Internationalisation of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe

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Introduction

Internationalisation has become an important issue in the development of higher education. Sven Groenning (1987 a) describes it as "one of the most powerful substantive developments in the history of American higher education." It is perceived "as one of the laws of motion propelling institutions of higher learning" (Kerr, 1990, 5); as "one of the important features of contemporary universities" (Moritz Csáky, Smith et al., 1994,1); as "a pressure no one who teaches can be unaware of" (Halliday, 1999); as "a major theme for the next decade" (Davies, 1997, 83); and as "one of the most important trends of the last decade" (Teichler, 1999, 6), if not "of the past half century" (Altbach, 2000, 2).

At the same time, the internationalisation of higher education is still a phenomenon with a lot of question marks: regarding its historical dimension; its meaning, concept and strategic aspects; its relationship to developments in society and higher education in general, in particular the movement to globalisation and regionalisation; and regarding its status as an area of study and analysis.

The questions addressed in this thesis are the following:

- What has been the historical development of the internationalisation of higher education, in particular in the United States of America and Europe, and how are the differences in development between these two regions to be explained?

- What are the rationales behind this internationalisation of higher education, its meaning and approaches, and the different strategies and organisational models?

- How can we interpret some of its key manifestations at the turn of the century: its relationship to the globalisation and regionalisation of our societies; the quality assessment of internationalisation strategies; the emergence of English as the common language in higher education; the development of regional and international networks and alliances; and the internationalisation of higher education as a research area?

One of the fundamental problems we face when dealing with the internationalisation of higher education is the diversity of related terms. Sometimes they are used to describe a concrete element within the broad field of internationalisation, but terms are also used as ‘pars pro toto’ and as a synonym for the overall term ‘internationalisation’. Each term has a different accent and reflects a different approach, but is used by different authors in different ways. For a better understanding of the internationalisation of higher education it is important to place that term in perspective to approaches and other terms used and to provide a working definition of its meaning, and this is the purpose of one of the chapters. These issues are mentioned here to warn the reader for this complexity. In this thesis mainly three terms will be used: ‘international dimension’, ‘international education’ and ‘internationalisation of higher education’, each referring to a specific phase of development.

Peter Scott (1998, 123) observes and at the same time questions that "in a rhetorical sense, internationalism has always been part of the life-world of the university." In this thesis it will be argued that the international dimension of higher education, prior to the twentieth century, was more
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incidental than organised. It will also be argued that this international dimension as an organised activity, referred to in general by the term ‘international education’, is a product of the twentieth century, at first mainly in the United States for reasons of foreign policy and national security. The third argument is that, around the end of the Cold War, this international dimension evolved into a strategic process, referred to as the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ and became increasingly linked to the globalisation and regionalisation of our societies and the impact of this on higher education. In addition, It will be argued that, with the further development of globalisation, the international dimension will evolve into an integrated element of higher education and move away from its present position as an isolated set of activities, strategies or processes. This is manifested in a shift in emphasis from more traditional forms of international education to strategies which are more directly related to the core functions of the university, and in a shift in emphasis from political to economic rationales. Implications of these shifts are the increasing importance of quality assessment of internationalisation strategies; the emergence of English as the common language in higher education; the increasing relevance of international networks and strategic alliances; and the gradual acceptance of the internationalisation of higher education as an area of research.

These arguments will be illustrated in the following way. In Part One, the historical development of the international dimension of higher education is analysed. This historical dimension is mentioned in many documents and studies on internationalisation, but if one takes a more careful look the references, with some exceptions, are rather limited. Most studies (for instance Altbach, 1998; Kerr, 1994, a; Neave, 1997; Scott, 1998) refer in general terms to the supposed international dimension of universities in medieval times – and before that in the Arab era. In Chapter One therefore, a historical context for the development of the internationalisation of higher education is given, mainly using examples from Europe, but with reference to other parts of the world. In Chapters Two and Three, this historical development is elaborated further on with a detailed analysis of the European and American case. In Chapter Four, a comparison is made between the development of the internationalisation of higher education in the United States and Europe.

In Part Two, a conceptual framework for the internationalisation of higher education is presented, in an update and extension of previous work (De Wit, 1995 a; Knight and De Wit, 1997). Chapter Five deals with the ‘why’, the rationales for internationalisation and relates these rationales to the different stakeholders in higher education. In Chapter Six, an overview is given of the debate on the meaning and definition of ‘international education’ and ‘internationalisation of higher education’ (the ‘what?’), a working definition presented for it, and different approaches to internationalisation are summarised. In Chapter Seven, the focus is on institutional strategies for the internationalisation of higher education, followed by an overview of organisational models.

In Part Three, five key issues that are relevant to the study of internationalisation of higher education at the turn of the century are discussed. It is not the intention to present these as the only issues of importance – for instance, the internationalisation of the curriculum as analysed by Van der Wende (1996), Mestenhauser and Ellingboe (1998) and others is another important issue not touched upon in detail in this study – but as relevant examples to illustrate the impact of internationalisation on higher education.

In Chapter Eight, the development of internationalisation of higher education is placed in the context of globalisation and regionalisation in our societies. In Chapter Nine, the link between
quality assurance and internationalisation is analysed. In Chapter Ten, special attention is paid to an issue that illustrates the growing link between the internationalisation of higher education and globalisation: the emergence of English as the new common language for higher education. In Chapter Eleven, a second illustration of this link is discussed: the development of regional and global academic networks and alliances.

In the last chapter, Chapter Twelve, the internationalisation of higher education as an area of research is analysed, following the argument of Ulrich Teichler (1996 a, 435) that “we might consider internationalization of higher education as the next theme which gives rise to a new focus of both higher education policy and higher education research.”

Although recently the number of studies on the internationalisation of higher education has been growing, few provide a historical and comparative analysis of this phenomenon. In De Wit (1995 a) and Knight and De Wit (1997) an attempt to present such a study has been made, stimulated by the Programme on Institutional Management of Higher Education (IMHE) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Other studies have followed on national (for instance on Australia, Back et al., 1996; and on Canada, Knight, 2000), or regional (for instance on Europe, Kålvemark and Van der Wende, 1997) policies for internationalisation, but an overall analysis is still lacking. This thesis provides a critical analysis of the internationalisation of higher education. While making ample reference to the internationalisation of research, it focuses on that other core function of higher education, teaching. This is true for most studies on the internationalisation of higher education. The notion of higher education as being ‘international’ by nature refers primarily to the research function. Although in recent years several studies have been published on universities and the knowledge economy (for instance Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1997; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), these studies refer more to research and globalisation than to teaching and internationalisation.

This thesis presents a critical tour d’horizon of the internationalisation of higher education: in its historical dimension; by comparing The United States of America and Europe and as a conceptual framework. This analysis is based on twenty years of experience with and study of the internationalisation of higher education, as an institutional director and vice-president for international affairs, a national and international administrator in a great variety of organisations, and as consultant, researcher and editor. The study is based also on previous publications by the author, an ample study of the literature and active involvement in developing and assessing strategies for internationalisation in the Dutch, European and international contexts.