

EURASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

<http://www.eurasianpublications.com>

INTERNATIONALIZATION AS UNIVERSITIES' STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

Nina Bijedic

University Dzemal Bijedic of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Email: nbijedic@edu.fit.ba

Drazena Gaspar

Corresponding Author: University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Email: drazena.gaspar@sve-mo.ba

Sead Pasic

University Dzemal Bijedic of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Email: sead.pasic@unmo.ba

Abstract

Internationalization, when not observed in the narrow sense of mere mobility, assumes all processes that lead to international recognition of a university. Consequently, one can think of internationalization as of all supporting processes in university's strive for widely recognized excellence. In order to use internationalization as a drive for changes, it is necessary to observe it through different aspects: strategic documents, teaching process, RDI policy, international projects, mobility programs and quality assurance. A useful tool for monitoring success of planned processes and measures is internal benchmarking, used to bring the institution ever closer to strategic goals.

Keywords: Internationalization of University, Excellence of University

1. Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) has a special status in Europe because of the country's deprecation during the war, which lasted from 1992 till 1995. Although arguments can be heard that the war is long over and that in the post-war period much more should have been done, the progress in the country is evident in a lot of areas. From this point of view, requirements for the state to position itself on the regional and international level have been met, which should, on a long term, ensure the states' prosperity. The situation at Higher education institutions in B&H is similar to the situation in the country; a turbulent political and socio-economic situation is not favourable for their development. However, the cumulative elements implemented through a large number of international and national projects have created a solid foundation for further development. Thus, at public Universities curricula have been developed together with international partners, which led to the implementation of the Bologna process and the development of its elements. At all public universities, one can find Quality assurance and International cooperation offices, and all the universities take part in projects that continue to strengthen their capacities. Preconditions for further development have been created, with the goal of positioning universities on the level of the country, region and internationally. The entire process of attaining international standards and achieving international recognition can be summarized by the term internationalization, as in (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Zolfaghari *et al.* 2009).

As a basic prerequisite for internationalization, and therefore its primary goal, the authors identified reaching international standards of higher education. This is in the line with the research on the effect of internationalization of scholars (Bedenlier and Zawacki-Richter, 2015).

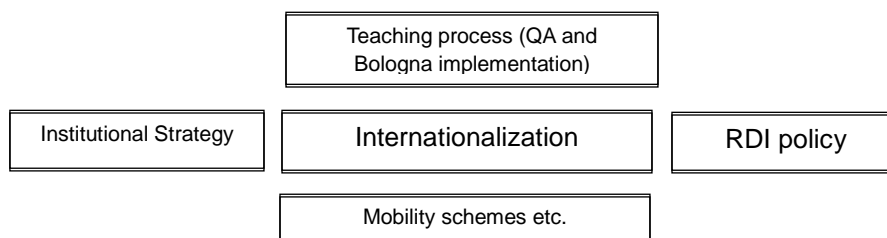


Figure 1. Aspects of internationalization

This implies a wide range of specific targets (Figure 1), such as:

- Revision and focusing of strategic documents of the University.
- Development of a sustainable RDI model (Research, Development and Innovation).
- Improvement of implementation of the Bologna process and quality assurance.
- Focusing on international cooperation.

Each of these specific objectives involves more than just internationalization, but during their actualization, internationalization must be considered as one aspect. Therefore, each of the specific objectives is going to be elaborated only in terms of internationalization.

2. Internationalization as a Part of Strategic Development at the University

The process of internationalization is dependent on internal, just as on external factors. Therefore, during the process of international positioning, parts of strategic documents need to be updated annually. The main factors that position a university at the national, regional and international level must be clearly defined, mapped into a set of indicators, and be monitored and evaluated. Some of them are:

- Selection of scientific fields in which a university can achieve academic excellence at the international level, and by which a university can become recognizable. It is necessary to examine the situation of international references of academic staff, pick the specialization with the most references and channel capacities to most of them; this will filter out the fields of excellence.
- Development of research capacities for the selected areas. In addition to laboratories and access to referent literature, this segment also focuses on visibility of research, by establishing and maintaining an online registry of projects and publications.
- Definition of a strategy for participation in international projects. One of the principles on which universities base their participation in international projects is that the results of each project should be upgraded, which directly increases international reputation of the institution. The other principle should be transparency and local dissemination of the results, and the third principle is to involve as many researchers as possible.
- Definition of short-term and long-term language strategies. After analysing the current situation, it is necessary to determine degree programs that can be offered in a foreign language, for which staff are able to maintain the quality of teaching. Parallel to that, it is necessary to improve language skills of academic staff in accordance with the selected areas of excellence, and focus of international cooperation.
- Monitoring trends on the local labour market, and following global trends.
- Definition and implementation of promotion strategies of the University.
- Definition of the enrolment policy and more.

In addition to the factors listed above, an action plan for improvement of the implementation of the Bologna process, and directions for the development of international cooperation

must be integrated in the development strategy.

As for any other project, the same goes for the process of internationalization of a university, and that is the necessity to allocate human and material resources. Although internationalization implies participation in international projects, it cannot be expected to be completely financed by foreign funds. Therefore it is necessary to clearly define, in the policy documents of an integrated University, the rights and obligations of staff in charge of the process of internationalization, as well as to allocate own resources for this purpose.

2.1. Internationalization and Implementation of the Bologna Process

The Bologna process in its essence can be used as a basis for the internationalization of any university, because it includes the development of most of the factors that are necessary for positioning a university at the international research and academic level, while putting an emphasis on quality. In practice, universities in BiH are using international incentives for years, to implement and improve the implementation of the Bologna process, and to be able to achieve international standards in the following areas:

- Quality assurance. Authors suggest that particular attention is paid to the development of quality assurance systems. This process has thus far been based solely on the implementation of international projects, but recently the quality system is developed through its own superstructure from results of past and current projects. For example, through the SHEQA project, a set of key performance indicators (KPI) has been identified, and software to monitor them has been installed at BiH universities. Further steps should be achieved by continuing focusing on KPI's, which serves as a basis for the development of a sustainable model of an integrated University. As the upgrade of KPI development, BiH universities are involved in BIHTEK Tempus project, in which they are used for benchmarking.
- Designing curricula that are consistent with local requirements, and are recognizable on a global level. Study programs that are offered should be developed in cooperation with regional and international partners, and thus provide a good foundation for student mobility.
- Implementation of ECTS. At all public BiH universities the development of curriculum went parallel with the development and implementation of ECTS. However, legislation in the state has not explicitly quit with the "old" school system, so one needs to continue to insist on the implementation of ECTS in accordance with international standards at the institutional and national level.
- Creating internationally accepted curricula with proper implementation of ECTS creates prerequisites for the establishment of common and/or international study programs. From this point of view, particularly interesting is the second and third cycle of study, in cooperation with partners from regional countries due to the absence of language barriers, and with international partners in areas where implementation is possible (for example in the field of ICT).
- Mobility of students and teachers. Universities achieve mobility through available regional and international networks and programs in accordance with their capacities. In addition, they have special agreements on cooperation with the institutions with which its employees have long been cooperating in successfully joint projects. Anyway, the principle authors suggest is that it must emphasize reciprocity in mobility, by using all possibilities for involvement of foreign experts in classes or workshops. University's resources for admission of foreign students are limited due to the language barrier, even by assuming the absence of study programs offered in foreign languages, we can still work on attracting students of BiH origin. In particular, it is necessary to develop strategies and studies to analyse and forecast students' interest and motivation for mobilities, for it is a complex matter, as presented in (Soria and Troisi, 2014, Gopinath, 2014, or Xu, 2015).

2.2. Internationalization with the Focus of International Cooperation

As the last holder of internationalization university should provide follow-up activities related to international cooperation. Concrete actions in this context include, but are not limited to:

- Short-term and long-term focus on international cooperation with institutions, and through networks and programs of interest in accordance with defined academic excellence. Internationalization of an institution depends not only on itself, but also on the movement of international policy towards the country and the region in which it is located. For example, the Republic of Turkey in recent years has shown great willingness to invest in the development of higher education in B&H. It is therefore natural that a university has set developing cooperation with the Turkish higher education institutions and agencies as one of their current priorities. Though, that does not mean that BiH universities focus exclusively on Turkey, but they are simultaneously working on developing a long-term cooperation with European and regional partners, as well as establishing new partnerships. Additional entries are created for language policy.
- Training of academic staff and students to master international standards. Training in the field of foreign languages, knowledge of international trends and project management can be commercialized and implemented in collaboration with other institutions, so that a university does not have to fully fund this aspect of capacity building.
- Improving the visibility and reputation in regional and international context. Offices for International Cooperation and Quality assurance follow the international rankings of universities and the conditions under which they are created. Management acts according to the governance structures in order to fulfil the required conditions and thus enhances its reputation. In addition, the services of a university are responsible for ensuring the dissemination of activities in digital and other media.
- International cooperation as a component of academic excellence. Even though in state legislative experience in international cooperation is not required for advancement to senior positions, it is advisable to incorporate this element as an advantage in its strategic documents, so the Office for International Cooperation seeks to include teachers and students from all faculties in offered projects and programs.

The process of internationalization of a university is enduring, but authors believe that the results could be visible after 3-5 years of implementation of all these measures.

2.3. Institutional Internationalization as a Benchmark

This part was developed mainly by authors, for the purpose of implementation of Tempus project BIHTEK (530696-TEMPUS-1-2012-1-BE-TEMPUS-SMGR).

Scoping Statement for this benchmark would be that it applies to institution level planning, policy development, institutional capacity and implementation in relation to the internationalization. It includes the delegation of authority and responsibility for developing and implementing policy, and strategic and operational plans.

Good Practice Statement can be formulated so that the institution has established, well understood strategy, governance mechanisms, policies and capacities that enable involvement in the international networks/programs, international mobility of students and staff, with the aim of international recognition and good reputation/ranking.

2.4. Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and Measures

KPI1: Institution strategic and operational plans promote internationalization.

In order to measure those indicators, there should be five measures ranging from 'No current strategic or operational plans', over 'Strategic or operational plan but no recognition of internationalization', 'Strategic or operational plan includes some elements of internationalization', 'Strategic and operational plans both have some elements of internationalization', to 'Strategic and operational plans both have clear recognition of internationalization'.

Similar scale for measurement can be applied for the next three KPI's:

KPI2: Specific plans relating to internationalization are aligned with the institution's strategic directions and operational plans.

KPI3: Authority and responsibility for the operational management of internationalization are clearly articulated.

KPI4: Planning for the ongoing process of internationalization is aligned with the institutions budget process.

In order to measure alignment of University's policies with the principles of Bologna process concerning the horizontal mobility, one could introduce the following key performance indicator:

KPI5: Institution policies, procedures and guidelines provide a framework for internationalization at both a course and program level.

In this case, measures still range from 'No policies, procedures and guidelines applied' over 'Some alignment with policies and procedures' to 'Comprehensive alignment with policies, procedures and guidelines', allowing for three modalities for more concise insight into the matter.

In this KPI it is necessary to define minimal number of study programs and courses taught in English, but this depends on the level of the Benchmark itself. Therefore, this is directly related to the already achieved international reputation of the university.

The next key performance indicator describes the connection between the institutional processes of RDI and internationalization.

KPI6: Policies, procedures and guidelines on internationalization are well communicated and integrated into research and development processes.

Measures are separate for communication and integration, with three respective modalities for each category, 'Not established', 'Moderately established', 'Widely established', and 'Not integrated', 'Moderately integrated', and 'Fully integrated'.

Like in the previous KPI, it is necessary to define minimal number international RD projects and number of researchers, but this again depends on the level of the Benchmark itself.

For the following KPI measures are intuitively clear.

KPI 7: The institution has memorandums on cooperation that enable international mobility.

Measures aim to distinguish both quantity and diversity of cooperation, therefore memorandums are classified as 'Non-existent or expired', 'Covering only one region, or only one mobility scheme, or less than minimal number (depending on the vision)', 'Covering variety of institutions and programs, but not in effective use', 'Well distributed but maturing', and 'Well distributed and mature'.

The last KPI chosen here aims to clasp mobility from several aspects, quantity, quality, regularity and diversity.

KPI 8: Institution is involved in mobility programs for both students and staff.

Proposed measures are divided into two groups, involvement and mobility. For involvement in programs measures start from 'None or inactive', over 'Only regional cooperation', 'Moderate international cooperation', 'Well distributed but incidental' to 'Well distributed and regular'. Measures for mobility range from 'No mobility', over 'Up to 0,1% for students and 1% for staff in-coming or out-going', 'Sufficient but unbalanced', and 'Well balanced but incidental', to 'Well balanced regular mobility'.

3. Conclusions

Internationalization is a hot topic in today's world of global area of higher education and research. All universities are entering the race to attract more international students, researchers and projects, in order to access significant funding. Thus, it is necessary to observe all elements of internationalization, in order to prepare the best strategy for reaching the top of international standards. This is in particular true for small universities with moderate ranking and funding, as are the universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this paper, authors joined their experiences in the university management, and pro-

posed a model for analysis of process of internationalization. The analysis, going further from mere mobility, is additionally supported by a proposal for benchmarking the institutional internationalization. This way, authors deem that they covered majority of issues relevant in the process of internationalization.

References

- Altbach, P.G. and Knight, J., 2007. The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), pp.290-305. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315307303542>
- Bedenlier, S. and Zawacki-Richter, O., 2015. Internationalization of higher education and the impacts on academic faculty members. *Research in Comparative & International Education*, 10(2), pp.185-201. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1745499915571707>
- Gopinath, D., 2014. Characterizing Indian students pursuing global higher education: A conceptual framework of pathways to internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19(3), pp.283-305. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315314563783>
- Soria, K.M. and Troisi, J., 2014. Internationalization at home alternatives to study abroad: Implications for students' development of global, international, and intercultural competencies. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(3), pp.261-280. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315313496572>
- Zolfaghari, A., Sabran, M.S., and Zolfaghari, A., 2009. Internationalization of higher education: Challenges, strategies, policies and programs. *US-China Education Review*, 6(5), pp.1-9.
- Xu, C.L., 2015. Identity and cross-border student mobility: The mainland China–Hong Kong experience. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(1), pp.65-73. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474904114565155>