Universities of Moldova in the Context of Internationalization

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Abstract

For dacades, globalization as one of the most important challenges from our individual, familial and social lifes, was seen in it's climax stage. Even though it's concepts and philofosphy have milenary roots stating in the ancient greece, we can still assist some real aspects of it's process even today. We have to agree that globalization has it's major influence in all of humanity's biological, psychological and social dimensions, but it also leaves a mark on the higher educational process. Because of it's influential nature, higher education needs adaptation and readaptation in the context of global changes. Today, the only way of discussing the dicto-scientific aspects of higher education, is only made possible in the international context of solving problems that humanity has to deal with. One of the greatest national priorities of every state is to maintain the educational process at an international degree, while striving for the development of technological values. In the actual context, as a state that aims to establish global values in said process, Republic of Moldova, has to take a set of definite steps in the different aspects of social, cultural and educational life. In this case study we try to analyse the different factors that may influence the internationalization of the higher education in Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: internationalization, globalization, Erasmus, the Bologna process.

Introduction

Globalization, as a result of a millenary human effort, is a undeniable phenomenon that leaves its fingerprints across all the components of human social life. Both ideas, resources, people, economy, values, culture, knowledge, goods, services, technology and higher education are subject to amendments of this process. The internationalization of higher education represents the process of international integration, the global and intercultural dimensions based on the functions and objectives of teaching / learning, research and services provided by universities or even an entire system of higher education. Internationalization emphasizes the relationship between nations, people, cultures, institutions and systems, while globalization underlines the concept of global economical flux, ideas, culture and others. The difference between the concept of "global flow" and the notion of "relationship between nations" is both striking and profound. Therefore these two concepts have a lot in common, but they are also very different. The debates that the internationalization of higher education is a catalyst reactor or agent of globalization still continues. There is no recipe or definition for an internationalized university. Internationalization is a process of change which is molded to meet the individual needs and interests of each higher education entity. Thus, there is no 'one size fits all' model of internationalization. Adopting a set of objectives and strategies which are 'in vogue' and for 'branding' purposes only negates the principle that each program, institution, or country needs to determine its individual approach to internationalization based on its own clearly articulated rationales, goals and expected outcomes. One of the objectives each university should be based on, in regard to internationalization, is the

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cognitive development. Studens must be able to make a right choice from a handful of universities wordlwide. Of equal importance is the traning of specialists linguistically and culturally, to be able to face the upcoming interconnections with groups from other regions of the globe. Another prioriority in the policy of internationalization of educational entities is the preparation for a global culture, IT development and a new world of multiculturalism. On the same level of importance is the preparation of an environment for staff and studens to be able to organize and participate in various international research.

This recognizes that the internationalization process is driven by an assessment of individual needs and priorities and that a 'formulaic' or latest fad approach is not appropriate, beneficial or sustainable. This truth can also present challenges. For example, what if an institution or county sees internationalization of higher education as a tool for economic gain or political advantage? This is an example where the academic purposes and values of cooperation, mutual benefit and partnership need to be emphasized. Recent studies, at a national and global level, regarding the internationalization of universities, shows that acquiring a certain global status is more important than achieving international standards of excellence. Capacity building through international cooperation projects is replaced by initiatives to set status or to achieve global recognition and higher rankings. And all this is hidden under the disguise of internationalization. But while there are countless examples of positive initiatives which illustrates how collaborative projects of experience exchange for students and internationalization strategy-based educational campuses, have contributed to the development of individuals, institutions, nations and the world. There are many benefits of internationalization, but so are the risks or unintended consequences of this process.

Definitions of internationalization of higher education.

One of the most common understandings on the internationalization of universities belongs to Jane Knight, who said that „Internationalization is the process of integration of and international dimension, intercultural and global in scope, functions and the delivery of post-secondary education".

According to Knight, the internationalization of education, is a process with two main components – „internationalization at home" and „internationalization abroad". The internationalization of home (campus) requires strategies and approaches for developing activities that help students in acquiring international understanding and intercultural skills. Internationalization abroad involves transnational mobility of students, teachers, programs, courses, curricula and projects.

In addition the the definition offered by Knight, Zha Qiang said in an article published in 2003, „The internationalization of higher education – building conceptual framework", that „internationalization is not an end in itself, but an important resource for development of a system of higher education, based on international standards; Secondly, it should be open and responsive to the global context in which it is." On the same note, De Wit mentions that internationalization is not a scope itself, this being the biggest mistake in the interpretation of internationalization. The main goal of internationalization, according to De Wit, is to increase the quality of education and research. He indentifies four categories of reasoning for the internationalization of higher education: political, economic, social/cultural and academic. Different stakeholders may have different reasons for internationalizations. These judgements may change over time and are mutually exclusive. Reasonings describe the motivations and factors affecting internationalization at international, institutional, and individual program, and are relevant in the understanding of the policy behind the direction of internationalization. Internationalization, according to Knight, has four distinc approaches, each focusing on different elements and components. Business approach focuses on promoting academic exchange activities for students and teachers, technical assistance and international students, an approach that, according to Knight, was the most frequently used, when the concept of internationalization appeared for the first time. Competence approach focuses primarily on the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values among both students and

members of the academics and administratives. The emphasis on creating a culture that supports initiative prospects and international approaches is linked to the ethos. The last process is the approach that focuses on integrating an international dimension and the services that benefit the society through a combination of various activities, policies and procedures. As De Wit noted, process approach is the most consistent with the definition provided by Jane Knight on internationalization, but in reality, the other three approaches, especially the business approach, are the most commonly used. He states that this is where the discrepancy between theory and practice appears.

We believe that a more suitable definition of the internationalization of universities is derived from globalization itself. The process of internationalization can be defined as the ability to meet national challenges in a global context and at the same time, the ability to prepare teachers and qualified personel in terms of thinking and concepts, that would make them more flexible in the context of globalization. An internationalized university, meets the minimum requirements for preparing students in the two directives.

Internationalization of higher education in Europe.

Considering that the global internationalization is a goal yet extremely difficult, we believe that the universities from Moldova, which tend towards internalization, must take into account at least the regional internalization, and because we tend to reach a european level of development, we'll talk about some of the elements that make up the base for the internationalization of higher education at an European level.

The Bologna Process – is a commitment to provide a common framework for higher education in Europe. The great aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area, based on international cooperation and academic exchange: facilitating the mobility of teachers, researchers and students; preparing students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies and supporting personal development; offering broad access to high quality university education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom.

The greatest aim of the reform is: Recognition of degrees: Adoption of a system of diplomas and comparable studies by adopting the three-cycle structure (bachelor, master, doctorate). Participating countries implement national frameworks for qualifications, which should be compatible with the general framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and define learning outcomes for each of the three cycles. Quality assurance in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area -ESG). One of the aims of the Bologna Declaration (1999) was to encourage European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education to develop comparable criteria and methodologies. In 2005, European ministers of education adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education, developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher in cooperation and consultation with its member agencies and other members of Group E4; Qualifications and foreign diplomas issued by higher education institutions in line with Council of Europe Convention / UNESCO recognition of higher education qualifications in the European region.. The aim is to enable recognition of qualifications obtained in an education system for those wishing to study in another education system (or country) without losing the real value of those qualifications. The main international legal text that aims recognition of qualifications is the Council of Europe Convention / UNESCO recognition of higher education qualifications in the European. Tools that facilitate recognition of qualifications are the European Credit Transfer System and Diploma Supplement. And actions address the broader social interest areas, such as links between higher education, research and innovation; equal opportunities and lifelong learning. Today the Bologna Process brings together 46 countries of the European Cultural Convention, committed to the goals of the European Higher Education Area. An important feature of the Bologna Process - and key to its success - is that it also involves European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, as well as representatives of higher education institutions,

students, teachers, employers and quality insurance agencies.La a period of two years, ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 countries come together to establish priorities for action. After Bologna (1999), meetings were held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007) and Leuven / Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium (April 2009).

Erasmus+ is European Union's Programme that supports actions in Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the period of 2014-2020. Erasmus+ replaces seven programs, bringing together Lifelong Learning, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the Programme for Cooperation with Industrialised countries.

The Programme aims to modernize and improve higher aducation system in Europe and across the world. Therefor it sets more simplified participation and financing conditions, compared to the previous programs. The seven year Programme will have a budget of €14,7 billion**, a** 40% increase compared to previous spending levels, reflecting EU's commitment to investing in these areas.Erasmus+ will provide opportunities for o wide range of actions and activities and encourages developing the competences of students, trainees, academic staff and volunteers. The Programme will support national efforts to modernize Education, Training and Youth systems. It will also assist transnational partnerships among Education, Training and Youth institutions and organizations to foster cooperation. The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Comission, with its headquarters in Brussels, is responsible for the complete life-cycle management of the Erasmus+ projects, from the promotion of the Programme, the analysis of the grant requests, the monitoring pf projects on the spot, up to dissemination of the project and Programme results. Erasmus+ adresses both to Programme Countries (EU states + Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey) and to Partner Countries (countries neaighbouring the EU and other countries in the world), Moldova being part of the Eastern Partnership Region. In Programme Countries National Erasmus+ Agencies are responsible for implementing the Programme. National Erasmus+ Offices are responsible for the Programme in Partner Countries.

University Rankings as a method of internationalization

There is no question that international and regional rankings of universities have become more popular and problematic in the last five years. The heated debate about their validity, reliability and value continues. But at the same time, university presidents state that a measurable outcome of internationalization is the achievement of a specific position in one or more of the global league tables. But it is an incorrect assumption that the purpose of a university's internationalization efforts is to improve global brand or standing. This confuses an international marketing campaign with an internationalization plan. The former is a promotion and branding exercise; the latter is a strategy to integrate an international, intercultural and global dimension into the goals and teaching, research, and service functions of a university. The objectives, anticipated outcomes and investment in a global branding initiative are different from those required for academic internationalization. It is a myth that an international marketing scheme is the equivalent of an internationalization plan. This does not deny the fact, that a strategic and successful internationalization agenda can lead to more international visibility but recognition is not the goal- it is a by-product. Assessment institutions do not have the potential for an objective assessment, taking into account the extremely high costs that may exist annually for the research and evaluation of over 30,000 universities worldwide, but at least the universities with traditions are always ahead. It is virtually impossible to have a potential institution with the sole scope of analisys and data collection of each university. And it is also extremely difficult to determine the hierarchy and provide objective ratings that reflet reality.

Conclusion

The universities from Moldova have already begun the internationalization process, and as evidence is the adherence of the universities to the Bologna Process and the European Union Erasmus Program, that support the development of Education, Formation, Youth and Sport.

Another evidence is the fact that at the moment, the number of foreign students enrolled in the universities from Moldova consists of 3.7 thousand persons, most of them being from Israel – 54,5%, Romania – 28,9%, Turkey – 3,5%, Ukraine – 3,2% and India – 2,8%. Thus, the number of students involved in mobility programmes, and the number of people wishing to study in Moldova has increased with 6,6% more than in 2015/2016. We believe that the efforts at implementing more effective traning of specialists, and programs that increase our chances of facing the global situation must be continued and expanded. A key issue is the recognition of diplomas internationally, as diplomas from Moldova are not recognized in most countries. Thus, graduates and professionals can not be employed using the diplomas from the universities of Moldova, meaning that the efforts for internalization have not yet reached the main goal. It is our duty to make everything that's needed for the acomplishment of that goal.

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