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

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Chapter Four

The development of internationalisation of higher education in the United States of America and Europe: a comparison

The active role of the European Commission, national governments and institutions of higher education in Europe with respect to the internationalisation of higher education as of 1985 has received a lot of attention in the higher education community in the United States. In a book review on the American view of international education, the following explanation for this phenomenon: "One can feel a sense of envy of internationalization of higher education in Europe. Envy that probably has a great deal to do with a feeling of frustration about European global 'superiority', compared to American cultural parochialism, whether right or wrong. In their 'envy', several authors overestimate the efforts in Europe with respect to internationalization, maybe also out of 'sheer frustration' with the limited federal support to internationalisation. Not only is ample reference made to ERASMUS and other European programs, but there is also a tendency to paint too rosy a picture. In many cases the description of these programmes is incomplete." (De Wit, 1993, 6) The new views on internationalisation seem to come from Europe. But it is important to note that what Ulrich Teichler (1996 b, 341) has said about research on international education and academic mobility is still to a large extent true for Europe as much as for the US, namely that it is "occasional, coincidental, sporadic, or episodic."

There are several reasons why passion, ethos, parochialism and the call for a national agenda are more strongly present in international education in the US than in Europe. The main reason is that international education in the US has seen its growth in reaction to the Second World War and, even more, the Cold War: the period between the 1950s and the 1980s. Although this international education was motivated mainly by political interests it has resulted in a great variety of national, private, and institutional programmes for international education, far more than in Europe at that time.

Those who still dominate American thinking on international education (Burn, Groennings, Harari, Lambert, Mestenhauser), wrote their work in that period. They tried to design a kind of conceptual framework for international education in the US. It is not surprising that the length of that period, four decades, and the great tradition developed during that period – combined with the conceptual thinking to place it in perspective – makes it difficult for US international education to move in new directions. Something that has become manifest in the second part of the 1980s and 1990s, when in Europe, under the impetus of the European Commission, strategies to Europeanise and internationalise higher education were placed high on the agenda of the Commission, national governments and institutions of higher education.

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38 One should add that Europe is not alone in this. In particular in Canada and Australia, international educators and research play a leading role in the present discussion on internationalisation of higher education.
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Strategies that are more integral and profound than the fragmented and isolated approaches that characterise most of American higher education.

The differences in developments in internationalisation of higher education in Europe and the United States of America in general terms can be described as follows:

- Immediately after the Second World War, the international dimension of higher education was more dominant in the United States, and founded on arguments of foreign policy and national security. In Europe the tradition is still rather young, only became more important as part of the European economic and political integration process and was primarily motivated by arguments of economic competition. At the same time, many older European universities regard themselves as belonging to a deep-rooted tradition of international institutions.

- For that reason, the international dimension of higher education has a longer tradition of organisation and higher level of professionalisation in the United States than in Europe.

- In the United States, the objective of international education, both at the governmental and institutional level, is more directed to global and intercultural awareness, in response to cultural parochialism; while in Europe the accent is more on the extension and diversification of academic performance.

- In the United States, for that reason, the emphasis in study abroad activities is on undergraduate mobility, while in Europe exchanges at the graduate level have more priority.

- The focus of international education in the United States is more directed to globalisation of the curriculum, area studies and foreign language study, while in Europe the focus is more on networking and mobility.

- In the United States, study abroad and foreign student advising have a tendency to be seen more as different, unrelated activities, while in Europe they are seen as related parts of mobility schemes, with the emphasis on exchanges.

- In the United States, study abroad has the tendency to take the form of faculty-supervised group mobility, while in Europe mobility is based more on mutual trust and is individual-oriented.

- In the United States, the push for internationalisation comes more from the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Defence, from private foundations and professional associations and from institutions of higher education and their representative bodies, than from state governments and the Department of Education. This has contributed to an active lobbying and advocacy tradition. Given the top-down development of internationalisation of higher education from the European Commission via national governments to institutions of higher education, in Europe such an active advocacy and lobbying tradition only recently has emerged and still has more the character of lobbying for national than for European interests. The lack of an active

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39 National governments, the Association of European Universities (CRE), the European Association for International Education (EAIE) and the Academic Co-operation Association (ACA) do fulfil at the EU level the role
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national policy for post-secondary education and the more autonomous character of American higher education are the main reasons for this active advocacy culture in international education in the US in comparison to Europe.

- In the United States, at both the policy level and the professional level, there is a lack of strategic approach and the tendency towards fragmentation. In Europe, the different programmes and organisational aspects are more integrated into an overall strategy, and at the professional level one can see a higher level of integration.

Explanations for these differences are:

- In the United States, internationalisation is seen as part of general education, while in Europe it is seen more as an activity within academic specialisation.

- In the United States, undergraduate education has to compensate for the lack of global and intercultural education and foreign language training in primary and secondary education. In higher education, this takes the form of international education. In Europe, general education, including global and intercultural education and, at least in some countries, active foreign language training, are an integral part of primary and secondary education. Higher education can undergo internationalisation more as an integrated part of academic specialisation.

- In the United States, area studies, foreign language training, the study of international relations and development studies are externally added and sponsored programmes, while in Europe they have developed as regular disciplines, no different from others such as law, economics and medicine.

- In the United States, internationalisation is more driven by political rationales of national security and foreign policy, while in Europe economic competition and academic quality are the main rationales for the internationalisation of higher education. ⁴⁰

If we look to the future, in spite of all the differences mentioned above, we are moving in each other's direction. America and Europe, although having the same higher education roots, come from a different starting point in international education.

As indicated, these are:

- Different cultures and structures in primary, secondary and undergraduate education.

- Different emphases in foreign policy after the Second World War. And related to these

that the Alliance plays at the federal level in the United States, but in Europe, private foundations and organisations are not involved in this advocacy. That does not mean that there are no private foundations and organisations active in international education in Europe. At the national level in particular, one may find a great variety, but they are not as organised and active in advocacy as in the United States.

⁴⁰ See also Hans de Wit, 1995 b, 49-50.
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- A lack of national policy for higher education and its internationalisation in the US.
- A lack of private initiative in higher education and its internationalisation in Europe.
- Different leadership traditions. And
- Different funding mechanisms.

These differences have influenced to a large extent our perceptions and our strategies for internationalisation. But in recent years, both our political and educational systems have moved towards each other. Globalisation, competitiveness and new forms of education are important factors influencing this development.

The implications in Europe are clear: less importance of national policies in higher education; more emphasis on private initiative and funding; and growing importance of individual leadership in higher education. For the internationalisation of higher education in Europe this will mean a period of uncertainty and change after the booming decade of the recent past. 'The flavour of the month', no longer exists. In that sense Europeans have a comparative disadvantage to their American colleagues, who are experienced in situations where funding is not guaranteed and strategies are designed in a pro-active instead of a reactive way.

As Rob Kroe (1996, IX) states: "Europeans have never stopped laughing at America, yet their collective imagination has filled with a repertoire of Americana. They may have reacted vehemently to it, producing a litany of Anti-Americanism that has been one long attempt at exorcism, driving out the devil of a pernicious American culture. Nevertheless, the devil was not simply to be wished away. If cultural guardians were watching the front door, American culture slipped in through the rear entrance." This applies to culture, but also to higher education. Now it is time for the Europeans to become jealous again. They should learn again to be "fascinated by the history of higher education in America and attracted to the good American University ... infused with a vitality and a social and educational commitment", and move away of "displays of arrogance and self importance", typical of so many European universities, in the words of Kjetil Flatin (1998). At the same time, some top-ranked American universities will have to abolish their arrogance and superiority and isolation, which they have developed in the twentieth century with respect to higher education in Europe and the rest of the world.