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STRATEGIC THINKING IN INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF ARMENIA: DRAWBACKS AND PROSPECTS

The present article discusses the drawbacks in strategic planning of higher education internationalization on the meso level (universities) in Armenia and possible impact of internationalization strategy development on the macro level (national). It seeks to identify the major issues and outlines some recommendations for further planning and performance improvements in higher education internationalization. Thereby, it draws upon the findings of survey and study conducted within the framework of Erasmus + HARMONY project on the level of internationalization, research and innovation of higher education in Armenia.

Keywords: Higher Education; Internationalization; Research; Innovation; Globalization; Strategy; Policy; Procedure; Regulation.

Introduction

In the era of globalization, internationalization of higher education has been constructed as an almost inevitable trend and has become a common pursuit of many nations in their higher education (HE) policies (Hong, 2018). Strategic thinking about internationalization is a relatively new phenomenon both on the national and institutional levels. The lack of clarity may lead to deficient policies that are not equipped to deliver the intended outcomes.

For instance, in spite of the rhetoric support for internationalization from institutional and national leaders, many of the articulated objectives of internationalization have not been operationalized for implementation (Crăciun, 2018).

Accordingly, a study conducted in the scope of Erasmus + "Development of approaches to harmonization of a comprehensive internationalization strategies in higher education, research and innovation at EU and Partner Countries" (HARMONY) project was aimed at clarifying the current development level of internationalization of higher education of Armenia and strategic planning in particular. The current state and challenges have been analyzed in five major domains, including the (i) Internationalization of management of tertiary institutions, (ii) International Mobility, (iii) Internationalization of teaching and academic programs, (iv) International Impact and Visibility, (v) Internationalization of Research and Education projects.

0n Methods

Within the scope of the HARMONY project and with the support of the RA Ministry of Education and Science a questionnaire has been designed (Appendix 1) and sent to all public and private universities in Armenia, except for 5 specialized universities (National Defence Research University, Military Aviation University, Military University After Vazgen Sargsyan, Educational Complex of the Police of RA, Crises Management State Academy of the Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia). The questionnaire has been completed by 25 universities out of the total of 60 universities in Armenia (22 state and international, 31 private, 5 international branch campuses of state universities and 2 international branch campuses of private universities, as of October 3, 2017) and the distribution of respondents is as follows: 3 international universities, 15 state universities, 7 private universities. The data provided by the universities was for the 2015-2016 academic year. The data have been analyzed, and the report has been prepared by the HARMONY project participants and scholars (authors of this very article) from Eurasia International University (Armenia) and Aston University (United Kingdom). Consequently, the quantitative study has been complemented by qualitative follow-up study and document analysis of universities has been carried out to uncover content and methodological issues, therefore.

Results

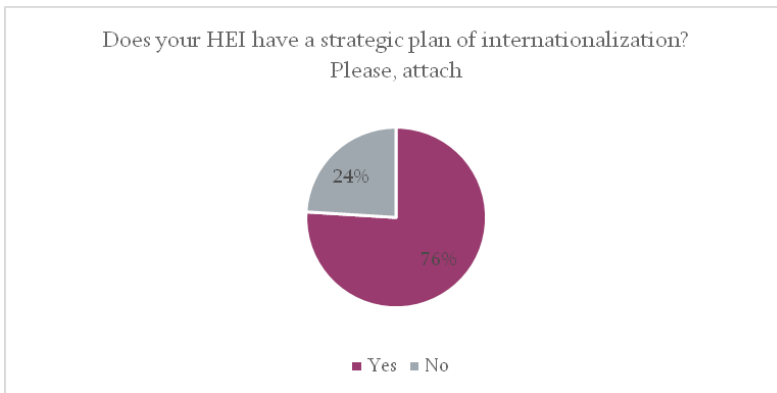### Internationalization of Management

To begin with, for assessing the internationalization of management and strategic planning of the universities, the respondents have been asked to specify whether the university has concrete strategic plan of internationalization or not and in case of availability has been asked to attach the plan. Out of 25 respondents, 19 universities reported that they have internationalization strategy available (see Chart 1) and only 12 universities attached an internationalization strategy. In most cases the attached strategic plan of internationalization was incorporated in the University Strategic Master Plan in a separate section (HARMONY project, 2017).

The strategic plans then were benchmarked with the content and structure of the European universities involved in the HARMONY project and although 76% of universities claimed having an internationalization strategy, the document analyses revealed number of issues content wise and most of the attached strategies had significant issues, lacking even the basic structure of strategic plans.

The presented documents were also lacking the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the institution, opportunities and threats, risks and assumptions, timeframe, resource planning etc. The presented strategic plans were short of concrete key performance indicators (process, outcome and/or impact indicators) and measurable targets, which might enable effective monitoring and quality assurance and serve as a base for future improvements. Several universities mentioned indicators of internationalization, but the indicators provided were vague and generic, not measurable and not time bounded, therefore.
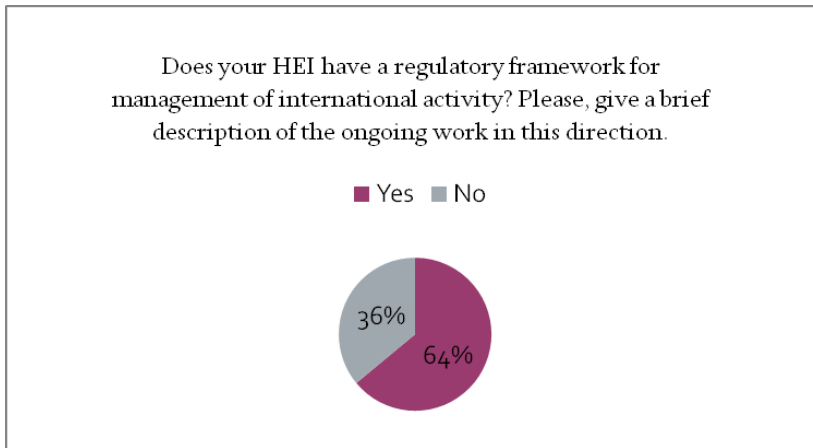
By the same token, most of the submitted strategies on internationalization were limited to information and general statements on international student recruitment and mobility opportunities: the strategies were lacking concrete statements on internationalization of management, curricula, teaching and learning, research, innovation etc.

Chart 1. Availability of Internationalization Strategic Plan (HARMO–NY project, 2017)

The respondents were later asked to evaluate the availability of internal procedures and regulations on managing internationalization activity. To the question "Does your HEI have a regulatory framework for management of international activity?" 16 universities responded positively (Chart 2), but the majority failed to provide concrete examples. Some universities have mentioned the availability of learning agreements, three party mobility plans as regulatory frameworks. In general, there is a lack of well-coordinated set of formal policies, procedures and guidelines for the management of international activities institution wide. The universities are lacking concrete regulations, procedures and guidelines on managing international projects, incoming and outgoing mobility and other programs, benchmarking, research, innovation, dissemination etc (HARMONY project, 2017).

Chart 2. Availability (of) regulatory framework (HARMONY project, 2017)

Does your HEI have a regulatory framework for management of international activity? Please, give a brief description of the ongoing work in this direction.

■ Yes ■ No

36%
64%

Outgoing and incoming student mobility

As illustrated in chart 3 below, there is a considerable increase in both incoming and outgoing student mobility[1] and the numbers of mobile students have been comparatively stable since 2014. Based on the data of the National Statistical Service of RA the majority of international students in Armenia in recent years come from the Russian Federation (1165 students in 2015), Georgia (840), India (748) and Iran (393).

Chart 3. Student Mobility in Armenia

■ Outbound ■ Inbound
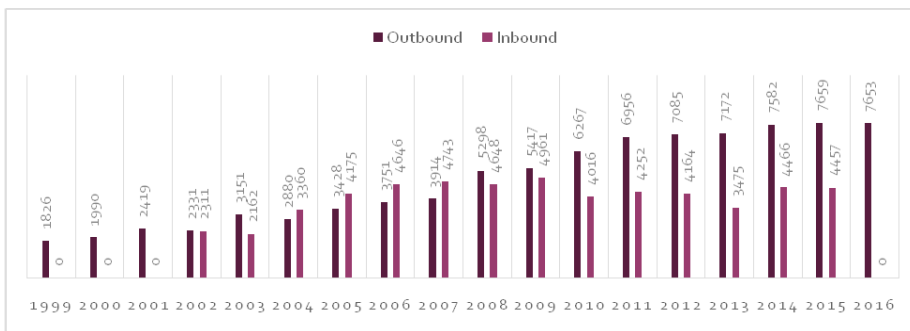
In the framework of the study, 5 universities (out of 25) reported above 10 percent of international students (including full degree students and exchange students) in the total student number. These universities reported mostly that recruit international students have

1 Source. UIS.State, rethrived from http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172, 05.10.2017

been from Russian Federation, Georgia, India and Iran. The rest of 7 universities reported between 1 - 4 % international student involvement per year and in case of the 13 universities, the indicator was 0. This leads to an inference, that the opportunities in the global and international educational market are leveraged only by 5 universities in Armenia.

Considerable differences and imbalances are observed among universities, as well as between the number of incoming and outgoing students. There are several universities (including Yerevan State University, Yerevan State Medical University and Russian Armenian University), which appear to be top sending when factoring absolute numbers. The reality changes when the ratio of total number of students to foreign students is considered: while in case of Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU) and Russian Armenian University (RAU) the percentage of foreign students in the overall student number is above 20 percent (22 % and 25 % respectively), the percentage of Yerevan State University is quite low: only 2% of students are reported to be international (2015-2016 academic year). It is worth mentioning, that the international students of Russian Armenian University are predominantly Armenians with the citizenship of other countries (mostly Russia and Georgia), which is a good example of pulling and recruiting students from diaspora. At YSMU the top sending country is India, while in the case of RAU it is Russia. In both universities however, the level of outgoing mobility is quite low and is comparable with other universities in the country.

The economic impact of international students on Armenian economy is significant: with our approximate calculations international students contributed more than 27 million USD to Armenian economy in 2015/2016 academic year: calculations are based on the contribution from tuition fees, rent expense, leaving expenses (including food, gas and electricity, internet, mobile phone, bus fares, clothing etc.) totaling to more than 8500 USD per year/per international student and the number of degree seeking international students studying in Armenian tertiary institutions (3207[1] students) in 2015/2016 academic year.

This calculation is useful for estimating the "opportunity cost" of not enjoying the benefits associated with the alternative to engage in international student recruitment more aggressively and internationalization of RA higher education in general.

Internationalization of teaching and academic programs

While twinning, franchise programs, double, joint and combined degree programs have skyrocketed in the last five years in number of countries and were used as a major tool to attract international students and internationalize the curriculum, Armenian higher education institutions remained inactive and the efforts are quite fragmented. Based on the study out of 25 respondent universities only 6 universities had reported more than 3 joint/double/multiple degree programs, 7 universities reported one-degree program and 12 HEIs had no collaborative initiatives or programs. The further analysis of the web sites of universities revealed, that public information about the mentioned programs is either absent or very scarce, which highlights the shortcomings in marketing efforts of the universities. The student number involved in these programs are also very low. The small number of joint/double/multiple degrees is partially explained by existing national limitations and law on Higher and postgraduate education, which is soon to be amended and is on the agenda of the

1 Source: www.armstat.am

post-revolutionary Ministry of Education and Science.

Concurrently, seventy-two percent of universities (eighteen in twenty-five) have academic courses/programs in English or in other foreign languages. Many universities have provided a list of the offered courses and some of them have the information available on their websites. Noteworthy, that most of the universities were also lacking strategy/policies to attract foreign professors (with an exception of American University of Armenia) and a clear system of rewards for teaching in English was also absent. Universities reported reliance on external funds and sources for ensuring inbound and outbound faculty mobility such as Visegrad Fund, Jean Monnet, Erasmus+, DAAD, Fulbright, Confucius Institute, etc, which proves the dependence of most of the institutions on international and intergovernmental funds and makes the task of internationalization of faculty quite risky. The percentage of incoming faculty is mostly limited to 0-1 percent (with only few exceptions), which is another evidence of clear strategy and efforts unavailability as well as lack of concrete policies to attract international faculty, henceforth.

International Impact and Visibility

The most common number presented by the universities to promote the university website, was two, and the languages mentioned were Russian and English. The analysis of the official web sites of universities reveals number of issues though, which may hinder not only international student recruitment, but also partnership development (HARMONY project, 2017). Search, navigation, and design outdated and missing information, the mix of marketing and academic materials, low standard of written content are among the major issues observed. In many cases, from the materials presented by the respondent universities it is obvious, that there is certain gap of content and presentation: in many cases the universities have outstanding programs, which are not correctly presented to wider public, including international audiences.

The participation in international fairs and memberships in associations are other visibility tools not leveraged by most of the HEIs. 6 universities reported (out of 25) participation in more than 5 international fairs, 12 did not participate in any. National Politechnic University of Armenia is in a leading position with the number of international associations and networks followed by the National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia. 8 universities reported the existence of a separate division/working group responsible for participation in the international rankings and 5 of those universities have relatively high ranking and presence in international ranking systems (YSU, RAU, ASPU, ASUE and AUA)

International research and educational projects

Twelve universities out of 25 reported having no research projects in 2015-2016 academic year, while at the other end of the scale two universities stand out with the highest numbers, namely, Yerevan State University (major research university) and American University of Armenia. There is immense imbalance between research and educational projects. 9 universities have neither an international collaborative educational, nor research project.

Discussion

Based on the study outcomes, it becomes obvious that there is a lack of well-coordinated and developed internationalization strategies with concrete key performance indicators and measurable performance targets. Adding to this the lack of well-coordinated policies, regulations and procedures of managing international activities make the further monitoring and quality assurance a difficult task in higher education system. A more goal-oriented universities may serve as a framework for institutional effectiveness and result in an overall national competitiveness of higher education in the global marketplace. A similar study entitled "Internationalization in European higher education: European policies, institutional strategies and EUA support" conducted among the member institutions of European University Association reveals a positive impact of the availability of Internationalization strategy on the university performance. 99% of institutions that replied to the survey either had an internationalization strategy in place (56%), intended to develop one (13%), or have considered internationalization in other strategies (30%). All but one institution stated that their strategy has had a positive impact on their institution's internationalization, particularly with regards to development of partnerships, outgoing student mobility, teaching in English, attraction of international students and development of staff mobility opportunities (European University Association, 2013).

The internationalization of higher education is widely considered as a strategic priority for governments around the world because of the economic, political, social, and academic benefits associated with it (Crăciun, 2018). As depicted above, only in 2015, the direct economic impact of international students in the Armenian economy has totaled to around 27 million USD. The collaborative efforts of the universities, the Ministry of Education and Science and other stakeholders should be targeted to international student recruitment, availability of quality programs and services, as well as well -coordinated institutional and national processes to ensure a smooth settlement and entry to Armenia for international students. Armenia also needs "a visa policy to maximize national security by focusing not only on keeping objectionable individuals out, but also on letting legitimate individuals in" (Johnson, 2004). The visa difficulties (which are mostly explained by security measures) and unclear processes may turn international students towards other countries.

The internationalization of universities may be enabled in case of national strategy alignment: during the current study, there has been found no national strategy of internationalization and the acting law did not enable and promote the internationalization at an institutional level. Luckily, the post-revolutionary government stresses not only the importance of internationalization (revising the current law and designing an internationalization strategy), but also autonomy of universities. This might create a sound bases for moving quicker and transforming the current practices. Internationalization efforts of the universities should be recognized by the government; tying the performance to funding might multiple the effect, but the absence may not be a reason for stagnation. Given the demographic decline and issues in the internal market, the universities should search for new revenue growth looking at international students to make up for funding shortfalls. The university should become more entrepreneurial. "The concept of the entrepreneurial university becomes the umbrella idea under which we speak of the self-steering, self-reliant, progressive university. It stresses that the university is engaged in the pursuit of opportunities beyond means that are currently avail-

able" (Clark, 2001). The major opportunity in this case is to internationalize educational programs, administrative staff, student cohort and faculty, as well as research.

Conferring the study outcomes, it is worth to mention that not all universities have enough capacities to internationalize the educational programs, curriculum and teaching targeted at international visibility and an increase in international student number. On the other hand, it is also obvious that there are best practices which could be replicated, and this requires a good coordination between government and a ground collaboration between universities.

Conclusion

Drawing together the threads that have woven throughout the study, it can be posited that strategy development is the process whereby a higher education institution (HEI) specifies clearly its future plans, direction and decision making, based on the analysis of its strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in the operating environment. Therefore, the implementation of internationalization among HEIs should be driven by a thorough analysis of the past, current and anticipated future performance or goals of the HEI in various areas. Thereafter, specific plan of actions leading to successful implementation and achievement of the internationalization objectives need to be put in place (Pascal Cromm, 2015).

The definition of, importance of, and motivating arguments behind higher education internationalization demonstrate that internationalization is now perceived as one of the main parts of university life, and one which brings enormous benefits, provided that the strategy is properly set and executed. Consequently, these topics require more attention and managerial approaches must be clearly defined. The increased international competition amongst higher education institutions caused by rapid globalization now requires universities to evaluate, alter or devise new and innovative strategies which will enable them to boost their international activities. There is a need to gain a competitive advantage in attracting more local and international students, involving staff in international exchange programs, conducting joint research, establishing collaborative degree and exchange programs, etc. (Alpenidze, 2015)

As universities and the external environment changes, the policies and procedures must be adapted and/or developed to meet the new challenges. Well-written policies and procedures increase university accountability and transparency and become fundamental to quality assurance and quality improvement programs, as well as increase productivity.

Increased autonomy, accountability and transparency and the international outlook of universities should go hand in hand with internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. The means do not justify the ends, thus the universities should be cautious especially when engaging in international student recruitment: rigid internal quality assurance mechanisms should be put in place to monitor the quality of studies, management, faculty, research and information, as well as processes enabling internationalization.

The motivations for internationalization include commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition, enhancing the curriculum with international content, and many others (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The national regulatory framework should be in place to enable and promote international initiatives, cross-border collaborative arrangements, English taught programs and courses etc. and clear monitoring mechanisms of international programs and initiatives should be in place both on the institutional and national levels.

Appendix 1. Questionnaire to evaluate the internationalization of HEIs: breakdown and questions (HARMONY project, 2017)

General Information and internationalization of management	• 1.1. Number of enrolled full-time (all levels) • 1.2. Number of academic staff • 1.3. Number of staff in international office • 1.4 Do you have strategic internationalization plan? • 1.5. Do you have legal frameworks to manage international activity?
International Mobility	• 2.1. Number of students (all levels) sent abroad • 2.2. Top 5 host countries for students • 2.3. Number of international students (all levels, both degree-seeking and exchange) • 2.4. Top 5 countries of origin of international students • 2.5. Do you assist your staff and students in participation in mobility programs?
Internationalization of teaching and academic programs	• 3.1. Number of international teaching staff (both temporary and permanent) • 3.2. Number of staff (all categories) sent abroad • 3.3. Number of international joint/double/multiple degrees programs (All levels) • 3.4. Do you offer programs in English or other foreign languages? • 3.5. Do you offer financial incentives for staff to learn foreign languages and to carry out teaching activities in foreign languages? • 3.6. Do you have strategy and special funding to support international staff recruitment? • 3.7. Do you have study programs where mobility windows are incorporated into the curriculum?
International Impact and Visibility	• 4.1. Do you have web-site in English • 4.2. Number of international fairs (education, research, R&D, etc.) where institution has been presented • 4.3. Number of international partnerships • 4.4. Number of memberships in international associations and networks • 4.5. Do you have internal unit / working group to deal with international rankings?
Research and Education projects	• 5.1. Number of international research projects • 5.2. Number of international educational projects • 5.3. Do you assist your staff in participation in international programs and projects

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Հովհաննես Հարությունյան
Եվրասիա միջազգային համալսարանի ռազմավարական զարգացման գծով պրոռեկտոր, փնտրեսաջիրության թեկնածու

Արևիկ Օհանյան
Եվրասիա միջազգային համալսարանի Որակի ապահովման կենտրոնի դեկավար, ԵՄՀ ասպիրանտ

ՌԱԶՄԱՎԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՄՏԱԾՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԲԱՐՁՐԱԳՈՒՅՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՍՏԱՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅՆԱՑՄԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՏՈՒՄ: ԹԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԵՎ ՀԵՌԱՆԿԱՐՆԵՐԸ

Հոդվածում քննարկվում է Հայաստանում մեջ (համալսարանական) մակարդակում բարձրագույն կրթության միջազգայնացման ռազմավարական պլանավորման թերությունները և մակրո մակարդակի (ազգային) միջազգայնացման ռազմավարության մշակման հնարավոր ազդեցությունը: Այն բացահայտում է հիմնական խնդիրները և սահմանում բարձրագույն կրթության միջազգայնացման գործընթացում ապագա պլանավորման և արդյունավետության վերաբերյալ առաջարկություններ: Հոդվածը հիմնված

է Erasmus+ HARMONY ծրագրի շրջանակներում անցկացված հարցումների և հետազոտությունների արդյունքների վրա՝Հայաստանում բարձրագույն կրթության միջազգայնացման, հետազոտության և նորարարության մակարդակով:

Հիմնաբառեր. բարձրագույն կրթություն, միջազգայնացում, հետազո– տություն, նորարարություններ, գլոբալիզացիա, ռազմավարություն, քաղա– քականություն, ընթացակարգ, կարգավորում:

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СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ В ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛИЗАЦИИ ВЫСШИХ УЧЕБНЫХ ЗАВЕДЕНИЙ АРМЕНИИ: НЕДОСТАТКИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

В статье рассматриваются недостатки в стратегическом планировании интернационализации высшего образования на мезоуровне (университеты) в Армении и возможное влияние разработки стратегии интернационализации на макроуровне (национальном). В нем определены основные проблемы и изложены рекомендации для будущего планирования и повышения эффективности в интернационализации высшего образования. При этом статья опирается на результаты опроса и исследования, проведенные в рамках проекта Erasmus+ HARMONY на уровне интернационализации, исследований и инноваций высшего образования в Армении.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, интернационализация, исследование, инновации, глобализация, стратегия, политика, процедура, регулирование.