher education policymakers in the post-Soviet countries. The articles in this issue provide useful examples of how the effects of war on education can be understood methodologically as these studies utilize a variety of approaches ranging from content analysis of policy literature and official media to the examination of social media communities and more conventional interviews and focus groups. They also offer some theoretical frameworks that can be potentially utilized for designing new studies and interpreting results. At the same time, it is important to recognize that this special issue provides only a snapshot of the developing situation in the affected region, limited by the data from individual countries and having failed to provide an analysis of the situation in the Caucasus, Belarus, some of the countries of Central Asia, and importantly, Russia.

The scholarly importance of this *JCIHE* special issue goes beyond the region and the specific conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This special issue is one of few attempts at an in-depth exploration of the effects of war on internationalization and international mobility in higher education. Unfortunately, with increasing geopolitical polarization in different parts of the globe, this issue might set an example for similar explorations of emerging conflicts. While the effects of conflicts on education and internationalization are important to understand, our world would be a better place if the need never emerged. Our hope is that this special issue will foster awareness of the negative consequences of military conflicts and help to uncover the transformative, peace-building potential of internationalization and international mobility in higher education.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported with a start-up grant (10037444) from the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Canada.

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