

The Importance of Internationalization Today and the Leadership Role of IAU



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Since its creation back in the fifties, the International Association of Universities (IAU) has been consistently fostering a set of academic values and principles to frame higher education institutions' mission and institutional practices, such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, social responsibility, cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, equity in access, open access to knowledge, scientific integrity, ethical behaviour, and quality in learning, research and outreach. These principles are most valuable in a world where globalization and the global economy paradigm have triggered fierce competition among universities for prestige, talent and financial resources at the global level. This is encouraged by global rankings, provoking tensions with universities' national missions and putting at risk the values of inclusion, solidarity and local social commitments. Besides causing increased inequality and tensions in social cohesion, as well as the rise of new trends of nationalism and populism within countries, globalization has provoked geopolitical tensions and boosted a wider division between the Global North and the Global South.

To face this global context and a rising discontentment towards the Western model of internationalization, the IAU has been a pioneer in putting forward and endorsing a set of values in the declaration "*Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action*" (International Association of Universities 2012). Besides proclaiming the substantial benefits of the internationalization of higher education, the declaration's main proposal has been to confront internationalization's potentially adverse unintended consequences, in order to ensure that its outcomes are positive and of reciprocal benefit to the institutions and countries involved. In the referred declaration, the IAU stressed internationalization as an evolving and dynamic concept, continuously shaped and reshaped by the international context in

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which it occurs. The present pandemic has definitively raised the importance of the terms of this declaration.

Indeed, the pandemic has provoked a large and ensuing debate concerning the future of internationalization, prompting us to re-examine the validity of the IAU's principles and values in the light of the present context. Is the pandemic a turning point for internationalization? To what extent is the pandemic creating conditions for a long-lasting effect on internationalization? And, last but not least, will the pandemic's impact be the same in the Global North as in the Global South, as far as internationalization is concerned?

In search of a response to these questions, some experts argue that the impact will be transitory, affecting mostly physical mobility and its business-like approach, but without changing its main strategies in the long term; while some others claim that the pandemic is posing a serious threat to internationalization and could even provoke its end, at least as we presently know it; and finally there is another position stating that the pandemic's consequences offer a valuable opportunity to re-examine internationalization's objectives, strategies, values and intended impact. This latter argument is not new, since there was already an ongoing process before the pandemic occurred, to redefine internationalization in the face of globalization's negative economic and social consequences, in the search of addressing rising criticisms towards some aspects of internationalization.

The main criticism of internationalization is that it has mainly been synonymous with international mobility, considered elitist because only accessible to a minority of few economically advantaged students or to the ones who can secure funding or fellowships. In other words, mobility has been too often seen as an end, rather than a means of connectivity through research, teaching and learning.

Internationalization and international mobility are seen as a phenomenon overly dominated by the Global North and the Western model, increasing asymmetry in favour of developed countries and promoting inequality at two levels: inside each country and among nations and regions, thus widening the gap between the Global North and the Global South; as well as provoking a standardisation of ideas.

Furthermore, if it is true that international mobility develops in students intercultural competence, professional and personal skills, which increase their employability and potential for success; its social impact is nevertheless claimed to be quite limited, as its benefits only attain a very small number of students (between 1 and 5%, depending on the region of the world); and furthermore, these benefits are effective at an individual level, but do not help students to be better global citizen, more aware of their responsibilities in civic and environmental matters; since there is a large-scale failure to integrate post-mobile students' intercultural experiences and global citizenship skills within the curriculum at home in benefit to the rest. In other words, mobility sustains an exclusive and selective model of education (Leask and Gree 2020; Hugonnier 2020).

Consequently, in the post-pandemic and its foreseeable long-term effects on the world economy, it is high time to rethink and redesign internationalization in a non-mobile world. In order to do so, countries and higher education institutions internationalization strategies have to change priorities. If internationalisation is to

remain a defining feature of university life, it has to be re-imagined, and measures must be taken to make internationalization accessible to a much larger number of students in the world (Leask and Gree 2020).

Most likely, the pandemic will also have a strong impact on another key aspect of internationalization, which is international cooperation in capacity building in higher education in the Global South. As Aarts (2020) points out, many universities in the Global North support partner institutions in poorer countries and regions in Global South with the objective of strengthening their capacity to improve institutional practices in order to offer higher education of better quality, to underscore local development agendas and contribute to their research capacity as well as to their global sustainable development agenda. Unfortunately, funding for such efforts will be significantly reduced because of the upcoming economic crisis. Hence, international cooperation, a most pivotal value of internationalization, will be significantly affected.

To substitute international mobility, higher education institutions (HEIs) should then focus their internationalization process on strategies of internationalization at home (IaH) and internationalization of the curriculum (IoC). These strategies could reach similar results in students without mobility by internationalizing programmes, curricula and pedagogies.

According to Leask and Gree (2020):

This new reality represents a rich opportunity for global learning at home, as online learning can open up the possibility of 'border crossing' for all students. Programmes such as Collaborative Online International Learning and virtual internships, combined with meaningful intercultural learning encounters on campus and in local communities, offer exciting potential to engage all students in meaningful intercultural learning on a global scale. The post-mobility world will allow for international partnerships to change from exporting education to collaborative models that use multinational expertise and situate education locally, while still building meaningful connections across borders and cultures. Moreover, a collaborative online model in which local university faculty co-teach with international faculty to deliver online courses could bend the cost curve, allowing high-touch online learning at the cost of a local degree – while encouraging knowledge transfer and building capacity in the process.

Nevertheless, the authors conclude that more research should be carried out to better understand the effects of this alternative internationalization and to identify the measures to be taken to make it more effective.

All this sounds fine and promising, but our concern is whether this transformation will be possible for the majority of universities. Will this transformation be within reach of the majority of HEIs in the Global South, namely for the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region? or will the post-pandemic consequences deepen even further the inequality between the Global North and the Global South, as far as higher education internationalization is concerned? If the response is negative, the future of internationalization might well be quite uncertain for LAC and could even diminish to insignificant levels, making LAC graduates even less competitive and potentially less successful than the students of the rest of the world; and LAC higher education systems less pertinent to their society.

In our opinion, the above-mentioned transformation of internationalization strategies will definitely not be so easy to implement for most universities in the Global South, or least for Latin America and the Caribbean, due to several factors inherent to the weaknesses of its higher education systems.

As reflected in different evaluations, namely the IAU's Internationalization Surveys (Egron-Polak and Hudson 2010; Marioni 2019), the British Council Reports (Ilieva and Peak 2016; Ilieva et al. 2017; Usher et al. 2019) and the OBIRET Survey (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez 2019), LAC's internationalization process is mainly and sometimes exclusively focused on mobility, with IaH strategies quite absent among the large majority of HEIs. Our concern is that IaH and IoC are by far the most complex strategies to design and implement, in particular, because they require some basic conditions to be present in the higher education systems; conditions which do not prevail in LAC. First of all, the region is characterised by a lack of public policies to support internationalization and is reported to have the least supportive governments of the world in that respect. In the forthcoming future and deep economic crisis, this situation is not likely to change; on the contrary, the light support achieved in the last decade could well disappear in favour of more urgent matters. Furthermore, as far as institutional policy is concerned, internationalization activities are still largely marginal to policymaking in teaching and research; and consequently, there is an overall lack of institutional planning, budgeting and evaluation of internationalization activities. Moreover, international activities are mainly based on individual initiatives and therefore fail, for the most part, to respond to institutional priorities. In other words, the large majority of HEIs has not yet developed an institutional culture for internationalization and its inclusion within policy, priority setting and budget processes. Additionally, the great majority of faculty is part-time and has no international profile; and the region has no strategy to recruit international scholars. In terms of curriculum, it is well-known that it lacks flexibility and innovation, is mainly traditional, profession-oriented and more than often obsolete. Additionally, the region's higher education systems suffer from a chronic lack of financial resources, infrastructure and professionalised human resources both for academic and administrative work. Furthermore, if international mobility mainly depends on the family's resources, IaH relies on institutional resources, which were extremely scarce before the pandemic and certainly will be even more so after it. The investment in international research is among the least of the world and mostly depend on foreign initiatives and subsidies, which will probably decrease in the post-pandemic period. Last but not least, as Unkule (2020) mentioned, international offices will be key for the transformation and should be:

on the frontline of advising students and faculty members, inventing catch-up strategies and looking for solutions that accommodate the new normal.

Unfortunately, this is another point of concern for LAC's internationalization processes, as the majority of international offices have little sway over policymaking, institutionalization and professional staff, with heads of office most of the time devoid of the expertise and experience required to deal with such a challenging task, due to

a constant turnover in staff and recruitment based more on affinity with the rectors than on professional standards.

In other words, LAC's internationalization processes are far from being comprehensive, which is a real handicap to overcoming the present situation, as Hudzik (2020) points out:

"A failure to integrate international activity into core teaching, research and scholarship, and community engagement missions is a fundamental error which seriously weakens internationalization's future position within institutions". "Resource sufficiency is at best extremely difficult in the absence of an institution-wide supportive culture and the participation of international leadership (senior international officer and programme directors) in strategic planning and budgeting processes".

In conclusion, the future of the internationalization in the Global South might be greatly affected due to an unprecedented economic crisis, forthcoming budget cuts in higher education, research, innovation and development, as well as a substantial reduction in mobility and international cooperation. Internationalization in LAC will most likely be reduced to insignificant levels, which will eventually deepen inequalities of opportunities among higher education students, faculty and institutions and will reinforce the elitist model of internationalization in society and with the developed regions of the world. More than ever, internationalization will be for a social elite and for institutions in the Global North. Within this context, the universities of the most developed countries should recall the IAU's principles and values of inclusion, fairness, solidarity and global commitment. More than ever, in post-Covid-19, the prevailing context for higher education internationalization will require all institutions to revisit and affirm internationalization values, principles and goals such as intercultural learning, inter-institutional cooperation, mutual benefit, solidarity, mutual respect, and fair partnership. The future of internationalization will require institutions committed to help shape a global system of higher education that values academic integrity, quality, equitable access, reciprocity and placement of academic goals such as global citizenship skills, the advancement of research, and addressing global problems at the centre of internationalization efforts. Within the context of forthcoming internationalization, IAU's principles expressed in the 2012 Declaration will be more than ever relevant and reflect IAU's pioneer vision and ability to position key ideas and values for the higher education sector. Additionally, the IAU Internationalization Surveys will continue to be the most valuable tool for feedback on institutional practices to help make the necessary transformations in internationalization strategies as described above.

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