



Internationalization of universities of the Republic of Moldova in the context of globalization

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Abstract

Higher education in the Republic of Moldova faces many challenges: the reduction of the student body, low levels of financing, as well as the requirement of alignment to the European standards of higher education. The internationalization of the education process can lead to the settlement of these issues and it is also an important tool in academic development, fulfilling the needs of the medium and allowing the adjustment to the existing quality standards on an institutional and national level. This paper aims at analyzing the current stage reached by institutions in the internationalization process, describing the actualities and outlining the prospects

1. Introduction

Modern society is facing an unprecedented pace of development of new technologies, on the one hand, and a deepening process of globalization of the world economy, on the other. As a result, significant changes are occurring in all areas of everyday life: behavior, education, family, production, etc.

To exist in such a world, a high degree of adaptation and courage is required from all participants (economic agents, individuals, etc.).

Today, university education is undergoing a reform process, adapting to the modern requirements of the society. The internationalization of universities is one of the main directions of reforming European higher education, which began with the implementation of the Bologna process.

In this paper, we will focus on some aspects related to the adaptation of universities to modern requirements, and first of all on the process of internationalization of higher education (IHE).

Recently, the topic of international activities of universities from all countries and, in particular, from the Republic of Moldova, remains one of the most important for the professional community. This is due to the fact that the process of globalization and internationalization in recent decades have determined the vectors of development of modern higher education, forcing them to adapt to new conditions and making changes to the value system of the university community. Under the influence of globalization, universities are becoming international economic factors that play an important role in political and economic life.

Nowadays the internationalization of universities takes place in a globalized environment under the influence of profound changes in all aspects of everyday life, including education. In this connection, a natural question arises: is the internationalization of higher education today a new process in response to globalization? In addition, in our opinion, every time we talk about the internationalization of higher education, it is necessary to introduce conceptual clarifications, since there are different approaches to this term, because in certain periods the concept of IHE was developed with different contents. For example, initially in European universities internationalization meant only academic mobility, namely, training and internships in foreign countries, the exchange of ideas and knowledge. Later other interpretations appeared. We do not intend to provide a detailed analysis on this topic, but we restrict ourselves to the following specifications.

A simple analysis allows us to find out the existence in the specialized literature after the Second World War of a multitude of approaches to the concept of IHE, which is interpreted and applied in different ways. Its interpretations varied depending on “the justification and reasons of internationalization, on the included set of activities, and on many political and economic circumstances in which this process is included.”¹⁵ The situation has changed since the 1990s, when internationalization was seen as a process of institutional strategic transformation. As a result, a number of new definitions of the mentioned concept have appeared. Today, the most widely accepted definition of the internationalization of higher education is the one proposed by Jane Knight in 1994:¹⁶

“The internationalization of higher education is a process of integrating the international / intercultural dimension into the functions of education, research and institution services.”

¹⁵Callan H. „La mise en pratique de la vision internationale : dix ans de progrès”. In *Enseignement supérieur en Europe*, Vol. XXV, nr. 1, 2000, p. 11.

¹⁶Knight J. *Internationalisation: Elements and Checkpoints*, Canadian Bureau for International Education, Ottawa, 1994.

We have to mention that this definition includes the following two main elements:

- internationalization is a process;
- internationalization includes both education / research and cultural elements.

Subsequently, the proposed definition was adopted by other authors, who, along with the above author, made several changes.

Jane Knigh, citing various approaches to the internationalization of higher education, identifies the following four main approaches:

- An “activity-based” approach: mobility of students, of teaching staff, international student enrollment, etc.
- An approach based on “competencies” or on results and goals: “added value” as a result of the internationalization of the professional and personal development of people.
- “Cultural” approach: creating international culture in university campuses.
- “Process” or strategic approach: it comprises elements of different approaches to establish the ability of institutions to develop an international strategy.

To all four approaches, it would be preferable, in our opinion, to add the fifth one - “Internationalization in response to globalization”. Many authors, such as P.G. Altbach, L. Reisberg, L.E. Rumbley, S. Kane etc., define the internationalization of higher education as many policies and programs developed by governments and universities to cope with the globalization and massiveness of higher education.

A deeper analysis of many definitions related to internationalization of higher education, including the one proposed by Jane Knigh, highlights some of the shortcomings because of which it would be more fair to define the university internationalization not as a process, but as a rather complex phenomenon.

Another limitation would be the fact that internationalization is the reaction of universities to globalization, moving them from an active situation to a reactive one. In this case, it is useful to remember that, taking into account the fact that universities are institutions that create high knowledge and knowledge has no boundaries, they have always been open. In other words, the international dimension has been present since the founding of universities. And Professor Mario Laforest, previously mentioned, calls it a *serious mistake* to interpret internationalization as a new process in response to the phenomenon of globalization.

All these negative aspects have influenced the successful course of the internationalization of higher education. As a result, Jane Knight, the author of the most comprehensive definition of university internationalization, after nearly twenty years in 2011 published an article in Boston's International Higher

Education magazine that identifies the following five myths regarding the internationalization¹⁷:

- *“Foreign students as agents of internationalization”*: according to which a significant number of foreign students is an indicator of the degree of external openness. The author refutes this hypothesis based on specific data.
- *“International reputation as an indicator of quality”*: According to the widespread belief, the international reputation of a campus depends on the number of foreign students. The author shows that in reality the reputation depends on the quality of education.
- *“International institutional agreements”*: the author casts doubt on the widespread illusion that the prestige of an institution depends on a large number of inter-university cooperation agreements. In fact, it's more effective for a university to focus only on a few more efficient agreements.
- *“International accreditation”*: many people believe that obtaining international accreditation (especially in the USA) is evidence of the high degree of internationalization of the institution. The author shows that there is no connection between this type of accreditation and the international activities of the university in terms of education, apprenticeship, research, or community services. This is not the subject of accreditation in question.
- *“Global branding”*: some confuse the strategy of the best international ranking (marketing campaign) with the internationalization plan, which mainly concerns the academic aspect. In fact, there is a confusion between one of the goals of internationalization and the potential effect of achieving this goal, which may offer the university great international fame.

The five myths mentioned above can also be based on quantitative data (the number of foreign students, the number of cooperation agreements, etc.), a subject to the accounting approach of university life. It can be stated that over the past twenty years, the quantitative analysis has become the main indicator of the work of the university, replacing the qualitative vision of education and scientific research.

World practice shows that the predominant use of accounting management often leads to the loss of the main reason for the existence of universities, namely, the quality in preparing thoughtful and responsible citizens and the development of knowledge in the service of humanity. For these reasons, some authors, such as Hans de Wit and Uwe Brandenburg, question the end of internationalization by publishing an article in 2012 entitled: *“Put Internationalization Back on the Right Path”*

¹⁷Knight J. Five Myths about Internationalization. International Higher Education, Nr 62: Winter 2011, Boston College Center for Higher Education, p. 14.

(in French “Remettre l'internationalisation sur la bonne voie”). And the International Association of Francophonie (AIF) publishes in February-March 2012 a report entitled “Repenser l'internationalisation” - “Rethink internationalization.”

It would be good not to fall prey to these extreme approaches, but at the same time we should bear in mind that the concept of “internationalization of higher education” is very variable and has a too broad goal to limit it to a variety of activities or specific programs; or through a unique model of strategic institutional changes. As noted by Hans de Wit and Uwe Brandenburg, the idea of internationalization must leave the departments of international relations at universities in order to “become an integral part of curriculum development, quality assurance and teacher training.”¹⁸ International actions should be evaluated not only on the basis of quantifiable indicators, but also in the light of the *added value* that they introduce in the education offered by the institution.

Thus, the internationalization of universities is a fairly broad topic, which includes several different strategies and activities. This concept is used to refer to one *external process* that limits the university and which obliges it to transform, and at the same time refers to the *internal process* that universities are experiencing in order to meet new requirements in a changing international context.

The following six main forms of internationalization of universities can be distinguished¹⁹:

- *Student mobility*: the most famous form of IHE which is spread since the creation of universities and which involves the departure of a certain number of students to study abroad.

According to UNESCO, the level of international student mobility has increased over the past 25 years by 300%. According to experts, if in 2010 the number of students studying abroad was 2.8 million, then by 2025 it will increase to 4.9 million. The reason for the increase in the number of students studying abroad at the present stage of the development of higher education is mostly the market processes, and not the state policy or the issues of assistance. The international market for educational services is rapidly turning into a developing sector of the economy, the central elements of which are the international marketing of educational institutions and a targeted recruitment of foreign students.

¹⁸ Brandenburg U., De Wit H. Remettre l'internationalisation sur la bonne voie. AIU, Horizons, vol. 17 nr 3, février-mars 2012, Dossier thématique: Repenser l'internationalisation, p. 18.

¹⁹L'internationalisation des universités québécoises. FEUQ, Montréal, 2010, p. 3-7.

- The *mobility of teachers*, which involves the exchange of teachers, the invitation of foreign teachers, etc. This form is very important for the entire learning process, because it is the teachers who provide the quality of education. Although the mobility of the teaching staff is not as well studied as the field of student mobility, it can be considered the second most important form of internationalization of higher education.

- *Transnational education* is the education offered by an educational institution from one country to another, in other words, in this case not the students are moving, but the educational institution itself, which offers its educational programs in another country either by physical presence (branches) or virtually. This includes distance education, double degree programs, online education, etc.

One of the most important impact of internationalization in the field of higher education, we consider to be the development of educational programs of double diplomas, which are designed to increase the competitiveness and quality of the education system. The implementation of these programs is one of the highest stages of inter-university cooperation in the process of internationalization of higher education.

When the double degree program is implemented, in fact, a common culture and climate of universities is created. There is a mutual exchange not only of the best practices of organizing the educational process, but also the familiarization with the cultural values of partners, their understanding and enrichment.

The organization of double degree programs on the basis of distance learning will reduce costs in the learning process, both for universities and for students.

- *The internationalization of education or the internationalization of curricula* that arose after the 1990s as a need for a transition from simple physical mobility to the integration of international and intercultural vision in university training programs. The implementation in practice faces many difficulties related both to the need to review curricula and the content of taught courses, and to the fact that they can affect certain important values in society.

- *The internationalization of research* implies the development of cooperation relations between researchers from different countries: the study of common topics, the organization of international conferences, the joint development of doctoral dissertations, etc.

- *Inter-university alliances*, such as the International Association of Universities (AIU), the University Agency of the French-speaking countries (AUF), etc.

Thus, each university has a rather rich palette of tools for developing its international strategy. To determine the degree to which the proposed goals are achieved, many of these tools need to be quantified. But we consider it appropriate to emphasize once again that "this accounting, carried out at

universities, is practically irrelevant for the main mission of the university."²⁰In other words, the effectiveness of the application of the form of internationalization will be dictated by its contribution (*value added*) to the achievement of the fundamental mission of the university.

2. HEI's Internationalization in Moldova

Considering the status of the IHE process in the Republic of Moldova, we remark that our country joined the Bologna process in 2005, when a number of reforms in the field of higher education were carried out.

In the context of the goals set in the Bologna process, and from the point of view of today's globalization, the internationalization represents a need for the Republic of Moldova, which will support the process of bringing the higher education system in the country not only in line with European standards and standards established in the Bologna Declaration, but also in the context of the desire for European integration of the country. The participation of the Republic of Moldova in the European academic community has enriched the academic and scientific horizons of the system by creating a new educational environment, as well as knowledge and understanding of the processes of modernization of higher education at the national and international levels.

The internationalization has several components, including the internationalization component of university and study programs, the development of joint study programs, the promotion of foreign language courses, mass open online courses (MOOC), educational and research projects with foreign partners, and international academic mobility for students and teachers.

In the Republic of Moldova, the process of internationalization was initially manifested in the development of international academic mobility - the task set in the Bologna Declaration, whose goal is to provide 20% of mobile students in the European space by 2020. Later, thanks to a more active participation of the country in the European Union programs: TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus and later Erasmus +, the flows of academic mobility increased significantly, with the growth of other elements of the internationalization process, such as: internationalization of university programs and training courses, implementation of partnerships in the field of education and research with European universities and others.

²⁰Laforest M. *Contribution pour une redéfinition de l'internationalisation universitaire*. In *Réflexions sur l'internationalisation du monde universitaire*. Paris: Editions des archives contemporaines, 2014,p. 11.

Opportunities for international academic mobility for students and teachers in the country are currently being developed in the context of a number of certain international programs / projects.

For example, *academic mobility based on international agreements in which the RM takes part*. Currently, the Republic of Moldova takes part in about 70 international agreements in the field of education and research, which also contain aspects of academic exchanges. The number of scholarships offered abroad on the basis of these agreements is about 6,000 scholarships per year, taking into account that most of them are provided by the Romanian government - about 5,000 scholarships per year.

At the same time academic mobility programs are proposed by international and regional organizations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the Central European Initiative, and the CEEPUS program. The Republic of Moldova is part of the 2010 CEEPUS program, which offers a 100-month scholarship for incoming students and teachers and at the same time has the opportunity to take advantage of a much larger number of scholarships for outgoing students and teachers. Unfortunately, the universities of the Republic of Moldova do not fully take advantage of this Program.

Currently, the European Union Program - Erasmus +, launched in Moldova in 2014, offers a key opportunity to promote the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova, as well as to increase the number of international mobility. The perception of the importance of the Erasmus + program for a country's higher education system is absolutely impossible without mentioning the size of the EU programs that preceded Erasmus +, such as: TEMPUS, Erasmus-Mundus (short-term mobility), Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree.

In 2014, the year the Erasmus + Program was launched, the Republic of Moldova continued to submit applications for Jean Monnet actions within the framework of the Program. In the period 2010-2018, 17 Jean Monnet projects were implemented in the country, which are very valuable for the improvement of knowledge about the political, economic, social and cultural life of the European Union.

An important aspect of the internationalization process is the admission of foreign students to study in the Republic of Moldova. The prestige of some universities in the country and the low cost of education compared to other European countries determine the positive dynamics of the number of foreign students coming to Moldova. For example, in 2017-2018, 4,500 foreign students studied in our country, compared with 1,500 in 2005 and 2,500 in 2010. The most attractive higher education institution in the country for foreign students is the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Nikolay Testemitanu, where about

80% of the total number of foreign students that study there are mainly students from Israel, India, Turkey, and the USA.

Together with the achievements in IHE in Moldova, also some limitations determined by the internationalization can be noted, such as:

- *The national identity of higher education in Moldova has been destroyed.*
- *Some traditions and cultural identity have been lost.*
- *The brain drain to the West has been promoted.*

Among the barriers to internationalization, a poor knowledge of foreign languages attained by students and teachers can be noted.

3. Internationalization at International Management Institute IMI-NOVA

The International Management Institute IMI-NOVA (hereinafter - IMI-NOVA), which has been operating for almost 25 years, also plays an important role in the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova. The fact itself of the existence of IMI-NOVA is already a vivid example of internationalization since it was created in 1995 as part of a project funded by the French Foreign Ministry. The concept of the institute was developed by a group of professors from various universities in France and Moldova.

One of the priorities of IMI-NOVA is the internationalization of the academic and research activities of the university through the development of international educational programs, strategic partnership programs and academic mobility. That is why IMI-NOVA has been actively cooperating with foreign universities since its foundation.

IMI-NOVA has achieved significant success in IHE, among which are the following:

- Implementation of double diploma programs: since 1999 with the University of Amsterdam (the first time in Moldova), and since 2008 with the University of Nice;
- Organization of joint training for PhD candidates with universities from Grenoble and Nice;
- Organization of international conferences, seminars, participation in Tempus, Erasmus + programs, etc.

Despite the successes achieved, not only Moldovan universities, but also IMI-NOVA face significant difficulties in the way of effective and fruitful participation in the IHE processes. For this reason, it is necessary to make significant additional efforts and costs, which are associated both with numerous tasks to improve the

quality of your educational product, and with the need for continuous marketing analysis of the educational services.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we note that higher education is one of the pillars of the knowledge economy (K-Economy) of the 21st century. As a result, universities are becoming more and more important in our societies and in the world at large. Concerning this issue, the French economist Daniel Cohen writes: “If we recognized that the scientific and technological innovations will be the same in the 21st century as the organization of industrial labor was in the 20th century, it would not be ridiculous to think that “the organization of scientific knowledge” is also needed. In the new century the university will be the same as Ford’s company in the last century: an institution that collects raw materials, knowledge and training, therefore it feeds the rest of the society.”²¹

The responsibility of universities in modern society, undergoing the profound changes under the influence of the globalization process, is increasing significantly. In this context, universities must distance themselves from a purely procedural vision and adopt an internationalization strategy related to the fundamental mission and social role of the university in this globalized world.

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²¹Cohen D. *Trois leçons sur la société post-industrielle*. Paris : Seuil, La République des Idées, 2006, p. 71.

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