

SUMMARY

University Over Borders Internationalisation of Higher Education in Poland and Germany

Higher education has always been internationalised to a greater level than other spheres of social life, as it is based on intellectual exchange, an immanent characteristic of which is crossing borders, including national ones. Internationalisation of higher education in its current form is, however, a new phenomenon. It is an answer to the changes occurring in the higher education environment and related to the ongoing globalisation. Educational institutions adapt to the new situation with speed and depth unseen before – they open up to foreign students and academics, they add foreign language programmes to their curriculum, they conform to the international standards of quality, and inspire one another to introduce new organisational and scientific solutions. Thanks to this the higher education system becomes compatible with the world economy and is able to prepare its graduates for the needs of the global job market. This also creates favourable conditions for the development of science, as aggregation of the intellectual, creative and innovative potential takes place in a competitive international environment. Internationalisation of higher education is one of the key catalysts of this process.

In the world the higher education internationalisation process started in the late 1970s, with mass migrations of students from Asian countries. The United Kingdom, Australia and the USA quickly became world internationalisation leaders, largely thanks to the widespread use of English. In the continental Europe the process appeared a little later. After 1989 internationalisation-related activities started also in the Central and Eastern European countries.

The subject of my research is the process of higher education internationalisation in Poland and Germany, especially in the first decade of the new century. The most important questions include the characteristics of the Polish and German model, as well as the applied variant of higher education internationalisation, existence and origin of the differences in the development of this process in both countries, as well as existence of the dependency between the federal/unitary model of state and development of the internationalisation process. I am therefore interested in the ways the higher education systems in Poland and Germany (on various levels) answer to the changes in the environment related to progressing globalisation and in the conditions favourable to effective development of the internationalisation process.

In relation to the internationalisation of the Polish higher education, it appears that this process came to a crossroads of its developmental paths. The model transferred mimetically from the Anglo-Saxon world is almost exhausted, while there is no clear vision of a particular strategy adapted to specifically Polish conditions and needs. In any case, lack of strategic thinking has been characteristic for politics in the area of science and higher education to date. Due to the role which internationalisation of higher education will necessarily play in creation of a positive future for Poland as a modern state, based on an open society and economy of knowledge, an answer to the question about the most effective development path in this area is vital.

Conscious of these dilemmas and taking into account my earlier interests and experiences in this area, I have reached a conclusion that the best platform for analysis of the situation in Poland would be a comparative study using a country whose development of the internationalisation process could, for many reasons, be regarded as exemplary – the Federal Republic of Germany. The higher education internationalisation process will be analysed in this work from the political sciences point of view – international comparison is one of the most important and most fertile study areas in reflection on higher education in this approach.

Several issues were decisive in selection of Germany and Poland as study cases. Using the most similar system design logic – MSSD – I have reached a conclusion that the German higher education system is one that is most similar (is not the most congruent) to the Polish system, therefore a comparison of these two examples should be especially clear and should enable formulation of justified conclusions.

Polish higher education is based on a German, Humboldtian university model. The higher education systems of both countries are similar. Also similar are traditions and academic culture as well as system parameters, which makes comparisons all the more justified. Despite having only half the population size of Germany, Poland has a similar number of students (in the relevant period it was about 2 million students) and its university system is similar in size – in the relevant period Poland had slightly over 400 functioning higher learning institutions, while Germany had about 380¹.

Most of all, the history of the process of internationalisation of the German universities creates an excellent platform for comparison. Germany united at the same time when post-communist system transformation began in Poland. The brand of German higher education was not rated particularly highly in the world at that time and its

¹ Still, the quality perspective must be remembered during the comparison. In Poland, in the short time after 1991, over 300 private higher education institutions were created and in definite majority of cases their quality leaves a lot to be desired. They were often small institutions, cheap to run, offering BA-level education to everyone who was not able to study at state universities and with no academic ambitions. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century the demographic situation changed significantly, a many-years demographic slump started and the number of private universities began to decline. The German system is mature and stable from that point of view. The general level of German higher education is probably also higher, but that's a subject for a separate analysis.

competitive position was rather weak – also due to the language. Within ten years, thanks to a coordinated, state-wide strategy, Germany performed a civilizational leap from the point of view of internationalisation of its universities. Strategic internationalisation goals were defined in documents issued by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), a specialised interministerial agency supporting internationalisation. Germany became the third most popular target country for foreign students worldwide, developed its offer of study courses in English and infrastructure for foreign students' needs. Concurrently there was systemic support for creation of internationalisation culture in universities and the academic staff was trained accordingly. During that period the German higher education really became internationalised, which can be symbolically confirmed by its achievement of the first place in the ranking of the most internationalised higher education systems, *Global Gauge*, done by the British Council in 2011. The German example shows what can be achieved in a short time if there is a clear, central strategy for internationalisation of higher education (although, paradoxically, the state is largely systemically decentralised). Observation of this process may be good for formulation of development goals for Polish universities and other Polish actors in the internationalisation process. The above arguments were decisive for the comparison structure of this study. It should be mentioned that there is a difference in the detail level of description in the two study cases. In relation to the goals of this study, the Polish case is analysed more carefully and with more detail.

My goal for this study was, apart from its other functions, to contain a reliable description of the current knowledge on the subject of internationalisation process in Poland, so it could serve as a convenient starting point for further consideration and analyses.

There are numerous arguments supporting the study of this subject. First, the subject of higher education internationalisation is a new one in Polish research and due to the current influence of this process over the situation in higher education as well as the scientific, economic and cultural potential of a country, the need for analysis and active debate in this area is quite pressing. There is also a more general need to broaden the political studies segment in the area of higher education analysis – a fringe area in Polish research tradition, especially in view of development of a new discipline – study of public policies.

Second, better understanding of the conditions surrounding this process in Germany would lead to valuable practical conclusions for its shaping in Poland, both on the institutional and central level.

Another encouragement to take up this subject is the advanced international discussion on the internationalisation dilemmas. This discourse is rich, dynamic and current. This study serves as an introduction to it, while also having ambitions of being an input into a debate within it, on the changes currently taking place in Poland.

This study was based on an assumption that internationalisation is a general answer to the changes taking place in the higher education environment in relation to the advancing globalisation. The general nature of this answer does not mean that its

individual, national variations must be identical. Despite the traits of universalism, a university is, *par excellence*, an institution defined nationally. The currently operating higher education institutions are largely a product of an ideology of the world defined by nation states. Therefore in this analysis – despite the fact that some researchers are worried that such a model for interpretation of a political reality has been exhausted – I will continue to operate in the nation states universe, on the basis that this concept is still the most convenient definition of the political reality.

I have also made an assumption that a study of the higher education internationalisation should be based on an analysis of conditionings, the role of actors, forms and course of this process in time as well as an attempt to analyse its efficiency. On the basis of such an analysis it is possible to attempt to define how universities answer the challenges posed by globalisation in different systems and also to evaluate which of these answers will be effective. Such an approach creates a possibility of identifying the developmental barriers observed in the case of development of the higher education internationalisation process in Poland.

I also focus on interrelations between these courses (part of the Polish solutions were inspired by German experiences) and the general context of the deliberation provided by the standardising influence of globalisation.

A typological analysis of activities on the level of a specific institution or state, as well as on a supranational level and the transitional levels related to internationalisation – focusing on such aspects as conditionings, actors, forms, progress, quantity and quality development, combined with investigation of reasons for their success and failure – means giving this study also a praxeological aspect.

The study combines two general research strategies. Part of the research questions are answered thanks to desk research, an analysis of the public debate and evoking of earlier studies on internationalisation of higher education. Other questions are analysed by analytical approach based on case studies and their comparison. Part of the analysis is conducted with use of theoretical models. There was also a need to study the higher education internationalisation process from the point of view of various research approaches. Focusing on a single approach would be inefficient. Apart from an institutional approach, the areas of interpretation related to analysis of organisational change were also useful, as well as those related to new managerial levels. An important interpretation inspiration could be found in the area of process analysis, isomorphism, policy transfer and diffusion of innovations.

The analysis confirmed that one of the key aspects of internationalisation process development is involvement in its creation of the key decision centres, which means the central – state – level. In Germany, where activity and reflection on this level has been present almost from the beginning of the relevant period, internationalisation of

the system is developing dynamically, culture of internationalisation is created and the process itself takes on more and more sophisticated forms. Apart from the initial phase, I have distinguished three phases of this process: quantitative, qualitative and the so-called sublimation phase. The first was based on accumulating the internationalisation potential, the second on gradual introduction of pro-quality solutions, while the last was characterised by appearance of a synergetic group of conditions necessary for a qualitative leap in the internationalisation process itself. These include: high awareness of the issues related to this area in a large interest group, the will to support the internationalisation process by persons and institutions responsible for shaping the higher education policy on various levels (with special emphasis on the highest) and stability of such a policy developed consistently over time, confirmed by dedicated budget resources allocated generously to pro-internationalisation initiatives. An important determinant of the third phase was an emphasis and prioritisation of the issues related to the internationalisation process development.

Internationalisation of the Polish higher education was not concurrent to the process taking place in Germany. Only the quantitative phase developed here in the analogical period and it still did not reach full saturation. It has been characterised by increase in internationalisation potential and especially by quick increase of the number of foreign students in Polish universities and of study programmes conducted in foreign languages (with definite domination of English) as well as activity on the level of a small group of universities which may be described as innovators in the diffusion of innovations process (which I have determined internationalisation to be) with consequent lack of strategic reflexion on the state level.

A conclusion about a connection between the centralisation level of a state (federal model versus unitary model) and development of the internationalisation process proved to be important. The bigger central involvement, the higher central coordination, the greater process dynamic turned out to be. Centralisation supported internationalisation. Paradoxically, in the federal Germany the higher education internationalisation process was run in a more centralised way than in the unitary Poland.

The dominant justification for internationalisation of the Polish universities in the analysed period were the economic reasons, defined in a short-term perspective. The discourse was dominated by a debate on direct financial profits resulting from the presence of foreign students, while other benefits were pushed to the background. In other words, a reflexion on internationalisation, as well as practice, was dominated by market approach. The Rationales Model I have proposed for Polish higher education internationalisation – with definite domination of short-term economic rationale – is characteristic for early, non-advanced phase of internationalisation, with low awareness of other than financial benefits resulting from the internationalisation process.

The internationalisation changes in Poland were characterised by effective bottom-up approach, in which higher education institutions and various bodies representing their interests initiated and inspired such changes. Apart from activities related to the Bologna Process implementation and creation of the European Higher Education

Area, inspired by the joint European policy, main impulses for internationalisation – most of all on a university level, but also in some broader perspective – were generated either by the universities themselves or by institutions representing the academic circles, or buffer institutions acting as intermediaries between the universities and the government. In the relevant period the state educational authorities remained passive in the area of creation of internationalisation culture. However, a process of accumulation of a critical mass of awareness and will, necessary for any future changes, could be observed. I have noticed portents of such changes in the recent years: 2011-2013.

In the German model of higher education internationalisation an important role was played by the academic rationale as well as the political rationale and the long-term economic one. I have observed every one of them, on a highly advanced level. It was a little more difficult to observe the influence of the cultural rationale, but it also turned out to be significant. The economic rationale in the short-term perspective turned out to be the least important, which was the main difference between this model and the Polish one. Significant weight of the financial rationale in the long-term perspective, as well as the political one, emphasised strategic thinking in this area on the state level and the intermediary levels. The role of the academic rationale reflected the highly advanced level of the discourse and the developed awareness of the stakeholders in this matter. This model reflected the causative structure of the internationalisation process in Germany. It was characterised by a top-down approach – with a leading, active role played by the decisive central bodies. This coordination ran along two paths: on the level of a land government and that of the federal government. Main impulses for internationalisation were generated by the central government or the institutions acting as intermediaries between it and the universities – with the leading role of the interministerial DAAD agency, largely independent.

Lack of simultaneousness in the course of higher education internationalisation processes in Poland and Germany was also caused by their different conditioning – a hypothesis which was confirmed. One of the causes of disturbances in the development of this type of process in Poland could have been the effects of institutional behaviour in the area of internationalisation, motivated by the mimetic isomorphism logic. Direct transfer of Anglo-Saxon solutions into different Polish conditions was harmful. On the other hand a systemic support of internationalisation of higher education in Poland, using solutions inspired by German experiences and adapted to Polish conditions – not by imitation but by creative adaptation – a transfer of inspirations, appeared possible. Therefore I decided to sum up my reflections by proposing a set of practical recommendations concerning creation of an internationalisation culture in Poland.

The internationalisation process itself appears to be a certain historical necessity, determined by objective changes taking place in the environment surrounding the higher education systems, a certain reaction to these changes. It can, however, appear in two completely different forms: it may be consciously administered by the institutions involved on various levels, sharing a more or less common vision of benefits which should result from it (the German case); or, with certain neglect and lack of

awareness of the stakeholders, it can take place somewhere on the margins of the system, in a non-systematised way, and its form, lacking a common vision taking broader public interest into account, may evolve in an undesirable direction, as it happened in Poland. This undesirable direction – identified in this study – is the inclination to formulate goals in relation to short-term financial benefits resulting from presence of foreign students at Polish universities. For the use of this study I have termed the other, more spontaneous form of internationalisation – “wild internationalisation”. “Wild internationalisation” is characterised by its chaotic nature and lack of sound bases when it comes to decisions related to its animation on various levels. In “wild internationalisation” serious role is played by neglect strategy, as well as all conservative strategies. This is one of the main dangers to internationalisation of the Polish higher education.

Many areas related to internationalisation of the Polish higher education remain unstudied. This problem is due partly to the lack of data and the fact that very little research has been done on the subject in general and therefore there is nothing to relate to. Certainly worthy of study with various research methods is the issue only signalled here in relation to the analysis of the rankings data – that of relations between a university’s internationalisation and the quality of its teaching and research. Also worthy of studying is the effectiveness of internationalisation strategies, country-wide and on the level of specific higher education institutions and an evaluation of public policy in this area. There is a definite lack of analyses related to evaluation of the effectiveness of changes implemented as part of the Bologna Process and creation of the European Higher Education Area. The fates of foreign graduates from Polish universities should also be analysed. A theory challenge that ended up in a fiasco for me would be to unify the models I have described – the Burton Clark Coordination Model and the Kälvermak and Van der Wende Rationales Model. Such an operation would create a tool enabling to research of relations between the method of coordination of higher education in a country and a local characteristic of the rationales for the internationalisation process. In the context of comparative research an analysis of the influence of university fees on presence of foreign students in the particular country would be an interesting direction to take – and here again it would be a good idea to compare Poland to Germany.

A question remains about the direction in which the process of internationalisation of the Polish higher education may develop in the future. It seems that in the case of Polish higher education at least two development scenarios are possible. In the first, optimistic one, as a result of accumulation of political critical mass the decisive central level would finally get involved in internationalisation of the Polish system, changes will be made in order to improve the dynamism of the whole process and profiling it to

suit the needs of creation of academic quality. A strategy for development of higher education in Poland will eventually get approved, with the role of internationalisation clearly emphasised and specific strategic goals defined in this area. The quality threshold of educational institutions actively operating in the field of internationalisation – necessary to set off mass diffusion – will be reached and progress in this area will start snowballing. At the same time appropriate know-how will be transferred from the world environment. In further perspective a dynamic, quality-focused internationalisation of the Polish higher education will contribute to Poland's strong position in the worldwide academic exchange, to making its offer more attractive in the eyes of potential foreign students and researchers, and also to creation of an innovations culture based on creatively adapted inspirations from all over the world. In this scenario the Polish society is not a subject of brain drain but a partner in creation of a brain circulation culture.

A second scenario – pessimistic – is based on an assumption that the Polish higher education will continue on its course of “wild internationalisation” and assumes a policy of neglect on all decision levels, further procrastination from the central bodies in involvement of structures and budget resources in multi-aspect, strategic support of the internationalisation process development and its push towards the pro-quality direction. Also lack of cooperation with the social partners and non-governmental organisations. This scenario would, in a long-term perspective, most probably lead to a systemic impossibility of correct preparation of graduates for the needs of the global job market and also to growing marginalisation of the Polish higher education in the world environment. Brain drain (gifted students, PhD students and scientists) by more attractive and better internationalised systems, permanent shortage of brilliant scholars coming to Poland from other countries, lack of desirable and intellectually fruitful brains circulation in culture will continue. In the effect this will lead to worsening quality of the “intellectual capital” and gradual erosion of possibilities to create a society and economy based on knowledge and to appropriately participate in the changes on the European level – including creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. Toffler's “velvet colonisation”, in which Poland will serve as a colony providing labour force or simple technologies for the real centres of progress and innovation concentrating European and world intellectual capital, will become fact.

Apart from the above extreme scenarios there are, of course, many intermediate roads available. However, as the experts alert – in view of the civilizational backwardness, of which limited internationalisation of the higher education system is a part, changes must take form of sudden leaps, they must be radical because “radical” describes the speed of changes in this area throughout the world.