

THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF INTERNATIONALISATION

Social Risks And Responsibilities

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Addressing “*the social dimension*” of internationalisation in higher education meets with the same problem as talking about internationalisation in general. At a first glance, it seems clear what we are talking about. A closer look, however, reveals that this concept can be interpreted in many different ways. With regard to internationalisation, some claim that we are in the middle of a global process of re-thinking it. And if we do not even agree on what internationalisation really means, it is even more difficult to speak of a single social dimension of this multifaceted process.

In this paper, the social dimension of internationalisation is approached from three different angles. First, the social dimension of the international student experience is addressed and particular attention will be paid to the relationship between the social dimension and academic performance. A second social dimension that the paper will analyse is the extent to which international learning experiences are accessible to students with different backgrounds. A third angle from which we approach the social dimension of internationalisation is the extent to which the internationalisation of higher education brings along global social risks, with a particular focus on skilled migration and the commodification of knowledge. In the last section, we will reflect on these social dimensions in order to identify some pressing issues in the current phase of internationalisation of higher education and to sketch scenarios for the future development of international higher education.

What social dimension?

The social dimension of the international student experience

Social has to do with “equality” and “egality”. Society should provide equal opportunities for individuals and this also means that we should guarantee an environment in which (domestic as well as) international students can live and learn and fully exploit their capabilities. A recent body of literature on these issues was published by Simon Marginson, Erlenawati Sawir and other colleagues from Melbourne University. In their research programme they focus on ‘International Student Security’, which they define as “the maintenance of a stable capacity for self-determining agency” (Marginson et al., 2010). For international students, the capacity for self-determining agency is challenged by several factors: moving from one country to another itself, living in or between multiple social networks simultaneously, being immersed in another culture, and language and having a considerable information asymmetry compared to fellow (domestic) students.

The capacity for self-determining agency is related to the students' embeddedness in social, cultural and individual networks in and around the university. Marginson et al. (2010) find major problems in Australia, in particular related to language issues, financial difficulties of students, loneliness and isolation, and discrimination and personal safety. The social dimension of internationalisation from this perspective is mainly about two issues: (i) the social and academic integration of international students within various networks and about (ii) the (equal) rights of international students to participate in these networks.

Social and academic integration

For governments and institutions hosting international students, their wellbeing has not been on top of the priority list. With an increasing marketisation and commercialisation of international higher education, governments and institutions have approached international students as consumers and, with that approach, the focus came to be on consumer protection measures. This came with an emphasis on information about content and on the validation of quality in the international higher education market and has led to a growth of national and international public and private accreditation bodies and to a proliferation of rankings as a way of informing students about quality (and prestige).

One might say that the focus has been on attracting students from abroad, not so much on educating them and giving them a valuable student experience. With more young students studying abroad and more diversity in the sending countries providing this education and student experience might create considerable challenges for governments, institutions, teachers and others. With this the social dimension and the well being of the student becomes more important and also the question of who is responsible. Is it the responsibility of the single student? Or do institutions and even governments have obligations in this?

Of course one might say that there is an inherent moral obligation for host governments and host institutions to care about the wellbeing of students, disregarding the impact on the institution or country. In this sense, universities have the obligation to contribute to a comfortable, safe and secure environment. There are, however, also indications that providing such an environment and facilitating social embeddedness has clear benefits for the image of a host institution or country. The incidents concerning Indian students in Australia and the negative impact on subsequent enrolments (AEI, 2010), for instance, have made security and wellbeing important issues in Australia. As an indirect effect, the wellbeing and safety of international students also became a matter of economic importance.

In addition, there is an increased pressure for universities to be efficient and increase performance and it is often assumed that academic performance on the one hand, and the level of a student's wellbeing on the other, show a positive correlation. Tinto's model of student retention, for instance, claims that whether a student succeeds or drops out can be explained by their degree of academic and social integration, which can both be seen as process with a strong social dimension. This model was applied, for instance, by

Severiens and Wolff (2008) and by Wilcox et al. (2005). They confirmed the positive relation between social factors like “feeling at home”, “connectedness to fellow students” and “support of friends”, as having a positive effect on study success and retention. Rienties et al. (2011) have tested the relation between social and academic integration and academic performance for international students in the Netherlands. They observed that there are substantial differences for this relationship between “Western” and “non-Western” international students. Non-Western students score lower on academic and social integration than other students. They have more adjustment problems, leading to lower personal and emotional wellbeing. In terms of academic performance, they score equally well as domestic students, but less well than Western international students. Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed (1998) confirm that adjustment issues are indeed more severe for international students whose home culture is more distant from the host culture.

In general they find that academic success is primarily determined by academic integration of the international students, in particular academic adjustment. Academic integration refers to issues like academic, social and personal/emotional adjustment and attachment. Academic adjustment is displayed by positive attitudes toward academic goals and academic work, by motivation to learn, and by a sense of satisfaction with the academic environment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). This and other studies (e.g. Mannan 2007) also found negative relationships between performance and social integration for specific cases. This was explained by the compensatory relationship between academic and social integration, whereby too much time spent on extra curricular activities lead to less time spent on academic activities.

What can be concluded from the literature on academic/social integration and student performance is that good academic integration of international students is likely to have a positive effect on performance. The relationship with social integration is less linear. For universities this also means that they have a clear stimulus for improving the academic integration of students, domestic as well as international. Obviously, looking at the growth in the offerings of student support services in modern universities, the importance for student support is recognized (although stronger developed in some parts of the world than others). Nevertheless, some services need to be created in order to serve international students, while others need to be adapted to the increasing (cultural) diversity of the student population.

Supporting the integration of international students in academic settings – in the classroom, on campus, in student associations, etc. – thus becomes crucial for international student performance. Language is a very important vehicle in this integration process. Language barriers can negatively impact students' well-being and their ability to adjust to academic life and learning in a foreign country (Barratt & Huba, 1994; Sawir, et al, 2011). In the English speaking countries, this means better English language support for international students. In non-English speaking countries offering English-taught programmes, however, eliminating language barriers in social and academic interaction means more than supporting international students in their English language skills. It also means offering them the opportunity to master the host country's language in order to facilitate interaction on campus and in the wider social environment.

It might also mean that domestic students need easier access to English language support in order to facilitate intercultural interaction in the classroom.

Other student services also need to adapt to the growing diversity in the student population. Misra and Castillo (2004) for instance emphasize the need to recognize cultural differences in stress management and argue that this also has implications for mental health providers in the university. Career support services need new knowledge in order to advise international students. Housing support obviously is different in many countries for domestic students versus international students. International students need support on visa issues, while domestic students don't, and so forth.

In order to be and remain attractive to international students, to let them perform optimally and to take advantage of the diversity in the classroom and on campus, institutions should not neglect the well being of their students and incorporate the goal of social and academic integration in their academic and internationalisation policies. The goal of academic and social integration can even be part of pre-departure preparation programmes. By connecting students online and by preparing them for other academic cultures and teaching methods, adjustment issues might be avoided or at least students will be more prepared for them. Integration can also be strengthened during the programme at the host institution. Westwood and Baker (1990) for instance point to the benefits of a peer programme where international students were matched with home students. They showed that students participating in the peer programme had higher overall achievement rates and lower drop-out rates. The authors hypothesized that these students were able to gain more critical information about how to function in the new society and the unwritten codes of the local culture.

Equal treatment and inclusion

Another aspect of the social dimension is the right of international students to be treated equally to domestic students and have access to all facilities and opportunities that domestic students have. Sometimes equal treatment is obstructed by national regulations. Most obvious in this respect are the differences in tuition fees between domestic and foreign students, or in case of Europe between students from within and outside the European Economic Area. The justification for differential fees from a national perspective (or in case of the United States, from a state perspective) is that domestic students (or their parents) pay indirectly through taxes and that the public will benefit indirectly from a highly educated population. This argument is less valid for the distinction between EEA and non-EEA students. From a legal perspective, differentiation – or in terms of European Law - *discrimination* between domestic and foreign students from EEA countries is not allowed. From a social perspective one could criticize the fact that some countries charge differential fees for “different foreigners”. The same can be said for student support. While under certain conditions EU students can receive financial student support in other EU countries, this is not possible for other foreign students.

Other financial disadvantages for international students are a result of not having access to certain types of support. For instance, students are often excluded from discounts on public transport or from certain types of healthcare facilities. In addition, they normally

do not have equal access to the labor market because of their study visa regulations (Nuffic, 2008).

Other obstacles to participate fully are not of a financial nature, but result from language differences, especially in such countries where the language of instruction might be different from the national language (which is the case for many English-taught programmes in non-English speaking countries). Do international students have access to all the information and facilities that domestic students have? Can they participate in university governance? In many universities, they might formally have the same rights, but because of language obstacles they are de facto excluded. If policy documents and meeting notes are not in English, if meetings of the university council (or other participatory bodies) are conducted in the home language, many international students will be excluded from university governance. In countries like the Netherlands – with the highest relative number of English-taught programmes in Europe – this has already caused problems.

Access to international higher education

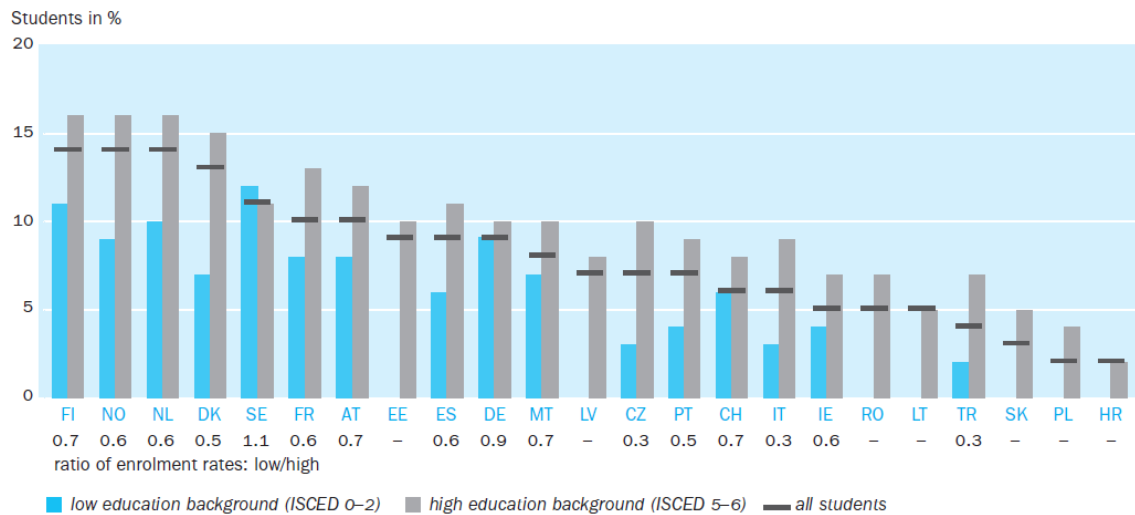
Many see higher education as something that should be accessible to everyone intellectually capable. Access should be meritocratic, not dependent on financial means or on origin. Clearly, the level of access to higher education differs between countries and is dependent on many variables, not just financial ones like tuition fees or financial support. Our interest here is not so much on access to higher education in general, but in access to an international higher education experience. To what extent is international higher education and internationalised higher education accessible to all social groups? What do we know about the socio-economic backgrounds of mobile students in Europe and globally?

Access to short term mobility

Orr et al. (2011) observe that foreign enrolment in Europe is in many cases socially selective. This is also the case in those countries where access to higher education in general is rather equitable (e. g. Finland, Switzerland, Ireland and The Netherlands). They observe that students from low social backgrounds:

- are underrepresented in the population of students who have been enrolled abroad.
- are less frequently planning to enroll abroad than their peers from higher social backgrounds.
- are more frequently discouraged to go abroad by obstacles such as financial insecurities and (perceived) language difficulties.

Figure 1: students enrolled in Erasmus by social background (Orr et al., 2011: 174)



These numbers refer to students already enrolled in higher education in their home country and going abroad for a study period, not a full degree. In a study by Wiers-Jenssen (2011), social selectivity is confirmed for Norwegian students. Students with highly educated parents are more likely to go abroad for a degree or exchange programme than students with parents that have not had higher education. Especially those students that have lived abroad or that have parents who lived abroad, more often have an international education experience. This finding is confirmed for students from Finland, Iceland and Faroe Islands (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen 2010). Both studies also show that it is more likely to have an international career – in terms of location, travel or use of foreign language – for students who have been internationally mobile in their study career. The finding that an international higher education experience increases the probability of employment abroad was also one of the conclusions of a 2008 study by Parey and Waldinger. They find that studying abroad increases the probability of working abroad by about 15 to 20%, suggesting that studying abroad is an important driver of later migration.

Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2006) also found that highly educated parents are overrepresented with Erasmus students. This overrepresentation was higher for Central and Eastern European students than for Western European students. While 57% of the Western European students had one or two parents with a higher education degree, this was the case for 69% of the CEE students. In their survey, however, there is no overrepresentation of higher than average salaries for the case of Erasmus students. While almost 40% of the non-Erasmus students had parents with a higher than average salary, for Erasmus students the share was only 30%.

Based on a survey of over 150,00 students from 2004/2005, Souto Otero finds that access to the Erasmus programme has widened, even though socio-economic obstacles still exist (Souto Otero, 2008). Erasmus students are more likely to come from households with parents in high-level occupations than the incidence of these occupations in the general population would predict. Erasmus students thus come largely from privileged socio-

economic backgrounds. Around 60% had one or two parents working as executives, professionals or technicians. For the whole student population, this was 40%. In the 1997/1998 survey of Erasmus students this share was higher (68%). In 2004/2005, around 58% of the Erasmus students had at least one parent who had experienced higher education, whereas this was slightly higher (60%) in the 1997/1998 survey. Reporting on parental income, the students indicated that 37% of them had higher or considerably higher than average family income. In the 1997/1998 survey this was 47%.

The Commission proposal for the new Erasmus for All programme acknowledges that access to international higher education should be widened. It looks for wider access predominantly by providing more study abroad opportunities to more students. Whether the increased budget for additional Erasmus scholarships will be approved by the member states, however, remains to be seen. At a time where many universities are facing budget cuts by their national governments, this is all but a sure thing. The Commission also tries to provide wider access by setting up a loan scheme for Master-level degree study abroad. This measure can be seen primarily as a reaction to the unwillingness of most of the member states to make student financial support portable for their students. Through the loan scheme, the opportunity for students to pursue a Master degree abroad will become more accessible for European students.

We conclude that – at least for Erasmus students – the socio-economic background still matters, but that its effect is decreasing. Research on US study abroad students also indicates that participation in study abroad programmes is linked to race, ethnicity, and socio-economic background (Dessoff, 2006, Mazon, 2009). With increasing diversification in US higher education and increasing financial pressures on students this is likely to be sustained. It is, however, not just a financial issue. El-Khawas (2003), for instance, argues that many low-income students do not receive the same information from their parents that other students do and that these students miss out on the critical social and cultural capital that helps engender a greater awareness of international education opportunities.

The 2005 report of the Lincoln Commission acknowledged this and recommended that the diversity of study abroad students should be one of the hallmarks of the Lincoln Study Abroad Programme. The commission considered it essential for the success of study abroad that the demographics of undergraduate students abroad be similar to those of the domestic undergraduate student population and to increase the proportion of study abroad students who are enrolled in community colleges, minority-serving institutions and institutions serving large numbers of low-income and first-generation students.

Access to degree mobility

The studies above refer to short term or credit mobility within Europe and the United States. They do not say anything about degree mobility and about student flows outside Europe and the U.S. While the background of credit-mobile European students is fairly well documented, this is not the case for degree seeking students globally. One might expect degree mobility, and especially South-North and East-West degree mobility, to be even more skewed towards the higher socio-economic classes in the sending countries.

After all, only a small share of the more than four million international students are supported by full scholarships and at the same time tuition fees are introduced or raised in many receiving countries and are frequently higher for international students (compared to domestic or – for Europe – EU students; see table 1). The OECD (2011) argues that tuition costs do not necessarily discourage prospective international students as long as the quality of education provided is high and its likely returns make the investment worthwhile. Still, in choosing between similar educational opportunities, cost considerations may play a role, especially for students from developing countries.

Table 1: Structure of tuition fees (OECD, 2011: 324)

Tuition fee structure	Countries (OECD and other G20)
Higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic students	Australia - Austria ¹ - Belgium ^{1,2} - Canada - Czech Republic ^{1,3} - Denmark ^{1,3} - Estonia ¹ - Ireland ³ - Netherlands ¹ - New Zealand ⁴ - Russian Federation - Turkey - United Kingdom ¹ - United States ⁵
Same tuition fees for international and domestic students	France - Germany - Italy - Japan - Korea - Mexico ⁶ - Spain
No tuition fees for either international or domestic students	Finland - Iceland - Norway - Sweden

1. For non-European Union or non-European Economic Area students.

2. In Belgium (Fl.), different tuition allowed only if institutions reach 2% of students from outside the EEA area.

3. No tuition fees for full-time domestic students in public institutions.

4. Except students in advanced research programmes, or students from Australia.

5. At public institutions, international students pay the same fees as domestic out-of-state students. However since most domestic students are enrolled in-state, international students pay higher tuition fees than most domestic students, in practice. At private universities, the fees are the same for national and international students.

6. Some institutions charge higher tuition fees for international students.

A study by Mozzarol and Soutar (2002) shows that financial costs are a very important decision factor in choosing the country or institution to study. They show that for many Taiwanese, Indians, Chinese and Indonesians this is an important pull factor. However, for most students it does not turn out to be the most decisive factors. Social factors, like safety, low racial discrimination and the presence of students from the same country are generally seen as more important.

The fact that costs play a major role in the decision to study abroad makes it an important determinant for access to international higher education. The rise of the upper middle class in countries like China, India, Brazil or Indonesia enables more and more students from those countries to study abroad. Many international students however, are still dependent on financial support. This support can come from the host countries as well as from the home countries.

Host country support for international students has shifted away from political and social to more economic rationales. The major programmes in the second half of the twentieth century focused on building future political relations – often in the context of the Cold War and since the 1990s also in the context of spreading liberal democratic values – and

building capacity in less developed countries. The programmes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century seem to be more economically focused. With the rise of knowledge societies and knowledge economies and the consequent rise of the economic value of knowledge, providing public funds in order to attract international students is legitimized in the context of skill shortages. With the increasing emphasis on the so-called war for talent, it is likely that financial support from the host countries will shift from need-based to merit-based and consequently might narrow access, especially from the less privileged in less developed countries. Obviously another social risk of this skills race is the brain drain from developing to developed countries (this issue will be discussed in the next section).

One of the ways for “Western” institutions to contribute to the widening of access to (international) higher education is by establishing branch campuses abroad or offering other types transnational education (twinning, programme articulation, franchising). Moving institutions and programmes instead of students – in theory – decreases the costs of international higher education. This, however, has proven to be a sensitive issue for national governments and in many cases the access of foreign providers also comes with many national safeguards. Nevertheless the phenomenon of branch campuses has made for instance an Australian or British degree in Malaysia much more accessible than it used to be. However, critics claim that it is not the international education from Nottingham or Monash that is on offer, but local education with the Nottingham and Monash brand names. Countries like Malaysia, Singapore, China, Indonesia, India and the Gulf States have – albeit cautiously – opened up their systems to foreign providers in order to create more capacity and be able to provide more quality education to more students. Although the absorption capacity is relatively small, it is a growing trend.

Increasingly, many emerging countries are also experiencing skills shortages themselves. In their case it is not so much because of a declining or ageing population – on the contrary –, but because they cannot (yet) offer enough quality education themselves. Countries like China (CSC Scholarships), Indonesia (DIKTI scholarships) and Brazil (Science without Borders Programme) are now funding many of their students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills abroad and apply them in the country’s economic and science system upon their return. With the growing understanding that an increase of the knowledge base is key to a country’s success, many emerging economies now send many of their best students overseas.

Global social risks and benefits

The social dimension of internationalisation also needs to refer to the macro-level implications of internationalisation. Societies are not by definition national. To some extent we can even talk of a ‘global society’. The internationalisation activities undertaken at one location on this globe have repercussions in other places. Inherent in the process of globalisation is that action undertaken by a particular national government or particular organisation might have an impact far beyond national borders. Likewise, internationalisation activities undertaken at particular universities on this globe will have an impact on universities, tertiary systems and societies in other countries. Shaping internationalisation is thus not just a matter of adapting your institution to the influx of

students from abroad, it is also a matter of taking into account the wider consequences of these student flows and exchanges. The social dimension in this case is all about the question whether we feel responsible for the higher education of others in our community and whether this concept of community transcends national borders.

In this respect, we can observe a paradoxical situation: while *globalisation* leads to the weakening of national borders and national authority, higher education, science and innovation increasingly become a driver of the *national* competition state. In the transition from the welfare state to the competition state (Cerny 1997), states and organisations are involved simultaneously in a race to the top and a race to the bottom in order to sustain their competitive advantage in the global economy. This requires a perspective in which states are the main actors and act on a basis of rationality. According to this rational perspective, globalisation of the world economy does not diminish the role of the nation state but fundamentally alters its functions. In a Hobbesian world of all against all, the role of the state is dominant, even if – paradoxically – its sovereignty might be waning. But authority is rationally being transferred upwards, downwards and sideways in order to position a nation in the global economy. Globalisation from this perspective is not a matter of external imposition, but a matter of self-interest pursued by sovereign nation states. While in the welfare state, the nation state's function was to insulate certain key elements of economic life from market forces, in the competition state, it has pursued increased marketisation in order to make economic activities on the national territory and contribute to the national wealth more competitive in international and transnational terms (Cerny 1997: 258-259).

Internationalisation in an age of sovereign nation states focused strongly on issues like capacity building and mutual understanding. In an age of globalisation and the rise of the competition state, the focus shifts towards goals of national self interest, like skilled migration and direct and indirect economic benefits of international education. This shift has taken place in countries in Europe and countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Higher tuition fees for foreign (or non EU) students are considered justified because these students have not contributed to the tax base of the country, which funds most of the public higher education systems. These countries increasingly shift from need-based recruitment of international students to merit-based recruitment. Higher education systems are increasingly seen as one of the main drivers of the national knowledge economy. Sustainability and the tackling of so-called global challenges are prominent in the mission statements of universities and in the policy papers of national (and European level) governments. But here also, skeptics might raise the question whether this is due to social - or even idealistic - reasons or whether it is merely another expression of the innovation race between nations in an attempt to strengthen their knowledge economies and improve their competitive position in the global economy.

A situation has emerged where we witness increased internationalisation, in terms of global flows of students, in terms of research and educational cooperation, in terms of institutional strategies, etc., in order to strengthen national higher education and innovation systems. This development is not a problem in itself. It does, however, raise questions about the extent of our social solidarity, for instance with respect to the issues

of brain drain and capacity of developing nations to develop their higher education systems and the risks associated with the commodification of knowledge.

Brain drain

Considering that many OECD countries state that the attraction of highly qualified skilled workers is an important goal of their higher education internationalisation policy, one might expect a worsening of the brain drain from developing to developed countries. In a World Bank study on the international migration of skills, Kuznetsov (2006) concluded that knowledge had become an integral part of the global economy and that therefore the mobility of highly skilled has increased. Developing countries see their best human resources leave in order to find better economic opportunities. A contrasting view is that the emerging highly educated diaspora plays a vital role in the development of local economies. Not just through remittances, but also through trade, foreign direct investment, research cooperation and knowledge transfer. Saxenian (2006) illustrated this process for the Chinese, Indian and Taiwanese diaspora in Silicon Valley, who contributed significantly to the development of areas like Hsinchu, Shanghai, or Bangalore.

In order to avoid the risks of skilled migration, sending countries have different policy options. Gribble (2008) refers to them as “retain, return and engage”. They can try to retain students, but for this they will need to expand access to and the quality of their own higher education systems, and through this minimize the push factors for international student brain drain. Another option is to provide incentives for international graduates to return home after their studies. These can be financial incentives, but the availability of high skilled jobs and a strong academic environment can also be pull factors to make international graduates return. Obviously, the willingness to return is highly dependent on the political and economic stability of a country. The third option Gribble provides is “engage” or the “diaspora option”, referring to the contrasting view above. Sending countries need to establish enduring links with their knowledge workers abroad, keep them informed and engaged about domestic opportunities and stimulate them to invest, trade and exchange knowledge. For domestic universities, academics abroad can function as bridges between the domestic and foreign universities, therewith strengthening research cooperation and knowledge exchanges.

Clearly, the right mix of policy options - and the ability to implement the policies - depends on the situation of the sending countries. The extent of skilled migration varies in different countries and so do the policy responses. Docquier et al., (2007) find that emigration rates decrease with population size and that they are higher in countries with religious fractionalisation and political instability, countries which are located in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa. They also find that the lower the natives' level of schooling, the greater is the brain drain. This explains why poor regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia experience increased outward migration. But does the size of these flows say anything about the social risks and benefits of skilled emigration? Docquier's research (2006) suggests that a limited but positive skilled emigration rate (between 5 and 10 percent) can be good for development. Nevertheless, the current spatial distribution of the brain drain is such that many poor countries are well above this level, such as sub-Saharan African and Central American countries.

Some major sending countries of international students have the possibility to implement a mix of policy options. China for instance is applying such a mix of policies (see also Constant et al., 2011). It is rapidly expanding its own higher education system, it is providing opportunities and scholarships for Chinese students to study abroad, and it attempts to repatriate some of its most talented graduates and academics. Incentives are sometimes financial, sometimes in the form of providing research opportunities. But incentives are not only aimed at repatriation, they are also aimed at engagement and knowledge exchange, for instance through incentives for Chinese academics abroad to provide guest lectures, attend conferences or participate in research cooperation and academic exchanges. Through such arrangements, the Chinese Diaspora creates benefits for both China and for receiving countries (Yang and Welch, 2010). Although countries like China, and also Brazil and India, might be in a position to implement such a mix of policies in order to benefit from brain circulation, for the least developed countries this proves to be more complex. They find themselves in a vicious cycle: they cannot curtail the outflow of skills until they develop economically, politically and academically. At the same time, the loss of these skills itself acts as a major constraint on achieving this growth.

In conclusion, international student flows can bring social risks as well as benefits, for receiving as well as sending countries. However, the social risks for the poorest countries in particular can be severe and it is a responsibility of both sending and receiving countries to reverse a situation of unidirectional brain drain to one of brain circulation.

Commodification of knowledge

Knowledge is becoming one of the major production factors in the global knowledge economy. Because of this, market assumptions are extended to knowledge and ideas, they gain economic value and become a global commodity. What is valued is the creation and dissemination of that type of knowledge which improves the nation's competitiveness (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Knowledge is increasingly treated as an intellectual property and therewith the free circulation of knowledge is hampered. The main fears of the critics of this process are that this commodification will harm the long term development of knowledge and that the pressures for commodification creates a differential impact on different types of universities, both within national boundaries as between countries (Naidoo, 2003).

The concern about the short-lived character of current knowledge policies is very apparent in national and European discussions on research and innovation at a time of economic crisis. For instance, in the new Dutch innovation policies, scientific research is increasingly drawn into the economic realm and means are distributed on the basis of their short- or medium-term economic impact. In the discussion towards Horizon 2020 and towards Erasmus for All, economic and labour-market relevance gain priority. Although this might be seen as a correction to the "ivory tower age" of the university, we need to acknowledge the global risks of such a shift. Although knowledge was seen as the ultimate public good (retaining or increasing its value, also after it is shared) increasingly, knowledge has a price. This has as a consequence that it is made available to some, but

not to others. Since science is a system that depends on the accumulation of bodies of knowledge through the free exchange of ideas, real science might become an elite activity. Access to newly acquired knowledge and the facilities to add to this knowledge base are very much limited to elite universities in developed as well as developing countries (although more limited). The core concern, however, is that this body of knowledge will be less available to society as a whole and will circulate more and more in a closed system of elite – or so-called “world class” universities and R&D intensive business.

The shift to more economically relevant knowledge also has an impact on the type of knowledge – in disciplinary categories – that we are willing to invest in. Simply stated, one might say that in addition to a shift from mode 1 to mode 2 knowledge production, there is also an increased emphasis on those disciplines that are economically interesting, i.e. which focus on certain emerging technologies expected to hold a strong potential for future application. These hot spots of science can currently be found in fields like nanoscience, biotechnology, energy research, information technology and materials science. The application of the scientific findings resulting from this research are believed to form solutions for the current grand global challenges, such as food security, ageing, energy, climate change, etc.

The answers to these global grand challenges are especially looked for in the natural and medical sciences, and in engineering. Some social and behavioral sciences and particularly the humanities are therefore struggling to secure a position in the big national and Europe research programmes. The societal and economic benefits of these disciplines are difficult to make explicit and to quantify.

It is the task of universities as well as national and international governance institutions to see to it that scientific knowledge does not become trapped in global networks of world-class universities and international business, but will trickle down to national and global society as a whole and to see to it that also the social and culturally relevant disciplines retain a major role in the global science system. Only then can the risks of the commodification of knowledge be curtailed and can global society benefit from scientific findings and applications.

Pressing issues in the internationalisation of higher education

Addressing the social dimensions of the internationalisation of higher education – as we did above – exposes several dilemmas. It becomes clear that internationalisation brings along both social risks as well as benefits. The first dilemma is how to balance internationalisation in such a way that benefits become optimal. Secondly, it exposes the dilemma of who is responsible for whom and especially the tension between national and global solidarity. A third issue is the direction in which we are heading, or in other words, setting the objectives of internationalisation in an era of globalization.

The benefits and risks of globalisation

Globalisation connects people, students, universities, higher education systems and accelerates the flows of people and ideas between them. The internationalisation of

higher education is a response to these globalising forces and brings benefits as well as risks for universities. Global science has been one of the first systems to benefit from the increased interconnectedness, which obviously is not strange since science itself has been one of the main “globalisers”. The new opportunities to collaborate and exchange ideas globally have been an important cause of the immense scientific progress in the last century. Although higher education commentators and researchers have been critical of the consequences of globalisation, we must acknowledge that both higher education and scientific research have benefitted enormously from the process. The critical perspective on globalisation's consequences for higher education, however, points particularly to the way this process was shaped in the last two or three decades. In this respect, the term globalisation has been treated almost like a synonym of neo-liberalisation and marketisation. With international education becoming an important new economic activity in some countries and with the increased commodification of scientific knowledge, this neo-liberal approach indeed has been apparent in higher education as well.

Although a neo-liberal approach has indeed been dominant, this is not necessarily the only way for globalisation to develop. Because of this pre-occupation with the neo-liberal nature of some aspects of globalisation, the benefits and positive impacts of globalisation have moved to the background. It is exactly the acceleration of globalisation which has enabled universities to put the international and intercultural dimension high on the agenda. Because of the multicultural nature of states and the international nature of business, science, politics and other sectors, universities became one of the most important actors in preparing the population for such a new situation.

Balancing the risks and benefits of globalisation will be crucial for universities around the world. At this point, this might mean that universities and national governments need to find ways to counteract the negative impact of increased commercialisation of international higher education. The welfare and wellbeing of international students and the accessibility of international learning experiences need to be protected against short-term economic interests. Recently, an expert committee of the International Association of Universities produced a statement addressing the values, but also the possible adverse effects of internationalisation, such as the dominance of the English language, the pursuit of so-called world class universities, the pre-occupation with prestige and reputation in order to score well in global rankings and unethical practices in student recruitment because of the emphasis on quantity over quality (IAU, 2012). Dealing with these risks and turning them into benefits for international student is an important challenge for contemporary universities that pursue a sustainable position in global higher education.

Who is responsible?

A second issue is best illustrated by the question: who is responsible? Many countries have long lived with the notion that nation states are responsible for the education of their citizens. Our understanding of higher education as a public good also links the responsibility of higher education to the public sphere and therewith to the nation state. To fund public goods we are frequently dependent on taxation and taxation is often the exclusive rights of nation states (or sub-national and supranational governments). This is

also the case in higher education. In the early phases of internationalisation, and especially in Europe, exchange of staff and students were the main vehicles for internationalisation. Because of the reciprocal nature of exchanges, this did not present a problem in terms of who was responsible for whose education. With the exchange of persons came the exchange of financial responsibility.

With the partial shift in Europe from credit mobility to degree mobility - in particular after the implementation of the Bologna declaration - and with the growth of degree mobility on a global scale however, the question arises of who is financially responsible for the higher education of incoming students. Within Europe, or rather, within the European Higher Education Area, the last decade has shown an increasing asymmetry in student flows. Through the European principle of non-discrimination and the resulting equal treatment in terms of tuition fees between domestic and EEA international students, systems with lower than cost covering tuition fees also finance the higher education of other European students. In most of the European member states, tuition fees are indeed far lower than the real costs or are non-existent. As long as student flows are fairly reciprocal this does not present problems. In Europe today, this, however, is not the case and therefore countries like Sweden and the Netherlands are showing signs of protest against the equal fees. Obviously this issue should not be neglected but should be discussed in European higher education. It is a fundamental issue questioning whether solidarity is nationally defined or on a European scale. In this discussion however, also the benefits for domestic students, universities, labour markets, and societies as a whole should be taken into account.

The question of national versus European or global solidarity is fundamental since it addresses the very way we view our world system. Do we see it as our responsibility to educate students irrespective of their nationality or are universities predominantly accountable to the tax payers of the country in which they are located? Is higher education a public good, and if so, is it a national public good or a global public good? And if it is a global public good, who is responsible for the provision of this good? The social dimension from a global perspective might therefore be contradictory to the social dimension in a national context. The current financial pressures on universities and national higher education systems make this dilemma even more pressing.

Where are we heading?

Taking these issues into account, the ultimate question is “where are we heading”? How social will international higher education be in ten years or so?

Will international learning experiences be available only to the happy few and does that lead to the emergence of a transnational intellectual network of global academic, business and political leaders? Considering that parents' education and socio-economic background still remain important predictors for foreign study and foreign exchanges, this is not an unlikely scenario. In developing countries and emerging economies, an international higher education experience is often still limited to the elite layers of society. In Europe and the United States, exchanges and study abroad are becoming more accessible for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but they are still

underrepresented. In order to keep this network of global leaders accessible to all capable students, scholarships or other means of financial support need to be available to those that could otherwise not access international higher education. And universities need to put more effort in providing the right conditions for them to integrate and adjust socially and academically.

Rather than – or at least, additional to – sustaining such a transnational elite network, universities and governments should make the international dimension of the tertiary learning experience available to many. Internationalisation is not just about creating elite networks but it is most of all about global intercultural interaction for all. For universities, this means that internationalisation penetrates all layers and all structures of the university and that an internationally and inter-culturally diverse student population is exploited fully in academic life. In international education circles this is referred to as comprehensive, mainstream, or embedded internationalisation. In order to make an international learning experience available to many, provide a conducive academic and social environment for students – international as well as domestic – and implement internationalisation measures in a globally sustainable way, this type of internationalisation will be a necessity. However in a time where the claims on the university seem to be expanding continuously, and budgets are not growing on an equal basis, this creates an enormous challenge for most universities. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that needs to be met by those institutions that really want to incorporate a social, international dimension in their mission.

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