

University over Borders: A Comparison of Internationalization Models in Poland and Germany

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Higher education has always been internationalized to a greater level than other spheres of social life, as it is based on intellectual exchange, an immanent characteristic of which is crossing borders, including national ones. Internationalization of higher education in its current form is, however, a new phenomenon. It is an answer to the changes occurring in the higher education environment and related to the ongoing globalization (Marginson and Van der Wende 2007).

Educational institutions adapt to the new situation with speed and depth—unseen before—they open up to foreign students and academics, and they add foreign language programs to their curriculum. In addition, they conform to the international quality standards, and inspire one another to introduce new organizational and scientific solutions (Siwińska 2007). Thanks to this, the higher education system becomes compatible with the world economy, and is able to prepare its graduates for the needs of a global job market. This also creates favorable conditions for the development of science, as aggregation of the intellectual, and creative and innovative potential takes place in a competitive international environment. Internationalization of higher education is one of the key catalysts of this process (Enders and Fulton 2002).

The higher education internationalization process started in the late 1970s with mass migrations of students from Asian countries across borders. The United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States quickly became world internationalization leaders, largely, due to widespread use of English. In continental Europe, the process appeared a little later. After 1989, international-

ization-related activities started also in Central and Eastern European countries (Kälvermak and Van der Wende 1997).

The goal of my research (the results of which were published in 2014 with the book: *University over Borders. Internationalization of Higher Education in Poland and in Germany*) was to compare higher education internationalization in Poland and Germany, especially, in the first decade of the new century. The most important questions included the characteristics of the Polish and German models, as well as the applied variants of higher education internationalization, the origins of the differences in the development of this process in both countries, as well as the relationship between the federal/unitary model of state and the development of the internationalization process. I was therefore interested in the ways the higher education systems in Poland and Germany (on various levels) answer to environmental changes related to progressing globalization and to the favorable conditions needed for an effective development of the internationalization process.

In relation to the developmental process of internationalization of the Polish higher education system, it appeared to reach a crossroads. First, the model transferred mimetically from the Anglo-Saxon world which is almost exhausted, in spite of the lack of clear vision of a particular strategy adapted to specifically Polish conditions and needs. Second, politics in the area of science and higher education to date have been characterized by a lack of strategic thinking. The response to the question about the most effective development path is vital due to the role that internationalization of higher education will necessarily play in the creation of a positive future for Poland as a modern state, based on an open society and knowledge economy.

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The analysis confirmed that one of the key developmental aspects of the internationalization process is the involvement of the key decision centers at the central or state level in its creation. In Germany, where activity and reflection on this level has been present almost from the beginning of the period, internationalization of the system is developing dynamically, the culture of internationalization is evident, and the process itself takes on more and more sophisticated forms (Huisman and Van der Wende 2004). Apart from the initial phase, I have distinguished three phases of this process: quantitative, qualitative, and the so-called "sublimation phase" (Hanh 2004, Kehm and de Wit 2005). The first phase was based on accumulating the internationalization potential, the second on the gradual introduction of pro-quality solutions, while the latter was characterized by the appearance of a synergetic group of conditions necessary for a qualitative leap in the internationalization process itself. These include: high awareness of the issues related to this area in a large interest group, the will to support the internationalization process by individuals and institutions responsible for shaping the higher education policy on various levels (with special emphasis on the top level) and stability of such a policy developed consistently over time, confirmed by dedicated budget resources allocated generously to pro-internationalization initiatives (Siwińska 2007). The emphasis and prioritization of the issues related to the internationalization process development was the most influential aspect for the third phase (Huisman and Van der Wende 2004).

Internationalization of Polish higher education was not concurrent to the process taking place in Germany. Only the quantitative phase developed there in the analogical period, and it still has not reached full saturation. It has been characterized by an increase in the internationalization potential, and especially by a quick increase in the number of foreign students in Polish universities. There has also been an increase in the number of study programs conducted in foreign languages (with a definite domination of English) as well as in activity on the level of a small group of universities which may be described as innovators in the diffusion of innovations, with a consequent lack of strategic

reflection at the state level. The centralization level of a state (federal versus unitary) proved to be an important factor affecting the development of the internationalization process. Centralization supported internationalization. The bigger central involvement and the higher central coordination, the greater the process dynamic turned out to be. Paradoxically, in the federal Germany, the higher education internationalization process was run in a more centralized way than in the unitary Poland. The dominant rationale for internationalization of the Polish universities in the period under consideration was economic in nature, defined in a short-term perspective. The discourse was dominated by a debate on direct financial profits resulting from the presence of foreign students, while other benefits were pushed to the background. In other words, the practice of and reflection on internationalization was dominated by a market approach. In the conceptualization developed in my study, the domination of short-term economic rationale observed in Poland is characteristic for an early, non-advanced phase of internationalization, with low awareness of benefits of internationalization other than financial ones. The internationalization changes in Poland were characterized by an effective bottom-up approach, in which higher education institutions and various bodies representing their interests initiated and inspired such changes. Apart from activities related to the Bologna Process implementation and creation of the European Higher Education Area, inspired by the joint European policy, main impulses for internationalization were generated either by universities themselves, by institutions representing academic circles, or buffer institutions acting as intermediaries between the universities and the government. In the relevant period, the state educational authorities remained passive in the area of creating an internationalization culture. However, a process of accumulation of a critical mass of awareness and will, necessary for any future changes, could be observed. I have noticed portents of such changes in the most recent years 2011-2013. In the German model of higher education internationalization, an important role was played by the academic rationale as well as the political rationale and the long-term economic one (Huisman and Van der Wende 2004). I have

observed every one of them on a highly advanced level. It was more difficult to observe the influence of the cultural rationale, but curiously, it turned out to be the most significant. The economic rationale in the short-term perspective turned out to be the least important, which was the main difference between this model and the Polish one (Siwińska 2010). Significant weight of the financial rationale in the long-term perspective, as well as the political one, emphasized strategic thinking in this area at the state level and at the intermediary levels (Kehm and de Wit 2005). The role of the academic rationale reflected the highly advanced level of discourse and the developed awareness of the stakeholders in this matter. This model reflected the causative structure of the internationalization process in Germany. It was characterized by a top-down approach—with a leading, active role played by the decisive central bodies (Hanh 2004). This coordination ran along two paths: on the level of a land government and that of the federal government. The main impulses for internationalization were generated by the central government or the institutions acting as intermediaries between it and the universities, with a leading role of the largely independent, inter-ministerial agency German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, as per its acronym in German).

Divergences in the course of higher education internationalization processes in Poland and Germany were also caused by their different cultural and historical conditioning in the relevant period. One of the causes of disturbances in the development of a more mature internationalization process in Poland could have been the effects of institutional behavior motivated by the logic of mimetic isomorphism. Direct transfer of Anglo-Saxon solutions into different Polish conditions was harmful (Ernst & Young and Institute for Market Economics 2010).

On the other hand, systemic support of higher education internationalization in Poland, using solutions inspired by German experiences and adapted to Polish conditions—not by imitation but by creative adaptation—appeared both possible and promising. Therefore, I concluded my research by proposing a set of practical recommendations concerning the creation of an internationalization culture in Poland (see more at:

<http://www.uniwersytetponadgranicami.pl>). The internationalization process itself appears to be a certain historical necessity, determined by objective changes taking place in the environment surrounding higher education systems. It can, however, appear in two completely different forms: it may be consciously administered by institutions involved at various levels, sharing a more or less common vision of benefits, which should result from it (as in the German case Hanh 2004), or with certain neglect and lack of awareness of key stakeholders. It can also take place somewhere on the margins of the system, in a non-systematized way, and its forms, lacking a common vision and a limited scope of public's interest, which may evolve in an undesirable direction (as happened in Poland). The latter direction identified in this study consists in the tendency to formulate goals in relation to short-term financial benefits resulting from presence of foreign students. For the purpose of this study I have defined the more spontaneous form of internationalization occurring in Poland as “wild internationalization,” which is characterized by a chaotic pace and lack of central or regional policy. Wild internationalization is made possible by a neglecting strategy in the area of public policy.

A question remains about the direction in which the higher education internationalization process of the Polish higher education may develop in the future (Ernst & Young and Institute for Market Economics 2010; Polish Conference of Academic Schools Rectors 2009). It seems that in the case of Polish higher education at least two development scenarios are possible. In the first scenario, the accumulation of political critical mass might prompt the decisive central level to finally get involved in internationalization of the Polish system. If this occurred, changes would be made in order to improve the dynamism of the whole process, so as to profile it to suit the needs required to reach academic quality. A strategy for the development of higher education in Poland would need to emphasize the role of internationalization in a clear way, and to define specific strategic goals in this area. The quality threshold of educational institutions actively operating in the field of internationalization—necessary to set off mass diffusion—would then be reached, and progress in this area

would start snowballing. At the same time, appropriate know-how would need to be transferred from the external environment. In further perspective, a dynamic, quality-focused internationalization of the Polish higher education would contribute to Poland's strong position in the worldwide academic exchange, to making its offer more attractive in the eyes of potential foreign students and researchers, and also to creation of an innovation culture, based on creatively adapted inspirations from all over the world. In this scenario, Polish society is not a subject of brain drain but a partner in creation of a brain circulation culture.

A second scenario is based on the assumption that the Polish higher education would continue on its course of wild internationalization, assuming a neglecting policy on all decision-making levels. It would involve further procrastination from the central bodies in committing structures and resources in strategic support of the internationalization process in a pro-quality direction. If the system continues as at present, cooperation with social partners and non-governmental organizations would remain weak or non-existent. This scenario would, in a long-term perspective, most probably lead to persistent systemic hurdles in preparing graduates for the needs of the global job market. It would also contribute to a growing marginalization of Polish higher education in the world environment. A lack of strategic internationalization policy is likely to cause an increase in the negative consequences of brain drain (of gifted students, PhD students, and scientists) by more attractive and better internationalized systems, a permanent shortage of brilliant scholars coming to Poland from other countries, and a lack of participation in the desirable and intellectually fruitful brain circulation in culture. In the effect, this scenario would likely lead to worsening quality of Poland's "intellectual capital" and the gradual erosion of possibilities to create a knowledge-based society and economy. It would also hamper appropriate participation in the changes on the European level—including the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. Using Alvin Toffler's notion of "velvet colonization," Poland is likely to serve as a colony providing labor force or simple technologies for the real centers of

progress and innovation concentrating European and world intellectual capital—located elsewhere.

Apart from the aforementioned extreme scenarios, there are many intermediate roads available. However, as the experts alert—in view of a civilizational backwardness, of which the limited higher education internationalization system is a part—, changes must take the form of sudden leaps, they must be radical because "radical" describes the speed of changes in this area throughout the world (Marginson and Van der Wende 2007).

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