UNRAVELLING THE CONCEPT OF INTERNATIONALISATION IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, internationalisation has slowly but steadily become the mot du jour in tertiary education, a concept brandished by all involved as the way forward towards achieving greater standards of excellence. No university strategic plan would currently be complete without a strong stance on internationalisation. However, in practice, the term is proving difficult to define, encompassing a wide range of strategies and activities and open to multiple and not always converging interpretations.

This paper aims to examine these conceptual nuances by looking into the fundamental principles of internationalisation as well as some of the prevalent myths and misconceptions regarding its meaning at higher education level. It also analyses quality-related issues that stem from internationalisation models and processes, such as: indicators to measure success; theoretical and practical challenges in any international strategy; the significance of the term internationalisation versus globalization; and the potential difficulties in assessing the validity and value of some of the most widespread internationalisation strategies being implemented by institutions across the world.

Keywords: Internationalisation, tertiary education, globalisation, university.

1 INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONALISATION, A MULTI-FACETED CONCEPT

Internationalisation as we know it today has come to occupy a core place in the agenda not only of universities and other higher education institutions but also of national governments and international organisations. This is mainly due to the fact that tertiary education institutions are facing major international challenges and feel under pressure to educate students in their disciplines whilst instilling in them a sense of global engagement and competence.

For the last twenty-five years, universities across the world have faced these challenges by expanding their international initiatives through all sorts of activities within a broad and varied spectrum, from study abroad programmes, student mobility programmes – the Erasmus programme being the best-known – or joint degrees to collaborative research programmes, international partnerships, cross-border education schemes or foreign-language enhancing programmes, to name a few. In fact, over the last 30 years, programmes like Erasmus have set the foundations for the existing approach, more wide-ranging and tactical, to internationalisation in higher education not only in Europe but also in the rest of the world, an approach also reinforced by the Bologna Process.

It is worth emphasizing that it has not merely been a quantitative expansion – the implications, scope and complexity of internationalisation have grown alongside the volume and range of such programmes and initiatives.

In view of this, a series of questions spring to mind: is there a universally accepted definition of internationalisation? How does an institution get to be truly international? What should be the indicators that define not only the process but also the main goal for institutions to become international? How does internationalisation differ from globalisation? The fact is that even though internationalisation has become a pivotal force in higher education, its true meaning and contours are far from clear.

There seems to be generalised consensus [1] [2] [3] over Jane Knight’s theoretical definition of university internationalisation, understood as the process by which global, international and intercultural aspects are integrated into the purpose, functions, or provision of tertiary education [4]. However, the Internationalisation of Higher Education Study commissioned by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education in July 2015 [5] clearly identifies not only the existing variety of approaches to internationalisation but also the diversity of objectives being pursued.
as well as substantial differences in terms of how the concept is perceived. Evidence suggests that internationalisation remains a diverse, complex and multi-layered concept, often with contradictory rationales, meaning different things to different institutions in different regions: a broad umbrella covering all sorts of activities, approaches and motivations.

In practice, even though the study emphasizes the need to understand what the underlying gist of internationalisation is, the truth remains that there are considerable regional and national differences and that higher education institutions themselves are constantly evolving. This all means that currently there does not seem to be a one-size-fits-all definition of the term. According to some authors, nor should there be one: Knight [4] herself argues that internationalisation should be a process of transformation adapted to the specific interests, requirements and circumstances of each university or institution.

In consequence, institutions should avoid approaches that arise from dominant trends or that are too formulaic, and focus instead on their own specific priorities and needs. De Wit [2] also emphasizes the need to develop a comprehensive institutional approach to internationalisation based on strategic capacity.

2 INTERNATIONALISATION VERSUS GLOBALISATION

Even though globalization and internationalisation are frequently confused, and they tend to be used interchangeably, they are far from synonymous – especially in relation to higher education.

The difference between globalization and internationalisation, as established by Jane Knight [4] and subscribed by authors such as De Wit [2] and Altbach [6], lies in the fact that globalisation as a process is based on the universal flow of concepts, people, resources, values, culture, information, goods, services and technology within the setting of the 21st century, while internationalisation of higher or tertiary education can be designated, as previously stated, as the integration of global and intercultural elements into the objectives, the research and academic capabilities and the service functionality of any given university or tertiary education institution.

The difference, therefore, is not only clear but also highly relevant: while globalization focuses on the idea of an international flow of ideas, economy, culture, etc., internationalisation is based on a relationship that arises among states, individuals, cultures, institutions and systems [4]. In reality, however, both terms are intrinsically intertwined: as De Wit [2] points out, a range of new terms related to internationalisation – such as cross-border education or borderless education, for example – are a direct consequence of the influence and impact that the globalisation of society is having on higher education.

In view of this, yet another question arises: is university internationalisation a driving force of globalization or rather a natural outcome of the latter? When it comes to higher education, the relationship between globalisation and internationalisation is complex and the distinction between both is certainly blurry, as they overlap in many aspects and elements.

Jane Knight [7] remarks that while internationalisation is transforming the domain of higher education, globalisation – as a reality of the 21st century – is the driving force behind it all, clearly influencing the world of internationalisation. If, as Altbach [8] argues, globalisation is based on a world economy which is becoming increasingly integrated, the ubiquity of new information and communication technology, and the already universal role of the English language combined with the advent of an international knowledge network, then internationalisation can be defined as the set of policies, initiatives, programmes and protocols that higher education institutions activate as a response to globalization.

In this respect, internationalisation is also something over which both governments and institutions can have some control, whereas globalization is dictated by external forces.

Consistently, internationalisation is seen as a positive term, as it is associated with the traditional idea of transnational cooperation and the humanistic principles of academic excellence, whereas globalisation, more associated in the collective consciousness with competition, economic forces and – in this context – the idea of education as a tradable commodity, generally adopts a more negative perception and both terms can become somehow antagonistic.

However, it is thanks to globalization that the 21st century has seen the emergence of the knowledge society combined with the dependence - much greater than ever before – on knowledge products and
services as motors for economic growth in many sectors. As Altbach [6] points out, the resulting, incontestable fact is that commercial forces have a legitimate and sometimes dominant place in higher education. Therefore, internationalisation of higher education must be understood, in the current context, as a response to globalization. In this sense, whether it is positive or negative, it is a response that is undeniably and increasingly moving from socially-oriented rationales to motivations which are more politically and economically driven; in other words, a move in which collaboration and cooperation are gradually giving way to competition.

Be it as it may, the goal of internationalisation cannot – or rather, should not be other than global citizenship, i.e. producing graduates who are ready and able to live and work in a global society, both from a social and a professional perspective. And while the social aspect goes back to the humanistic ideals that may initially have set the basis for internationalisation, employability remains, currently, at its core.

3 REASONS AND DRIVERS FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

It has been stated in the introduction that the internationalisation process needs to be determined by an analysis and appraisal of individual needs, interests and challenges instead of following standard, formulaic or fashionable approaches that not only might turn out to be inappropriate for a given institution but also that would fail to bring benefits or might prove unsustainable in the mid/long term.

The list of reasons for universities to seek internationalisation is rather long indeed, but maybe the emphasis needs to be placed on what internationalisation is not, or rather on what it should not be. Knight [4] stresses that it should not be used as a means to boost economic advantage or political gain but rather be based on an ultimate goal of academic excellence as well as on values such as cooperation, mutual benefit and partnership.

However, as previously stated, economic factors do play – necessarily and undoubtedly – a significant role in the equation. Wide-reaching integration in areas such as investment, commerce, politics, health, research, culture and the environment has been one of the key drivers of academic internationalisation, dramatically helped by the advances in information and communication technologies as well as cheaper and more efficient transport options. Regardless of whether these are ideal causes for internationalisation or not, the truth is that they cannot be underestimated.

Therefore, it is safe to say that internationalisation is driven by a combination of motivations: academic ones, certainly, but also political, economic and sociocultural. These rationales adopt many different shapes, procedures and dimensions, depending largely on two main elements, namely the geographical region in which they are located and the characteristics and strategic approaches of each institution.

However, regardless of these differences, there are common elements across the board, from the increasing importance of reputation and competitiveness, via demographic considerations or long term economic gains, through to student employability. These common goals could be divided into two main groups: internal and external drivers.

In a global survey on Internationalisation of Higher Education carried out by the International Association of Universities (IAU) [5], the respondent institutions identified as the main internal driver the existence of an internationalisation strategy as well as an internationalisation champion, i.e. a person or department driving the process and having specific responsibility for his area within the institution.

In terms of external drivers, the study identified government policy (both at national and regional levels) as the most significant in advancing internationalisation. European institutions also ranked the Bologna process very highly alongside government policy. In relation to how EU mechanisms and initiatives contributed to promoting internationalisation, most respondents highlighted the provision of funding. In this respect, credit must be given to the existing European programmes (e.g. Erasmus+) as powerful stimulators and facilitators for internationalisation, not only in Europe but all over the world.

Other factors, as cited by Morris [1] include:

a) The aspiration of universities to remain relevant, current and innovative, not only in terms of teaching methods but also in terms of research and service;

b) The need to make sure that university students leave their institutions fully equipped to find employment and to compete in an increasingly global marketplace;
The desire to achieve specific goals not only from an academic point of view but also economic, entrepreneurial and social.

There is yet another important element outlined by de Wit [2], which is the unprecedented dominance of English as the predominant language of academic and scientific communication, only comparable in history to the supremacy of Latin in academic circles in medieval Europe.

This has been helped by the fact that information and communication technologies have contributed to the dissemination and circulation of scientific and academic content in faster and cheaper ways than ever imagined possible.

4 INTERNATIONALISATION MODELS

Even though internationalisation in higher education is a fairly new concept that has taken shape over the last two decades, in reality universities have always had an international dimension. The roots of internationalisation can, in fact, be traced back to the Middle Ages, when the roads of Europe were transited not only by pilgrims but also by a different kind of travellers: students and professors hoping to find enlightenment, learning and social connections in university cities. De Wit [5] remarks that it is not coincidental that the flagship mobility programme of the European commission is named after the Dutch philosopher Erasmus, as some of the arguments for internationalisation today are rooted in scholar mobility at that time: the use of a common language (Latin then, English today), the broadening of knowledge and experience, and the recognition of qualifications.

Moving forward to the 21st century, the lack of a commonly accepted definition of internationalisation in higher education means that internationalisation efforts adopt a variety of models, with emphasis on different quantitative and qualitative indicators. Some authors, such as Altbach [8], see geographical trends when it comes to highlighting different models while others, such as Knight [4] classify them by type of activity (student mobility, collaborative programmes, research partnerships, institutional networks, etc.).

In all cases, Knight [4] warns about the dangers of adopting one standard set of goals and strategies just because they seem to be in vogue or because they may fit well with an institution branding initiatives, as this intrinsically contradicts the precept that each and every university or nation needs to define their own attitude and approach to internationalisation on the basis of their own individual needs, objectives and expected results.

Notwithstanding this idea, there exist general trends and patterns that can be incorporated into any institution, regardless of their size or location. They all stem from the generally accepted dual scope of internationalisation: abroad and at home.

4.1 Internationalisation abroad

Internationalisation abroad encompasses all kinds of formal and non-formal education initiatives that take place across borders, from student mobility to collaborative projects and programmes, e-learning providers, international networks, etc. although the hallmark of internationalisation abroad has been and still is, without a doubt, international academic mobility.

However, in the past twenty-five years, international academic mobility has also experienced a massive transformation, moving from the simple exchange of students and initially affordable only by a small elite, into a mass phenomenon and a big, competitive business, sometimes clearly focused on recruitment; some countries are investing millions of dollars in all sorts of initiatives to attract talent to study and work in their institutions, so that their innovation and research projects are led by the best “brain power” possible.

Knight [4] forecasts that this trend will continue and stresses that neither the challenges nor the benefits of academic mobility should be underestimated, as the race for attracting and recruiting this brain power is now ubiquitous. There is a generalised obsession with global rankings and economic competitiveness, especially in some regions, and the impact of these on international mobility remains to be seen.

Another, more recent, trend in terms of internationalisation abroad is the creation of collaborative programmes between universities located in different countries. These collaborations can lead to institutions being able to offer double or joint degrees, although a lot of work is still to be done in terms of eliminating legal handicaps, especially in the case of joint degrees. The main objective of these is
not only to offer students an enriching international experience with a comparative edge, but also to
improve their opportunities for employment at an international scale.

On the downside, the reality is that these programmes become – in some cases – little more than a
double-up of course credits, which verges on academic fraud. As Knight [4] points out, while
this option can be very attractive for students, it can mean that the learning outcomes are not always
achieved. There is a vast, world-wide offering of excellent and innovative joint and double degree
programs, but it is evident that there is also abuse or misuse of degree granting and recognition
protocols.

De Wit and Hunter [9] classify international students into two groups: a) those who seek credits
through international mobility programmes, e.g. Erasmus, as part of their degree at their home
institutit; or b) students who enrol in full programmes abroad in order to attain a degree from a
foreign university. In either case, the presence of international students benefits the host university but
is also advantageous for governments, municipalities and service providers linked to higher education,
although Knight, as quoted by De Wit [2], is sceptical about the role of foreign students as
internationalisation agents or as indicators of success. According to both of them, the assumption that
a higher number of foreign students on campus will lead to a more international culture and curriculum
within any given institution is one of the big myths surrounding internationalisation.

With regards to the future, De Wit [5] believes that three of the current trends will definitely continue
to expand and grow: 1) student mobility of the credit-seeking type (with a high probability that the
Erasmus model idea will be copied in other regions of the world); 2) cooperation and competition; 3)
all things virtual, particularly collaborative online and blended learning on an international scale.

4.2 Internationalisation at home

Knight [7] describes internationalisation at home as the activities, initiatives and programmes which
are implemented by higher education institutions in order to help students nurture international
consciousness and intercultural skills. As such, internationalisation at home has to be curriculum-
oriented and focused on learning outcomes if it really needs to prepare students to be active in a
globalised world.

The idea for internationalisation at home was born in 1999 in Europe, according to De Wit [5], as part
of a movement with the same name, which emerged as an effort to counteract the fact that
internationalisation efforts had traditionally placed a strong emphasis on mobility; at the time, Erasmus
had established a target of 10% of students, and the movement sought to offer an international
dimension to the remaining 90% of students who did not have the opportunity to experience an
academic stay in a foreign university.

While it is evident that mobility provides important benefits to students, organisations and countries
alike, Beelen and Jones [10] highlight the need to recognise that mobile students will continue to
represent only a small percentage of the entire student population. Hence the adequacy of the term to
designate internationalisation activity intended for the whole student community, thus ensuring
internationalisation for all – a more inclusive, less elitist approach.

Since 2013, internationalisation at home is included in the European Commission’s education policy
and in the executive summary of the Internationalisation of Higher Education Study of 2015 [5], the
fifth recommendation for all policy levels is based around the importance of “Internationalisation at
home”, urging institutions and countries to integrate into the curriculum international and intercultural
learning outcomes for all students.

Once again, though, there is some confusion surrounding the term, as it overlaps with another new
concept: internationalisation of the curriculum. They are both aimed at preparing graduates to live and
work in an increasingly globalised world. For Beelen and Jones [10], the main difference is that the
latter refers exclusively to dimensions of the curriculum, regardless of where the curriculum is
delivered and, in that respect, it could include mobility or it could refer to curriculum in transnational
or cross-border education programmes. Internationalisation at home, on the contrary, focuses on
domestic learning environments, incorporating intercultural and transnational aspects into the
curriculum in a resolute way for all students in all programmes.

Looking into the future, the current trends in Europe show a sturdier emphasis on internationalisation
at home, not only via curricular content but also through concepts such as global citizenship [5], as set
out in the 2015 Ministerial Conference for the Bologna Process with three objectives: 1) graduate
employability, which demand greater attention to competences; 2) more inclusiveness in tertiary education, particularly in the case of groups of immigrant origin, with implications regarding the type of curriculum offered; and 3) improvement of the quality and significance of learning and teaching.

5 MEASURING SUCCESS

As the importance of internationalisation grows, so does the need to measure it. However, the difficulty in defining internationalisation leads to yet another question: how to reach consensus as to which of the many potential indicators are the most relevant when it comes to measuring or determining the degree of internationalisation of a university and how successful its efforts turn out to be.

More than two decades of internationalisation initiatives have led to a substantial transformation in the world of tertiary education and, as Knight argues, the concept of internationalisation itself has sustained fundamental changes and has grown in terms of scope, scale and importance [4]. As it has been pointed out, international mobility, for instance, has developed far beyond what anybody could have predicted twenty-five years ago to become a huge business, in some cases more related to innovation and recruitment purposes than its original aspiration of helping each other by way of sharing and collaborating.

The issue is whether these changes have stuck to the underlying principle of seeking international standards of excellence. A number of authors see forces rather more material behind it all: Knight [4] categorically argues that, at present, institutions promote internationalisation in order to establish an international profile or global standing, rather than in order to reach international standards of quality, and adds that cooperation projects have moved away from capacity building to embrace status-building initiatives instead. De Wit [11] also points outs that the importance and value traditionally associated with exchanges and partnerships are being contested by increasing competition as well as the commercialisation and cross-border provision of higher education.

In this respect, the emergence of global rankings is a new phenomenon with potentially negative impacts. Some authors, such as Knight – as quoted by De Wit and Hunter [9] – criticise these rankings and the measurements used in them as being extremely narrow and not reflecting the richness and diversity of the programmes and activities carried out by universities in their efforts to become more international.

It is not all negative, though. Examples abound of encouraging initiatives which illustrate how cooperative partnerships, cross-border programmes and campus-based internationalisation policies can make a positive impact on the progress, growth, development and improvement of students, staff, institutions, countries and ultimately the world. Some of the existing cooperation strategies – flexible and sustainable – in the fields of research and education at university level are proof of this positive trend.

In relation to this, governments and universities, as well as all the agents involved the Bologna process, strive to review and evaluate internationalisation with an increasingly stronger focus both on quality assurance and national accreditation instruments within Europe with a view to common standards and indicators.

In order to assess whether internationalisation efforts are proving successful, it is imperative to work against a set of such indicators, which should be predetermined by each institution according to what they want to achieve through internationalisation. In terms of actions, each university needs to: define their own term and purpose; agree an internationalisation strategic plan with the involvement not only of internal agents (teaching and administration staff) but also of external partners if necessary; identify internationalisation as a core value and goal of the university; establish a clear and feasible link between the internationalisation strategic plan and the institution’s strategic plan; ensure promotion and communication; designate internationalisation champions, i.e. deans, department heads and managerial roles to be held accountable for defining and achieving their internationalisation objectives; identify and secure funding sources to support internationalisation activities; recognize and celebrate success.

The indicators used to measure success can be many and varied; Morris [1] provides some examples:

a) Quantity and proportion of students and faculty members studying and teaching abroad.
b) Quantity and proportion of faculty members that take part in or advantage of development opportunities or international partnerships in terms of research or service.

c) Quantity and proportion of courses and course components that can be considered global/international.

d) Quantity and proportion of administrative and lecturing staff who are actively involved in achieving the goals of internationalisation.

e) Quantity and percentage of mobility- and non-mobility-based international partnerships.

f) Availability of funding to support the internationalisation objectives.

g) Regular comparative exercises with comparable institutions.

h) Existence of an administrative structure that reflects the internationalisation strategy and goals.

The availability of funding highlighted by Morris in this list seems indeed to be of upmost importance. In 2013 the European University Association (EUA) – which plays a critical role in the Bologna process – conducted a consultation among 175 universities in 38 countries about internationalisation in European higher education [12]. When asked about which aspects could have an impact on improving internationalisation at national level, most of the respondents mentioned funding as the leading aspect, followed by the necessity to advance an effective and coordinated strategy in terms of internationalisation at national level, more flexible regulations for visas and immigration, and the improvement of the language skills of both students and staff.

De Wit [11] insists on the fact that, since there is not one model for internationalisation, when it comes to measuring it there is also a diversity of rationales, approaches, objectives and strategies that need to be taken into account, and these can, in turn, vary depending on each institution, country and region. Therefore, the elements to be assessed are highly complex. He categorizes them in three groups: inputs (resources available to support internationalisation strategies, such as money, people, policies, etc.); outputs (the amount and types of activities or initiatives undertaken in support of internationalisation efforts); and outcomes (impacts or end results). In the long term, De Wit adds, the tools for measuring outcomes – although they will be the most difficult to develop – will also be the most important.

Even so, the difficulty in providing final answers as to how success in internationalisation can be measured is obvious, not only because there is too much diversity as to how internationalisation is defined but also due to conflicting opinions as to what success means or what – and how – needs to be measured.

6 CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over the past few years, internationalisation has abandoned the initial reactive approach to become a proactive, strategic priority. De Wit [2] stresses that this transformation is mainly a shift from an essentially collaborative model to a more competitive one.

This means that the value which was traditionally placed on mobility, cooperation and partnerships has also changed focus to include increased competition and international rankings as well as a much higher relevance of what previously in this paper has been described as “internationalisation at home” (i.e. the internationalisation of the curriculum and of the teaching-and-learning processes), although some common misconceptions still prevail in this respect, like the idea that internationalisation is similar to - or simply limited to – teaching in English or incorporating an international subject into the syllabus.

Quality remains a crucial issue and one that transpires into every single aspect of internationalisation processes, from the quality of the academic offer, the international curriculum and the academic experience of students involved in cross-border education through to the integrity of providers or credential recognition and accreditation.

There is also the question of quality versus quantity, with the underlying perception that the more international agreements or partnerships a university enters into, the better its reputation and the more prestigious and alluring it becomes for students or for other higher education establishments. In the practice, however, properly managing such high volume of partnerships is a difficult task, amongst other reasons because of the big investment in human and financial resources it requires. Knight [4]
points out that having a long list of international partners ends up being little more than a status symbol, rather than an efficient, tenable and functional record of academic collaborations.

In the 2013 study carried out by the European University Association [12], within the main findings of the consultation, the EUA highlights different aspects that need to be improved: at institutional level, it cites language skills – not only of students but also of staff – as well as increased funding in order to stimulate and support internationalisation; at national level, there also increased funding, the development of comprehensive, strategic approaches to internationalisation, and simplifying the strict and bureaucratic procedures and regulations currently in place.

Altbach [8] lists other uncertainties that may have an impact on the future shaping of internationalisation, including:

a) Political realities such as terrorism, which are already translating into tighter visa requirements in the United States and other countries and also into a decline in student flow in specific geographical areas;

b) E-learning, which will help distance education but may impact mobility numbers negatively;

c) The cost of study and the government policies related to the cost and tuition and fees for documents such as visas;

d) The rising prominence of English as the medium of instruction and research at graduate level;

e) European policies and the protection of the EU’s “European higher education space”. In this respect, Brexit poses new questions both within the EU and between the EU and the rest of the world.

f) Quality control, which is becoming a major problem at an international level as it is not always easy or possible to maintain consistent standards

In terms of credit mobility and credit recognition, De Wit and Hunter [9] point out that there are still issues and constraints for which solutions are needed, for example in terms of accessibility for disabled and disadvantages students or in terms of what is perceived as academic tourism.

Another issue – which in Europe involves Central and Eastern countries and at global level affects certain regions – is what could be described as a lack of balance between ingoing and outgoing students, i.e. in these countries or regions, the interest in sending students out is far greater that the ability to attract incoming students.

Finally, there is the question of the digital revolution, as digital learning and virtual mobility are increasingly being seen as key elements in finding new dimensions for internationalisation, with massive potential to improve access to higher education. Tools like blended learning, as well MOOCS, collaborative online learning or virtual learning will certainly need to be given more attention, although some regions still have considerable catching up to do in the digital revolution.

Regarding opportunities, there is a growing interest in fostering greater collaboration between higher education institutions and industry in the context of mobility and in response to an increasing attention on work placements.

The recommendations set out in the executive summary of the 2015 Internationalisation of Higher Education Study, commissioned by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education [5], place a strong emphasis on both points (the development of innovative models of digital and blended learning, and paying more attention on work placements and industry involvement) as well as on other areas for improvement which include supporting the crucial role of academic and administrative staff; paying more attention to the importance of internationalisation at home; or stimulating bilingual and multilingual learning in previous educational stages.

With regards to the future of internationalisation, there are other important issues at social, economic and cultural level that are the result of a complex and changing reality. These issues, although seemingly external to higher education, will nonetheless represent considerable challenges for universities in their internationalisation efforts: global financial crisis, changing demographic trends, more restrictive immigration policies and laws, tensions related to ethnic and religious groups, etc.

Throughout the paper it has been pointed out that with internationalisation come many and wide-ranging benefits, as well as potential risks and unplanned consequences. What is clear is that internationalisation is not only a rapidly evolving phenomenon but also one that cannot be understood as an objective in itself but rather a means to an end. As Knight [13] points out, while it is true that
internationalization’s advantages and goals may greatly vary from one institution or country to another, the widely-shared hope is that it will add to the quality and significance of higher education in an increasingly interconnected, intercultural and inter-reliant world.

The future looks bright: it is safe to say that internationalisation is more vibrant and effervescent than ever before and that it will – without a doubt – continue to change. But change is in fact – as has been pointed out in this paper – part of the complexity, and it is to be desired that all the parties involved will strive to maintain an open dialogue about both opportunities and challenges as things keep evolving. So among all the recent hype, perhaps institutions need to revisit the traditional concept of internationalisation and carefully reconsider the what, why and how.

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