

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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The aim of this contribution is to explore how universities are responding to a new global environment. Today, the questions that are generally raised by those addressing the internationalization of higher education focus on the new realities facing universities in an “increasingly global higher education knowledge space” (Graham, 2005) requiring adaptation, innovation, international collaboration and the capacity to respond to the increased mobility of faculty and students. The availability of information and communications technologies and the many possibilities this offers raises a number of important questions, not the least of which is the relationship between the information commons and the university campus, the need for internationalized curricula, the creation of an appropriate balance between distance learning and face-to-face contact between students and professors and between researchers collaborating in international projects.

What is the impact of the increased capacity for collaboration between universities in the North and in the South made possible by this increasingly global knowledge space? What new opportunities are universities providing for students to participate in a global higher education environment? (Graham, 2005: 1) How are universities meeting the challenge to structure new learning environments for students now able to access unlimited quantities of information on their own? How are universities responding to the need for a more internationalized curriculum? What is the role of the university in creating an international dialogue beyond the academy to include other non-academic stakeholders? How can granting agencies participate in creating such a dialogue? The questions are many; I raise only a few to begin to explore the role and responsibilities of universities in this new globalized context and the many forms that these might take.

Universities have long been involved in the internationalization of education through international curricula in many disciplines, a variety of programs and exchanges between faculty and students facilitated by granting agencies, government bodies and international institutions and organizations. In consulting several documents by UNESCO and the International Association of Universities (IAU), among others, on proposed directions for internationalization, a common theme emerges, best captured in the IAU’s mission statement:

the university must continue to adapt and change if (...) challenges are to be met. It will remain an institution central to societies throughout the world as long as its activities make a difference to better the conditions of mankind. (Egron-Polak, 2001) Internationalization of higher education in the form of

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inclusive partnerships to create a global learning environment is necessary today to address global issues of poverty, human rights, environmental protection and the need to build democratic institutions for social justice.

These commitments are reinforced in several international declarations by the IAU in recent years. Of particular significance is the growing concern that the internationalization of education dedicated to “international solidarity, human security and global peace” will yield to competitive behavior as universities participate in a growing international market for education made possible by the use of new educational technologies and so-called transnational teaching. (IAU, 1998) How to embed useful tools and opportunities for teaching and research collaboration into a global learning environment, is a very relevant question, if these tools become the basis for a disengaged or dis-embedded education. The recent reports of the IAU repeatedly emphasize the importance of North/South cooperation in higher education as a major instrument to combat inequality and the importance of dialogue to share experiences internationally. Most interesting is the reference by the IAU to teachers and professionals as “lifelong learners” in this rapidly transforming global environment, calling for multi-stakeholder partnerships between universities and civil society organizations, inter-governmental organizations, foundations, international organizations and government.

The university must mirror the complex arrangements and relationships that exist internationally; this requires institutional innovation on many levels. The research environment must also innovate and develop opportunities for collaboration and access to a “world pool of knowledge”; it has to be more open to inter-disciplinary research in order to address complex issues.

The support given to multi-stakeholder research collaborations by universities, granting agencies and government in many countries is, in my view, a template for how the internationalization of higher education might develop in the future. The foundations for this approach exist; many lessons are learned from the relationship between collaboration and innovation in industry and science and from a growing literature on the “geography of knowledge flows” and local interaction, all of which confirm the value of dialogue in knowledge creation. While this reference refers to spatialized settings, it is an important reminder in our discussions of globalization that the translation of ideas and practices requires the movement of people to and through local contexts emphasizing the importance of situated face-to-face dialogue. These are illustrations of what I wish to call “socially embedded research”, drawing upon Karl Polanyi’s concept of embeddedness to suggest that these are important illustrations of strategies to embed knowledge in society in an increasingly complex global environment.

**References**

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