Internationalisation of Higher Education: Misconceptions

Dr. Hans de Wit

Professor of Internationalisation, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, University of Applied Sciences

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Internationalisation of Higher Education

The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education

(Knight, 2003)
But like Higher Education itself,

**Internationalisation**

- Is still largely embedded in institutional, national and regional cultures and systems
- Expresses itself in specific ways by disciplines and their relation to society
- As well as by levels and type of education
- And changes over time in response to political, societal and academic developments
Over the last two decades, the concept of the internationalisation of higher education is moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core.

In the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s, activities that can be described as internationalisation were usually neither named that way nor carried high prestige and were rather isolated and unrelated. (…)

In the late 1980s changes occurred: Internationalisation was invented and carried on, ever increasing its importance. New components were added to its multidimensional body in the past two decades, moving from simple exchange of students to the big business of recruitment, and from activities impacting on an incredibly small elite group to a mass phenomenon.’ (Brandenburg and De Wit, 2011)

This process is also described as mainstreaming of internationalisation.
Van Vught, van der Wende, and Westerheijden state:

“In terms of both practice and perceptions, internationalisation is closer to the well-established tradition of international cooperation and mobility and to the core values of quality and excellence, whereas globalisation refers more to competition, pushing the concept of higher education as a tradable commodity and challenging the concept of higher education as a public good.”

But in reality there is a lot of overlap between the two, also in international strategies of universities
'Internationalisation of higher education is being fundamentally changed in reaction to and support of the competition agenda and market orientation.

- What is certain is that it brings new opportunities, risks, benefits and challenges. (…)

- The double role of internationalisation in furthering both cooperation and competition among countries is a new reality of our more globalised world.’ (Knight, 2010)
Internationalisation is claimed to be the last stand for humanistic ideas against the world of pure economic benefits allegedly represented by the term globalisation.

Alas, this constructed antagonism between internationalisation and globalisation ignores the fact that activities that are more related to the concept of globalisation (higher education as a tradable commodity) are increasingly executed under the flag of internationalisation.’

(Brandenburg and De Wit, 2011)
In the 1970’s the accent was on *development cooperation* to the South: scholarships for students, training by academics, and infrastructural support.

In the 1980-1990’s the accent shifted to the massive recruitment of students in the U.K. and Australia (*from aid to trade*), where in continental Europe it shifted to exchange of students and staff (*from aid to exchange*).
Over the past 15 years we have seen also in Europe a gradual shift to recruitment of students, although the rationales are less financial than political and academic.

In the US, study abroad and attracting international students have stayed rather stable but also separate from each other and from other international activities and in relatively small numbers over the years in comparison to its overall student numbers.

For the coming decade we can see a shift to global competition for the best students (skilled immigration), and a related call for more emphasis on international and intercultural competencies.
Summary of the context

- There is an increasingly more competitive higher education environment (impact of international rankings)

- The role of cross-border delivery of education is becoming an alternative for student mobility

- Skilled immigration: competition for skilled labour in the global knowledge economy between developed countries and emerging countries is becoming more driving

- Internationalisation of the Curriculum is becoming a key part of institutional strategies
Five myths on internationalisation

- Foreign students as internationalisation agents
- The international reputation as a proxy for quality
- International student agreements
- International accreditation
- Global branding (Jane Knight, 2011)
Nine misconceptions about internationalisation

I will describe nine misconceptions, whereby internationalisation is regarded as synonymous with a specific programmatic or organisational strategy to promote internationalisation.

In other words: *where the means appear to have become the goal.*
Misconception 1-5

- Internationalisation is education in the English language
- Internationalisation is studying or staying abroad
- Internationalisation equals an international subject
- Internationalisation means having many international students
- Having a few international students in the classroom makes internationalisation into a success
There is no need to test intercultural and international competencies specifically.

The more partnerships, the more international.

Higher education is international by nature.

Internationalisation is a goal in itself.

Misconception 6-9
We have to go back to the fundamental question: Why internationalisation?

- In the current time, that question requires different answers and related approaches and strategies than in the previous decades, in the light of the global knowledge society.

- At the same time, the foundation remains the same: internationalisation is not a goal in itself but a way to enhance the quality of education and research and their contribution to society.