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THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE AND THE 'EURO-INTERNATIONALISATION' OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Edited by
Alexander Frame and Barbara Curyło

The European Universities Initiative and the 'Euro-internationalisation' of European Higher Education

This book examines the European Universities Initiative from multiple angles and comparative studies.

It outlines the scope and potential of this initiative, and the different epistemological and methodological approaches which can be adopted to investigate it in the light of previous research on Europeanisation, on the internationalisation of higher education, and on the construction of European identities through everyday practices. With this, it presents the concept of "Euro-internationalisation" to understand the factors which brought the initiative into being. Bringing together contributions from all over Europe, involved in several of the first European University Alliances, the book helps to foster a better understanding of the evolution of Higher Education in Europe.

The book will be of key interest to scholars and students of higher education policy and governance, European Policy, European integration and more broadly to international relations, globalisation and the sociology of education.

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Preface

Under the impulse of the European Commission, the number of alliances has grown through successive funding calls, from 17 in 2019 to 64 in 2024, with over 560 higher education institutions in Europe involved in experimenting with new models of integrated cooperation. Through the Erasmus+ and the Horizon funding programmes, as well as differing levels of support from national governments, the emerging "European University alliances" benefit from unprecedented levels of funding and freedom to develop university-wide cooperation activities outside the established framework of existing Erasmus+ actions.

This volume was born from the editors' and authors' realisation of the potential of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) as an object of study, from various disciplinary perspectives. The editors' role in designing and setting up one of the alliances of the first wave gave them a privileged position from which to appreciate the strategic political importance of the initiative in the light of the ongoing Europeanisation of Higher Education, but also as a unique field in which to observe this process playing out through everyday practices within universities. While preparing a first research article published in the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary European Research* (Frame & Curyło, 2022), they launched a call for papers in 2021, collected and selected contributions, and hosted an authors' workshop in 2022, in order to present the assumptions of their articles and work on the complementarity of the various contributions to the volume. As research interest in the EUI grew, through panels at European Studies conferences in Belfast (UACES, September 2023) and via monthly online meetings of an informal network of scholars interested in the EUI as an object of research, organised by Nadia Manzoni, further chapters were subsequently integrated during the book development process.

The ambition of the collective volume, which, to the best of the editors' knowledge, is the first to be published specifically on the EUI, is to provide some systematic analysis of the context and the way in which the initiative developed, to underline the potential of this object of study for further research and to suggest some further lines of enquiry in light of its current and probable future developments.

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Part I

Euro-internationalisation in higher education

From institutional context to pedagogical impact

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1 The European Universities Initiative as an object of scientific study in the context of "Euro-internationalisation"

Alexander Frame, Barbara Curyło and Romée Jager

Introduction

The internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe and around the globe, broadly covering inter-institutional cooperation, student and staff mobility, transnational research and education initiatives, has long been the focus of policymaking on institutional, national and trans-national levels, with HEIs coming under growing pressure from funders and global university ranking systems to fulfil specific objectives in this area. The process has been researched across various disciplines, producing a body of literature dealing with its various aspects and effects on the institutional level (Wihlborg & Robson, 2018) and also on the individuals involved, for example, on the level of learning outcomes and purported impact on students and university staff, in terms of "intercultural competence" (Sommier et al., 2023).

In the context of European studies, internationalisation efforts in the area of higher education (HE) are believed to have led to the most tangible effects of Europeanisation, notably concerning university students (Trondal, 2002; Corbett & Henkel, 2013). Regional, trans-border, thematic or other international alliances created between HEIs, often presented in terms of common goals, aspirations and opportunities, have long featured in the European HE landscape. However, it will be argued, the emergence of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) constitutes an important new development in this area, explicitly bringing together efforts of internationalisation and of Europeanisation. Setting up European University Alliances (EUAs) with an unprecedented degree of inter-institutional integration is an ambitious step for European HEIs in terms of their strategy, especially in terms of their internationalisation policy, as well as a strong commitment to promote "European values" and a feeling of belonging to a European-level entity. While the aim of this collective volume is to study this process from various disciplinary standpoints, this introductory chapter proposes to capture this double movement with the novel concept of "Euro-internationalisation": when internationalisation is used to serve Europeanisation, through calls launched by European-level funding bodies for higher education, and embraced by HEIs across Europe.

After setting the political and institutional scene for the emergence of the EUI, and after introducing the concept of Euro-internationalisation, the chapter will

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outline the potential of the EUI as an object of scientific study within this context, from a variety of disciplinary, conceptual and methodological perspectives. These include political science (Europeanisation, political developments in the European Higher Education Area, EU public diplomacy, etc.), communication studies (European identity, interpersonal and intercultural communication, etc.), education science and many more. Having established links with some of the existing literature in these areas, the chapter then outlines the various contributions to the collective volume, structured in two parts: the first dealing with Euro-internationalisation in practice and the second developing original perspectives on the EUI as an object of study, with examples taken from different alliances, but also different disciplinary and methodological postures, in order to provide a broad overview of the initiative and of its potential for research.

Setting the political and institutional scene: towards the concept of Euro-internationalisation in higher education

The EUI in the context of HE as a vector of Europeanisation

From the beginning of the process of European integration in the 1950s, education was situated in the realm of competence of Member State governments, a situation reflected in EU policy in this area. The significance of education for advancing European integration has, however, long been recognised and gave rise to many European-level initiatives in the field of education, such as the Erasmus programme or the Bologna process. These are commonly acknowledged as having transformed higher education in Europe (Corbett & Henkel, 2013). The Bologna process was, however, presented first and foremost as a political process, based on intergovernmental dynamics, meaning that decision-making lay with the governments of the member states. This, in turn, translated into a preference for national solutions (*ibid*.) and, moreover, did not involve academic communities in a decisive or comprehensive manner (*ibid*.). However, over the years, there has been increased discussion of HE between member states and EU institutions, leading scholars to note an increasing tendency to perceive HE as part of European integration (Corbett, 2006) or to talk about the "Europeanisation of higher education" (Corbett & Henkel, 2013; Trondal, 2002). This comes from the conclusion – frequently mentioned in the literature – that successes in the field of HE, and the Erasmus programme in particular, contributed substantially to progress in European integration. Indeed, higher education seems to be a realm that is intrinsically receptive to Europeanisation in terms of both reacting to and adopting its incentives as well as itself inspiring certain developments (*cf*. Chapter 2, this volume).

Since the European integration process began in the 1950s, it has become increasingly evident that this process is hybrid in nature. Its hybridity is consistently reflected in the EU's institutional structure, which combines intergovernmental and supranational mechanisms, and in the fact that varying degrees of integration can be observed across different sectors and areas. These aspects of the integration process will be discussed further, both later in this chapter and in the

final chapter of the volume. Studies of higher education in the EU also highlight this hybridity: while HE is still formally positioned within an intergovernmental framework, developments in the field have led scholars to increasingly consider it as part of EU policy.

> In the early years of the history of European integration education policy was firmly based on the idea of closed national systems, founded on the basic principle that the particular character of education systems in the Member States should be fully respected, while coordinated interaction between education, training and employment systems should be improved. While vocational training was identified as an area of Community action in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, education was formally recognised as an area of EU competence with the Treaty of Maastricht. The Treaty of Maastricht granted a complementary/supporting role to the EU – the legal instruments available for EU action in the field were limited to the so-called "incentive measures" and recommendations – in short no harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.
>
> (Gornitzka, 2018, p. 242)

This division of competences was initially challenged by several interrelated factors. When it was set up, the Erasmus programme significantly contributed to international cooperation in the field of education, by facilitating student and staff mobility across national education systems. The rationale and objectives of the programme aligned with the broader political ambitions of completing the Single Market and promoting the concept of European citizenship (*ibid*.). Further significant developments in European higher education were marked by the Bologna Process, which began with the signing of the Paris Declaration in 1999. The primary aim of the Bologna Process was to harmonise diverse national education systems by adopting a framework of easily readable and comparable degrees (based on three degree cycles); implementing a European system of academic credits; enhancing mobility of students and staff; promoting European cooperation in quality assurance; and fostering a European dimension in higher education through curriculum development and inter-institutional cooperation (Brooks & Rensimer, 2023). The Bologna Process was designed as a voluntary European-level process implemented in EU and non-EU European states, aiming to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and has been presented as an example of "soft law in the framing of integration within the EU" (Kanniainen & Pekkola, 2023, p. 4) and "soft governance" (Dakowska, 2019, p. 3). The literature suggests that Bologna reforms indeed led to "a significant degree of homogenisation – of structures, principles and broader understandings of the purpose of higher education – across the continent, through the substantive reforms themselves, and also the values that underpin them" (Brooks & Rensimer, 2023, p. 2). This was seen to result in the creation of an "international higher education regime" (Zahavi & Friedman, 2018, p. 1) (*cf.* Chapter 5, this volume). At the same time, the intergovernmental nature of this regime resulted in member states implementing it in line with national principles,

which in turn resulted in a "gap between formal adaptations and local practices" (Dakowska, 2019, p. 1).

A breakthrough moment for higher education was the so-called Lisbon Strategy in 2000 (*cf.* Chapters 5 and 7, this volume)

> The Lisbon process is a landmark for European education policy: when EU heads of state publicly stated the EU's ambition to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, this positioned education in the interface with the EU's economic and social policy. Education received attention in Lisbon as part of a much larger agenda and political project. The Lisbon strategy expressed greater coordination expectations, not only between territorial levels but also across sectors, *i.e*. an opportunity for horizontal integration of policy sectors that had operated independently of each other. The Lisbon strategy defined the whole knowledge and skills area as a necessary component of an economic and social reform strategy.
>
> (Gornitzka, 2018, p. 243)

As the EU framework began to crystallize, the Bologna Process stimulated concrete educational reforms contributing to harmonisation between national systems, while the Lisbon Process aimed to elaborate a common political vision and inspired further institutionalisation. Dakowska concludes:

> the Lisbon Strategy paved the way for the Commission to become more directly involved in policy fields that used to be a matter of intergovernmental coordination, such as social affairs and education. . . . This allowed the Commission to authoritatively participate in the formally intergovernmental Bologna Process . . . and to sustain it by providing expertise and resources.
>
> (2019, p. 2)

In light of this, the EUI can be seen to go even further into the education area, despite this remaining formally part of the "national domain" in the EU. Setting up a "European University" requires an unprecedented level of bottom-up actions, including daily communication, coordination and integration between participating HEIs, which typically go far beyond traditional international cooperation in HE in Europe. As concluded by Maassen et al. (2022): "this development represents an attempt to find an organizational solution to the European policy ambitions in higher education, research and innovation" (p. 1). The initiative does not foresee the direct influence of national Erasmus+ agencies or other national actors, but invites local stakeholders in each university of the alliance to work together in order to forge their own "European University." These factors contribute to the novelty of the initiative, both in the realm of the Higher Education Area in Europe and in terms of giving a new impulse to processes of Europeanisation in general.

As observed by Andrew Gunn (2020, p. 14): "The idea of a supranational university is as old as the European political project" *(cf.* Chapter 5,

this volume). However, the idea behind the EUI specifically gained political momentum thanks to the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, who, in his 2017 Sorbonne speech entitled "New Initiative for Europe," positioned the need for joint European Universities alongside core strategic EU challenges like tax convergence, a joint EU budget or a common defence policy. In Macron's understanding, European universities as "a network of universities across Europe with programmes that have all their students study abroad and take classes in at least two languages . . . with real European semesters and real European diplomas" (Macron, 2017) would embody and strengthen what he saw as the key values of culture and education which, he suggested, bind the European Union together.

Through various discussions and decision-making processes surrounding the design of the initiative (*cf.* Chapter 5, this volume), the European Commission defined a set of "ambitious" criteria for establishing such "European Universities." These went beyond traditional forms of cooperation in academia to envision emerging forms of "supranational European Universities." In the terms of the first funding call from the European Commission, European Universities were to consist of "bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities" (European Commission, 2019, p. 125). The priority was to distinguish "European Universities" from other forms of cooperation by encouraging them to "test different innovative and structural models" and "design relevant and efficient common management structures" by "setting up joint boards, developing common pool of physical and virtual intellectual and administrative resources, distributing shared resources, common provision of infrastructure, data and services" (*ibid.*, p. 127). Following this logic, "European Universities" were to function on supranational premises while following the objectives of the call which stressed the need

> to reach a substantial leap in quality, performance, attractiveness and international competitiveness of European HEIs and contribute to the European knowledge economy, employment, culture, civic engagement and welfare by making best use of innovative pedagogies and striving to make the 'knowledge triangle' a reality.
>
> (*ibid.*, p. 127)

In slightly more concrete terms, the European Universities alliances were expected to

> offer student-centred curricula jointly delivered across an 'inter-university' campus at all study levels, taking a 'challenge-based approach' in which students, academics and external partners cooperate in cross-disciplinary teams to tackle the main issues facing Europe today, according to the Commission's DG for Education and Culture.
>
> (Maassen et al., 2022, p. 3)

In particular, European University alliances were:

- To share an integrated, long-term joint strategy for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation and society at large, that goes beyond any potential existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
- To establish a European higher education inter-university campus offering curricula where students, doctoral candidates and staff can experience mobility at all study levels;
- To build European knowledge-creating teams ("challenge-based approach") of students and academics, possibly together with researchers, businesses, regional actors and civil society actors – depending on the overall strategy and vision of the alliance – to address together societal and other challenges of their choice in a multi-disciplinary approach;
- To act as models of good practice to further increase the quality, international competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education landscape.

(European Commission, 2019, pp. 125–126)

"European Universities" thus appear to represent a novel form of academic cooperation in the European HE landscape, involving contacts at every possible level between HEIs within an alliance, engaging university students and staff but also associate partners (typically other local institutions to whom the alliance can offer a new dimension to their activities) and external partners in businesses, schools and wider society. Through the activity of its alliances, the EUI is thus to serve a wider objective of Europeanisation, expressed by the European Commission as:

> promoting common European values and a strengthened European identity by bringing together a new generation of Europeans, who are able to cooperate and work within different European and global cultures, in different languages, and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines
>
> (European Commission, 2019, p. 125)

The internationalisation of HE

The increasing support for internationalisation initiatives within HE on a regional level in the EU, as exemplified by the Erasmus+ programme and the EUI, is part of a wider global trend in internationalisation of higher education in the last half-century. Although some argue that universities have always had international dimensions in their research, teaching and service to society (*cf*. de Wit & Merkx, 2022, for an overview of the history of internationalisation in HE), it is only since the early 1980s that internationalisation gained popularity in the field (Knight, 2004). In the foreword to the first edition of the *Handbook of International Higher Education*, Josef Mestenhauser (2012) pointed out that, back in 1961, an extensive literature review revealed only "some 180 pieces of research and publications" which addressed the topic of internationalisation within the realm of education (p. vii). Since then – and particularly from the mid-1980s onward – a rapidly

growing body of research on the internationalisation of higher education has been established, covering various angles (Deardorff et al., 2022). Today, the increasing number of internationalisation strategies in national, regional, international and institutional policies shows that internationalisation is no longer an *ad hoc* part of the HE landscape (de Wit, 2019, 2020b; Knight & de Wit, 2018).

The term "Internationalisation of Higher Education" (IHE) is one which has traditionally been used to discuss the international dimension of any HE activity. However, the term can mean different things on national, regional, institutional and individual levels (Proctor & Rumbley, 2018) and indeed is commonly used to refer to many activities, such as international linkages and partnerships, education provided to other countries through online media, branch campuses or franchise programmes, regional education hubs, the integration of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the curriculum and teaching, the international makeup of the student, teacher and scholar population and predominantly to the international mobility of students, researchers and staff (see Knight, 2021, for an overview of the evaluation of the main terminologies used over the past 50 years). It is notable that the EUI seems to simultaneously target several of these dimensions, thus approaching IHE in quite a broad sense. Overall, the literature broadly suggests that internationalisation is a complex phenomenon, adopting different forms in different contexts, and being employed in a multitude of ways. Thus, not only does IHE have various interpretations (de Wit & Merkx, 2022; Egron-Polak & Marinoni, 2022; Hunter et al., 2022; Knight, 2021; Proctor & Rumbley, 2018; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017) but, in light of this, scholars have proposed various definitions for the term, over the last few decades (e.g. Arum & Van de Water, 1992; de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 1994, 2003; Van der Wende, 1997).

Among these definitions, those proposed by Jane Knight (2003) and Hans de Wit and colleagues (2015) seem, however, to prevail in the field.[1] Building on an earlier definition she had proposed, Knight defines IHE as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Despite the popularity of this operational definition within the field (e.g. Brewer & Leask, 2022; de Wit, 2020a; Hunter et al., 2022; Woldegiyorgis et al., 2022), a study conducted by de Wit et al. (2015) for the European Parliament on the state of internationalisation in HE proposed a second definition which has since also become widespread:

> the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.
>
> (p. 29)

De Wit et al. (2015) argued that updating the definition was needed for several reasons. One of these was that internationalisation "has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility" (p. 29). Furthermore, the later definition "re-emphasises that internationalisation is not a goal in itself,

but a means to enhance quality, and that it should not focus solely on economic rationales" (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Indeed, the relatively recent shift towards more inclusive internationalisation strategies, aiming to extend potential benefits of internationalisation to the wider population, is reflected in the common use of qualifying adjectives to further specify the term. Thus scholars focus on "intelligent internationalisation" (e.g. Rumbley, 2015), "comprehensive internationalisation" (e.g. Hudzik, 2011, 2015), "internationalisation of higher education for society" (e.g. Brandenburg et al*.,* 2020), "internationalisation at home" (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Nilsson, 2003) and "internationalisation of the curriculum" (e.g. Leask, 2015). This shift seems to mirror underlying evolutions in the field over the past three decades, such as the predominant practice of associating IHE with the mobility of students, scholars and programmes (see González & Whalen, 2022; Papatsiba, 2006; Proctor, 2016; Teichler, 2017). Other progressive evolutions identified in the literature include the paradigm shift from cooperative internationalisation rationales to competitive motives (see de Wit & Deca, 2020; Luijten-Lub et al., 2005; Van Der Wende, 2001) and the manifestation of reputation and branding exhibited by national and global ranking systems (*cf*. de Wit, 2019; Hauptman Komotar, 2019; Locke, 2014; Teichler, 2023; Westerheijden, 2015).

Both Knight and de Wit acknowledge that "there is no simple, unique or all-encompassing definition of internationalisation of the university" (Knight & de Wit, 1995, as cited in Knight & de Wit, 2018, p. xix). However, regardless of the differing discourse, prominent researchers largely agree that internationalisation should be understood as a process and not as a goal in itself (e.g. Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; de Wit et al., 2015; de Wit & Deca, 2020; Deardorff et al., 2022; Hunter et al., 2022; Knight, 2003, 2004; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017).

In addition, the rationales for internationalising HE may change, overlap and differ over time in response to rapid contextual changes and may be given different weights by different stakeholders. Jones and Killick (2007) suggest that the motivations behind (curriculum) internationalisation can be pragmatic, values-based, or a combination of the two. Pragmatically based rationales centre on preparing graduates for effective performance, emphasising the skills and knowledge necessary to live and work in a globalised world while enhancing international competitiveness and influence. In contrast, values-based rationales prioritise "notions of global citizenship, responsibility, ethics and justice, and are likely to include references to global issues such as poverty reduction, human rights and sustainable futures" (p. 111). An alternative typology, proposed by Knight (2004), qualifies rationales corresponding to different sectors of life: social/cultural, political, economic and academic, again underlining their multiple, potentially overlapping nature. Arguably, the EUI could usefully be analysed in light of all of these different rationales, spanning identity-building, national and European-level HE policy, promoting innovation and the knowledge society and from the standpoint of cooperation in research and education. These various rationales for IHE are mirrored by diverse approaches scholars use to study internationalisation, including notably *process*, *activity*, *competency*[2] and *organisational* approaches (Knight, 1994).

Despite this wealth of definitions, scholars generally clarify how they are using the concept of internationalisation. However, the way various HEIs decide to internationalise and their motives for doing so also varies significantly, making IHE a nebulous concept treated differently by different actors. This in turn raises the question whether internationalisation is, in fact, an ideologically driven policy or rather a social fact which happens for a variety of institutionally driven reasons, which may or may not be ideological.

Europeanisation as a complex process shaping the emergence of the EUI

Europeanisation is also a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, involving multiple actors, rationales and definitions. As mentioned previously, the impetus behind the EUI is generally considered to have been given by President Macron, but the idea was then reworked and fleshed out by the European Commission. This can appear typical of the European integration process, which has historically been shaped by both intergovernmental and supranational actors, a classic distinction in the literature. This has led some authors to question whether the EU should be seen as "an international regime, an international organization, an agency acting at the will of the member states, or as a federation or supranational institution gradually transforming into a European state" (Czaputowicz, 2008, pp. 354–355). As the same author continues:

> Perhaps the EU is all these things at once; its different forms appear in different activities, in different institutions and at different times. There is a full spectrum of forms of action in the European Union, from pure intergovernmental policy, a system of balance of power and a model of international organization, e.g. in defence matters, to a model of supranationalism close to the form of a state, e.g. in the field of the common market.
>
> (Czaputowicz, 2008, pp. 354–355)

This complexity of European integration is reflected in a number of theoretical approaches. Intergovernmental approaches point to member states as the main architects of integration processes and decision-making mechanisms (Chari & Kritzinger, 2006, p. 37). This assumption is consistently questioned by supporters of the supranational, as well as functionalist and institutional approaches, who postulate the need to take into account EU institutions when constructing the topography of influence of various actors in the EU (Egeberg, 2004). In this context, many researchers refer to the concept of multi-level governance, which assumes that the European Union is a system consisting of permanent negotiations between various actors at many levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). Ruszkowski (2013) points to the constitutive features of multi-level governance in the EU, which confirm both its specificity and complexity and are:

> cooperative decision-making, lack of a strict decision-making center (government), dispersion of the process decision-making, not having the apparatus

> of force, allowing state and non-state actors to participate in the decision-making process, determining the cooperation of state and non-state actors, having features that are more regulatory and redistributive than stabilizing, including formal and informal mechanisms.
>
> (p. 10)

As a result, the European Union appears as a "hybrid political system" which adapts to external and internal challenges (Riedel, 2008, p. 78).

Because the EUI developed in the context of this complex, multi-level system, this chapter proposes to analyse it not as a simple artefact of European integration, but rather in light of the ongoing process of Europeanisation, which focuses on the mechanisms of integration as seen through the multiple and complex networks of interactions between the European Union and the Member States. Seen in this way, Europeanisation

> consists of processes of a) construction b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles and 'ways of doing things'. It also consists of shared beliefs and norms that are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.
>
> (Radaelli, 2006, p. 59)

Europeanisation is not presented here as another theory of European integration with its own appropriate conceptual apparatus, but rather as an "orchestration" based on existing concepts and theories, drawn from various scientific disciplines (Radaelli, 2006). Unlike approaches that treat Europeanisation as the end product of integration mechanisms, here it is assumed that it is a process and its research agenda "demands explanation of what goes on inside the process, not a simple black-box design in which one correlates the input, 'EU independent variables' to the output, 'domestic impact'" (Radaelli, 2006, p. 61). Finally, Europeanisation is not limited only to the analysis of processes flowing from the EU level to the Member States (top down) but also to those from the Member States to the EU (bottom up) (Börzel, 2005). This follows from Radaelli's (2006) conclusion that "the EU may provide the context, the cognitive and normative 'frame', the terms of reference, or opportunities for the socialization of domestic actors, who then produce 'exchanges' (of ideas, power, policies, and so on)" (p. 62). Europeanisation thus constitutes "an approach that enables us to orchestrate existing concepts and to contribute to cumulative social science research, it is a process, rather than end-state, it is an explanandum, rather than an explanans" (Radaelli, 2006, p. 63).

A number of conceptualisations of Europeanisation have been proposed in the literature, based on specific criteria. Three of them will be discussed here. Firstly, in the context of governance, Europeanisation is seen to have led to the recognition of multiple levels of governance and partnerships between public and private actors, including regional ones (Radaelli, 2006, p. 63). Secondly, Europeanisation can be seen as a form of institutionalisation and understood as "a process through which formal rules and informal ways of doing things are first discovered and experienced

in the EU context and then institutionalized by means of the behavior of domestic actors" (*ibid*.). As a result of these rules and ways of behaving, socialisation and social learning occurs, which in turn contributes to the institutionalisation of norms and development of new identities (*ibid.*). In the third understanding, Europeanisation is defined as discourse-based, with the assumption that policymakers and other stakeholders construct Europe through discourse in different forms, via rhetoric or policy narratives. Discourse is believed to be "a transformative power in EU policy and politics" which may contribute to changing the preferences and behaviour styles of various stakeholders. Additionally, as stressed by Radaelli (2006),

> discourse is not just language. It is also an interactive process. Indeed, it is a set of ideas and an interactive process. The ideational dimension itself divides into two activities: a cognitive activity that enables actors to make sense of reality (drawing on knowledge, policy analysis, information about problems, actors and resources) and a more normative activity of assessing and judging reality, which refers to the world of norms, values and principles. The interactive dimension of discourse covers the relations between policymakers at the stage of policy formulation (how they convey meanings, in which institutional forums, through which acceptable norms of behaviour and expression) and how policies are communicated to the public.
>
> (p. 65)

Once again, if we take European integration as a multi-level system and Europeanisation as an "orchestration" of different concepts and approaches, these three conceptualisations appear complementary and suggest that "effects" of Europeanisation can occur under the influence of many factors and in different circumstances (*cf.* Chapter 2, this volume).

Furthermore, since domestic actors' responses to EU policy initiatives are often a key part of this process, it is important to consider different modes of governance. The literature identifies three major modes: "bargaining," "hierarchy" and "facilitated coordination" (*cf.* Radaelli, 2006, p. 69). The first mode is common in EU politics and is also referred to as "negotiated order" (*cf.* Curyło, 2012; Jönsson et al., 2000). It assumes that negotiations between different actors take place at every level of EU decision-making. The second refers to the hierarchical way in which EU law is implemented in the common market. The third mode, facilitated coordination, "operates like a forum for discussion and a platform for policy transfer" (Radaelli, 2006, p. 70). Facilitated coordination gained importance in the context of the Lisbon agenda and its key ambition to make the EU "the most competitive knowledge-based society in the world" (Radaelli, 2006, p. 70). In this mode, the EU provides opportunities for cooperation between member states and their domestic stakeholders, rather than producing European legislation. It often does this by leveraging financial incentives in the form of funded projects, for example, which aim at contributing to learning, socialisation and exchanging best practices as a way of promoting bottom-up Europeanisation. This mode of governance is clearly being used in the context of the EUI.

Although Higher Education remains a "national domain" (*supra*), Radaelli (2006) points out that "the presence of fully-fledged European policies in a certain

domain is not a pre-condition for Europeanization" (p. 67). Indeed, the EUI seems to illustrate perfectly the mechanisms of Europeanisation, as argued by Marina Ciño Pagliarello (2022):

> [D]ifferently from the limitations from Bologna Process with respect to achieving coordination in terms of governance, low mobility, and shared values, the EUI can play a significant role in promoting renewed market integration in European higher education. On the one hand, the EUI incorporates the aims of the EHEA and the ERA into a common European dimension by linking education, research and innovation within a common transnational approach. On the other hand, the EUI seems to be characterised by ideational coherence, political commitment, and a hybrid type of governance that combines a EU top-down dimension, under the policy coordination of the Commission, and a bottom-up approach in which alliances are formed by multiple sets of actors, including public and private institutions, civil society organisations, and municipalities.
>
> (p. 150)

In this way, the EUI can clearly be seen as a manifestation of Europeanisation in practice, involving processes which are both top-down (EU-driven policies and conditions) and bottom-up (actor-led solutions and practices). With reference to Europeanisation as institutionalisation, it potentially contributes to institutional changes in HEIs through socialisation and learning, while also shaping discourse on HE and on European identity. The initiative also seems to mobilise all three modes of governance. If facilitated coordination appears to be a main driver, decision-making around the initiative also involves significant negotiation or bargaining – between EC and member states, between partner universities in the alliances, or between individuals involved in alliance activities – while relying on hierarchy for some aspects, for example in terms of nationally applied regulations.

The concept of Euro-internationalisation in the context of the EUI

Although both internationalisation and Europeanisation can clearly be seen as useful (and already complex and multifaceted) concepts with which to analyse the EUI, we would like to argue that, in this case, the sum is somehow greater than the parts and that it can be intellectually stimulating to try to think the two concepts together. The term "Euro-internationalisation," which we are proposing here, is intended to reflect an apparent convergence between a particular vision of internationalisation as a part of HEI strategy, encouraged by university management, and of Europeanisation relying notably on facilitated coordination and opportunity structures (*cf*. Chapter 2, this volume) put in place by the European Commission. Thus, HEIs forming a consortium of European Universities and applying for EUI funding within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, or, once such funding has been obtained, individual staff members setting up or participating in actions within the framework of their alliance, can be seen as means to implement

institutional internationalisation goals. A combination of the funding available (facilitated coordination) and the formal internationalisation goals (institutional prescription) may serve to motivate, to different degrees, the actions of both the universities and the individual staff members. Coincidentally, in a sort of "piggy-backing" manoeuvre, these actions also contribute to reinforcing the opportunity structures or the manifestations of Europeanisation in the institutions themselves. The European Commission can thus be seen to harness the institutional drive towards internationalisation, for whatever reasons it may occur, in order to further its own objectives and actions in favour of Europeanisation. Euro-centric internationalisation becomes a vector for European identities and values, while ostensibly allowing universities to meet their (self- or other-) prescribed objectives in terms of internationalisation.

This state of affairs, which is the fragile product of a complex set of actors and motives, is not a new trend with the advent of the EUI. However, the systemic, transformative ambitions of the EUI and their apparent impact (*cf*. Chapter 10, this volume) arguably extend in scope beyond previous iterations of the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes and other EHEA initiatives. The lasting impact of this remains to be explored, in terms of both Europeanisation and internationalisation. For the former, the move by HEIs to explicitly embrace "European values" and foreground them overtly in institutional communication according to Commission guidelines (European Commission, 2022) might be seen as potentially creating resistance among free-thinking members of the academic community, as a reaction to overt pro-European propaganda. Inciting or even forcing students to partake in alliance activities, notably if this involves foreign languages, can likewise counter the desired effect, depending how these activities are organised, how receptive students are to them, and so forth. If European and national identities and ideologies are negotiated in everyday practice (Frame & Curyło, 2022), then such practice may equally result in rejection of the European ideal, strengthening stereotypes (Kokkonen et al., 2022) and strategies of avoidance.

Concerning the impact of this development on broader internationalisation objectives of HEIs, there is also a need for further analysis. In the drive by HEIs to promote membership of and activity within alliances, it could be suspected that efforts in terms of broader, non-European internationalisation receive less attention or funding priority. Although many established academics may resist what they might perceive to be top-down efforts by university management to encourage them to work with new partners within the alliance, instead of their established international partnerships with other foreign universities, it is likely that facilitated funding and contacts within alliances will have a more noticeable effect on the choice of partners for new networks built by early career researchers. Will the HEIs become less "globally" internationalised because of their role within an alliance? Naturally, this also depends on the nature and size of the HEI and on political importance it attributes to membership of its EUA. Internally, there is a risk that communication around the alliance takes the emphasis away from other international projects, or even that the alliance becomes seen as the key priority in terms of institutional internationalisation policy, again depending on the institution.

Moreover, within the process of "Euro-internationalisation," there may also be some degree of conflict between the apparent objectives of the two components. Both can be seen to promote contact and interactions with foreign counterparts in many forms, but arguably the desired end-goals may differ somewhat in their conception. On the one hand, internationalisation aimed at "global citizenship" or "intercultural competence" appears to serve an objective of encouraging students and staff to develop (new) interpersonal skills helping them to work effectively elsewhere around the globe. Although the EUI shares this aim in the way it is formulated by the European Commission (European Commission, 2019, p. 125), the European project goes further in promoting the idea of a fundamental unity of "European values." The idea of a "European campus" suggests that alliances can be structured as "scapes" (Appadurai, 1996) as a set of transnational localities, whereby the (imagined) "community" of the alliance (Anderson, 1983) is "at home" in various European locations. This can be manifested through a visual identity, including recognisable logos and signage present across these locations, but also interoperative information systems, study-rights, etc., which are planned within the "Erasmus without papers" scheme. Such a "regional" or even "local" colour is arguably not a component of most other internationalisation activities of HEIs.

Similarly, this time with an internal focus, the potential "transformative" effect of the EUI on member institutions constitutes another possible disparity between internationalisation and Europeanisation. The question of developing efficient and acceptable alliance governance structures is one which must be addressed by all EUAs (*cf.* Chapter 9, this volume), and this raises the additional question of how and where these structures should interface with the institutions' own administrative structures. While many of the universities chose initially to attach the alliance to the international office, on the basis of an informal survey among alliance coordinators in French universities,[3] it appears that a growing number of the latter have moved the service to a more transversal position, either in a transversal projects office, or directly attached to the President's (or Rector's) office or top-level administration, while others disseminate employees working for the alliance in different internal services of the university (*cf.* also Chapter 10, this volume, for the case of Polish universities). The same cannot be said for other internationalisation projects of a smaller scale. In such cases, the Europeanising "cuckoo" seems definitively to have left the nest of internationalisation, possibly weakening it somewhat in the process.

However, such organisational dynamics are nothing if not complex, and it is likely that Euro-internationalisation also opens up new opportunities for institutions in terms of their internationalisation activities. The alliances themselves are increasingly becoming internationalised, going as far as to present common stands at international HE fairs such as the EAIE, NAFSA or APAIE congresses. Some alliances have a focus on particular regions of the world beyond Europe, such as North Africa or Latin America, while others try to develop customised offers for "global partners," showcasing the alliance as a portal for these non-European partners to access agreements spanning not just one but multiple European HEIs, or

offering tailored activities for incoming students and staff, spanning several campuses in Europe. The success of such offers, as well as the association potential of alliances to boost the number of non-European international partners of each of their member HEIs, remains to be seen.

Finally, another possible impact of the phenomenon of "Euro-internationalisation" could be the political role which is increasingly attributed to EUAs and their individual members as mediators between the European Commission and member states. As will be developed in Chapter 11, EUAs, organised into the FOR-EU+ network, and more recently the FOR-EU4ALL "community of practice," can in some ways be seen as a European political pawn: both an instrument of the Commission, in a bid to influence policies of member states on questions such as European degrees, for instance, and a collective to be taken into consideration by national ministries as an interlocutor to consult or cite in budgeting and policy discussions with the Commission. This does arguably give alliances and individual HEIs both more visibility and potential influence as an actor of public diplomacy, whether on the national or European levels.

By proposing this new concept of "Euro-internationalisation" to characterise the processes leading to the emergence of the EUI, we are seeking to underline not only the "piggy-backing" effect mentioned earlier but also the intricate interweaving of a variety of institutional factors and motivators on multiple levels of governance and agency, which form the backdrop to this initiative. We thus contend that not only internationalisation and Europeanisation but also the unique synergy between the two needs to be taken into account in the analysis of this particular object of study.

Establishing the EUI as an object of scientific study from a variety of disciplinary, conceptual and methodological perspectives: introduction to the collective volume

The EUI as a scientific object

By situating it in this ongoing process of Euro-internationalisation, we argue that the EUI developed in a particular context, in a given configuration of political, economic and socio-technical factors affecting HEIs. However, beyond this focus, the EUI and EUAs themselves provide a rich potential for research in different disciplines, from different epistemological stances, and involving a variety of methods of study, on different levels, focusing for example on the initiative as a whole (macro), on social interactions within individual alliances (micro), or on the structures developed within different EUAs (meso). The objective of this collective volume is also to outline this potential and to show how, as an object of study, the EUI can allow scholars to progress in different areas. Without seeking to be exhaustive, this section lists several of these scientific fields, within political science, communication studies, education science and others.

In the area of political science, the EUI seems particularly promising as an object of study, which can be analysed from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary angles,

taking into account multiple factors and dimensions of analysis, through conceptual or empirical studies. On the macro level, the EUI offers several interesting research perspectives. Firstly, in terms of decision-making, the ongoing processes around design and implementation of the initiative are worthy of further investigation due to the importance of higher education for both the EU and national governments. Faced with national regulations, which often threaten to limit the initiative, a genuine process-based EU education policy seems to be emerging, with EU tools being designed to counterbalance the national limitations. Secondly, in relation to that, the EUI and its "hybrid" nature could be as explored via European integration theories, also in the light of growing interest among scholars in the question of disintegration. This could be particularly relevant in the face of the Commission's ambitious proposals, which are sensitive topics for the sovereignty of member states, aiming to advance integration in HE by developing a legal entity for EUAs and establishing the possibility of a European degree (*cf.* Chapter 11, this volume). Thirdly, the EU's expectations that the EUI should contribute to strengthening the European identity, promoting European values and a European vision, can lead to research in several areas, from analysing the EU's public diplomacy in terms of soft power or civilian power to Europeanising national, regional and local identities through the implementation of the EUI and discourse around it.

On the meso level, the EUI, with its ambition to upgrade the cooperation to "the next level," seems a particularly interesting field for comparative politics approaches with reference to governance structures of the alliances. These assume a novel combination of traditional and transnational or supranational institutional arrangements, with commonly shared rules of decision-making as well as additional procedures like quality assurance, financial management, etc. So far, as indicated also in Chapters 10 and 11 in this volume, EUAs are striving to work out a governance model that will facilitate cooperation and satisfy partners' interests, while ensuring that governance is effective and efficient. In addition to this, alliances are entering into a phase of "networking of networks," meaning closer cooperation between alliances and adding more relevance still to this field of scientific inquiry.

The micro level also represents possible directions of study for political science. Firstly, in the context of the alliances' governance structures, decision-making and everyday activities, it is on the individual level that day-to-day decisions are being made, through interactions and socialisation processes involving people from all over Europe. They are enacting Europeanisation through "bargaining" via these same negotiated practices, and it can be interesting to analyse which factors influence the forms that emerge, in terms of the way governance and power structures work in practice, decision-making protocols adopted, formats of meetings, etc. Secondly, in the areas of international relations and diplomatic studies, these individuals can be seen to act as public or informal diplomats, on behalf of their universities but also their countries, thus contributing to international dialogue, verification of national stereotypes, and so on.

In the domain of communication studies, the EUI can be situated at the intersection of several subfields, depending on the chosen focus. At the macro level, and

with obvious links to political science, it can be taken as an object of study for scholars working on European political communication, or public or institutional communication, for example analysing the ways in which European institutions go about promoting European values and identity (Cram, 2009; Dacheux, 2016), or how such discourse is received in the "European public sphere" (Dacheux, 2017; Roginsky & Jeanne-Perrier, 2015).

Secondly, the EUI or individual EUAs or their member institutions can interest the field of organisational communication, with a focus on the organisational dynamics associated with this particular type of inter-institutional cooperation. They form a promising object of study for scholars adopting a Communicative Constitution of Organisations (CCO) approach to HEIs and who might look at the way in which the initiative and the individual alliances themselves exist through communication (Bouillon & Loneux, 2021; Cooren, 2012; Schoeneborn et al., 2019), as a result of European-level texts, direct and mediated interactions between actors on different levels and the traces of these interactions (Frame & Brachotte, 2016), plus ongoing conversations through which the alliances "exist," often without a specific legal personality. Questions of how and what alliances communicate internally and externally through "traditional" and online channels, of perceived injunctions and hierarchy, may be of interest to organisational communication scholars, as well as how different stakeholders relate to and make sense of these new structures in their working environment (*cf.* Chapter 10, this volume), and also forms of collaborative remote working, for example.

Thirdly, on the microsocial level, face-to-face or online interactions between individuals within the international setting of European Universities can interest scholars specialising in interpersonal or intercultural communication. The international dimension of alliance activity creates opportunities for comparative studies but also, going beyond positivist approaches to interculturality, to focus on the ways in which individuals negotiate their multiple identities and cultures in interactions they see as intercultural (Frame & Sommier, 2020): EUAs present a unique context bringing together people of different nationalities but also who may present different professional statuses and identities (academics, administrative and technical staff, students, etc.), different scientific disciplines or areas of technical specialisation, different age groups, language groups, genders, ethnicities, etc.

The different areas of study mentioned are resumed in Table 1.1. As shown in the fourth column of the table, the methods used in these two disciplines are multiple and have some degree of overlap. In political science, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used, involving surveys or the analysis of large statistical or historical datasets, but also interviews, textual analysis or participant observation. Systemic analysis contributes to building up a comprehensive picture of the object of study, apprehended as a whole system with its elements, determinants and evolutions. Historical methods concentrate on the evolutions of processes, while institutional methods focus on different entities' internal dynamics, and comparative analysis relies on specific sets or models of criteria used to compare different processes and institutional arrangements. Given that the principal focus of communication studies is communication, data collection and analysis

Table 1.1 Disciplines and subfields of political science and communication studies, relating to the EUI as an object of study

Discipline	*Subfield*	*Key concepts/questions*	*Data collection and analysis methods*
Political science	European studies	Europeanisation, theories of European integration, disintegration	System analysis Comparative analysis/ institutional analysis/historical analysis (case studies) Behavioural analysis (interviews, questionnaires, participant observation) Textual/discourse analysis
	International relations	EU as soft power, EU role in international relations	
	Public policy	Political developments in EHEA	
	Public diplomacy	EU-level public diplomacy and EUA-level informal diplomacy, including thematic aspects: citizen diplomacy, science diplomacy	
	Comparative politics	Governance models of EUAs, decision-making procedures	
Communication studies	Political/ institutional communication	(EU level): communicating European identity & values	Discourse analysis; semiotic analysis; (organisational) ethnography; interviews, etc.
	Organisational communication	(EUA level): internal/external communication; imagined communities	
	Interpersonal/ intercultural communication	(micro level): negotiated cultures and identities; cultural repertoires	

methods focus on discourse analysis and on multimodal communication and may include, for example, textual and semiotic analysis, ethnography and participant observation, as well as interviews with selected informants. These methods are dominantly qualitative, though they may also rely on some quantitative indicators in mixed methods approaches.

Outside these two disciplines, which are those best known to the volume editors, the study of EUI can naturally also interest many other disciplines and fields. Given that the initiative deals with HE, the most obvious of these is possibly education science, with possible research in several subfields. These include curriculum development, for example, around formal and informal internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) in the framework of alliance educational activities but also intercultural or cross-cultural education (Dervin, 2024) with a focus on situations of teaching and learning linked to the internationalisation of the classroom or multilingual education within the EUI (Brudermann, 2023). Given the importance of online and "hybrid" or "blended" teaching and learning within alliance strategies, EUAs also potentially provide a fertile terrain for research focusing on virtual exchange (Kokkonen et al., 2022), COIL or blended learning (Hunter & Austin, 2021). Given the multifaceted nature of the EUI and the wide range of activities in

research, education and service to society which are undertaken by the alliances, many other disciplines can naturally also bring additional, complementary perspectives, including organisation studies or management science (organisational governance, etc.), sociology or human geography (migration patterns linked to HEI internationalisation), economics (innovation ecosystems, European technology transfer), psychology and many more.

Introducing the volume

The chapters making up this volume present a variety of approaches to the EUI as an object of study (Part 2) or to the context in which it emerged (Part 1), bringing together contributions from early career researchers and some of their more established colleagues, from several of disciplines, notably political science, communication studies, sociology, language studies and education science.

Following on from this introductory chapter, the first part of the book is a collection of chapters reflecting on Europeanisation and internationalisation relating to mobility and associated pedagogical practices, in the context of collaborations between universities in Europe. In Chapter 2, Krzysztof Zuba addresses the question of the impact of Europeanisation on HE, which is revealed mainly through its potential as a catalyst and a space of opportunity, regardless of the initiatives taken at the EU and member state levels in this area. In his reasoning, Europeanisation is not a closed system but a dynamic space of interaction within which new impulses are born, old ones expire, and others are strengthened or transformed. This interpretation of Europeanisation is rooted in the nature of higher education. The author argues that this actually limits the direct impact of Europeanisation on HE but at the same time – as the chapter shows – exposes it to indirect impact. The theoretical inspiration for the analysis comes from the concept of opportunity structures, and its main focus is on those features of Europeanisation that enable it to play such a role. This leads the author to the overall conclusion that the relationship between Europeanisation and higher education is bilateral and – interestingly for the hypothesis of Euro-internationalisation – that the "weaving" of higher education's natural internationalisation tendencies into Europeanisation processes has largely occurred on a bottom-up basis, as a result of impulses coming from academia.

Chapter 3, written by Lotta Kokkonen, Teija Natri and Juhani Moisio, looks at how internationalisation policy can be applied across an institution, through curriculum development involving multiple actors, and more specifically targeting competence acquisition on the level of each individual student. After discussing the different levels on which "top-down" internationalisation may be promoted (international, European, national, institutional, departmental, etc.), they describe a system designed and implemented by two of the authors at the University of Jyväskylä, in order to encourage students' reflexive development of "multilingual and intercultural communication competence" (MICC). The authors report on feedback from staff and students regarding a pilot study of the system in three faculties and elaborate recommendations for a student-centred approach to internationalisation within EUAs, highlighting institutional conditions which appear to favour this.

In Chapter 4, Romée Jager critically examines the emphasis on "intercultural competence" which commonly emerges as an objective in institutional discourse around Euro-internationalisation. She discusses what this term seems to cover, and the conditions in which such competence might be encouraged through "Internationalisation at Home" (IaH), whether for students participating in physical mobility or through online forms of pedagogical activity. She takes the example of a recent modality of international cooperation introduced in the Erasmus+ programme – the "Blended Intensive Programme" (BIP) – and discusses how BIPs might constitute a way for EUAs to promote IaH and thus move closer to the ambitious mobility objectives fixed by the European Commission, while also promoting key "intercultural competence" skills among students as "global citizens." Based on an in-depth literature review, she warns, however, that the development of such skills is far from automatic and that it very much depends on the conditions in which such BIPs take place, as well as their design and execution by academic staff members of the alliances.

In the second part of the volume, the authors are concerned with the conditions in which the EUI was set up and how it has evolved during the first years of the initiative. In Chapter 5, Stefan Gänzle and Rómulo Pinheiro take a closer look at the political philosophy and vision of European Higher Education which seems to be at the origin of, but also promoted by, the EUI, from French President Emmanuel Macron's (2017) Sorbonne speech to the criteria of the subsequent calls for projects published by the European Commission. The authors situate this in a movement bringing together aspects of both the "Bologna Process" (convergence) and the later "Lisbon Strategy" (excellence) for European Higher Education, in the context of a long-standing desire among some members of the European elite to create European-level HEIs, as well as the need to modernise the sector and make it competitive on the global scale. They argue that, as such, the EUI currently seems to have a strong transformative potential for the European HE sector in general, in the hands of both European bureaucrats and the local university administrators who take advantage of successive waves of Euro-internationalisation to seek to bring about changes in the ways their institutions function.

Chapter 6, written by Almudena González del Valle-Brena, María-Jesús Díaz-González and María-José Ferrari, adopts the theoretical and methodological framework of Gerald Delanty's "critical cosmopolitanism," to approach the EUI as an initiative that may foster Europeanisation as a process and thus contribute to strengthening European identity. The authors explore the four dynamics of critical cosmopolitanism with regard to their potential for research on the EUI. These are (1) the capacity to relativize one's own culture or identity, (2) the capacity to recognise the Other in a positive way, (3) the capacity to mutually evaluate cultures or identities and (4) the capacity to create a shared normative culture. Taking these dynamics as a framework, the authors carry out discourse analysis of official documents and programmatic texts published by European institutions, relating to the EUI. They conclude that European documents present a clear aim of creating a shared normative culture. The authors detect linkages between cross-border mobility (first dynamic) and the final objective of Europeanisation (fourth dynamic),

defined as a shared identity and normative culture structured around the idea of a systemic and sustainable European way of doing things.

Chapter 7, written by Nadia Manzoni, uses a discursive institutionalist approach to characterise the prototypical "European University" in the eyes of European-level policymakers, and the way in which this has evolved in recent years. Based on official documents pertaining to the EUI, the chapter's findings confirm the literature showing that policy seems to have been extended from the solely economic (here linked to the green and digital transitions) to the more cultural dimension of Europeanisation and notably towards more direct evocations of European identity and active citizenship as objectives to be targeted by alliances. The author places this evolution in the context of broader multi-actor governance of European Higher Education, as well as dominant social representations regarding the successive crises with which it has been faced in recent years.

In Chapter 8, Agata A. Lambrechts examines the possible mechanisms at play during the period of alliance formation in the framework of the EUI. Taking on a perspective from management and economic sociology literature, the author identifies three core observable theoretical mechanisms for tie formation among the higher education institutions which comprise the alliances: complementarities, similarities and pre-existing network ties. These are explored in detail, regarding their characteristics and long-term implications, for instance, potential tensions between achieving geographical spread and fostering more strategic, resource-based complementarities. The findings of the chapter confirm the presence of all three alliance formation mechanisms in the EUI. However, the author concludes, the relative prevalence of each mechanism differs, and while all three mechanisms appear concurrently in more than a third of the alliances, the key finding is the predominance of similarities in particular in relation to activity profile, subject orientation, size and reputation.

Chapter 9, written by Manuel José Damásio, Barry Dignam, Veerle Van der Sluys and Sophie Quin, explores the governance models of EUAs in the context of challenges facing them. These are linked to both European (e.g. legal status) and national (e.g. shift in organisational structures in HEIs from "organised anarchy" to "boardism") developments, in the area of HE governance. To explore these challenges, the authors carry out a case study of one the EUAs: FilmEU – The European University of Film and Media Arts. They discuss it in relation to different perspectives on HE governance models, and with reference to concrete examples of other alliance or governance models, including EUAs (UNA Europa, Aurora University Alliance, UNIC University Alliance) and Swiss Higher Education Institutions. Finally, on the basis of their case study of FilmEU, the authors propose a concrete, fit-for-purpose governance model for EUAs and diagnose its limits and affordances.

Chapter 10, written by Dominik Antonowicz, Marta Jaworska and Rafał Muster, argues that, despite the political prominence of the EUI, there are few empirical attempts that investigate how such deep and intensive international cooperation has affected the organisation and work of universities. In this chapter, the authors report the results of a large research project aimed at evaluating

the impact of the alliances on the organisation and performance of Polish universities with specific focus on non-academic staff. This category of personnel is critical for the performance of universities but often receives relatively little attention from scholars. The core finding here is that the EUI symbolises a different account of internationalisation, both horizontal and inclusive, which goes deep into the institutional fabric of HEIs, creating opportunities for those previously excluded from the internationalisation process, with its benefits and specific constraints.

In the final chapter, following on from Chapter 1, the editors of this volume discuss current and new challenges faced by the EUI linked to the framework of "facilitated coordination" and "opportunity structures." They identify potential research questions and avenues of scientific investigation which might help shed light on the top-down and bottom-up dynamics of Europeanisation. From a top-down perspective, the authors refer to the evolving context in which the initiative has developed, shaped by successive funding calls published by the European Commission and by Commission and Council documents relating to the EUI. Two particular pilot calls, relating to the European degree and the legal status of EUAs, were discussed in the light of evolving challenges but also because they illustrate the uncertainty associated with conflicting forces in Europeanisation: they may result in further advancement of supranational integration within HE in Europe, but if European institutions are seen as going beyond their mandate in this sensitive area of national politics, they could also trigger further divisions and to some degree of re-nationalisation of HE politics. The bottom-up perspective is concerned more with how various actors within institutions deal with and make sense of the EUI, the degree to which it affects their everyday work or study practices. Potential research from this perspective, for Europeanisation scholars or those interested in interpersonal and intercultural dynamics in multinational settings, focuses on individual and collective social dynamics, social representations and motivations which can explain different behaviours and identity postures within and between universities and alliances. The chapter calls on academics to develop further research into multiple aspects of the EUI, as it continues to evolve in the coming years.

Notes

1 Although the definitions proposed by Knight (2003) and de Wit et al. (2015) are the most frequently cited in the field, these definitions do not come without criticism. For example, see Marginson (2023) for a discussion on the limitations of the leading definition of internationalisation of higher education. Marginson (2023) argues that the definition proposed by Knight (and which is further built upon by de Wit and colleagues) "is overly normative and insufficiently explanatory, uses a truncated geography, claims a universality that cannot be achieved, and when applied in the practices of Euro-American higher education has regressive effects in the non Euro-American world" (p. 3).
2 *Cf.* Chapter 3, this volume for a student-centred competency approach towards curriculum internationalisation.
3 First author's personal communication within a network of coordinators of French universities within alliances, May 2024.

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2 Europeanisation as an opportunity structure for higher education

Krzysztof Zuba

Introduction

Europeanisation is such a wide-ranging and multifaceted process that one might get the impression that there is a tendency in the scientific community to frame more and more phenomena within this process or in its context. This becomes somewhat understandable if we refer to the mainstream definition, which sees Europeanisation as the reaction of the state and its social, economic and cultural systems to the process of European integration (Buller & Gamble, 2002). Indeed, it is difficult to identify a sphere of state or societal activity (especially in relation to EU Member States) that is excluded from the influence of European integration. The case of higher education perfectly reflects this phenomenon.

The aim of this chapter is to look at Europeanisation as a kind of underlying process that allows for the emergence or activation of minor processes, often not directly conditioned by European integration. In this understanding, Europeanisation can be interpreted as an institutional and normative space of possibilities. Regardless of the initiatives taken at the EU and Member State level in the sphere of higher education (Kwiek, 2007), the impact of Europeanisation is revealed here mainly through its potential as a catalyst and a space of opportunity.

In this sense, Europeanisation is not a closed system, but a dynamic space of interaction within which new impulses are born, old ones expire and others are strengthened or transformed. This interpretation of Europeanisation arises primarily from the nature of higher education. Firstly, it remains fundamentally a policy for nation-states. Secondly, it is assigned academic autonomy in almost all EU countries in terms of research, teaching and cultural space (student life, initiatives, debates). These factors limit the direct impact of Europeanisation on higher education but at the same time – as this chapter will show – expose higher education to its indirect impact. This character of higher education makes it difficult to show precisely which phenomena and processes within it are predominantly determined by Europeanisation itself, and which by globalisation or internationalisation in the broadest sense, and which constitute a side-effect of Europeanisation, manifested in the form of national impulses (Perez-Encianz, 2018, p. 109). In general, however, the impact of Europeanisation on higher education can be demonstrated unquestionably by referring to both inductive and deductive analysis.

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The theoretical inspiration for the analysis comes from the concept of the opportunity structure. Although it was originally framed in a narrow sense – to analyse new social movements – it now forms the basis or inspiration for broader studies (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004), also in education research (Roberts, 2009). The main focus is on those features of Europeanisation that enable it to play such a role.

Theoretical considerations

The statement made in the Introduction that Europeanisation applies to most spheres of the EU Member States' and societies' activity is as true as it is vague. Due to the fact that Europeanisation has so many facets, more detailed findings are needed to identify which of its dimensions affect higher education more and which less, and why this is so. The differences regarding Europeanisation presented in the literature are so considerable that they influence not only its various definitions but also the possibility of implementing such definitions in the analysis of reality. From the perspective of the objectives of this chapter, it is crucial to distinguish between approaches that limit Europeanisation to the institutional dimension (see Olsen, 2002)[1] and those that extend it into the realm of knowledge, values and beliefs (see Radaelli, 2003). Limiting Europeanisation to the institutional dimension ignores the key domains in which Europeanisation of higher education is revealed, which determines the adoption of the second of these theoretical approaches as the theoretical basis of this chapter.

Radaelli distinguishes three main domains of Europeanisation: domestic structures, public policy and cognitive and normative structures (2003, p. 35). Making a theoretical clarification, I will focus on each of these dimensions, analysing their theoretical relevance in relation to the objectives of this chapter, as well as the general objectives identified by the editors of the volume.

The changes taking place within domestic structures are the most general, most evident and, at the same time, the "hardest" manifestation of Europeanisation. They concern the structure of the state on a macro scale, including, in particular, changes petrified in the legal and institutional structure. The Europeanisation of domestic structures takes the form of convergence, adaptation and changes "forced" by accession agreements (the Copenhagen criteria). These are inherently top-down processes, taking place between the European institutions and the authorities of EU Member States and candidate countries (*cf.* Bretherton & Mannin, 2013). Higher education is not part of the political structure of the state. The possibility of indirect, central influence of the mechanisms of Europeanisation via the domestic structure is limited by the principle of university autonomy, or, more broadly, the right to freedom of scientific expression and apolitical education. Thus, the processes taking place within the domestic structure are not relevant to the Europeanisation of higher education. Even in those aspects where top-down European regulations (the Bologna Process) are in operation, it is up to Member States to define the supervision model and evaluate their actual application. Especially when these mechanisms are internal (state accreditation commissions), their activities can be limited to a procedural dimension.

The second of the domains identified by Radaelli, namely public policy, stems from the fact that Europeanisation does not take place evenly across the social, economic and political spaces. European integration is sectoral, which means that some spheres (policies) are subject to it at a faster pace and more thoroughly than others (Saurugger & Radaelli, 2008, p. 215). The process of development of the European Communities, and subsequently the European Union, was first directed towards the integration of economic sectors, followed by other spheres of state activity. This was also reflected in the evolution of the nomenclature: from the Coal and Steel Community, through the Common Market, to the European Union. This explains why higher education in EU countries is at a relatively low level of integration (compared to other areas). This sphere, associated with the "management" of national identity and the cultural component of society, is still recognised by states as their exclusive domain. In order to understand the persistence of states in controlling higher education, it is important to bear in mind that its functions go beyond universalist (scientific and educational) objectives. From the perspective of power – any power – higher education "performed basic functions which resulted from the particular combination of cultural and ideological, social and economic, educational and scientific roles" (Enders, 2004, p. 362). Therefore, higher education in the EU remains, in most aspects, the responsibility of Member States acting in the capacity of either owners/funders (state universities) or regulators (private universities). At the same time, the specificity of the academic sphere, due to its social functions and, consequently, its autonomy, limits the scope of the impact of the unification and convergence processes planned under various policies. In practice, this means that Member States cannot (even if they want to) decide in a simple, top-down way to transfer competence related to higher education to the EU, as they do for other public policies. However, this is not a barrier to Europeanisation, because at the same time, this specificity of higher education and autonomy allows for convergence, only "softer" (not based on institutionalisation) and occurring on a bottom-up basis. Summarising these findings, it should be stated that public policy as a domain of Europeanisation will play a much more important role than changes influenced by the Europeanisation of the domestic structure, although not having a direct impact.

Such crucial importance should be attributed to the third domain of Europeanisation, namely cognitive and normative structures. This sphere should be equated with social "software": knowledge, beliefs and values. At the same time, it is a domain that is fundamentally non-institutional. Both Member States and the European Union have an important but indirect influence on the shaping of cognitive and normative structures. The rise of Eurosceptic and populist attitudes, which threaten European unity and challenge the democratic order of Member States, shows how difficult it is nowadays to manage this domain. Its formation, transformation or consolidation is derived from a number of socio-economic conditions, revealed over decades or even centuries. This domain, as already mentioned, includes cognitive, axiological and emotive components that interact with one another. The first (cognitive) component is related to the level and structure of knowledge, which refers to the capacity to acquire, critically process and operationalise knowledge. This

is not just the knowledge of European integration processes but it also concerns a holistic body of knowledge that allows European integration to be placed within the structure of social, economic and political processes. Normative structures include non-legal social norms that determine the views and beliefs of individuals, social groups or communities. This framework includes the prevailing opinions of the general public, political culture (Delanty, 2005), ideology, the electorate's preferences, as well as political parties' programmes and agendas (Aspinwall, 2002). These values do not necessarily relate to either European integration or higher education, but they can nevertheless significantly determine the propensity of individual actors and the academic community to adopt patterns associated with Europeanisation. An example can be religious values that shape the holistic worldview of individuals and groups, influencing, among other things, their perceptions of the role of education, the state or the nation, and thus creating a space that facilitates or limits the impact of Europeanisation on higher education.

Just as the essence of the two domains of Europeanisation determines their small (domestic structures) or medium (public policy) impact on higher education, the essence of cognitive and normative structures determines their strong impact (Figure 2.1). Therefore, it is the latter domain that should be considered the dominant dimension of Europeanisation in relation to higher education. It is evident that this domain most fully reflects the role of Europeanisation as an opportunity structure included in the title. This is determined by the following characteristics:

- it does not force changes but makes them possible;
- it does not have a direct impact but creates a climate in which such an impact occurs;
- it is based on a community of values rather than interests;
- it is manifested primarily in the form of bottom-up processes.

Europeanisation through values

The peculiarities of higher education indicated earlier mean that the process of Europeanisation takes place in a "soft" form, through ideas, values and principles rather than through "hard," top-down norms of European law. A Europe of Values

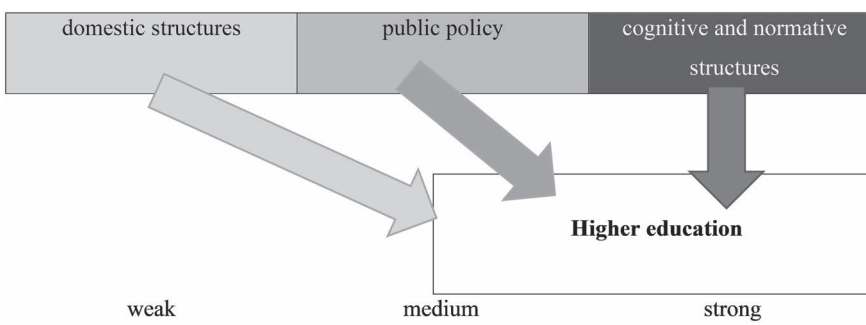

Figure 2.1 Impact of the domains of Europeanisation on higher education

was not merely an integral part of the European project but was at its core. As Alcide de Gaspari put it, "the main principle of uniting Europe is in the conscience of the spiritual and cultural community rather than the political, legislative, economic and social coordination" (*cf.* St. John, 2021, p. 19).

The trend of institutionalising the core values that underpinned European integration in the form of treaty standards intensified in the 1980s. It is not obvious whether this is a good direction from the perspective of higher education, but it should be stated that it is compatible with the common practice of constitutionalising the values observed in nation-states. Already at the dawn of European integration, there was a widespread conviction that a united Europe could not be built solely around economic efficiency, as this posed a risk of an asymmetric distribution of benefits among stakeholders (Member States, regions, social groups) and consequently the delegitimisation of the Communities.

The most general, and at the same time fundamental, value that is the cornerstone of the European Communities is the rule of law, which compensates for the democratic deficit at the European level. It constitutes, as Joseph H. Weiler notes, a key element of "the political and legal culture of European integration" (2011, p. 686). The impact of the rule of law on the Europeanisation of higher education appears to be contextual. It has, however, revealed itself forcefully in two historical moments: democratisation and de-democratisation. Democratisation and Europeanisation are parallel processes, which were most directly manifested during the accession negotiations with the Central and Eastern European countries, and earlier (in the 1980s) with the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal. The introduction of the rule of law was *a sine qua non* condition not only for accession but also for the commencement of accession negotiations. The progression of democratisation meant at the same time the strengthening of the de-ideologisation of academia, ensuring its autonomy, consolidating its position as a sanctuary of free thought and unfettered debate. For the countries emerging from authoritarianism, the introduction of European standards meant a paradigm shift in state policy towards higher education. This transition was considered sustainable as long as the rule of law was not challenged in EU Member States. The emergence of de-democratisation processes, which, not coincidentally, overlap with de-Europeanisation processes, put the issue in a different light. Higher education has become one of the victims of de-democratisation/de-Europeanisation. This applies to Hungary after 2010, Poland in the years between 2015 and 2023, or Slovakia under Robert Fico. The first case is the most vivid in this respect. Hungary's political system has been "reprogrammed" so that Europeanisation appears more and more as an external, alien and even hostile process, non-complementary with the norms on which the system is based. As part of this process, the higher education system has been centralised and politicised, with its goals and functions subordinated to those of state authorities (Bárd, 2020).

The three freedoms of the movement of capital, services and persons were articulated already in the Treaty of Rome (Article 3a). Subsequently, the catalogue was expanded to include the free movement of goods (Foret & Calligaro, 2018). Although they were originally economically oriented, over time their interpretation

became fused with the idea of utilitarianism, also rooted in the concepts of the Communities (Bluhm, 1993). One can argue with the opinion of De Wit and Verhoeven (2001, p. 204), who believe that all four freedoms contributed to the Europeanisation of higher education as its catalysts. In such a view, even the most economically oriented of these freedoms, that is, the free movement of goods, capital and services, were meant to create an opportunity structure for intensifying cooperation between business entities and higher education institutions in the Communities. A good example of this is the Professional Qualifications Directive (2005), which also specified a framework for the mutual recognition of diplomas in the higher education systems of Member States. This directive was derived directly from the free movement of services (Kainer, 2019, pp. 49–50).

However, the greatest influence on the Europeanisation of higher education was exerted by the free movement of persons, which in the first decades of European integration was more narrowly interpreted as the free movement of workers. This principle proved absolutely fundamental to the essence of Europeanisation as an opportunity structure. The free movement of workers, long before upsetting the supremacy of the Member States of the European Communities in the field of higher education, intensified the mobility of academic staff, especially those oriented towards cooperation with the industrial sector. In the subsequent stages of European integration, this process was extended to other spheres, eventually encompassing the whole of academia. This was regardless of the fact that the free movement of workers originally did not include the rights of citizens of the Member States of the Communities in the scope of educational needs. However, the continuation of this state of affairs was becoming increasingly dysfunctional, not least because of the growing benefits of cooperation among the spheres of knowledge, science and economy. The place of education ceased to be a key criterion for recruiting employees; this criterion was now market demand and workforce flexibility. The first breakthrough, arising from the European Court of Justice's decision in the case of Françoise Gravier versus the City of Liège (1985) concerning the right to satisfy "educational needs," was based on the right of non-discrimination, derived precisely from the freedom of movement of persons (Van der Mei, 2003, pp. 333–334).

The freedom of movement of persons also had a significant impact on those elements that Bianchi referred to as "peripheral," that is, related to livelihood issues, security, culture, socialisation, etc. (Bianchi, 2013, p. 397). The possibility for students from other Member States of the Communities to take up gainful employment made it easier for them to break down economic barriers, which was necessary in order to meet subsistence needs or to pay tuition fees. The aforementioned principle of non-discrimination, derived from the freedom of movement of persons, was also crucial in making the higher education environment and infrastructure more inclusive in terms of administratively serving students from other Member States of the Communities, meeting their cultural needs and fostering social integration.

At the same time, the deepening Europeanisation of higher education, especially when it entered the stage of institutionalisation (the Bologna Process, ERASMUS), created new challenges that would be difficult to overcome without referring to

another cherished principle of United Europe, namely solidarity. Among these challenges, the issues of funding the process of staff and student exchange or the implementation of joint projects proved to be particularly important (Huisman, 2014, p. 134). Firstly, a significant asymmetry between the benefits and costs incurred becomes apparent. In particular, the better academic centres from the richer EU countries participate in staff and student exchanges, often forming a "closed circle." Secondly, the disparity in expenditure incurred by individual states and higher education units becomes evident. Thirdly, in the process of the Europeanisation of higher education, the phenomenon of the exclusion of some students and academic staff for economic reasons was not eliminated (ERASMUS, 2023). Regardless of the solutions adopted, there is general consensus that meeting these challenges is crucial for not only the effectiveness of academic cooperation but also embodying the idea of solidarity, which is fundamental to the European project. Indeed, solidarity should be considered a constitutional principle of the EU's functioning, regardless of the fact that its jurisprudential interpretation is not self-evident (Dagilyte, 2018).

To conclude this section of the chapter, it is worth referring to the overall objectives of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): "to adopt reforms on higher education on the basis of common key values – such as freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent student unions, academic freedom, free movement of students and staff" (EHEA, 2024).

Europeanisation of higher education as a spill-over effect

The somewhat outdated concept of spill-over is rooted in neo-functionalist European integration theory. It originally interpreted European integration as a self-reinforcing and inevitable process (Haas, 2004, p. 292). Nowadays, a less deterministic conception of integration and Europeanisation is subsumed under this term – pointing to its tendency to spill over from one field to another (Niemann & Schmitter, 2009). This process is, however, reversible and its symptoms can also be seen in de-Europeanisation tendencies as spill-back (Golecki, 2018).

The spill-over process can be cross-sectoral or intra-sectoral. The former relates to situations where there is a transfer of Europeanisation impulses from one sphere of state and societal activity to other spheres. Intra-sectoral spill-over occurs when the process of Europeanisation expands and intensifies within the same policy. It can manifest itself as the effects of Europeanisation being transferred within the same public policy of some countries to other countries or "spread" within a single policy across the EU.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of exchange capitals is helpful in analysing the cross-sectoral dimension of spill-over. This concept, as well as its numerous interpretations, assumes the co-existence of several forms of capital in social space, which, like different currencies, can be exchanged. The most commonly analysed forms of capital are political, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 164). As already stated, in the first decades, European integration focused mainly on the economic sphere, and the spill-over to the political and cultural spheres followed

later. Higher education is predominantly based on cultural capital, which results from both its core functions and the essence of academic life. This phenomenon is well illustrated by the evolution of the composition of the European Commission. The composition of the first two European Commissions (ECs) did not include the position of Commissioner for Higher Education. The subsequent two ECs (Jean Rey, 1967–1970; Franco Malfatti, 1973–1973) feature portfolios covering "research and technology," while education as part of a portfolio is included for the first time in François-Xavier Ortoli's commission (1973–1977) (Dinan, 1998, pp. 61–64). Thus, the following sequence can be observed: (1) the EC as an economic governance structure; (2) the EC linking the economic and cultural spheres; (3) the EC within which the cultural sphere becomes empowered.

With all this, the sphere of education, including higher education, was perceived as a particularly sensitive dimension of national sovereignty. Through it, state authorities were able to pursue key objectives related to the formation of specific cultural patterns and codes. The nature of these first intergovernmental cooperation initiatives did not go beyond the accepted framework of intergovernmentalism. To that extent, they did not threaten the supremacy of states in the field of higher education (De Wit & Verhoeven, 2001).

From an intra-sectoral point of view, spill-over initially emerged mainly as subprojects initiated by one or more countries and then extended to other Member States of the Communities. The first initiatives to internationalise education in EC countries date back to the 1950s. It is significant that one of these, the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation, was established in 1952, the same year that the Treaty of Paris came into force, establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (van Dijk, 1985, p. 118). And this was not the only initiative of this kind, as similar ones were established in other Western European countries. At this stage, however, they were not the result of Europeanisation processes but ultimately acted as a catalyst for Europeanisation. In some cases (the United Kingdom, France), the objectives of these initiatives were particularistic, as they were intended to promote the national culture of the countries that initiated them. This was, in a sense, the nature of the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration. An important motive behind the actions of the four founders was the desire to reduce tensions and problems emerging in national higher education systems (Huisman, 2014, pp. 119–120). It is no coincidence that the projects now recognised as milestones in the Europeanisation of higher education were initiated by countries with the most "internationalised" national cultures and the most resilient higher education systems. From this perspective, internationalisation was becoming a form of soft power-based policy: "export" of national cultural models, promotion of countries and a magnet for human and investment capital (Deodato, 2016). The Sorbonne Declaration met with criticism from several Member States, such as Luxembourg and Portugal. Critics pointed out that higher education was the exclusive preserve of nation-states and that this could only be changed by treaty (Marçal-Giro, 2003, p. 4). They referred to legal and constitutional arguments, but these should rather be considered secondary to the concerns arising from the disparity in the higher education potential of these countries compared to that of the Sorbonne Declaration's

initiator states. With the benefit of hindsight, we interpret the aims of this declaration quite differently: it paved the way for the Bologna Declaration, signed just a year later, and subsequent initiatives launched under the EHEA.

The spill-over concept in the Europeanisation of higher education seems to be confirmed by the increasing number of countries joining common initiatives in this area. Only four countries were signatories to the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), France, the UK, Germany and Italy, while the Bologna Declaration was signed by 29 countries. Currently, 49 countries are official members of the EHEA, an initiative whose origins lie in the Sorbonne Declaration. Figure 2.2 presents the dynamics of intra-sectoral spill-over, using the example of the number of signatory states to successive declarations and communiqués announced during ministerial conferences.

The second aspect of intra-sectoral spill-over, related to the expansion of the range of matters agreed upon within declarations and communiqués, no longer shows such spectacular growth rates. During the ministerial conferences in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003), the previously stated objectives were extended to include lifelong learning, enhancing the role of students in the Bologna process, and agreements were made on quality assurance and accreditation as well as doctoral studies and mobility. Subsequent conferences were primarily limited to assessing the progress and effectiveness of the changes implemented, as well as general recommendations and appeals. This relatively small dynamic becomes fully understandable if we recall the previous findings on the nature of the Europeanisation of higher education.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from these findings: a negative one and a positive one. The former is due to the EHEA's excessive "territorial expansion" beyond the borders of the EU. This mainly results in little coherence among its initiatives. Even if we take into account the modestly outlined goals – not as integration but only as coordination of activities – with such radical differences in national higher education systems, they are difficult to achieve. The lack of criteria for EHEA membership is particularly problematic. Membership status has been

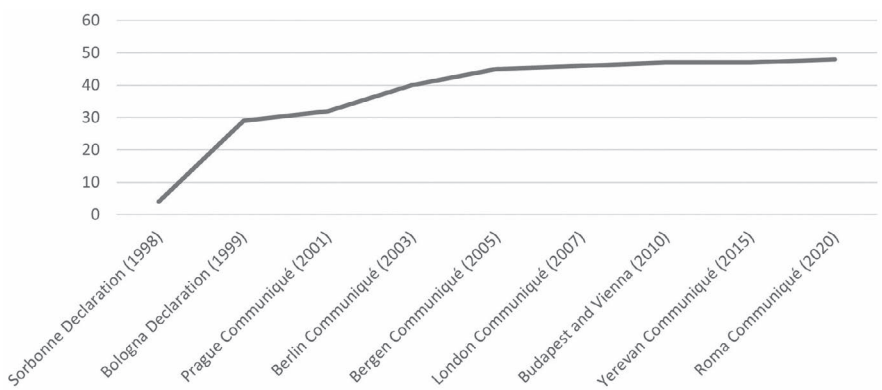

Figure 2.2 Number of countries-signatories to the declarations and communiqués ⏎

granted, for example, to Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia.[2] The implementation of the Bologna Process in these and a few other countries is strictly procedural, even facade-like. If we accept as correct the claim that the Europeanisation of higher education is mainly revealed within the domain of cognitive and normative structures, the lack of widespread acceptance of the fundamental values of higher education significantly limits the entire process of Europeanisation.

Positive conclusions are drawn from the nature of the activities undertaken and befitting the essence of higher education. As the earlier findings show, the top-down, institutional formula of Europeanisation conflicts with the essence of higher education, if only because of the autonomy of academic units. And from this perspective, the reduction of regulatory trends under the EHEA is not only understandable but also fully justified. Also positive is the evolution of the EHEA from a "ministerial" formula to an umbrella initiative, increasingly ceding the field to the academic and research communities: the European Association of Universities (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB, later replaced by the European Student Union, ESU), the European Network of Quality Assurance agencies (ENQA), Education International, and Business Europe (Huisman, 2014, p. 123).

The need to eradicate negative phenomena emerging from the EHEA while reinforcing positive trends is becoming increasingly apparent. The European Education Area framework, outlined in September 2020, draws directly on the positive achievements of the EHEA but limits its field of action to the EU territory. This offers a chance that the spill-over effect will not be limited to formal criteria but will mean the Europeanisation of higher education on the basis of the fundamental values of United Europe (Kushnir, 2022).

The social core of Europeanisation

The final aspect under analysis concerns academia in its broadest sense as the social and intellectual core legitimising and affirming European integration processes. It is linked to the nature of science and higher education as a sphere functionally predestined to benefit from the opportunities offered by Europeanisation. It is not only about the sphere of freedom of speech and belief but also about the utilitarian network created in the processes of Europeanisation, such as the exchange of data, staff, students, and finally the transfer of ideas, knowledge and funds.

It is no coincidence that a system of student exchange and a market for academic staff had already taken shape in medieval Europe and had developed until the end of the 18th century (de la Croix et al., 2023). This demonstrates that, despite existing barriers, Europe's cultural space has been conducive to internationalisation for centuries and has made higher education a sphere particularly susceptible to internationalisation processes. On an unprecedented scale, European integration has eliminated the barriers separating countries and their education systems. The dismantling of these barriers, with their most prominent manifestation in the form of national borders, has created unique conditions for the internationalisation of all spheres of social life.

With all this said, Europeanisation and higher education function in a complex network of mutual relationships and impacts. Thus, the "weaving" of higher education's natural internationalisation tendencies into Europeanisation processes has largely occurred on a bottom-up basis, as a result of impulses coming from academia (Huisman, 2014, p. 120). Academic circles, alongside business and bureaucracy representatives, were the most active pressure groups for European integration. Bureaucrats and entrepreneurs had a direct interest in extending European integration. This took place under the conditions of developing the European economic space, as well as the supranational bureaucratic structures that were the dominant dimension of integration in its early stages. Against this backdrop, academia supported European integration for both ideological (expanding the space for freedom and transnational cooperation) and utilitarian (expanding professional opportunities) reasons (Fligstein, 2000, p. 36).

The level of educational attainment is one of the key predictors of public attitudes towards European integration. The fact that a higher level of education favours pro-integration attitudes while a lower level of education favours Eurosceptic attitudes is not due to the formal aspects of "holding a degree." The key factor is the resources acquired in the educational process, located within the domain of cognitive and normative structures. Researchers point to three main determinants for the causal relationship here: improved cognitive skills, socialisation into cosmopolitan values and utilitarian cost-benefit calculations (Kunst et al., 2020, p. 28). By its very nature, the educational process leads to the broadening of a person's cognitive horizons, the ability to acquire, process and use knowledge. Knowledge of the origins of European integration, its historical background, and the mechanisms of the EU serve to diminish stereotypes and rationalise judgements. Although the overall level of knowledge of European issues among the citizens of all Member States is relatively low, there are clear differences among individual countries, social groups or sociopolitical characteristics of respondents. In all countries, however, a clear influence of the cognitive factor on the level of support for or negation of European integration is revealed: higher levels of knowledge favour pro-European attitudes, while lower levels favour Eurosceptic attitudes (Partheymüller et al., 2022).

The development of cosmopolitan attitudes in the course of academic training is generally linked to two aspects. Firstly, one acquires new skills that facilitate interpersonal contacts beyond those within one's own national community. These include language skills, knowledge of other countries and peoples, and even acquired skills in communication techniques. Here, too, it is important to broaden knowledge of other peoples' cultures in order to overcome stereotypes or, in the extreme, xenophobic or racist attitudes. Secondly, the saturation of academic circles with cosmopolitan attitudes, much higher than in other groups, is conditioned by the characteristics of a culture based on tolerance, openness and social inclusion, which have been promoted for centuries. This puts pressure on community members who, for adaptive purposes, are inclined to embrace these values as their own. The dominance of cosmopolitan attitudes among members of the academic community determines a different perspective on questions of nation, state, internationalisation, or, ultimately, European integration.

As indicated earlier, in the first decades of European integration, the benefits of the European integration process were not as obvious for higher education as they were for the business community or the bureaucracy. The progression of European integration, especially with regard to the internationalisation of the common market, significantly changed this situation. People with higher education have increased their chances of finding a job but have also received higher salaries and attractive jobs. Existing research clearly shows that "trade liberalisation and increased factor mobility advantage those with higher levels of human capital and hurt those with less" (Hooghe & Marks, 2005, p. 421). European funds aimed at not only research, staff and student exchange but also inclusivity, mobility and elimination of disparities are indicated among other benefits for universities and academics. This is a factor that additionally strengthens the positive attitude of academia towards European integration (Tsoukalis, 2005, p. 46).

As already mentioned, the internationalisation of academia preceded the actual integration of Europe by many centuries. This paradox of Europeanisation without European integration makes it clear how relatively little is needed to create a friendly ground for cooperation in higher education at the European level. Against this background, the aforementioned weakness of Europeanisation in the dimension of domestic structures and public policy can lead to a misleading conclusion concerning a low level of the Europeanisation in higher education. If we refer to findings on Europeanisation in the dimension of cognitive and normative structures and combine them with findings on academia as the social core of Europeanisation, we get a very different picture. The Europeanisation of higher education is taking place not through top-down institutional projects, but through the specific characteristics of broadly understood Academia (learning, education, teaching) and academic circles (researchers, lecturers, students).

Conclusion

In accordance with the dominant view of Europeanisation presented in the literature on the subject, it is equated with convergence. In this dimension, it becomes either a cause or an effect of actions taken at the levels of nation-states and the EU. Though nation-states still maintain the status of "gate-keepers" in terms of European integration, they do not have a monopoly in this regard (Börzel, 2002). Europeanisation is taking place on many levels, within which the social and civic plane, autonomous from the state, is an important, and in some countries, a dominant category.

The central argument of this chapter is that the Europeanisation of higher education is driven by not so much top-down, institutional actions of Member States and the EU itself as its cognitive and normative structures. They represent a non-institutional cultural component based on values that foster both Europeanisation and the development of higher education. The Member States and the EU play a fundamental role in guaranteeing values, among which the rule of law, solidarity, freedom of movement of persons and freedom of expression have a special place. It is from this perspective that Europeanisation appears as an opportunity structure in which higher education gains new development possibilities. The EU's or nation-states'

activism in higher education policy, for example, through treaties, regulations or directives, can paradoxically lead to undermining the effects of Europeanisation. The activity of the EU and the Member States is necessary to create an optimal climate in which cognitive and normative structures conducive to the internationalisation of higher education can be embedded. A dilemma is therefore revealed here, which has come to be known in the scientific debate as the Goldilocks principle. The heroine of the fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," tasting porridge at different temperatures, declares that the best porridge is the one that is neither too hot nor too cold. This parable tells us much about the nature of the Europeanisation of higher education. The activity of Member States and the EU in this regard must be neither too big nor too small – it must be just right. It is significant that the main institutional levels equated with higher education, that is, the Bologna Process and EHEA, are not directly coordinated by any EU body, remaining in fact an intergovernmental structure (Neave & Maassen, 2007). Member States and the EU have rightly recognised that "the porridge should not be too hot."

At the same time, disadvantages result from this situation. One of these is the inclusion of countries that blatantly reject the axiological principles of the EU and higher education in joint projects (EHEA). Another is the difficulty in effectively monitoring the use of European funds and the degree of implementation of accepted measures and procedures (Vukasovic, 2013, p. 315). The drive to eliminate these disadvantages was, among other things, at the heart of a new initiative, this time linked directly to the EU, namely the European Education Area – "the porridge should not be too cold." The need to maintain the necessary balance also runs through the debate on the future Europeanisation of higher education. On the one hand, the potential dangers of excessive juridification, bureaucratisation, regulationism and economisation of higher education at the European level are pointed out (Bache, 2004). On the other hand, there are calls for more attention to be paid to social, bottom-up integration initiatives, whose main actors would be academic entities (universities, colleges), academics and students (Huisman et al., 2012; Frame & Curyło, 2022).

Notes

1 Olsen distinguishes five approaches: changes in external boundaries; developing institutions at the European level; central penetration of national systems of governance; exporting forms of political organisation; a political unification project (Olsen, 2002, pp. 923–924).
2 In April 2022, Russia and Belarus were suspended from membership due to the invasion in Ukraine.

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3 Bridging the gap between policy and practice

The individual perspective on internationalisation as a part of curriculum development

Lotta Kokkonen, Teija Natri and Juhani Moisio

Introduction

Internationalisation has been widely discussed in academic journals and publications of higher education policies and practices during the last two decades (Hunter et al., 2023). It is often paired with the term *globalisation*, which is used to describe the global forces of markets and competition that cannot be controlled by states. The internationalisation of higher education (HE) can be seen as a response to globalisation by policymakers (Tight, 2021). It is evident that constant evolution in global, national, or local environments produces shifts in political, social, and educational rationales as well as changes in internationalisation processes in HE (de Wit, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2021).

Within the field of HE, the term *internationalisation* is nearly impossible to avoid. However, people working within HE might have challenges in defining and describing the phenomenon. Traditionally the numerical data, such as student mobility numbers, the number of degrees by foreign nationals and the amount of international teaching and research personnel at a HEI, have been used as indicators of the so-called level of internationalisation within an institution. This quantitative approach is often used in policies, strategies or budgets to promote and evaluate the level of internationalisation. Today, although international rankings and economic rationales continue to drive the agenda of internationalisation, there is more emphasis being placed on other motivations for and outcomes of this process. For example, according to de Wit (2020), more attention is being paid to integrating international dimensions into the quality assurance mechanisms of tertiary education, through the work of national and discipline-specific accreditation agencies and institutional policies related to student learning outcomes.

One of the important roles of HE is indeed to prepare students for an ever-changing world. The growing amount of research and the number of publications concerning internationalisation of HE as well as the multitude of political and strategic processes for increasing HE mobility and cooperation demonstrate the significance of this aim. Therefore, references to the development of international and intercultural competencies and abilities and the development of global citizens are common in statements of intent by universities across the world (Leask & Bridge,

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2013). The competence required to meet global needs is included in recommendations, such as the United Nations Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015), and in international or European projects, such as the "Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture" of the Council of Europe, started in 2013 (CoE, 2013).

While the internationalisation of HE can take many forms and aim for various goals, in this chapter, we focus on the processes that are preparing students for future working life, which seems to be ever more diverse, constantly changing and evolving. The goal of this competency approach is that students learn how to interact successfully with diverse peers and professionals (*cf.* Griffith et al., 2016). To meet these aims in the HE context, the preparation of students for internationalisation should be considered as a part of holistic curriculum development and not just as an issue for one single course (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). This type of development, however, requires that, on a faculty and department level, the staff understands the competencies needed, has the motivation to integrate them into the curriculum and has the competence to guide students through the process (Deardorff, 2014; Dervin, 2010).

Before further discussing what is meant by the goal of students being able to interact successfully with diverse peers and professionals, the context and frame within which the higher education institutions (HEIs) operate must be considered. It is not just individual students that operate within HE as free agents, but there are larger political and institutional frameworks that guide processes of internationalisation. Within the European context, European Commission policy is an important driver for internationalisation. Its political objectives are fostered by the institutional international objectives in terms of Europeanisation taking place on institutional levels but placing expectations and requirements also on an individual level (Bache, 2006). The European Universities Initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2018 within the Erasmus+ programme to promote further integration in the European HE sector (Gunn, 2020). It aims for a deeper level of cooperation to develop "European campuses" and a shared sense of belonging between partner universities.

On the institutional level, policy formulations concerning internationalisation correspond to national rationales, and often fragmented, ad hoc, government policies focus merely on economic motivations and national, regional and global rankings (de Wit, 2020). On a departmental level, the degree to which academic staff engage or not in internationalisation of the curriculum is linked to their institutional mission, ethos, policies and how much they prioritise other matters (Leask & Bridge, 2013; Weimer et al., 2019).

What steps are needed to put the policy-level decisions into practice so that they reach each and every student in an HEI? Typically, the different levels of internationalisation starting from the global, to the European, the national, the institutional, and finally to the individual level (see Figure 3.1) are addressed separately and there might be gaps in the implementation of international or European policy-level decisions on the national or institutional level as well as in the implementation of institutional-level policies on the individual level of every student.

In this chapter, we will concentrate on the implementation of an institutional-level policy at the individual level. We will present a university-level project that connects internationalisation to curriculum development with the aim to foster

students' competencies to verbalise their internationalisation competence or more precisely, multilingual and intercultural communication competence. The project took place at the University of Jyväskylä, which is one of the 14 universities in Finland. There are 6 faculties, approximately 14,000 students from 100 countries and 28,00 staff members working at the university.

This chapter analyses the way the university seeks to promote competence linked to internationalisation among students and staff, by anchoring it in a wider process of internationalisation of the whole curriculum. We reflect on and describe the process from the facilitators' perspective, since the first two authors are also facilitators and experts in multilingual and intercultural communication. Even though we are not conducting organisational ethnography, self-reflexivity is needed here to acknowledge the different power and authority positions we are representing and negotiating as employees at the institution in question. To address possible emotional elements that might hinder our analysis, we have applied a collective approach to analysing the project and our own work (*cf.* Gilmore & Kenny, 2015). Our approach very much focuses on the competencies of students and university staff. We also utilise data compiled during a pilot phase of the project. As data, we recorded experiences from the three faculties participating in the pilot phase, including about 200 students and 20 faculty and administrative members. The data consists of online surveys and interviews. We use the data to illustrate our reflections concerning the possibilities and challenges of this kind of curriculum-level development within HEIs and share the lessons learned during the whole process while thinking ahead to how these could be implemented elsewhere.

The process of internationalisation from top-down policies and strategies to an individual-level competence development

Continuous adaptation of internationalisation policies to meet global, national or local needs throws light on internationalisation as a process (de Wit & Deca, 2020; Deardorff & Jones, 2022; Hunter et al., 2023; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017). The approach to internationalisation as an intentional process underscores that it does not happen in isolation nor does it occur automatically; rather, it requires deliberate strategies and actions on supranational, national and institutional levels in a comprehensive manner (*cf.* de Wit, 2020). These different levels of internationalisation should be connected and influence one another before reaching the individual level, as presented in Figure 3.1. The idea is that while international governance bodies, such as the EU, are reacting to and reflecting on the changing global situation, their actions will guide national and institutional level actions and processes. When the actions reach the individual level, individuals (students and staff) should be able to develop competencies that help them to participate and contribute to working life in international and global settings. In Figure 3.1, this process is presented by the arrows from the individual levels pointing back to the global levels of internationalisation. But how "internationalisation" is understood at the different levels may vary (*cf.* Weimer et al., 2019). For some, it might be mostly policy papers on quantitative mobility; yet for others, it could mean the skills to manage global diversification.

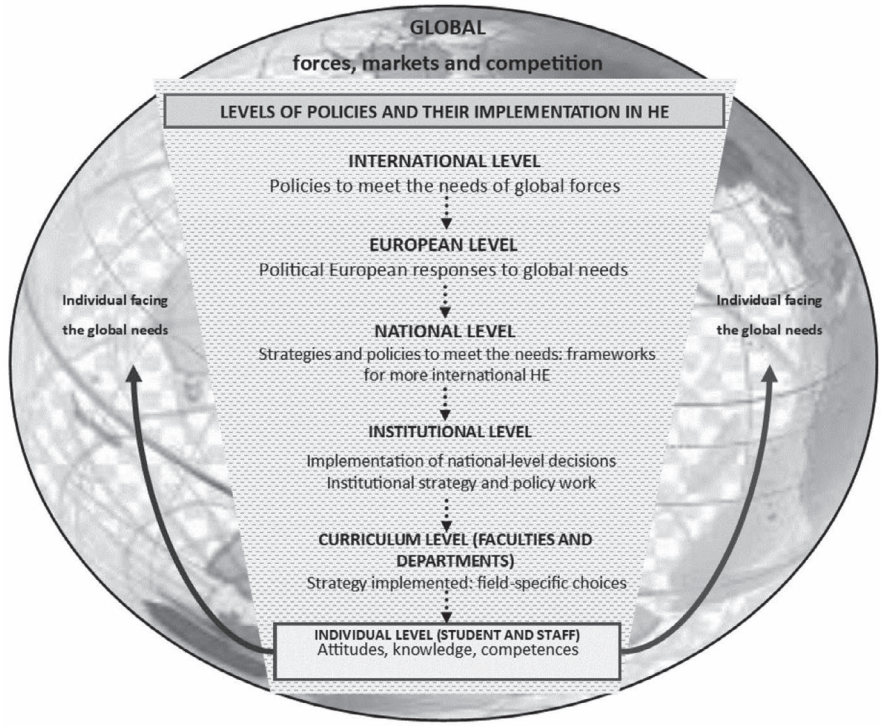

Figure 3.1 Levels of internationalisation in higher education

The United Nations (UN, 2015) is an example of an actor that sets guidelines and policies that are expected to influence HEIs policies and practices alike. The United Nations's 2030 Agenda for Education, published in 2015, is one initiative presenting guidelines for global sustainable development and education. It underlines among others relevant skills for employment, knowledge and skills for global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and sustainability. On the European policy level, the Council of Europe also adopted the UN's universal aims in 2018 and defined specific recommendations and frameworks as well as activities for reaching the defined objectives (*cf.* CoE, 2018). This policy design is an example of a macro-level transformation for the internationalisation of HE. Horizon Europe (European Commission, 2024a) and the European Education Area (European Commission, 2024b), featuring the European Universities Initiative (EUI), are recent strategies and funding structures created to promote internationalisation by the European Commission.

These international and European recommendations, programmes and initiatives constitute a strategic framework in Europe for Europeanisation, as well as for national and institutional policies of internationalisation and their implementation. The international and European framework for more international higher education with its practical consequences is, in turn, promoted on a national policy level. In

practice, the processes of internationalisation are not linear and the idea of top-down ideological change is challenged on many levels. For example, since the UN or the EU do not have authority over institutions, national authorities may not apply all the given directives or recommendations.

On a national level, it could be argued that in Finland, there has been a shift from a purely quantitative approach to a more qualitative approach in regard to how the state funding is being used to guide the internationalisation of the HEIs. While the previous state core funding models had internationalisation as separate goals and indicators focusing on purely numerical data, the current funding model for Finnish HEIs 2021–2024 has internationalisation as a performance goal and an indicator in the strategic development section of the funding model. In this model, HEIs' internationalisation is being evaluated through strategic choices and outcomes of the institution's strategy in relation to the goals of the national education and science policy (Minedu, 2023). The Ministry of Education and Culture created in 2017 Policies to Promote Internationalisation in Finnish Higher Education and Research 2017–2025. To develop the implementation of these policies, a forum of actors was set up giving recommendations on their implementation. One of the recommendations focuses on "the internationalisation competence" of the students and staff. HEIs should support this through either physical or virtual mobility or internationalisation at home. It is recommended that each student in HE should have components in their studies and degree that create this "internationalisation competence." This should be built into all degrees and the learning outcomes relating to internationalisation should be included in the HEI curriculum and the competences gained should be described. Also "the international competencies" of staff should be identified and developed systematically (Minedu, 2020).

On an institutional level, Knight (1994, 2004) has outlined four approaches to internationalisation that reflect the values, priorities and actions that are guiding the implementation of internationalisation. The different, partly overlapping and not mutually exclusive approaches are called process, activity, organisational approach and competency. In the process approach, the international dimension is integrated into various activities, policies and procedures of the institution. The activity approach underlines that internationalisation demands various categories or types of activities, including curriculum development, scholar/student exchange programmes and technical cooperation initiatives. The organisational approach views internationalisation as the cultivation of an ethos or culture within the university or college that appreciates and nurtures intercultural and international perspectives and endeavours. The reason behind this approach can be, for instance, the need to strengthen the institution's reputation (see also Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Knight's last approach to internationalisation, the competency approach, examines it through the lens of cultivating skills, attitudes and knowledge among students, faculty and staff, emphasising the human dimension presented in the UN Agenda more than academic strategies or organisational concerns (Knight, 1994).

The competency approach to internationalisation addresses the micro-level of internationalisation and aims to produce beneficial outcomes for students, such as wider perspectives, better intercultural competence, and/or language skills, as

well as the positive impact of employability as a response to the needs of local and global economies and communities (*cf.* Critchley & Wyburd, 2021; Hunter et al., 2023). Deardorff and Jones (2012, 2022) have long argued that intercultural competence development is emerging as a central focus and outcome of many internationalisation processes. Indeed, there are numerous references suggesting that internationalisation activities, which incorporate notions of intercultural competence, have the potential to cultivate the skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for students to thrive in a globalised world and within multicultural contexts (see, e.g., Leask, 2009). In addition, Beelen (2023) states that internationalisation is not an end goal but rather a means to enhance student competencies and the quality of education. This micro-level internationalisation needs a curriculum design that enables graduates to be prepared for life and work in a culturally complex, increasingly globally interdependent and interconnected world (Garrett-Rucks & Jansa, 2020; Krebs, 2020; Smith-Isabell & Rubaii, 2020). If only mobility and exchange programmes are stressed in HEI strategies, they may reach only a small number of students and be unsuccessful in bringing international and intercultural learning to most students (Killick, 2020; Kimmel & Volet, 2012).

Our focus is on the micro-level work among staff members, such as teachers or counsellors and students (see Sá & Serpa, 2020). However, among university staff, the term *internationalisation* often still refers only to physical mobility as well as to cross-national knowledge transfer in HE (Tight, 2021). International mobility continues to be considered an important part of internationalisation strategies even if exchange programmes are only one of the numerous activities that aim at achieving internationalisation objectives.

Describing the context and the project at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The University of Jyväskylä (JYU) emphasises all Knight's approaches to internationalisation (*cf.* Knight, 1994, 2004) in its strategy. Yet, in this chapter, we will focus on the competence approach and how it has been considered at the University of Jyväskylä. As a part of internationalisation, the strategy aims for every graduate to have a "JYU identity," which according to the JYU strategy 2030, includes strong interpersonal skills, language and cultural awareness and global and ethical responsibility (University of Jyväskylä, 2018). In line with the strategy, strengthening internationalisation competence is part of each student's personal study plan, in which the student not only chooses courses but can also reflect and discuss their studies and other study-related possibilities (mobility, internship, etc.) with a study counsellor or a teacher tutor from their field. To fulfil this strategy, students must have the possibility to systemically include in their studies elements or opportunities, which can foster the internationalisation and intercultural competence related to their field. This aim is included in the curriculum development for 2024–2028 as the focus area called "international competence and teaching in a foreign language." Every curriculum should therefore include teaching and studies to support the communication and language skills required in one's field, as well as studies

that pay attention to cultural diversity and sustainability. These can be compulsory communication and language courses in a degree or optional studies. Furthermore, the curriculum should include studies provided in a foreign language from the bachelor's level onwards and encouraging students to participate in activities and learning possibilities enhancing their intercultural competencies, including physical and virtual mobilities or internationalisation at home. (University of Jyväskylä, 2018). While negotiating and designing the strategy aiming at "JYU identity," University of Jyväskylä also become one of the founding members of the FORTHEM European University Alliance in 2019. This alliance, and funding that came along with it, was a significant contextual element enhancing the European dimension and focus within JYU internationalisation strategy.

The Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication at the University of Jyväskylä (Movi) is one of the main actors responsible for the promotion of internationalisation at JYU. Movi is responsible for the development and implementation of the mandatory communication and language courses in the degrees of the University as well as staff training and participates in various development projects on pedagogy and study guidance, academic study skills, academic expertise and student well-being. In the latest JYU strategy, Movi's role as enhancing the overall internationalisation of the University and implementation of JYU's strategy was strengthened and a team of experts was established within Movi in 2019. With 13 colleagues representing different languages, communication studies and administrative staff, Movi's internationalisation team started the development project for promoting internationalisation competence throughout the curriculum, focusing on students' competencies. The main aim of the bottom-up approach was that students should be able to identify and consciously build up the competencies needed for international and multilingual working life during their studies. This is aligned with the University's strategy to make internationalisation part of all students' overall academic expertise, whether they are going abroad for an exchange or a placement, or whether they are doing internationalisation at home.

The Movi internationalisation team began its task by defining and describing students' competencies. This work started prior to the main project, in 2017, when two of the chapter's authors (LK and TN) participated in a pedagogical development project and focused on defining multilingual and intercultural communication competence (MICC). The definition of MICC, and the subsequently developed framework, serves as a tool to help students and faculty members alike to reflect on and verbalise the kinds of competencies needed today. We will shortly introduce the definition and framework in the next paragraphs.

The framework for multilingual and intercultural communication competence

The debate around the internationalisation of the curriculum has prioritised the development of students' competence in intercultural understanding (Fragouli, 2021). Less attention has been paid to connecting this discussion to the no-less-topical debate on the competencies that make a graduate employable in different contexts. As Beneitone and Yarosh (2022) have summarised, such competencies

have also been referred to as "generic competencies" (GC), "soft" or "transferable skills," more "subtle and flexible skills," or "broad generic skills and capacities."

To help learners understand what the possible positive outcomes of international experiences, virtual exchanges and internationalisation at home could be, a framework for MICC was developed. It is described in detail elsewhere (*cf.* Kokkonen & Natri, 2024). The framework is based on the research and literature in the fields of intercultural communication and applied linguistics and is thus limited in the perspective it takes on the competence needed in modern work and study settings. The primary objective of developing the MICC framework was to cater to pedagogical needs and to provide support to learners within the HE context.

The MICC framework integrates aspects of intercultural communication competence (ICC) and multilingual communication competence, highlighting the interpretative and situational aspects of the phenomenon. The framework emphasises the approaches presented by many scholars on the fluid, dynamic and contested nature of cultures; the recognition of multiple cultural identities and intercultural interactions (*cf.* Dervin, 2010, 2017; Holliday, 2018; Martin & Nakayama, 2015). It also highlights the importance of language use and multilingual resources and repertoires in intercultural contexts (*cf.* Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013; Piller, 2017). By the term *multilingual and intercultural communication competence*, we mean

> an interpretation of effective and appropriate communication with the use of linguistic and semiotic resources and repertoires in situations and contexts where interculturality and cultures are relevant to the interactants. MICC is situated and contextual and evolving as a continuous and dynamic process based on interaction.
>
> (Kokkonen & Natri, 2024, p. 30)

The framework consists of different elements of multilingual and intercultural communication competence and examples of possible learning outcomes. The framework is not a measuring tool and is not suitable for summative assessment. Within the MICC framework, competence is viewed as a developmental process, implying a lifelong journey (*cf.* Blair, 2017). This underscores the situational and contextual nature of MICC, wherein competent communication varies depending on the specific situation, context, participants, and discussion objectives (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

The definitions and creation of concrete learning outcomes alone are not enough to ensure students' opportunities to enhance their competencies. As Leask (2009) notes, the development of intercultural competence among students requires a campus culture that motivates and rewards interaction between domestic and international students, both in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, as Dervin points out, when the concept of intercultural competence is introduced, "one needs to develop ways of making sure that it is *developed*" (Dervin, 2010, p. 156). In this respect, JYU has adopted an approach to internationalisation that aims to enhance competencies, offering multilingual and intercultural communication competence as a tool for students so that they can communicate and collaborate with people from

different countries. It is also important to remember that the competencies can be field specific. Therefore, one of the issues addressed throughout the process is the need for the faculties and departments to define what are their field specific competencies and learning outcomes for the process. Next, we describe the process of internationalisation of the curriculum that is taking place within JYU as an illustration of the fundamental elements needed when implementing the policy-level statements and decisions at the individual level, that is, when addressing students.

Developing internationalisation of the curriculum at JYU

The Movi internationalisation team divided the internationalisation of the curriculum into three phases. At first, the framework for multilingual and intercultural communication competence described earlier was created, and it served as a possible tool to describe competencies needed in the internationalisation. The second phase consisted of establishing, in cooperation with the participating institutions and faculties, field-specific learning outcomes related to internationalisation. The third phase concretised how internationalisation competence and its development can be integrated into the development of students' academic expertise as a part of their study plan.

Movi's role was to act as a facilitator in faculty-level discussions and to offer tools for planning, structuring and putting into practice the internationalisation plans. The role was not to be part of an authoritative top-down management. Thus, during the second and third phases of the project, the different faculties and departments of the university were contacted. The team of 13 Movi staff members then coordinated with the departments and faculties the creation of study guidance policy, practices and paths (internationalisation plan) to help every JYU student create and articulate their internationalisation competence aims. The development process contained three types of collaboration with faculty members: working on field-specific learning outcomes about internationalisation competence, solutions for the documentation of internationalisation plans, and the practical process of creating and updating the plan with various checkpoints with each faculty or degree programme. Different faculties and departments could choose very different ways of organising their internationalisation plans, but in most cases, students reflected on their internationalisation competencies as part of their learning assignments or portfolios.

Table 3.1 lists the primary actors and actions within JYU whose participation and support were fundamental in the process development. They gave the necessary strategic and policy-level support, frames and mandate within JYU. They also granted funding for the team of experts within Movi to work for a strategic period of four years. Synergy in communicating about and implementing the process was also supported through collaboration with the overall curriculum development of JYU and the development of guidance and counselling as the process reached the individual level.

As Table 3.1 illustrates, commitment to the process needs to be acknowledged and supported at many levels of the university administration. Further, as competence can also be field-specific, it is important that students get support and

Table 3.1 The primary actors and actions within JYU ⏎

Level	*Actors*	*Tools*	*Actions*
Institutional level at JYU	Rector, Vice Rectors, University Senate	University strategy for 2018–2024 (+ discussions leading to the launch of strategy)	Setting the mission statement and strategy for JYU, setting the tone and the aims of JYU
	University Services: Division of Policy and Planning		Examining and enabling the JYU strategy to the national funding model and other set policy targets and goals on a national level
	Education Council, University Services: Student and Academic Services	Development programme of Education 2020–2024 Handbook for curriculum development 2024–2028, published in 2022; Curriculum development workshops Guidelines for good guidance and counselling, main framework approved in 2023 (but constant development work before and after); Guidance and counselling training	Providing the frames, support for the process as well as cooperation possibilities and synergy with other JYU processes relating to curriculum and study guidance development
Curriculum level	Movi internationalisation team	Coordination and support, training, research, material as of 2019 (+ preceding projects)	Managing and developing the process of internationalisation of the curriculum
	Movi team and faculty members of the different departments/ faculties	Discussions and possible workshops with Movi and among themselves on competencies Development of teaching	Facilitating academic staff to become skilled and empowered to develop and deliver a curriculum to meet the entitlements of a diverse student body that enhances the competencies needed in modern working life Deciding field-specific internationalisation competencies and learning goals for the degrees, degree programmes and individual courses

(*Continued*)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Level	*Actors*	*Tools*	*Actions*
			Building a path of progression and reflection on the aforementioned goals and competencies
			Achieving a more inclusive approach to learning, teaching and assessment regarding internationalisation and the learning outcomes set by the faculty/department in their teaching
Individual level	Students	Internationalisation plan	Verbalising and discussing, reflecting on and developing their internationalisation competence
	Teachers	Training, personal and professional development	Helping students to verbalise and discuss, reflect on and develop their internationalisation competence
			Understanding and developing their internationalisation competence
			Including and addressing elements of field-specific internationalisation competencies in lesson plans and teaching
	Study counsellors	Training, personal and professional development	Helping students to verbalise and discuss, reflect on and develop their internationalisation competence
			Guiding students to the suitable resources and means for their development and wishes

guidance for competence development from a specialist within their study fields. The guidance aims to give students an understanding of how to reflect, verbalise and enhance their competencies during their studies and later in their working lives. Through guidance, students should also be able to identify the places and possibilities for enhancing their competencies. Naturally, this requires that the staff who supervise the students at the department also know how to verbalise and

explain to the students the key concepts and possible learning outcomes related to the internationalisation of their discipline. To facilitate this, discussions on the field-specific competencies were also organised for Movi teachers in charge of the language and communication courses in the faculties.

Experiences from the project

The project of internationalisation of the curriculum at JYU had a pilot phase during the academic year 2020–2021, when three different faculties participated in the project with selected degree programmes. Since then, more degree programmes, departments and faculties have been included in the project. At the time of the writing, the project and the students' internationalisation plan are being implemented in all the bachelor's degree programmes at the JYU.

In spring 2021, we sent a survey to students and teachers/instructors of the participating faculties and their departments and degree programmes to get feedback on different phases of the process. The Movi team also interviewed one to two staff representatives from each pilot faculty to deepen the information gathered by the survey. The pilot and the interviews explored the opportunities and challenges involved in implementing a personal internationalisation plan for each student. The survey was completed by a mere 14% of the student body (28 out of 200) and 40% of the staff representatives (12 out of 30). Consequently, it would be imprudent to draw definitive conclusions solely based on this limited dataset.

The student survey indicated that the concept of an internationalisation plan was not yet clear to everyone even if they had a good understanding of the internationalisation opportunities available to them. For students, an exchange is the most familiar type of internationalisation, but different forms of internationalisation at home were also identified. The survey revealed that it was important to address these issues as part of their study guidance. Students saw internationalisation competence as an important part of academic competence and expertise, but they needed more help in identifying and conceptualising their strengths and areas for development and in articulating them.

For the staff, implementation of the project was also facilitated by the Movi team. Personal interest and mentoring responsibilities were the main reasons given by staff to explain their participation in the pilot. The challenges raised by staff were multiple. Time was reported to be needed for the study guidance and its organisation, as well as for introducing the phenomenon to students and staff and familiarising them with it. In addition to time, staff members reported that more knowledge was needed. The results from the pilot suggested that staff expertise on internationalisation competence should be improved, for example, with concrete examples of the phenomenon and how to enhance it. The third challenge mentioned in the survey was the lack of involvement of the staff in the development of the study counselling. This challenge is related to the question of the distribution of responsibilities between study counsellors and instructors. At JYU, faculties and departments decide in an autonomous manner about their counselling and study guidance practices, which creates a

differing organisation of practices and disparate priorities in counselling. The staff claimed that the guidance given within a whole faculty should be harmonised and should not be dependent on the interests of the counsellor or instructor. They underlined that the focus should be on the individual needs and goals of the student. This could enhance the student's goal-oriented development and accumulation of competencies. Staff members agreed that the internationalisation plan is an important part of guidance and that there was a true need for practical solutions, processes and practices, as well as support in its implementation.

After three years of intense work towards the development of the internationalisation plan at the JYU, considerable variation remains between degree programmes, departments and faculties in the management of internationalisation plans and the processes used to implement them. Departments and faculties have developed methods and processes that fit their context and their interests. The challenges that were already present during the pilot phase, namely distribution of responsibilities, time constraints and lack of knowledge about internationalisation competence, persist, even if the idea of shared responsibility for implementation of internationalisation plan to every student is being addressed. Regardless of the consistent uptake of inclusive practices across the whole university as well as sharing knowledge and good practices between the faculties some students seem to have very different experience of discussing and reflecting the competencies. Thus, more communication within degree programmes is needed to ensure that the students will have equal opportunities to address these issues and the discussions on students' internationalisation is not down to the motivation and/or resources of the individual study advisors. Another challenge seems to be the lack of knowledge of possible pedagogical solutions on how to work towards the set learning goals and how to provide students with opportunities to enhance their competencies related with internationalisation. Simply teaching in English and asking students to work in diverse groups might not be enough. Earlier studies show that if students are not provided with pedagogical support, they may experience overwhelming difficulties associated with intercultural groupwork (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Overall, the mere presence of students with diverse cultural backgrounds in the same institution is insufficient to enhance students' intercultural competence (*cf.* Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Leask, 2009; Summers & Volet, 2008).

Figure 3.2 illustrates how the internationalisation process in HE could be balanced and viewed also from the perspective of individual competencies to better bridge the gap between policy and practice. It is important to note that staff members have a crucial role in this approach. They need field-specific knowledge of national, European and international objectives and the competence to guide the students in their learning path.

To sum up, we see that the individuals involved in degree programmes need to be agents for change themselves and the process should be heavily invested in at the individual level. Various forms of active participation, interest, motivation and commitment is needed to get individuals involved on a more personal level. But when this is achieved, it is much more efficient than only relying on departmental policy and process protocols in study guidance and curriculum development. Yet, this level of participation cannot happen without sufficient resources.

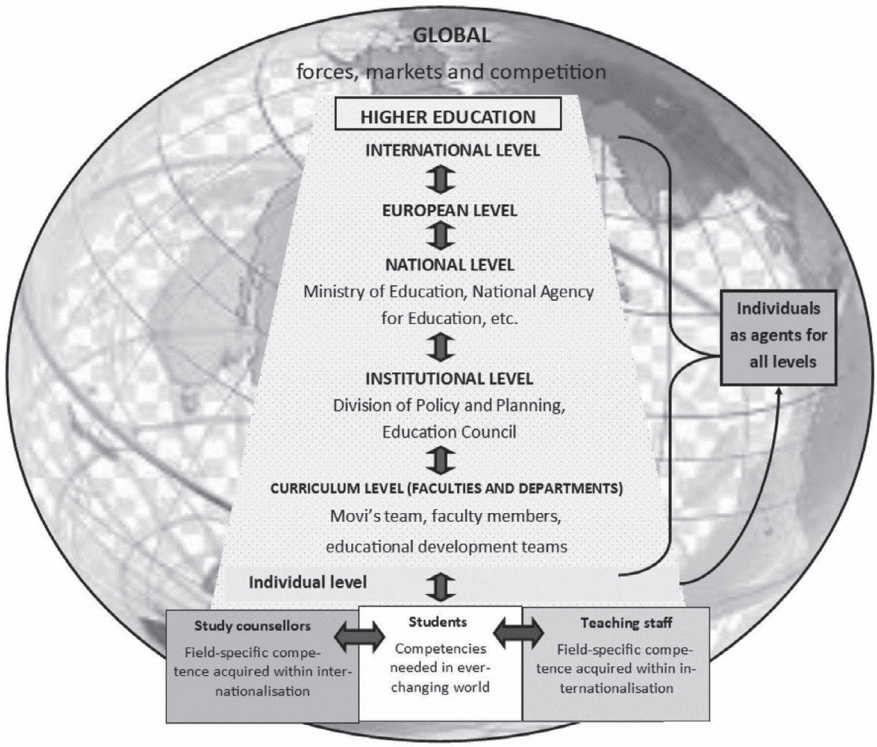

Figure 3.2 Levels and agents of internationalisation starting from the individual ⏎

Conclusion

As regards to developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education, May and Bridger (2010) point out that change needs to take place on the individual level as well as the institutional level and that both levels require equal attention to bring about inclusive policy and practice. On a policy and strategy level, worldwide, in Europe and nationally, the importance of global needs and internationalisation competence has been recognised, as we can see from various recommendations and frameworks, starting with the UN Agenda from 2015. The challenges seem to be that these policy-level and strategic recommendations and/or decisions take multiple years to reach the individual level in HEIs, and they are then seen as top-down decision-making processes that fail to consider the needs and practices of individual-level staff members and students.

We also have to acknowledge the critique that questions internationalisation and the motivations of such process as neoliberal capitalist-driven exploitation and colonialisation (*cf.* Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). For these and other reasons mentioned earlier, the Movi internationalisation team has adopted an approach to internationalisation and European collaboration that has at its core not only the

ability to communicate and collaborate with people from different countries but also intercultural competence considering much broader spectrum of diversities. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the competence needed in the diverse global study and working life is often field specific and contextual. Thus, having one shared definition is not possible and this entails paying attention to individual students' career projects, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all solutions.

The findings of the process at the University of Jyväskylä demonstrate that it takes years to achieve the competence objectives that are contextual and field specific as well as to discuss and reflect them at the individual level. In the meanwhile, new political agendas appear and replace the previous ones before they have even been fully implemented. The means and sufficient time to ensure the quality of a bottom-up, student-centred approach to competence development should be guaranteed. This is naturally very challenging in a world where changes are occurring at an accelerating speed.

Gaining competencies that enable students to interact and work in multilingual and intercultural contexts should be possible for all students, not only for those participating in mobility. In this situation, internationalisation at home plays an important role, which means that the key actors in fostering internationalisation competence are teachers and counsellors. They too need motivation, knowledge and competence to be agents of change. As universities strive to internationalise and develop internationalisation competence or multilingual and intercultural communication competence in students, it can be that many faculty and staff members have limited competencies in these issues themselves. The competence needed in HEIs should be established for university employees, followed by strategies to help them develop it (*cf.* Fantini, 2020). This view was supported by findings from the pilot interviews and from the ongoing discussions with the participating staff members. They suggest that more resources are needed, encompassing not only the knowledge and pedagogical practices for integrating and discussing the topic in teaching and counselling but also resources to ensure the personal competence development of staff members.

As members of the Movi internationalisation team, we have also noticed that change should be fostered with various methods because different individuals need different methods to be engaged. The team has developed research-based resources and materials to help the process. The cooperation with faculties and departments has taken place in advisory or working groups where the team has provided opportunities for dialogue and disseminated effective practices. The professional development has been supported by staff training, organised by Movi, on multilingual and intercultural guidance and the internationalisation plan as a part of student guidance. In the future, more research on the process and its results will be conducted because solid evidence is required to bring about change in management processes and to demonstrate its benefits for the institutional context and stakeholder groups. According to May and Bridger (2010), an implementation assessment should include reviewing and developing policy, conducting equality impact assessments, revising performance management or induction processes and data analysis. In the overall process of enhancing the internationalisation of the whole curriculum at the university, these steps are still to be developed.

Time, resources, cooperation and dedication at the HEI are needed to expand strategy and policy and to make it a part of the HEI's ethos and mission as well as actions and activities of the individuals in the HEI. The process also needs to be maintained and developed, and individual actors should be supported with updated knowledge and tools, as competencies are dynamic concepts. However, our experiences show that while change is slow and takes resources, agents of change will emerge and enable individuals and HEIs alike to address the abstract international and policy-level expectations from an individual competence point of view and bridge the gap between policy and practice.

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4 The development of intercultural competence through internationalisation at home

The case of Erasmus+ blended intensive programmes within European University Alliances

Romée Jager

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed growing consensus among political representatives and institutions involved in higher education around the need to prepare students as "global citizens" to live and work "successfully" in an interconnected world (e.g. Killick, 2012; Mitchell, 2023). Higher education institutions (HEIs) are nowadays encouraged by policymakers to focus on developing "intercultural competence" among their students by participating in various internationalisation initiatives, for example, through the European Universities Initiative (EUI) or other actions within the Erasmus+ programme. The election of pro-European Emmanuel Macron as the French president in May 2017 was an important driver for the current emphasis on curriculum internationalisation (also referred to as "internationalisation at home") and the EUI. Macron's speech at the Sorbonne University, Paris, in September 2017, was an influential driver for the European Commission's report *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture* which emphasised the creation of a European Education Area "based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth" (Gunn, 2020, p. 16).

International academic mobility of people, programmes, policies and projects has been a frequent topic in the study and discourse on internationalisation, and for the past few decades, there has appeared to be a consensus around the idea that education abroad is a key factor in "intercultural competence" learning (Jones, 2017; Knight & de Wit, 2018). While before the 1970s academic mobility in Europe could be characterised as voluntarist, unorganised and individualistic, scholars suggest that from the 1970s onwards, there has been a notable increase in EU involvement, with the EU emerging as a key player in promoting student mobility and enhancing recognition of studies abroad within Europe (see de Wit & Merkx, 2022; Papatsiba, 2005). Ambitious targets set by the European Commission highlight the emphasis placed on student mobility even further. For example, the European ministers agreed that 20% of the students in higher education should complete a study or training abroad, as was reaffirmed in the Rome

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Ministerial Communiqué of 19 November 2020,[1] and the Council conclusions on the EUI set the goal to have at least 50% mobile students within the European Higher Education Area (The Council of the European Union, 2022). However, despite these ambitious goals, until today, these targets seem to be elusive, with the proportion of European students studying in another country being far below the targeted numbers and remaining more or less constant (see Teichler, 2017 for a critical overview of the changing role of international student mobility). According to the latest data from Eurostat, approximately 9% of EU students who graduated in 2021 participated in a mobility abroad for at least three months during their studies.[2]

In addition to the stagnating mobility numbers, further considerations of inclusiveness, COVID-19-related travel restrictions, growing use of online learning environments and digital communication platforms in universities, as well as ecological concerns regarding carbon-intensive modes of transport, have all contributed to an increased focus on the potential for internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC), internationalisation at home (IaH) and more flexible forms of mobility (Deardorff et al., 2022). These are concepts that seem to target the vast majority of students who may not have the opportunity to spend a semester abroad, but who can potentially develop their "intercultural competence" through contact with incoming students or online collaborations with peers from other countries.

Reflecting the vision of the European Commission, the most recent Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027)[3] aims to be more accessible, inclusive, digital and green, notably through the addition of "blended mobility" in the form of "blended intensive programmes" (BIPs). These short-term programmes combine physical mobility with a virtual component. The objective to make mobility more accessible and inclusive is clear, but it also raises questions about methods and implementation. In the respect that that European University Alliances (EUAs) "are considered to represent a testing ground for institution-wide transnational cooperation" (Craciun et al., 2023, p. 12), and further "forced" by the COVID-19 pandemic, BIPs are a new activity that was prefigured by many of the first wave of EUAs, which developed new forms of blended mobility. In this context, this chapter investigates the potential of BIPs as a vector to enhance students' "intercultural competence" within the context of European University Alliances. The chapter will discuss how BIPs can be regarded as an activity contributing to the process of internationalisation at home and question if they have the potential to foster "intercultural competence" among students. First, an overview of the internationalisation of higher education within the context of the European Higher Education Area will be provided, followed by a closer look at BIPs. Next, a brief critical overview of the literature on intercultural competence learning will be given, with a specific focus on interpersonal interactions and disequilibrium learning. This will be followed by a discussion on how these elements can be applied to formulate recommendations on how BIPs can act as a possible vector contributing to the development of "intercultural competence" among students in the context of EUAs.

Internationalisation of higher education training: towards internationalisation at home and curriculum internationalisation

To critically examine BIPs in the context of the internationalisation of higher education, it is essential to first understand the multitude of rationales driving this, and specifically, the development towards the encouragement of internationalisation activities that include wider audiences, such as IaH and IoC. The literature widely accepts that internationalisation is a complex phenomenon, adopting different forms in different contexts (e.g. de Wit & Merkx, 2022; Egron-Polak & Marinoni, 2022; Hunter et al., 2022; Proctor & Rumbley, 2018). Rationales may change, overlap and differ over time in response to rapid contextual changes, and they may be weighed differently by different stakeholders. Knight (2004) suggests that traditionally, the various rationales for internationalisation can be qualified into four categories (*social/cultural*, *academic*, *political* and *economic*) while highlighting their diverse and possibly intersecting characteristics. Rationales such as promoting intercultural understanding, citizenship development and social and community development could be typified under a *social/cultural* rationale. On the other hand, *political* rationales could include foreign policy, national security, peace and mutual understanding, national and regional identity building, and "Euro-internationalisation" (*cf.* Chapter 1, this volume). Motives such as economic growth and competitiveness, labour market and financial incentives can be found under the umbrella of *economic* rationales, while giving an international dimension to research and teaching, extending academic horizons, institution building, profile and status, and enhancement of quality could be typified as *academic* rationales for internationalisation.

As internationalisation of higher education is a nebulous concept treated differently by different actors, its definition has been the subject of much discourse. It is argued that the differing and competing rationales, along with the confusion over terminology, contribute to both the complexity of implementing an internationalised curriculum and its various impacts (e.g. Beelen & Jones, 2015; Knight, 2004). Over the past decades, several definitions have been proposed (Arum & Van de Water, 1992; de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2003, 1994; Van der Wende, 1997) but the term is still currently used in a myriad of ways (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2017). A frequently cited and widely accepted definition of internationalisation is that by Knight (2003) who defines internationalisation in higher education as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2). This definition was revised in a report by the European Parliament in 2015 to

> the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.
>
> (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 283)

The revised definition acknowledges the importance of inclusive internationalisation by accentuating the notion that internationalisation should enhance the

quality of education and research for all students and staff, aligning with the idea that today's global context requires providing an internationalised curriculum for all students, not just the mobile few.

In this context, the concepts of internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) and internationalisation at home (IaH) gained increased interest, and interestingly their definitions were both updated in 2015 as well (Hunter et al., 2022). Early work on the concept of IaH by Nilsson (2003) – who is also referred to as "the father of internationalisation at home" (Beelen & Jones, 2018) – presents how IaH was "born" in 1998 when Nilsson became the vice president for international affairs at the newly founded university in Malmö, Sweden. Here, Nilsson was faced with the challenge of establishing an internationalisation strategy without being able to refer to existing structures of mobility or partnerships and hence opted for another approach: internationalisation at home. Nilsson (2003) points out that

> the concept of IaH is of course not new in an international academic context – it is just a way to embrace all ideas about and measures to be taken to give all students an international dimension during their time at the university.
>
> (p. 31)

IaH can be defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). This concept is closely related to the concept of "internationalisation of the curriculum," which is defined by Leask (2015) as "the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study" (p. 9). Leask stresses that this definition supports both the formal curriculum, such as the syllabus and the structured and organised schedule of experiences and activities that students are required to undertake as a requirement within their degree programme, and the informal curriculum consisting of the range of activities that universities offer that are not assessed as elements within the formal curriculum but that may facilitate learning, such as support services, extra activities and optional opportunities outside the formal curriculum (Leask, 2015).

While IaH and IoC could be seen as distinctive concepts considering that IaH focuses on integrating international and intercultural elements into domestic learning environments and IoC encompasses a broader spectrum of curricular enhancements, Beelen (2023) points out that "they should be considered interwoven concepts that overlap and are essentially the same" (p. 105). Both IaH and IoC acknowledge that the internationalisation of higher education is no longer an *ad hoc* element in HEIs and challenge the assumption that "study abroad offers the golden remedy" (Jones, 2017, p. 355). Both concepts seem to be aimed at benefiting a large population of students who might not have the chance to study abroad but can still cultivate their multilingual and intercultural competence by engaging with various students, by participating in online collaborations with peers from different backgrounds, or other forms of short-term mobility. Within this context, both concepts are here understood in the

same spirit, namely, making intercultural and international learning accessible to all students. Be that as it may, for the sake of coherence, this chapter will focus on IaH, understood as the possibility of enhancing students' international and intercultural competence beyond solely traditional exchange periods, based on the idea that international and intercultural learning opportunities should be accessible to all students regardless of their background or study cycles. Next, BIPs will be discussed as a "novelty" contributing to IaH, an activity which could possibly be a factor in providing intercultural learning opportunities to wider audiences, notably among new possibilities proposed within EUAs.

Blended intensive programmes: a novelty in the Erasmus+ programme

The internationalisation of higher education in Europe is strongly influenced by the European Union's internationalisation strategy and policy (*cf.* Chapter 5, this volume). Considering the various ambitious mobility targets that have been set (*cf.* supra), it is not surprising that the European Union's flagship programme when it comes to education, the Erasmus+ programme, tends to show the development towards encouraging internationalisation activities that include wider audiences. While Erasmus+ still strongly encourages long-term physical mobility, it also recognises the need for more flexible forms of international cooperation. In the context of becoming more accessible, inclusive, digital and green, "blended mobility" in the form of "blended intensive programmes" (BIPs) has been introduced as a "novelty" in Erasmus+'s most recent programme (2021 till 2027) (European Commission – Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). BIPs have been introduced as a new activity eligible for funding under Key Action 1 (KA1) – mobility of individuals. Blended intensive programmes are short-term programmes that combine physical mobility with a virtual component and which the Erasmus+ programme guide defines as:

> Short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation. The programmes may include challenge based learning where transnational and transdisciplinary teams work together to tackle challenges for example those linked to the United Nations' sustainable development goals or other societal challenges identified by regions, cities or companies. The intensive programme should have added value compared to existing courses or trainings offered by the participating higher education institutions and can be multiannual. By enabling new and more flexible mobility formats that combine physical mobility with a virtual part, blended intensive programmes aim at reaching all types of students from all backgrounds, study fields and cycles.
>
> (European Commission, 2022, p. 47)

Specific eligibility criteria have been set for BIPs, the most important being that the programmes must be developed and implemented by at least three HEIs coming from at least three EU Member States and/or third countries associated with

the programme.[4] This appears to be a requirement that enforces institutional cooperation and makes BIPs a suitable activity to be carried out within EUAs, to not only build upon the collaboration within the institutions of an EUA but also as an opportunity to strengthen and foster it. The programme must combine collaborative online learning with short-term physical mobility, in which the physical mobility must have a duration of at least 5 days and a maximum of 30 days, while no criteria have been set for the duration of the virtual component. For the BIP to be eligible for funding, at least 15 mobile participants (not including teaching and training staff) must participate and the BIP must award at least three ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits to students.

Blended mobility in the form of combining an online exchange with physical mobility is of course not new, and there are multiple examples of blended mobility projects that have been carried out under the internationalisation realm supported by the Erasmus programme (for instance see Malichová et al., 2022). BIPs, however, are an innovative form of short-term mobility that were newly introduced under the Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027),[5] with funding available not only for staff and institutions but also for students across all study cycles and disciplines. BIPs are by no means exclusive to the EUI, but EUAs seem to have the conditions that can facilitate these activities due to their inter-institutional network. The EUI can be seen as an initiative, which promotes internationalisation through EUAs, employing physical mobility and other IaH actions in their collaboration schemes, through, for instance, visiting students and staff, and online and blended activities such as BIPs. As such, the EUI can be seen as a solution that contributes to achieving the goal of having at least 50% mobile students within the European Higher Education Area (*cf. supra*). BIPs appear as one means among others to gain funding, taken from the Erasmus+ funding of the universities, but not from the EUI budget in particular, in order to carry out an innovative form of mobility which concerns a number of students at a time.

In 2022, the European Commission published a blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility to provide guidance for beneficiaries of blended mobility funding[6] on how to implement and organise "high quality" blended mobility opportunities. Although only limited advice is given on implementation, it is acknowledged to be a "living document" as new evidence that will evolve emerges. The guide frequently refers to how BIPs are integrated as "novelties" to provide more inclusive mobility forms and argues that BIPs have the potential to encourage IaH. BIPs are introduced with the idea that they can lead to innovative teaching practices and more flexible learning pathways as students can work together across different disciplines with the opportunity to learn "new types of competences" (*ibid.*, p. 8). Although what these "new types of competences" include remains rather vague, it could plausibly be interpreted that "intercultural competence" is among these targeted competences.

Intercultural competence learning

There appears to be much support for the idea that internationalisation "is an effective option for universities through which they can ensure that all of their students

develop the essential intercultural and international knowledge, skills and attitudes required for citizenship and professional practice in an increasingly connected and yet divided and unequal world" (Marants-Gal & Leask, 2023, p. 114). Already in the first edition of the *Handbook of International Higher Education* (2012), Deardorff and Jones argued that "intercultural competence development is emerging as a central focus – and outcome – of many internationalization efforts" (p. 283). Almost a decade later, in the second edition of the Handbook, the argument is still much the same, though intercultural competence development is no longer presented as an emerging focus. The new edition states that "intercultural competence development has become a significant focus of internationalization efforts at many higher education institutions" (Deardorff & Jones, 2022, p. 223).

More than a decade ago, Deardorff and Jones (2012) pointed out that different approaches and disciplines use different terms to refer to the concept, including "intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence, global competence, global citizenship, multicultural competence, cultural fluency, communicative competence, cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural literacy, cross-cultural capability, and so on" (p. 284). Since then, many more terms have been introduced, such as "Global Fitness," introduced by Spencer-Oatey et al. (2022) as a term that compromises "all the features that enable a person or organisation to succeed in contexts of cultural diversity" (p. 10); "cultural mindedness," which Layne and Teng (2022) define as "a multidimensional concept concerned with how students think about and engage with interculturality and diversity" (p. 1); and a framework for "multilingual and intercultural communication competence" is proposed by Kokkonen et al. (*cf.* Chapter 3, this volume).

Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) provide a detailed overview of the numerous theoretical models of intercultural competence.[7] Their overview shows that "there is obviously no shortage of feasible approaches or models for guiding conceptualizations, theories, measurements, and investigations of intercultural competence" (p. 35). However, interestingly, the models seem to have a lot in common, which was also noticed by Spitzberg and Changnon: "the theories and models display both considerable similarity in their broad brushstrokes (e.g. motivation, knowledge, skills, context, outcomes) and yet extensive diversity at the level of specific conceptual subcomponents" (p. 35). They found that over 300 different terms and concepts were used to relate to intercultural competence, many of them very similar yet distinctive in wording. Therefore, they argue that one of the problems with looking at "competence" is that "the same behavior or skill may be perceived as competent in one context but not another or one perceiver but not another, and thus no particular skill or ability is likely to ever be universally 'competent'" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 6). Hence, they reason that conceptualisations of competence are relevant if they "attempt to account for the process of managing interaction in ways that are likely to produce more appropriate and effective individual, relational, group, or institutional outcomes" (p. 6).

Deardorff (2006) tried to document consensus among intercultural scholars and academic administrators on the best way to measure "intercultural competence." The study found that most administrators preferred a very general definition of

"intercultural competence," mainly a definition that works for all students in all situations. The most favoured definition of the institutions participating in Deardorff's study is from Byram (1997) and can be summarised as "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (as cited in Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). Deardorff visualised the results of her study in two models, one of which is a process model which "depicts the complexity of acquiring intercultural competence in outlining more of the movement and process orientation that occurs between the various elements" (p. 257).

Taking a process perspective as well, Jones (2013) argues that intercultural competence "is not about specific knowledge of a single culture, but means operating effectively across cultures and challenging our own values, assumptions and stereotypes" (p. 97). The paradigmatic shift seems to be away from essentialist approaches to culture, in which the latter is seen as a concrete social phenomenon where national cultures are predominantly used as explanations for human behaviour, towards seeing culture as "a dynamic, fluid, and multifaceted processes, collaboratively constructed by participants through their interactions taking meaning from but also deviating from prefigured macro-level constructs" (Kokkonen et al., 2022, p. 1). Holliday's notion of "small cultures," which can be defined as "any social arrangement where two or more people come together to make or negotiate culture and could range from established social groupings such as a department, a social club or a family, to an event such as a meal or a meeting" (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020, p. 9) is an example of the shift away from "large culture" paradigms. Small culture thinking may "open our eyes to different conceptions of how we interpret the intercultural, and present alternative opportunities to 'interculturalize,' as well as to internationalize, our curriculum" (Jones, 2022, p. 2). Taking a non-essentialist approach to culture obviously means that interculturalisation does not necessary lead to more internationalisation, yet the targeted competencies may in fact be similar. Hence, Jones (2022) suggests that "transformative internationalization, in the form of interculturalization, can come not only through international experiences but also through purposeful and constructive engagement with perceived cultural 'otherness' of any kind" (p. 3).

Interpersonal interactions and groupwork: fundamental elements of intercultural learning

Constructive engagement with perceived cultural "others" or "strangers" could happen everywhere and in any situation as, citing Mendoza et al. (2022), "any member of a university is a potential stranger, who has to negotiate membership, identities, interactions, and (mis-)encounters" (p. 95). There appears to be a consensus around the idea that intercultural interaction is needed to develop intercultural competence as "culture is to be discovered in action" (Hester & Hester, 2012, p. 576). Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) identify four development stages of internationalisation: pre-internationalisation, structural internationalisation, community

internationalisation and competency internationalisation. Moving through these stages, they argue that having a diverse student and staff population leads to structural internationalisation, and when interaction takes place among the diverse community, the process moves to community internationalisation, which according to Spencer-Oatey and Dauber ultimately leads to interculturally competent staff and students. Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2019) note that integration – which in their study broadly refers to "the combined notion of mixing/interaction/participation with involvement/connectedness/identification" (p. 1037) – is important in higher education as it reduces stress, enhances students' well-being, is related to academic achievement and helps to the development of intercultural skills.

However, research literature also demonstrates that different student populations do not mix easily. For example, De Vita (2007) found that "intercultural interaction, in and outside the classroom, is not developing naturally, and is at best limited among students from culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 165). Peacock and Harrison (2009) concluded in their study on discourse between home and international students in the United Kingdom that "work groups tend to crystallise around national and language groupings, with little interaction and some possible antipathy from U.K. students to international students" (P. 507). A study by Holmes and O'Neill (2012) found that "intercultural contact that occurs at a functional level – through group work in, or brief meetings beyond, the classroom – does not of itself foster intercultural friendships or develop intercultural competence. It may even reinforce cultural stereotypes" (p. 707). This was also seen in a study by Turner (2009) which found accounts of students negatively stereotyping foreign students and positively stereotyping their national counterparts. Interestingly, Turner also found that students became more task-focused and competitive, which is a rather "puzzling" outcome as there was no group assessment. Turner proposes that this unexpected outcome could be explained by considering that a focus on work and performance might deflect away from dealing with differing interpersonal styles and relationship building (which students also described as difficult) toward something more tangible. Rienties and Nolan (2014) also point out that it is challenging for international students to establish friendships and working relations with host students due to language barriers, perceived discrimination, and the fact that host students already tend to have well-established friendship networks. As pointed out by Jokikokko (2021), language- and power-related issues are important concepts in "intercultural learning communities." English is often the *lingua franca* in international settings, giving native and fluent English speakers advantages, while other students might have limited linguistic skills, which could lead to reinforced cultural essentialism and simultaneously discourage an equal "intercultural learning community" (Jokikokko, 2021).

Although much research regarding intercultural student interactions resulted in outcomes of minimal interaction, engaging with the diverse student population at home should not be disregarded easily due to the possible benefits it may bring to the majority (e.g. Jones, 2013; Kokkonen & Jager, 2024; Turner, 2009). Emerging patterns in the literature can be found on what can be considered as factors that contribute to "successful" intercultural interactions among students. For example,

Rienties and Nolan (2014) found that "institutions can effectively intervene in the classroom to encourage cross-cultural relations to develop and maintain over time" (p. 31). They found that "when students were randomised in groups and worked on authentic group tasks and assessments, students developed strong cross-cultural friendships and learning links within their groups over time," while this did not happen when there was no constructive alignment of learning outcomes, tasks and assessment given (pp. 31–32). Group division also seems to be an important factor as the literature suggests that a good balance should be sought in the multicultural classroom and intercultural group work, as without a suitable balance, students may tend to associate it with a negative experience (e.g. Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

Furthermore, the literature widely acknowledges that specific contextual circumstances – such as task interdependence, teacher support, task instructions and small group characteristics – are critical elements to achieve the motivational, cognitive and affective benefits of group work. Kimmel and Volet (2012) point out that ''group learning activities that incorporate cultural dimensions of the professions [*i.e.* cultural aspects that are relevant in the context of the practice of the course at hand,] and that are carried out with continuous, structured teacher support are expected to lead to positive, secure, and rewarding experiences for all students involved" (p. 177). However, incorporating intercultural dimensions into teaching must be done attentively, avoiding essentialising practices and simplistic views of the "Other." As argued by Sommier et al. (2021), "unreflexive intercultural communication teaching practices might have significant repercussions as they reproduce social divisions and inequalities rather than promote unbiased curiosity, respect, connecting, solidarity, and social justice" (p. 2). To encourage students to engage in constructive and inclusive dialogue, the focus can be placed on finding "DeCentred threads" – resonances created to connect with others that resist "Centre" narratives and discourses (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020). In their study of an online course on intercultural communication, Kokkonen et al. (2022) found that pedagogical solutions that aimed at enhancing interpersonal relationships, such as encouraging discussions among students and creating set activities which drew attention to similarities instead of differences (i.e. finding DeCentred threads), positively influenced the class atmosphere.

Cultural disequilibrium as a catalyst for intercultural learning

Perhaps one of the reasons for international mobility being the dominant activity within the internationalisation of higher education (*cf. supra*) is that many (traditional) learning theories, including the literature on intercultural learning, suggest that "a dilemma or a feeling of disjuncture and disequilibrium as a motivation (even a requirement) for learning" (Killick, 2012, p. 382). For example, the model of the process of learning to become culturally competent, proposed by Taylor (1994), suggests that cultural disequilibrium "is the catalyst for change and its emotional nature is the driving force that pushes the participant to become interculturally competent in the host culture" (p. 161). Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) argue that "the

importance of disorienting experiences to act as stimuli for change and growth" is a key take away emerging from the learning models on intercultural competence (p. 4).

Such moments of discomfort/cultural disequilibrium are often experienced during physical mobility. Physical mobility takes someone out of their comfort zone, for example, out of their known social network of family and friends, food habits, experiences of language obstacles and so on. Taylor (1994) argues that when one travels to another "culture" to live for a period of time, one often experiences a transformation due to the necessity to survive, and it is this transformation that requires a person to look at the world from a different point of view. In the study by Lilley et al. (2015), *out of the comfort zone experiences* were mentioned by students as a fundamental factor for change and helped students to think, reflect and grow. Examples of *out of the comfort zone learning* provided by Lilley et al. (2015) include "being away from family and friends, language difficulties, cultural differences, having to engage with different others, saving yourself in new or different situations, coping, interpersonal conflict, and differences in university structure and support and approaches to learning" (p. 233).

The idea that moments of discomfort are needed for learning seems to be aligned with anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory which suggests that the effectiveness of communication is linked to individuals' abilities to manage their uncertainty and anxiety (see Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). However, arguably, certain moments of discomfort might correspond to very high levels of anxiety, which in turn would tend individuals to focus on simplistic information in the form of stereotypes, and be less open to learning. Hence, Gudykunst and Nishida (2001) note that "when anxiety and uncertainty are either very high or very low, they do not predict effectiveness of communication" (p. 56). While research on the stages of cultural adjustment has mainly been focused on mobility abroad, some suggest that such moments of cultural disequilibrium or uncertainty could happen at home as well or through other forms of short mobilities (Killick, 2012; Lilley et al., 2015). For example, in the study conducted by Lilley et al. (2015), "several informants thought *out of the comfort zone* experiences at home or abroad, even for short periods, could facilitate life-changing realizations; mobility per se was not considered the panacea for 'change'" (p. 234).

Implementation in developing blended intensive programmes within European University Alliances

Given that BIPs have only been recently introduced within the framework of Erasmus+, the academic literature on these programmes is rather scarce, opening it up as an emerging object of study. As of the time of writing (spring 2024) only preliminary papers that somewhat address BIPs are sporadically being published, yet these papers seem to underline similar aspects that ought to be important requisites in the development of intercultural competence. For example, the study by Frampton et al. (2023) describes how they utilised an innovative art-based approach in a BIP on social work as a response to the pedagogical challenges presented by the

heterogeneity of international social work curricula and the linguistic and cultural diversity of students. Recognising the need to balance promoting social work principles while accommodating varied perspectives, they advocate for an inclusive pedagogical style drawing from the arts and argued that by incorporating music and dance exercises, they fostered openness and communication skills among participants. Emphasising the importance of social interaction to enhance learning throughout the BIP, they state that "relationships are not an add-on aspect of the week's learning: instead, they form the week's pedagogic heart" (Frampton et al., 2023, p. 4).

Their recommendation seems to be in line with the important element of engaging in interaction and enhancing meaningful relationships among students to foster intercultural competence learning. Yet, as outlined previously, fostering intercultural competence through engaging students in these exchanges has limited success unless intentionally addressed as part of these experiences. Creating BIPs in which students from various universities participate could lead to a reverse outcome as it may even reinforce stereotypes and could lead to interpersonal relationships restricted to people from the same home country, as a way of avoiding unfamiliarity. Additionally, as Sommier et al. (2021) point out "given the popularity of essentialist narratives, many of our students' first – or only – understanding of intercultural communication is limited to post-positivist models of intercultural competence, essentialist shortcuts about national culture, celebratory rhetoric of diverse customs, traditions, and food practices, watered-down discourses about clashing civilizations, or convenient lists of dos and don'ts" (p. 3). Emphasising the international element of BIPs and dividing groups accordingly might lead to teaching built upon monolithic and essentialist views of culture and "the other" and could lead to the typical pitfall of reducing culture to national discourses, which could direct away from non-essentialist approaches to intercultural communication. Integration of group work exercises and creating set activities, which draw attention to similarities instead of differences (finding non-essentialistic threads) aiming to enhance interpersonal relationships among students, might be a pedagogical solution for students to build and maintain equal relationships. Such group work exercises have the potential to lead to experiences of cultural disequilibrium, which are identified in the intercultural competence literature as important stimuli for growth.

Due to BIPs being intended for all disciplines, it might be challenging for teachers from different disciplines who have limited experience in the field of intercultural communication to manage these diverse groups and to explicitly create settings that enhance intercultural competence learning. The study by Clement et al. (2023) examining how KU Leuven is integrating online mobility into its mainstream offerings, advocating for BIPs as a means to achieve their "Mobility for all" policy, emphasises the importance of incorporating intercultural knowledge into the organisational and teaching teams of BIPs. Drawing upon the TPACK model by Mishra and Koehler (2006) (as mentioned in Clement et al., 2023, p. 7), they assert that effective implementations of BIPs require design teams that include expertise on the course-specific content (what), the pedagogical knowledge (how), the technical knowledge (using

online tools) but also international and intercultural knowledge. Hence, they argue that when creating international online learning activities, it is crucial to consider international and intercultural literacy. Therefore, when developing and supporting initiatives like BIPs, it is imperative to have a design team that includes expertise in international and intercultural knowledge (*ibid*.).

Shifting the focus from mobility to IaH challenges how internationalisation is organised and supported within universities. Beelen (2017) points out that when internationalisation was primarily linked to mobility, it was the international office taking the lead. However, the emphasis placed by IaH on internationalising the curriculum leads academics to become key actors in the internationalisation of teaching and learning. EUAs combine various types of student-centred cooperation, from joint degrees and long-term mobility to online and blended activities. Among these, BIPs appear as one means among others to gain funding to carry out an innovative form of mobility. This way, it could be interpreted as an activity that helps get closer to EUAs' mobility objectives while building on the close ties between institutions to facilitate the organisation of this otherwise quite complex form of hybrid mobility. Although BIPs are introduced by a top-down process in which the Erasmus+ programme sets the funding requirements, they require bottom-up initiatives to be implemented in which academic staff play a key role. Setting up a BIP requires (a) a network of institutional partnerships, (b) organising teachers who know each other, (c) intrinsic motivation among teachers to set up the BIP, (d) students who sign up for it and (e) a digital space in which the online activities can take place. All of these conditions are not exclusive to but can be facilitated by an EUA due to their shared pool of resources and infrastructures, making it a context in which the implementation of BIPs becomes more streamlined.

Conclusion

Due to their short-term nature, BIPs can appeal to students of various backgrounds and study cycles. Despite there still being a physical mobility component, BIPs can be regarded as activities that can contribute to objectives that are closely aligned with internationalisation at home. In the introduction, the question was posed whether BIPs could act as a vector to foster students' intercultural competence. While we have to critically ask whether someone can ever be definitively labelled "interculturally competent," given the grounded and relational character of this competence (*supra*), BIPs do seem to have the opportunity to facilitate an international environment in which important elements of intercultural learning can be integrated and hence students' intercultural competence can be fostered. Yet we cannot assume that BIPs automatically enhance intercultural competence, in the light of the numerous studies stating that intercultural competence is not a natural outcome but is fostered by (intentionally) incorporating important notions of interculturality (*supra*). BIPs do, however, have the characteristics to create environments in which disequilibrium can take place due to the heightened uncertainty of working with a diverse group of people in a different setting, outside the "comfort zone."

In this regard, we have to acknowledge the importance of pedagogical design and the crucial role laid out for the teachers and organisers involved in these programmes to create a context that could positively foster students' intercultural competence – a situation that enhances openness and curiosity to learn from and with the perceived "other" – in which teachers can provide guidance and pedagogical tools for students to "successfully" interact in such settings. Hence, this also raises the question of the extent to which we can expect educators, who are specialists in their respective domains, to engage in intercultural learning without a clear understanding of its concrete implications or possessing the necessary pedagogical tools and expertise to facilitate it. In this regard, there is a need for specific guidance aimed at teachers and/or organisers wishing to set up BIPs, considering the implication of internationalisation objectives, to leverage BIPs as an activity that has the potential to prepare students as "global citizens" to live and work "successfully" in an interconnected world. This is an important aspect that needs further exploration into "good practices" to leverage BIPs as an activity within EUAs that successfully facilitates the development of intercultural competence among students and fosters enhanced collaboration.

Notes

1 www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf (accessed on 19/04/2023).
2 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231117-1 (accessed on 19/06/2024).
3 https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/erasmusplus-programme-guide (accessed on 16/12/2022).
4 Please see https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries for the list of EU Member States and third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme (accessed on 03/01/2024).
5 In the previous Erasmus+ programme (2014–2020), physical mobility of a short duration was not possible for students but only for staff and in KA2 strategic partnerships, so BIPs have been introduced as a novelty under KA1 in Erasmus+ most recent programme.
6 The Blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility KA131 can be found at https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8a4bbab0-540d-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1 (accessed on 03/01/2024).
7 It is not the aim of this chapter to look at models of "intercultural competence" into depth (on that topic *cf*. Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009); however, general understanding of the concept is needed as we look at "intercultural competence" as a desired outcome of internationalisation.

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Part II

The European Universities Initiative as a vector of Euro-internationalisation

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5 From the "European university" to the Europeanisation of universities in Europe

E pluribus multum?

Stefan Gänzle and Rómulo Pinheiro

Introduction

Universities have not always been immune to propelling nationalism in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Still, academic freedom and cosmopolitanism have also remained at the forefront, keeping alive reflections about the place of universities in broader processes of globalisation, including the transcendence of national boundaries. Thus, the idea of a "European university," or more generally, the reflection upon the role which universities may assume in the process of Europe's peaceful unification, has a very long trajectory in European integration. Rather than emphasising the need for locating in geographical terms one or a few supranational universities, which – in addition to various legal implications – would risk escalating endless debates about the choice of the physical location, the newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron eventually suggested the creation of several new, EU-sponsored alliances of universities in 2017. These alliances should, among other things, help increase student mobility and become drivers for excellence and innovation. Thus, Macron not only took sides in a long-standing debate on the "European university" but also drew "European Universities" into a broader and comprehensive design for an increasingly differentiated European Union in the wake of Brexit, that is the United Kingdom's cumbersome withdrawal from the European Union (Leruth et al., 2022).

There have been several proponents in the past, who made a case for underpinning economic and political integration by stressing the role of a common European culture and heritage. After World War II, Walter Hallstein, a seasoned West German diplomat and foreign minister, was a staunch supporter of the idea of a supranational university which could eventually become a role model for other universities in both West Germany and Western Europe. Yet, with Macron's initiative, it seems that the debate has tilted towards the idea of a new form of transnational alliances of existing European universities rather than the enactment of the old notion of a supranational European university (Pinheiro et al., 2023). At the time of writing, almost four dozen university alliances have started life under the umbrella of the European Universities Initiative (EUI).

Clearly, associations at university level are not entirely new, neither in Europe nor on the global stage: the oldest university-level alliances date back to the

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beginning of the 20th century and were trans-national – if not trans-imperial – in nature. The *Universities Bureau of the British Empire* was founded in 1913 and would later become the *Association of Commonwealth Universities* that is still in operation today. The *International Association of Universities* (IAU), in turn, first proposed in 1948 by the Dutch government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was eventually launched in 1950 (Gunn, 2020, p. 13). In Europe, the *European University Association* (EUA) was created in 2001 as a merger of the *Association of European Universities* (CRE) and the *Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences* (1964–2001) to establish a single representative body in Europe for universities and their national associations. Other alliance initiatives *at the European level* include the *Coimbra Group*, set up in 1985 as an association of long-established European multidisciplinary universities of high international standard; the *European Consortium of Innovative Universities* (ECIU), established in 1997 as a network of 13 universities with the aim to create, test and evaluate a whole new educational model centred on multi-stakeholder collaborations for solving real-life challenges; the *Young European Research Universities Network* (YERUN), founded in 2015, consisting of 18 universities which "decided to formalise their collaboration structures and create the first representation of young research universities in Brussels" (YERUN, 2019, p. 6). At the national level, there are associations such as the *Russell Group* in the United Kingdom, which was founded in 1994, bringing together 24 research-focused UK universities for better representation *vis-à-vis* both the parliament and government. It is interesting to observe that even in some national university associations, there is a strong transnational component: the Dutch University of Groningen, for example, participates in the *Association of North-German Universities* (founded in 1994) as an external partner on equal footing. Despite the variety in terms of organisational set-up, the main purpose of these associations at both the national and European levels has been to strengthen their voice *vis-à-vis* policy-makers, of which the European ones have gained importance over time.

This chapter seeks to disclose the origins of Emmanuel Macron's initiative arguing that it can be grasped in a threefold way as (i) a recombination of the "Bologna process" on the one hand (with focus on quality and convergence of structures in higher education) and the "Lisbon Strategy" (centred on research excellent and global competitiveness) on the other; (ii) a decade-old ambition to create – if not "a European university" – a set of leading comprehensive European universities capable of competing on a global level; and (iii) an extension of the need for further modernisation of the European university landscape, taking into account both the need to engage broadly with a multiplicity of stakeholder groups and to address pending social challenges (such as climate change). The chapter is organised as follows: the next section briefly retraces the moves towards a European university or research-centred institute (EIT) starting in the 1950s. The following section then explores the Bologna process and its subsequent Lisbonisation. This is followed by a discussion of institutions, such as the European Research Council (ERC), driving EU-level research excellence. The last two sections eventually present the European Universities

Initiative as an attempt to further Europeanisation in both higher education and research and advance some conclusions.

Towards (what kind of) a European university?

Although European integration has not explicitly embraced university-level education and research from its very start, there have been various timely attempts to engage in collaboration in the field of higher education. Since the late 1940s, several proponents of the "European project" have levelled the idea of establishing some form of common university-like institutions. One of the early proposals emerged well before the establishment of the European Community on Steel and Coal, which is generally recognised as the founding organisation of European integration. In the wake of the first Congress of the European Movement in The Hague in 1948, a meeting which gathered important political figures of the time from all corners of Europe, the Spanish statesman and philosopher, Salvador der Madariaga, successfully called for the creation of a College of Europe: "The idea was to establish an institute where university graduates from many different European countries could study and live together in preparation for careers related to European cooperation and integration" (College of Europe, 2023). The College of Europe eventually started to operate in the Flemish city of Bruges in 1949. Since then, it has offered a growing number of postgraduate programmes and is perceived as providing an important site for networking between present and future leading administrators of the EU. Although the College of Europe started its life outside what soon developed into the European Community, it certainly provided stimuli for furthering discussions inside the "Common Market." Again, as in the case of the College of Europe, it very much depended on the determination of key personnel to advance the idea of a European university. Walter Hallstein firmly believed that the establishment of a supranational university would not only provide a space for "a common market of the intelligence" (quoted in Corbett, 2003, p. 318) but also serve as a role model helping to reform traditional universities, particular back home in West Germany.

With his proposal for a European University, put forth during the Messina Conference in 1955, which convened to prepare what was to become the Treaty of Rome, Hallstein came to be at odds not only with his domestic partners but also with his European ones. Although the other founding members of the European Economic Community certainly did not oppose the idea in principle, they did not subscribe to it as one of their top priorities at the time. Yet, the French position differed sharply from the West German one in that the French government saw "the value of a European university solely in the then-emerging area of nuclear energy research and training" (Gunn, 2020, p. 14). Consequently, the idea of a European University was taken up, but restrained to be only included in the Euratom Treaty where it never became realised in practice. The difficulties at the European level were matched by stout resistance from the powerful West German universities rectors' conferences who were keen on preserving their institutions' autonomy (Corbett, 2003, p. 318) rather than exposing it to the influence of either the federal state

or a newly emerging international organisation. While Lehmann (2019, p. 76) is certainly correct in that "university representatives were decisive informal actors" and that a European University was "first and foremost rejected due to academic resistance which especially heads of universities from western continental European countries organised in the late 1950s" (quoted in Gunn, 2020, p. 15), one should not overlook that the technocratic preference of European partners did not play out in favour of West German aspirations.

Despite this stalemate, a committee including representatives from national ministries and universities was mandated to elaborate proposals for a European University. These were presented in 1960 as the Report of the Interim Committee on the European University. It advanced three core ideas: first, to cater for residential postgraduate education in the humanities for approximately 500 students (one third of whom from outside EU member states); second, to allow national research institutes to have access to EU funding; and third, to encourage structured collaboration and exchanges amongst existing universities (see Corbett, 2005, p. 45; Gunn, 2020, p. 15). While advocating for a campus-based residential university, the proposal strongly recommended furthering bottom-up initiatives that would strengthen transnational ties and practices amongst Europe's different university systems. Thus, the report in many respects foreshadowed future developments of European cooperation in higher education, which would eventually come to the forefront when the European Community started taking a more active role in this policy field after 1973 (see Corbett, 2005, p. 60ff). Yet, for the time being, these proposals remained dormant because of unresolved questions of funding and persistent French resistance to any form of supranationalism in higher education.

With Charles de Gaulle becoming President of France in 1959 – the integrationist progress stalled for yet another decade. It was only in 1969, at the time when de Gaulle left office, that France called for the formation of the EC Council of Ministers of Education to administer political cooperation in that area with the support of a small bureaucracy in the European Commission. The idea of the European University was then reactivated when Italy took the initiative to assume responsibility for this project – and by this measure also "distancing it from Franco-German wrangling" (Gunn, 2020, p. 15). This resulted in European leaders agreeing on the establishment of the European University Institute (EUI) in 1969, which eventually opened in Florence in 1972. It clearly was only "a pale reflection of the original European University proposal for a full university" (Corbett, 2003, p. 319). The title "European University *Institute*" clearly reflected the nature of the compromise and – like the College of Europe – kept a focus on postgraduate training. Whereas the College of Europe focused on practical elite training (offered by an overwhelmingly non-residential "flying faculty" institute), similar to the French tradition of *grandes écoles*, the EUI with its focus on research at least partially inscribed itself much more in the German Humboldtian tradition (see Nybom, 2003). Clearly, both models were still distinct from the original idea of a comprehensive supranational European university.

This debate yet again remained silent until José Manuel Barroso took office as President of the European Commission in 2004. Barroso was adamant in living

up to the objectives garnered by the Lisbon Strategy. Adopted under the Portuguese EU Council Presidency in 2000, the Lisbon Strategy aimed to turn the EU into "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council, 2000) by the year 2010. Thus, it intended to address the then low productivity and stagnation in the EU's economy by way of the so-called Open Method of Coordination (OMC), that is, the formulation of various policy initiatives to be taken up by all EU member states (for a discussion on the OMC as a watershed in European Education Policy, see Gornitzka, 2006a). To fuel this ambition, Barroso proposed the establishment of a European Institute of Technology (EIT) – reminiscent of the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT) – which would undertake "high level education, research and innovation activities, both in some strategic thematic areas and in the field of science and innovation management" (quoted in Gunn, 2020, p. 15). In addition, the new institute should dispose of a large campus in Strasbourg but "was never created [*in its initial form, the authors*] as it lacked sufficient backing from member states, existing universities, and the businesses it was supposed to benefit" (Gunn, 2020, p. 15).

A revised proposal, however, skilfully orchestrated by the Commission's administration, "consulting stakeholders, adjusting the proposal to the views of the stakeholders, and bringing the EIT proposal better in line with the Lisbon governance (especially the stress on innovation and entrepreneurship)" (Huisman & de Jong, 2014, p. 12), eventually secured that the EIT opened its doors in 2008. Like the process of establishing the European University (Institute) before, it presented a compromise taking into account the various viewpoints of members states, universities, research institutes and businesses – albeit in a much shorter time frame. Whereas the EUI had been in preparation for more than 20 years, the EIT was created within the timespan of only approximately three years. Yet, the idea of a truly supranational campus-based university was put aside for some time once again – until the election of pro-European and remarkably young Emmanuel Macron as French President in May 2017. Macron sought a complete overhaul of the European Union, along the lines of creating "European sovereignty" based on renewed institutions, including an expanded and joint budget as well as strengthened collaboration in defence.

Bologna meets Lisbon: convergence of European higher education structures

On 18 September 1988, under the auspices of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, the oldest institution in Europe, close to 400 rectors and university heads from across Europe signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum*. This symbolic document reaffirmed the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, introduced by the Humboldtian revolution, as a guideline for good governance and self-understanding of European universities in the future. A decade later, on 25 May 1998, the Education Ministers of Europe's powerhouses – Germany,

France, Italy and the United Kingdom – signed The Sorbonne Joint Declaration for the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system.

> The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a *Europe of knowledge* as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development.
>
> (Allegre et al., 1998, p. 1; emphasis added)

The Sorbonne declaration provided the political impetus for the Bologna process, which was initiated one year later, with the core aim of establishing a common European Area for Higher Education (EAHE) by 2010. The scope of membership clearly went beyond the European Union since it encompassed 29 European countries, of which only 15 were EU member states.

It is important to note that the Bologna process has been designed as an intergovernmental rather than a supra-national process, with the EU – represented by the European Commission – becoming a formal member in 2005. Given the importance attributed to the principle of national sovereignty, the primary aim of "Bologna" is the convergence of structures (e.g. degrees, quality and assurance, student mobility and credit transfers, etc.), rather than harmonisation *per se* (Witte, 2006). That said, it is worth highlighting that national governments throughout Europe have resorted to "Bologna" as a legitimating mechanism for enacting a series of national reforms that would otherwise have received considerable resistance from domestic stakeholders (Gornitzka, 2006b). Norway is a case in point, where the then Ministry of Education took advantage of the strategic opportunity brought by the Bologna process to undertake a set of structural reforms (e.g. as regards the internal governance of universities, performance management and funding) that had previously been attempted, yet failed due to stakeholders' resistance, as part of its 2003 Quality Reform in Higher Education (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2005).

In addition to a strong focus on student and staff mobility, "Bologna" brought to the fore the importance of integrating so-called European dimensions at multiple levels, including the curriculum, mobility and inter-institutional cooperation. The governance of the process took place in the form of joint policies and measures that were later ratified at the national level. As alluded to earlier, coordination and implementation resorted to a system of joint objectives and benchmarks that provided the basis of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The Bologna process represented a watershed in the transition from an old governance regime centred on diversity between national higher education systems towards Europe-wide institutional diversification (Olsen & Maassen, 2007). In so doing, and in spite of national sensitivities, Bologna made education in general and higher education in particular a "discussable topic" in the European context (Neave & Maassen, 2007).

Historically, one of the most important aspects regarding the EU's influence on the Bologna process pertains to the latter's governance system (such as rotation amongst members) and lack of dedicated resources. The lack of a permanent secretariat provides the EU with an opportunity to bring the process closer to its own objectives and structures, which over time resulted in the convergence – or what some critical observers would term "co-optation" (Pinheiro, 2015) – between Bologna and the Lisbon Agenda. According to Keeling (2006), by drawing effectively on both Bologna and Lisbon, the EU Commission was successfully able to firstly, constitute, and later reconstitute, higher education as a European policy domain (Keeling, 2006). Slowly but gradually, what started as a rather successful intergovernmental process with European member states at the forefront became increasingly centred on the institutionalisation of supranational dimensions that aimed at supporting the process of European integration more broadly and the EU's economic and social agendas. As part and parcel of this expanding role, starting in 2005, the EU advanced a set of neo-liberal inspired (market-centred) reform agendas geared towards the modernisation of European higher education systems and institutions. These encompassed the need for tackling identified problems such as over-regulation, fragmentation and a cultural ethos of uniformity and egalitarianism (European Commission, 2006). As for the so-called reform goals or imperatives, these included:

- More geographical as well as inter-sectoral mobility of both students and researchers
- More autonomy to higher education institutions and stronger accountability to society
- Stronger interactions with society, including links with industry
- Fostering graduate employability in the light of local and European labour market requirements
- Funding efficiency in the education and research realms
- Enhancing interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity
- Rewarding excellence amongst students and researchers

(European Commission, 2006)

As a result, several New Public Management (NPM) inspired national reforms, along the lines outlined by the Commission, were enacted across Europe. Overall, and despite contextual variations, these reform efforts have stressed the need for higher education systems and institutions to become more robust, responsive, efficient and globally competitive. Attention was centred on structural reforms aimed at scaling up, through forced and/or voluntary mergers between domestic providers (see Pinheiro et al., 2016), alongside changes in the ways institutions are managed and governed, resulting in the centralisation of decision-making and a stronger role (influence) attributed to external stakeholders, such as local government, industry and (indirectly) the Ministry in charge of the system (through Board nominations, including the appointment of the Rector and the Head of the Governing Board). In other words, Bologna and Lisbon have acted as "soft" policy or

steering mechanisms for the modernisation of European higher education and the subsequent infusion of European or transnational dimensions (policy imperatives included) in what were traditionally considered domestic affairs.

As an "international higher education regime" (Moscovitz & Zahavi, 2020) developing into a point of reference worldwide, the Bologna process had a tremendous effect both at home and in the entire world, despite attracting criticism from early on. The criticism related to its uncompromising move towards harmonisation in higher education systems subscribing to NPM, promoting new actors with only limited legitimacy, such as the European Commission, and pushing towards "a common, more or less Anglo-Saxon, model based on, for instance, the introduction of a two-cycle structure (Bachelor and Master), a system of comparable credits, cooperation in quality assurance, and the promotion of student and staff mobility" (Reinalda, 2008, p. 463). As a result, most higher education systems in Europe are deeply locked into the practice of "Bologna."

Europeanisation of research excellence

In the realm of research, efforts have been made during the last two decades to foster the establishment of a European Research Area (ERA). The idea was first launched in 2000 by the then EU Commissioner Philippe Busquin as a means of addressing the fragmentation, isolation and compartmentalisation of national research systems and the lack of policy coordination between member states and the EU. A key priority in this first phase (2000–2007) related to the creation of large-scale research infrastructures and efforts for increasing the attractiveness of Europe as a research and innovation area, also with the rationale of attracting research talent from outside the region. Devised as two separate projects, the ERA and the EHEA finally converged in 2003, following the subsequent enactment of the goals set out in the 2000 Lisbon Agenda (Maassen & Musselin, 2009, p. 9). In a second phase (2007–2012), the ERA's focus shifted to research mobility in the context of the 5th freedom – movement of knowledge, and the creation of world-class scientific infrastructure and excellence initiatives, including cross-sectorial collaborations, came to the forefront of the EU's policy agenda. Finally, Article 179 of the Lisbon Treaty formally recognises ERA as an area of joint interest, providing a legal mandate for the EU commission on related matters:

> 1. The Union shall have the objective of strengthening its scientific and technological bases by achieving a European research area in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely, and encouraging it to become more competitive, including in its industry, while promoting all the research activities deemed necessary by virtue of other Chapters of the Treaties.
>
> 2. For this purpose the Union shall, throughout the Union, encourage undertakings, including small and medium-sized undertakings, research centres and universities in their research and technological development

> activities of high quality; it shall support their efforts to cooperate with one another, aiming, notably, at permitting researchers to cooperate freely across borders and at enabling undertakings to exploit the internal market potential to the full, in particular through the opening-up of national public contracts, the definition of common standards and the removal of legal and fiscal obstacles to that cooperation.
>
> (Lisbon Article, 179; ex Article, 163 TEC)

In a third phase (2012–2020), particular attention was placed on reinforcing the ERA commitments in the light of the EU's goals for research excellence and economic growth and innovation. Key priorities included the enactment of more effective national research systems, optimal circulation, access to and transfer of scientific knowledge, and inter- and trans-national collaboration as well as competition. As far as governance is concerned, a strategic policy advisory committee (ERAC) on topics related to research and innovation is tasked with advising the EU Council (in particular the Competitiveness Council), the European Commission and EU member states in ERA priority areas. Composed of delegates emanating from the EU member states and the Commission, ERAC meets four times a year for plenary sessions. It is co-chaired by the Commission and an elected representative from an EU member state, with the Council acting as its secretariat. In addition, the governance structure encompasses three standing working groups, which provide strategic advice on areas like open science and innovation, HR and mobility and gender-related issues, alongside two strategic forums, one on research infrastructures and the other on international collaboration. A high-level group on Joint Programming coordinates efforts for a more efficient use of ERA resources in the context of strategic imperatives (grand challenges), such as climate change, energy and food supply.

The chief institution within the EU's research ecosystem is the European Research Council (ERC) commanding 17% of the overall Horizon Europe budget, that is, 16 billion euro (2021–2027) (European Research Council, 2024). Established in 2007, its main goal is, in its own words, to support "the best of the best" researchers in Europe across all fields of science, scholarship and engineering; in so doing, it aims to "enhance the dynamic character, creativity and excellence of European research at the frontiers of knowledge" (ibid.). The ERC is organised in the form of a Scientific Council composed of 18 eminent scientists and scholars. The members are appointed by the European Commission, on the recommendations of an independent Identification Committee. The Council's Chair is the ERC President who also presides over the ERC Board and Scientific Council meetings and prepares the agenda. The President is assisted by three vice-presidents – representing three broad disciplinary domains – who are equally the vice-chairs of the Scientific Council. In terms of agenda setting, the ERC entails six thematic working groups on strategic areas such as gender, open science and relations with industry. Of significance is the fact that the ERC has, in the last decade, become the "gold standard" for scientific excellence and competitive funding, often dwarfing national funding agencies. Its establishment and prominence represent a watershed

in terms of the institutionalisation of transnational research excellence across the continent. Given its salient role in agenda setting, the ERC has also become the relevant template or benchmark when it comes to guidelines and operating procedures for the various national funding agencies within member and partner states alike. In addition, ERC funding has had considerable impact on the university landscape in Europe, both in terms of reinforcing existing inequalities (vertical differentiation) among research groups and institutions alike, resulting from the traditional "Mathew effect" in science (see Langfeldt et al., 2015; Kwiek, 2018) but also as regards the institutionalisation – across Europe – of the unitary model of higher education centred on the research-intensive university (Kyvik, 2009). Alongside national funding regimes, ERC funding has helped establish relatively autonomous Centres of Research Excellence within European and partner universities, opening up an "arms race" for competitive funding and research excellence (Geschwind & Pinheiro, 2017). This, in turn, has had considerable local impacts on universities and domestic systems, for example, in the realms of academic tenure and promotion tracks, or competitive recruitment (Pietilä & Pinheiro, 2021).

Alongside other EU agencies and funding mechanisms supporting research and innovation, as a policy instrument, the ERC has helped in the transition from a "Science in Europe" into a "European Science" governance regime (Nedeva & Wedlin, 2015). The transition towards a coherent and integrated European-wide transnational governance science regime encompasses three important elements, namely, (1) a shift in the rationale for supporting research and building research capacity at the European level; (2) changes in the targets for policy intervention; and (3) a transformation of the organisational architecture of the European science space (*ibid*.). This regime transition, in turn, marks an important historical development in the institutionalisation of a European space for higher education and research (Amaral et al., 2010; Maassen & Olsen, 2007), *inter alia*, characterised by growing levels of commensurability between transnational and national (domestic) features, dynamics, actors and institutions. In other words, the borders between national and transnational elements underpinning science and higher education policy in Europe have become increasingly blurred and hybridised. Over time, this policy space has become marked by the presence of multiple actors and contrasting (sometimes clashing) strategic agendas resulting in growing complexity as regards the governance of European higher education and research affairs (Fumasoli et al., 2018).

From European University to European Universities Alliances

Shortly after taking office, the new French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a landmark speech at the Sorbonne University in September 2017 – returning to the place where almost 20 years before the EU education ministers had launched the Bologna process. The speech was aimed to set the tone of French European policy for the years to come and to reflect upon Europe's imminent future in the wake of Brexit, the UK's withdrawal from the EU following the British referendum of June 2016. In his address entitled "New Initiative for Europe," Macron sketched out his

vision for a "fair, protective and ambitious Europe" (Macron, 2017) effectively united by "culture and knowledge" which are the "strongest cement that binds the European Union together" (*ibid*.). The president urged that by 2024, Europe should become a place where half of students "should have spent at least six months in another European country by the time they are 25, whether they are university students or learning a trade" (*ibid*.) and where all students can master at least two European languages.

To realise this vision, the president proposed the creation of new structures in the European higher education landscape focusing on universities as prime institutions of culture – as Walter Hallstein had, almost 70 years before:

> I believe we should create European Universities – a network of universities across Europe with programmes that have all their students study abroad and take classes in at least two languages. These European Universities will also be drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence. We should set for ourselves the goal of creating at least 20 of them by 2024. However, we must begin setting up the first of these universities as early as the next academic year, with real European semesters and real European diplomas.
>
> (Macron, 2017)

Macron's vision was quickly embraced by the European Commission services, who produced a report entitled "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture," emphasising the creation of a European Education Area "based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth" (EU Commission, 2017, p. 11), which should be in place by 2025 and would foster "a sense of a European identity and culture" (*ibid*.). Specifically, the report recommended "creating world-class European universities that can work seamlessly together across borders" (*ibid*.). The Commission also advocated a range of new initiatives to supplement Macron's vision, including establishing a School of European and Transnational Governance to be hosted by the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, developing further strategic partnerships between higher education institutions, creating 200 more Erasmus Mundus master's programmes, and increasing the visibility of the U-Multirank tool to promote the EU as an attractive study location (see Gunn, 2020, p. 16; European Commission, 2017). In its conclusions of December 2017, the European Council called upon both the member states, the Council and the Commission to take work forward with a view to:

> strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty "European Universities," consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities.
>
> (European Council, 2017)

In light of this, the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and the Directorate-General Joint Research Centre commissioned research to map out existing transnational collaborative partnerships (Gunn, 2020, p. 17). The mapping exercise concurred that the new network would add value when compared to what was currently in place, provided it contributed to improving existing funding instruments which were described as extremely complex and too limited in time and scope to fulfil the purpose of extending transnational cooperation between higher education institutions. Furthermore, there was an urgent need to address the lack of common accreditation standards and differences in academic calendars (Karvounaraki et al., 2018).

Subsequently, the European Commission adjusted the necessary procedures of the Erasmus+ Regulation to make them fit a pilot phase. The pilot round was intended to test different innovative and structural models, seeking the creation of a number of alliances, ideally involving between five and eight European Universities. To qualify as successful alliances by 2025, applicant alliances were compelled to, first, develop a shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy for education with links to research and innovation and society at large; second, a European higher education inter-university "campus," where all students and staff can move seamlessly (physically or virtually) between any of the partner institutions who have embedded mobility at all levels and deliver new joint and flexible curricula; and third, European knowledge-creating teams of students, academics and other parties of relevance to the alliances, to address societal and other challenges in a multidisciplinary approach.

The call for the first round of pilot funding closed at the end of February 2019, and 54 applications for new alliances were received. The proposals were evaluated against five criteria: relevance of the proposal, geographical balance, quality of the proposal and implementation, quality of the alliance cooperation arrangements and sustainability and dissemination. Ultimately, the applications from 17 prospective alliances, involving 114 higher education institutions from 24 member states, were retained and announced in June 2019. Up to five million euros have been earmarked for each alliance. The second call opened in November 2019. In July 2020, the European Commission presented 24 newly selected European Universities from altogether 62 applications it had received. The new European Universities involve 165 higher education institutions from 26 member states (European Commission, 2020). These (by then 41) European Universities have, according to the Commission, served as "catalysts for the launch of new instruments and legal frameworks and can inspire the wider higher education community across Europe" (European Commission, 2022, p. 2). In a subsequent call in the fall of 2022, the total number of alliances was raised to 50, spread across 35 countries and encompassing 1,700 associated partners from across the public, private and civic sectors. As of 2024, the EUI encompasses 60 alliances involving more than 500 universities from all European Union (EU) Member States, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia Norway, Serbia and Turkey.

Some of the core objectives that the European Commission seeks to achieve are to work towards a legal status for alliances, to foster and expand joint European

degrees, the establishment of a European Student Card as well the upscaling of quality assurance and mutual recognition (*cf*. Chapter 11, this volume). Some plans refer to the need to enhance existing funding and support structures, for example, by "creating a supporting administrative and regulatory environment for European Universities and other similar long-standing institutionalised cooperation models" (European Commission n.d.). Taken together, these steps represent a move towards a substantial trans-nationalisation of the higher education and research space in Europe – with the Commission often in direct contact with the leadership of EUI partner universities. European Universities provide the platform which produces a unique structure which can be described as a "network of networks" combining, through their membership, a bottom-up approach with a top-down strategic scheme with common overarching aims and objectives. This is a novel organisational form for a university alliance, as it differs from established multilateral structures.

It does not come as a surprise that President Macron, when presenting the objectives of the 2022 French EU Council Presidency, concluded:

> We have – our universities have – been extraordinarily efficient: there are 40 European universities today. That is one of those very tangible achievements that, since my Sorbonne speech, have made it a reality. We will bring together those 40 universities, and any others created in the meantime, in France, in order to further this agenda and to highlight the importance of universities in Europe. I would also like this Presidency to be the opportunity to create a Europe Academy, bringing together thinkers in all fields from all 27 Member States to inform our ethical debates, monitor our freedoms, and propose actions and cultural projects.
>
> (Macron, 2021)

While it is still too early to evaluate the impact of the EUI on the higher education and research landscapes in Europe, it seems fair to assume that the initiative is likely to trigger significant impacts – which may differ across individual universities in relation to their size, leverage and funding.

Conclusion

The EUI can be best conceived of as an evolutionary and experimental network of university networks. In most cases, several of the participating universities already were in some form of established relationship – by way of other EU funding schemes, such as the Erasmus program – prior to the launch of the EUI and have subsequently expanded membership with a view to meeting the EU Commission's criteria for the alliance scheme. It remains to be seen whether the EUI will just become yet another "playground" for inter-university collaboration or whether the effects will yield significant impact in the longer term. The ambition to develop a legal status for these collaborations points in the direction of the latter – as the EUI seems to establish itself as a new layer of European transnational university governance for the longer term (Pinheiro et al., 2023).

As shown in this chapter, the trajectory of the EUI goes well beyond its launch in 2017. Its core characteristic is to bring closer together both science policy and economics by increasing harmonisation in higher education and research across European countries – with a prominent role for the European Commission – as well as the ambition to increase competitiveness on the global stage. Historically, the initiative resonates with a long-standing craving among the political elite to create a European university or universities that go well past the aspirations of the post-World War II architects of European integration.

Clearly, the EUI is very likely to occupy central place in most participating universities' external relations. Historically, the EUI answers the long-standing albeit elusive quest for a single-campus-based European university in favour of the establishment of a network of competing university alliances. The EUI thus has the potential to contribute to the strengthening of Europeanisation in university higher education, bringing together *both* research and education under one roof. In this respect, it has the potential to positively contributing to the long-term goal of establishing European Areas for Higher Education and Research, initiated two decades ago with the Bologna process. The evolving practice of direct contacts between EUI alliances and the Commission services not only presents another case of "bypassing the nation-state"; it also provides a push for formalising the internal EUI governance structure to make such contacts manageable. There is also room to believe that the advent of the EUI will have some consequences on the rollout of at least some funding schemes at both the national and the EU levels.

Although structural tensions between member states have marked the debate on various aspects of the European Higher Education and Research Areas for quite some time, it seems that the ultimate beneficiary is the opportunistic and persistent policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission: the EU's creeping competence in higher education and research policy "is also a tale of persistence, of smart civil servants and wily bureaucrats seizing every opportunity to push the commission's proposal forward, using conditions of crisis to put in place little by little and progressively a small division, a capacity to act and a budget to sustain action" (Corbett, 2005). Yet, the initiative has helped mobilise not only the "wily bureaucrats" at the European level but also local university administrations, which have benefitted from establishing and managing the various unfolding forms of internationalisation and managerialism that accompany each wave of increasing cooperation in higher education and research in Europe (*cf.* Chapter 1, this volume). This is particularly salient at a time where national governments across Europe are retreating from funding traditional internationalisation activities (such as tuition fee waivers for non-EU students) and where geopolitical tensions (China, Russia, the Middle East, etc.) and uncertainty (the US elections in 2024) are resulting in a strengthening of the European dimension in the lines of "cooperating for competing" (Pinheiro & Pulkkinen, 2023). Such developments may, in the mid- to long term, lead to increasing convergence manifested in the decline of the distinctness of the respective spheres of university administration and bureaucracy on the one hand and science on the other.

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6 Critical cosmopolitanism as a theoretical and methodological approach to the EUI

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Introduction

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) was launched by the European Commission (EC) in October 2018 as its most ambitious step towards establishing a European Education Area (EEA) by 2025. It responded to the conclusions of the Gothenburg Social Summit on the future of education in November 2017, which aimed to create transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that would come together in "European campuses" to "strengthen strategic and in-depth transnational collaboration for the benefit of students, teachers and society." (European Commission, 2020, p. 1). The project's long-term objectives included fostering shared European values and a stronger European identity by bringing together a new generation of Europeans who can cooperate and work within different cultures,[1] in different languages, and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines.

As of December 2023, there were 50 active European Alliances and the initiative stated the intention of reaching up to 60 European Universities and more than 500 higher education institutions from Europe by mid-2024 (European Education Area, 2023). It is a significant increase from the previous years in which the initiative was launched and started to develop: in 2022, at the end of the second call, there were 41 alliances, amounting to 215 member universities from EU member states and five partnering countries (European Commission, 2020, p. 1). The reason is to be found in the results of the evaluation of the third call and the expected results from the fourth call. The calls were published on 30 September 2022 and 3 October 2023, respectively.

The literature on the role of higher education institutions in promoting a European identity aligns with the EC's view that culture and education play a significant role in "strengthening the sense of belonging together and being part of a cultural community" (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 3). Fostering young people's commitment to Europe, in its dual implications of identifying as a European and expanding a European way of citizenship (Cram, 2012), has been at the core of Erasmus since its inception. However, studies on the achievement of these objectives show inconclusive results in both the "cultural" and the "civic" dimensions of European identity (Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Mitchell, 2015; Mazzoni et al., 2018;

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Van Mol, 2018). Several studies show a clear correlation between intra-European mobility and the reinforcement of a European identity, while others highlight the "stratified" aspect of the phenomenon, whereby only a small number of already "pro-European" students benefit from this form of cross-border interaction, making their experience peripheral in the formation and expansion of a European identity (Kuhn, 2019; Fligstein et al., 2012). As Gunn (2020) explains, the EUI has been conceived with an awareness of these challenges in mind, giving it the potential to achieve a level of cooperation that triggers European integration in a way that surpasses all previous attempts.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the potential contribution of the EUI to European identity and the Europeanisation process by studying the programmatic texts of the initiative under the light of the theoretical framework of critical cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Delanty (2009). The aim is to set out the case for the idea that critical cosmopolitanism is a valid entry point to assess whether the EUI can be a primary vehicle for the Europeanisation process and contribute to the construction of European identity.

To do so, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section states the theoretical characteristics of critical cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2009; Delanty & Harris, 2019). The second section explains the methodology used to analyse the discourse of the programmatic texts. The third section displays a discussion of the main results. Lastly, the chapter ends by summarising the main conclusions and suggesting that the Europeanising potential of the initiative in bringing about or reinforcing the conditions for a shared normative culture seems to be present but not fully achieved yet, affecting its potential to contribute to a European identity, one of the EUI main aims.

Theoretical framework

As part of the European Education Area, the EUI rests on a transactionalist approach to the process of European integration; as stated in the Council's address in Gothenburg, "strengthening our European identity remains essential and education and culture are the best vectors to ensure this" (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 3). Transactionalists such as Deutsch et al. (1967) claim that the sustained interaction between people of different national and cultural backgrounds generates a shared identity and sense of belonging. Promoting networks and opportunities to bring Europeans together leads to a social form of European integration that functions beyond the political and the economic (Deutsch et al., 1967; Mazzoni et al., 2018). While some argue that the new supranational identity that arises from this contact implies the dissolution of the national (Castells, 2002) or leads inevitably to political conflict (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), others claim that it is possible to have a multifaceted identity where the national and the supranational coexist (Haas, 2008; Radaelli, 2003; Delanty, 2009).

Whether Europe may be defined as an identity, a political project or a single market, the motto of *unity in diversity* is used to evoke the coexistence of the national and supranational within Europe. A similar idea can be expressed through

the concept of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism allows to trace the tension between the local and the global, the normative and the pragmatic (Panzanesi, 2019). Cosmopolitanism sees the world as a political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives. Its view is linked with universalism through the recognition of the rights of the individual as opposed to the state, which in many contexts is labelled as a post-western term. Additionally, cosmopolitanism is a reality, as well as a moral and political interpretation, and can become an approach to the analysis of the social world (Delanty, 2019b). Cosmopolitanism as a tool for social analysis identifies transformative potentials within the present. In doing so, it also views reality as shaped by moral or political conditions. This means that the experience of cosmopolitanism may be measured as an empirical condition (Delanty, 2012).

The connection between cosmopolitanism and critical theory lies in a certain conception of culture and politics that engages with the perspective of the Other as opposed to rejecting it (Delanty, 2019b). Critical cosmopolitanism offers a development from classical cosmopolitanism in political thought to one that conceptualises the social world as an open horizon in which new cultural models take shape. The cosmopolitan situation unfolds in the encounter, in the exchanges and in dialogue and when, because of those encounters and dialogues, a shared normative culture emerges (Delanty, 2006). In this sense, it can explore the social contexts and incentives that the EUI presents to the development of normative cosmopolitan ideas and values in Europe.

When characterising the transformation across time that Europe has undergone, Delanty favours the term "Europeanisation" to that of "integration" (2009, p. 214). For the author, Europeanisation, or the creation of a European identity, happens in the emergence of public spaces of debate. It is here that cross-fertilisation of discourses leads to reshaping and transforming the national, rather than overcoming it. Reinforcing this idea, Radaelli (2003, p. 30) refers to processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules and ways of doing, and of "shared beliefs and norms" that are first consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics, then incorporated into domestic discourse and identities.

According to Delanty and Harris, critical cosmopolitanism differs from other notions of cosmopolitanism precisely in its focus for "moments of self-transformation in contexts in which there is an expansion in reflexive capacities and ultimately in those situations in which something undergoes a normative transformation from the encounter with the Other"[2] (2019, p. 99). When defining Europe, Delanty points out that "Europeans became reflexively conscious of themselves as the inhabitants of Europe as distinct from other parts of the world, Asia, Africa, the Americas, the definitions of which changed over the centuries" (Delanty, 2019a, pp. lii-liii). The conceptualisation of the Other may be understood in two directions: first, whenever the Self and Other are mediated through the wider category of the World, and second, in relation to European identity as well as to Europe as a social space and a space of identities:

> If identity implies a relation to another, it may be the case that the Other of Europe's identity is in fact its own past and that what is needed more urgently

> today is the re-discovery of the diversity of traditions that constitute what we know as Europe.
>
> (Delanty, 2019a, p. 332)

This second conceptualisation may prove to be more useful for the purpose of this chapter. The re-discovery of diversity may very well happen within States' societies and communities, including traditions, diversity in social classes and levels of education.

Methodology

The method we have used is based on the application of Delanty's dynamics to a sample of texts related to the EUI, noted later in this section. The texts were selected because they serve as the main programmatic documents for the EUI as an initiative.

Four dynamics must be present to demonstrate the extent of a cosmopolitan orientation (Delanty, 2009). These relationships or dynamics include frames, socio-cognitive structures, cultural repertoires and discourses, and quasi-objective cultural phenomena (Delanty, 2012, p. 340). The relationships are the focus of analysis, not the social actors. The four relationships or dynamics include some type of reflexivity and show the condition of cosmopolitanism to be of a processual nature. They are the following:

The relationship for the relativisation of one's own culture or identity

This relationship typifies a condition in which a reinterpretation of culture occurs as a result of the encounter of one culture with another.

> The use of the Other[3] to reinterpret one's own culture has been a feature of many forms of everyday cosmopolitanism, . . ., but also includes "soft" kinds of cosmopolitanism around curiosity/appreciation of other cultures, and which are often found in educational programmes. In terms of dispositions, it is characterised by an orientation towards tolerance of diversity, recognition of interconnectedness and a general disposition of openness to others.
>
> (Delanty & Harris, 2019b, p. 97)

The relationship for the positive recognition of the Other[4]

This relationship personalises encounters between self and Other that take a stronger form, one that involves political and ethical commitments. Progress toward cosmopolitan citizenship occurs whereby universalistic meta-rules play a greater role. "It is a stronger reflexive relationship entailing the inclusion of the Other, not just awareness as in the previous type of relationship. Such types of relationship can be found in the so-called politics of recognition,

as in liberal multiculturalism, the awareness of vulnerability, ethical and political consciousness, and responsibility for others. One major expression of cosmopolitanism on this level is the internationalisation of law." (Delanty and Harris, 2019b, p. 97).

The relationship for mutual evaluation of cultures or identities

This relationship involves the mutual evaluation of cultures or identities, both one's own and that of the Other. "This is a self-reflexive mode of relationship that is based on cultural distance, scepticism and critique and makes it possible for people to mediate between cultures. Such kinds of relationships make possible the critique of cultures. Expressions of reflexivity can be found in varieties of post-nationalism and what are often referred to as rooted, or embedded forms of cosmopolitanism." (Delanty and Harris, 2019b, p. 97).

The relationship to create a shared normative culture

This fourth relationship entails a shared normative culture. Self and Other relations present a world consciousness. "This kind of cosmopolitanism entails the formation of a moral consciousness rooted in emotional responses to global issues, concern with global ethics based on shared values, putting the non-national interest before the national interest. One of the main expressions of such kinds of relationship is in new forms of civil society, such as global or cosmopolitan civil society. This, then, is a yet stronger expression of cosmopolitanism relating mostly to legal, institutional arrangements and major societal transformation whereby cosmopolitanism becomes constitutive of a new politics, global civil society etc." (Delanty and Harris, 2019b, pp. 97–98).

Taking these dynamics as a framework, the methodology consists of discourse analysis of the following sample of documents:

- Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg (European Commission, 2017) (referred to as EC17)
- Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area (Council of the European Union, 2018) (referred to as CC18)
- European Universities Initiative First Call Press Release (European Commission, 2019) (referred to as FIRST)
- European Universities Initiative Second Call Press Release (European Commission, 2020) (referred to as SECOND)
- European Universities Initiative Third Call Press Release (European Commission, 2022) (referred to as THIRD)
- Conclusions on the European University Initiatives (Council of the European Union, 2021) (referred to as CC21)
- Call for Proposals. Partnerships for Excellence-European Universities (Erasmus+ Programme, 2021)

The sample covers the period from 2017 to 2021. It does not include two calls put forward by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme in 2022 and in 2023 **(**Erasmus+ Programme, 2023). The authors recognise that the objectives of these last calls rely on the original main objectives of the initiative, that is, "to support higher education institutions in gradually achieving their long-term ambitious vision towards becoming a fully-fledged European University" (Erasmus+ Program, 2022, p. 5).

The discourse analysis was undertaken by looking in the texts for the definition and characteristics of each dynamic. The researchers looked at the texts separately, and then the results were triangulated.

The methodological challenge was to find the right categories or indicators since Delanty does not establish them specifically throughout his extensive work on Europe or critical cosmopolitanism. The researchers reviewed Delanty's work to try to find relationships between certain categories present in the in the texts under analysis and the four dynamics, under the assumption that it is precisely in these dynamics that the Europeanisation process – from the encounter with the Other to the creation of a shared normative culture – is shown.

Results

The results are organised to exhibit whether the programmatic EUI documents in the sample show the dynamics established by Delanty's critical cosmopolitanism as part of the desired Europeanisation process, and, if so, to what extent.

The first dynamic, defined as the capacity to relativise one's own culture or identity, was explored by looking at discourse elements that may produce cultural encounters or indicate the possibility of mobility, or the need for language learning. These elements are present in all texts in the sample. The stress is on how education remains essential to strengthen European identity, an aim that remains important when we face the future of the Union.

In EC17 it is stated that

> education and culture play a pivotal role for people to (i) know better each other across borders and (ii) experience and be aware of what it means to be European. Understanding and preserving our cultural heritage and diversity are pre-requisites to maintain our cultural community, our common values and identity.
>
> (European Commission, 2017, p. 3)

The cultural encounter occurs in the possibility that the EUI allows for the creation of a European Education Area "based on trust, mutual recognition, cooperation and exchange of best practices, mobility and growth" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 2). Another example of how cultural encounters may occur within the EUI appears in the first call in 2019: "European Universities are transnational alliances of higher education institutions from across the EU that share a long-term strategy and promote European values and identity" (European Commission, 2019, p. 1).

Cultural encounters may result in exchanges and interaction among institutions within the European Union. These new European Universities show the possibility of becoming spaces for cultural encounters in that "they will deepen cooperation between their institutions, their students and staff and pool online and physical resources, courses, expertise, data and infrastructure" (European Commission, 2020).

Geographically speaking, there is a widening of the space for this cultural encounter to happen from the first call to the second and third calls. The second call widens the scope to "higher education institutions from all Member States and beyond, located not only in capital cities but also in more remote European regions" (European Commission, 2020). The third call includes all Bologna countries, thereby extending beyond the EU Member States and their overseas countries and territories (OCTs).

One key element that is identified in the analysis is the stress on multilingualism to initiate the Europeanisation process. EC17 recognised that "the European integration process calls for acquiring good language competences. Multilingualism represents one of the greatest assets in terms of cultural diversity in Europe and, at the same time, one of the most substantial challenges" (European Commission, 2017, p. 7). The notion that multilingualism is a strength is further developed in subsequent Council meetings in 2018 and 2021, recognising "that languages play a key role in fostering understanding and diversity, as well as promoting European values, and are essential for personal development, mobility and participation in society and employability" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 10).

Mobility is one of the key concepts in this category. The Alliances have the possibility of enhancing student and staff mobility and fostering co-operation. CC18 states that European Universities should be "geographically and socially inclusive and work seamlessly across borders" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 6). These institutions can contribute "to empower new generations of European citizens and to strengthen the international competitiveness of higher education in Europe" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 6). They suggest the possibility of creating a voluntary European Student Card which should contribute to improved learning mobility.

The importance of physical mobility is highlighted in 2021 Council of the European Union conclusions on the European Universities Initiative. It declares its support for the initiative

> in reaching the ambitious target of 50% mobile students, focusing on balanced physical, virtual or blended mobility schemes and brain circulation, acknowledging that physical mobility is a priority and cannot be replaced by other forms of mobility, which have complementary roles.
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 19)

It is interesting to note that only one document, EC17, mentions the need to integrate a culturally diverse migrant population (European Commission, 2017) as an element that may help face the increasing challenges, such a steadily aging workforce or other demographic trends.

No meaningful results were found on the second and third dynamics. It is worth noting that in fact, the only examples found highlight the difficulties students could encounter when returning to their home country's education system after periods abroad in cases of insufficient communication between the national educational systems. Therefore, the analysis shows that the second dynamic, the positive recognition of the Other, may or may not occur. The third dynamic, the capacity for mutual evaluation of cultures or identities, is not present in the texts. This may be because at the time of the publication of these texts, and of conducting this research, the COVID-19 pandemic required avoiding physical and cross-national mobility. This circumstance delayed the implementation of most of the initiatives of the EUI, particularly those related to opportunities for cultural encounter and mobility. We anticipate that a more current assessment might yield different results, given the increasing interest in post-pandemic Europe in opportunities for physical encounter and exchange.

The fourth dynamic addresses the ability to create a shared normative culture, in particular the "reshaping of identities around the normative concepts of justice and rights" (Delanty, 2009, p. 226). Delanty lists the main "defining European values of a European social contract" as citizenship, anti-corruption, sustainable development and stakeholder capitalism (2009, p. 356).

The analysis shows that the construction of a shared normative culture resulting from the implementation of the EUI and the social dimension of education (Council of the European Union, 2021) is explicitly stated as a key objective in all the texts; THIRD refers to it as the "co-envisioned long-term strategy focused on sustainability, excellence and European values" (European Commission, 2022). The different documents mention the development of a European way of tackling current social issues, particularly those stemming from the green and digital revolutions. They also stress the need to bridge inequalities, assumed in the motto "excellence and inclusiveness," expressions that appear often in the documents.

It is precisely the concept of inclusiveness that stands out throughout all the documents. It is understood as "reinforcing equal opportunities." (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 3) for different European actors, particularly those from "underrepresented regions and groups, first time applicants and organisations with smaller capacity" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 3). CC18 cites the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights as a stepping-stone: "everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that allow full participation in society and successful transitions in the labour market" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 2). This definition is enlarged from CC21 onwards as a result of COVID-19 to reinforce the inclusion of groups with less developed capabilities in and access to digital technologies: "the pandemic has also revealed weaknesses regarding equitable access and support for students, staff, and researchers, in particular those with fewer opportunities and lower digital competences, as well as mobile early career researchers" (European Commission, 2022). It is relevant to mention that while Delanty specifies the need to address the inclusion of women, immigrants and ethnic minorities, the EUI

subsumes these categories under the larger concepts of inter-geographical and socio-economic collaboration with the exception of "the children of workers who relocate to another Member State for shorter or longer periods" (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 3).

Several texts refer to universities as places of confluence of and interaction between a broad range of agents, such as college students, professors, researchers, staff, local administrations, training providers and corporations:

> European Universities will also contribute to the sustainable economic development of the regions where they are located, as their students will work closely with companies, municipal authorities, academics and researchers to find solutions to the challenges their regions are facing.
>
> (European Commission, 2019)

or, as CC21 states, "working in partnership and building European knowledge-creating, transdisciplinary and transnational teams of students and academics, together with researchers, and those from the business, innovation and wider communities" (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 12). They do not mention what specific initiatives or activities are to be developed but instead declare that it will depend on each alliance to define their programmes, goals and strategies.

The analysis shows that the shared norms and culture envisioned in the EUI documents are structured around the notion of sustainability, insisting on the goal of systemic, structural and sustainable impact. This impact is targeted at local communities and ecosystems, with the aim to increase the overall competitiveness of Europe and Europeans in the international markets.

Sustainability is conceived in a broad sense, addressed in its social, economic and political dimensions. It mostly focuses on providing education for all, job creation, developing competitiveness for local companies, and building resilience to crisis. When referring to the political, it delves around the concept of reinforcing a form of European citizenship. All these objectives are expected to be attained through education:

> It is therefore in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity.
>
> (European Commission, 2017, p. 2)

Lastly, it is important to note that most of the texts mention the structural network needed to support this shared normative culture. They allude to the need to allocate a specific budget, to develop certain legal provisions to enable collaboration between different countries despite the principle of subsidiarity, or the need for recognition of diplomas from all educational levels within the European space.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore whether Delanty's "critical cosmopolitanism," as a theoretical and methodological framework, made sense to approach the EUI as an initiative that may foster Europeanisation as a process and back the development of European identity. The research allows us to advance that it is a useful framework.

As to the potential of the EUI to contribute to fostering a European identity and to the Europeanisation process, the EUI documents present the clear aim of creating a shared normative culture. The texts suggest a progression between the opportunity that the alliances create to bring together actors across European borders and cultures and the aspiration of fostering a European identity and a European way of tackling societal challenges as one.

As seen in the results section, when looking at how the four dynamics established by Delanty are present in the texts, we see that most of the findings fall in the first and fourth dynamics, and almost none in the second and third. This shows the intentions to display the initial mechanics of a process (first dynamic), that is, to create opportunities of cross-border mobility, and the final objective of Europeanisation (fourth dynamic), defined as a shared identity and normative culture structured around the idea of the systemic and sustainable European way of doing things.

The two dynamics that the texts miss refer to the steps that enable Europeanisation through the encounter of people of diverse backgrounds, and the exchange and reflection that this encounter triggers. This reflective process affects one's own identity, developing understanding and empathy for the Other, and the rise of the shared European supra-national identity. The EUI explicitly mentions that the forms of these encounters are not defined so that each alliance can define their own mechanisms, but this strategy runs the risk that these spaces of reflection and European identity building do not come into being. In other words, that there is mobility but no reflexive encounter. Furthermore, the programmatic texts in the EUI display almost no reference to the non-European Other, that is, to students or staff coming from outside the European geographical zone.

Another relevant element that stems from our results is the tension between being European in a socio-cultural sense, on the one hand, and in an economic sense, on the other. As stated in the documents, the EUI assumes that education, exchange and multilingualism lead to cultural and economic integration but these two goals do not necessarily happen simultaneously and as a result of one another.

Based on the findings, the Europeanisation process appears to be put into motion, but it seems as if it has been "filed" or come to a halt, due first to the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically to the geopolitical situation in Europe. We can assert that the general vision of a shared European education formulated in the first call has found more detailed developments in subsequent calls (*cf.* Chapter 11, this volume).

Lastly, it would be interesting, for further research, to study the path that the alliances have followed in areas such as mobility for different categories of staff and students, joint educational offers or the promotion of cross-institutional research.

Notes

1 The only EU programme supporting culture is Creative Europe (COM(2018) 366 final). However, the programme provides an "open-ended" (sic) definition for the term culture (https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/eu-competences-in-the-field-of-culture), and this open-ended definition permeates the EUI documents. Consequently, the term culture in this chapter covers several types of culture, including national ones, but also, organizational or professional ones.
2 In upper case in the original.
3 In lower case in the original.
4 Idem.

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7 Sketching out the contours of the vision of European higher education advanced by the European Universities Initiative

Nadia Manzoni

Introduction

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) has given rise to much discourse about the vision of European higher education that has permeated the international, national and institutional settings. It has spread from the speech of a government leader (Macron, 2017) via the European institutions and the beneficiaries of the programme (European University Alliances (EUAs) and their constituent universities) to the discourse of the broader transnational community of international officers, consultants and experts, the political statements of government representatives and even to the academic writings of scientists. Since the launch of EUI in 2019, a number of policies have been issued by the European Union to facilitate the work of EUAs and push forward further integration of the European higher education space (Gunn, 2020; Maassen et al., 2022; Charret & Chankseliani, 2022; Craciun et al., 2023; Hartzell et al., 2023). These policies are an interesting reflection of the discourse at play in relation to European University Alliances as they are simultaneously both the products of a discourse among European higher education stakeholders and the producers of a discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), which then gets further diffused among stakeholders.

Discourse is understood here to mean "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1) and a discourse analysis tries to discover the answer to the question "how is the social world, including its subjects and objects, constituted in discourses" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 14). The discourse around the European Universities Initiative has developed its distinct way of talking about the identity, purpose, goals and governance of higher education in Europe. In addition to its contents, however, the discourse also implies an interactive process by which ideas are conveyed (Schmidt, 2008). And while the terms "discourse" and "ideas" are not synonymous, in this chapter, they are used interchangeably because the chapter primarily looks into the substance part of discourse which corresponds to the more static ideas. The more dynamic part of discourse that includes an analysis of the interactive process of coordinating and communicating ideas between actors thus falls outside the scope of the present chapter.

It is worth analysing the EU discourse around EUAs not only to better understand its substance (the what?) but also to get a sense of the policy rationale (the

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why?), the suggested ways of meeting the objectives (the how?), the level at which the policy solutions will be found (the where?) and the role of different actors in meeting the objectives (the who?). Since discourse delimits our possibilities for action, it is interesting to analyse how discourse at the European level may affect the collective vision of the future for European Universities and frame policy and institutional developments in European higher education.

The EU is certainly not a single actor in this policy process and the policy vision behind the European Universities Initiative may not be uniform. Indeed, different policy actors may have different perspectives about higher education in Europe, especially when it comes to its geographical borders, its level of inclusiveness versus its level of excellence, its role as a vehicle for further Europeanisation as well as the role of nation states within it (Brooks & Rensimer, 2023, p. 5). However, the co-creation process among a broad group of stakeholders that led to the adoption of policies on the EUI, depicted in Nijboer and Girotti's work (2023), has meant that the discourse around European Universities is not unidirectionally imposed from top to bottom but rather continuously co-created in a reiterative process together with national and institutional actors. It is also permanently in dialogue with policy ideas from other ideational entrepreneurs and other policy fields. The ideas related to European University Alliances that European institutions, and in particular the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, communicate in the political and public arenas are symptomatic of the vision of an "ideal" European higher education space that is the outcome of consultations, deliberations and negotiations among a broad set of actors.

As Musselin and Maassen (2009) state, "EU interactions and rules move forward through the coproduction of norms, procedures and decisions rather than domination of some actors over others." As the efficacy of soft law relies heavily on the perception of trustworthiness and competence of the decision-maker and the ability of policymakers to convince the beneficiaries of the desirability and necessity of policy goals (Levi et al., 2009), focusing on the power of the discourse in the case of EU's higher education policy can be revealing. This is especially interesting in an area of policy where soft power is the only type of power that governing institutions have recourse to, as in the case of the multi-level governance of higher education in the EU (Dakowska, 2019) and where broadly shared understandings, norms and values are needed as a legitimisation device for European Union politics (Bunea & Thomson, 2015).

Therefore, this chapter looks at the discourse stemming from the official policy documents of the EU institutions on this topic, which are listed in the appendix. The bulk of the analysis is concerned with the ideas represented in that discourse and how they jointly form a vision for European higher education.

The evolution of ideas behind European higher education policy

An analysis of the policy ideas behind the European Universities Initiative needs to be placed in the context of six decades of European-level cooperation on higher education development among Member States and, in particular, the acceleration

of European soft governance in higher education since the 2000s. The process of European cooperation in higher education has neither been linear nor singular. On the contrary, multiple streams of policy work (involving a variety of policy ideas, policy actors and institutions) have run either in parallel or in sequence, often intertwining and sometimes overlapping with each other. These streams and the interactions between policy ideas and policy actors have been documented and critically examined within the field of (higher) education research and political science research (Alexiadou & Rambla, 2022; Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Keeling, 2006; Corbett, 2003). There are many interesting facets of this history of cooperation depending on what we take as a unit of analysis and the lens through which we observe it, but one way to distinguish different policy streams is to zoom in on the evolution of policy ideas underpinning EU policy on education.

In this endeavour, it is important to bear in mind that higher education policy of the EU is not isolated from the dynamics of science and research policies at national or European level (Gornitzka et al., 2007; Keeling, 2006) nor from the influence of macroeconomic, competition, employment, welfare, social justice and increasingly, migration and environmental policies. So naturally, elements of all these policies find their way into EU's policy framework on (higher) education. For instance, Marques (2024) found that in the case of EU's research funding programmes (five cycles from Framework Programme 4 in 1994 to Horizon Europe in 2020), it is incremental ideational change of the guiding ideas which affected the direction of European science and how universities do research more than the regulatory features did (Marques, 2024). However, of primary interest for this chapter is the higher education policy addressing universities as the main target and advanced by the European Commission's Directorate-General of Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

The period between 2000 and 2020 is characterised by the tone set by the top-level Lisbon Strategy and later Europe 2020 strategy that discursively situated education policy within the EU's ambition to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. The agenda of modernisation of Europe's education systems was therefore discursively linked to knowledge-driven economic growth, competitiveness on the market and jobs. As Dakowska (2019) notes, "The Lisbon Strategy and the subsequent Europe 2020 strategy highlighted the economic framing of HE policies, through the catchwords of 'knowledge economy,' 'market relevance,' and 'employability,' designed to lend credibility to the Commission's calls for HE 'modernization'" (p. 2). Correspondingly, instruments to monitor progress involved targets, indicators, benchmarks and reporting mechanisms that formed part of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education (Gornitzka, 2005, 2018).

At the exact same time, the intergovernmental process of the Bologna Declaration signatories (1999) strived to achieve a European higher education area to promote citizens' mobility and employability via better comparability and compatibility of national higher education systems. While developing concurrently with the European OMC, the Bologna process has by no means been an analytically separate process and Keeling (2006) demonstrated that, while it lacks overall

coherence, the EU policy framework for action in higher education successfully interweaves policy goals of the Lisbon research agenda and the Bologna process. She claims that the European Commission's presentation of higher education "as purposeful, progressive, successful, economically beneficial, collaborative and international – parallels closely its construction of the wider European project . . . . Higher education is thus depicted as quintessentially European" (Keeling, 2006, p. 211). In turn, this also legitimises the European Commission's role in the construction and development of higher education.

Moving to the post-2020 period, Alexiadou and Rambla (2022) analyse the evolution of policy goals behind the European Education Area policy of the EU (2021) from the perspective of the coordinative and communicative discourse of actors such as the European Commission and the Council of European Ministers. They conclude that post-2020, the EU exhibited a lot of continuity in terms of policy goals with the previous phases, "consolidating the goals of skills and employability within the new priorities around the green and digital traditions" (Alexiadou & Rambla, 2022, p. 860). However, Cino Pagliarello (2022) finds that

> the framing of education reflected this time a set of multiple crises to be addressed through the reinforcement of a common European identity to be achieved through education . . . (opening) up a discourse more fine-tuned to the importance of the 'cultural' element of education policy, in parallel with the economic one that had been predominant until then.
>
> (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p. 177)

Therefore, while there is a continuation and extension of the employability and competitiveness discourse, there is also the fostering of a sense of active citizenship and European identity, as a response to the current climate of multiple crises.

Most recently, looking specifically at the underlying policy ideas in the latest policy on European University Alliances, Angouri (2023) identifies a foregrounding of what she terms "transnational educational collaboration" in the discourse of national and international policymakers (Angouri, 2023). By analysing the discourse across all the EU policy documents pertaining to European University Alliances between 2017 and 2022, Angouri (2023) is able to show that the stated purpose of transnational education cooperation is identified in "macro" terms with little focus on the concrete mechanisms through which these would be achieved. The benefits are that it "increases global competitiveness; contributes/creates a European dimension of higher education; strengthens European identity, democracy, and belonging; helps to tackle global challenges, especially green and digital transitions; transforms higher education through capabilities and capacity building; and nurtures equality" (Angouri, 2023, p. 11). A clear discursive link is made between transnational education collaboration and achieving the stated macro goals.

Béland (2009) proposes three main ways in which ideational processes (as one among other factors) impact policy change. First, such processes help to construct the problems and issues that enter the policy agenda. Second, ideational processes

shape the assumptions that affect the content of reform proposals. Third, these processes can become discursive "weapons" that participate in the construction of reform imperatives. Following Béland (2009), what is of interest to this particular research is to unpick the ideas in the discourse around EUI that construct the policy problems, shape the reform proposals and feed into the reform narrative directed at the European higher education sector.

Conceptual framework

I use the framework of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008, 2010, 2011) to try to systematise the discourse on European University Alliances and distinguish between different levels of discourse in the EU policy documents on EUAs. Dakowska (2019) identifies three main explanations of European higher education reform effectiveness – the power of instruments, standards and performance indicators; the power of the purse, which pertains to the materiality of the process and the financial means of the Commission; and the power of agency, which emphasises governing by expertise and networks. I advance a fourth dimension, which lies in the power of ideas and discourse, as elaborated by discursive institutionalist scholars (Béland, 2009; Blyth et al., 2016; Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016).

Schmidt reveals that "in discursive institutionalism, there is always the recognition that ideas and discourse can also provide power, as actors gain power from their ideas at the same time that they give power to their ideas" (Schmidt, 2011, p. 120). Carstensen and Schmidt speak of the "ideational power" as a fourth source of political power alongside coercive, structural and institutional ones (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). In the EU's higher education policy setting, the EU is constrained with its limited competences to control the higher education systems through coercive, structural or institutional power. As a consequence, ideational power, defined as the "capacity of agents (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements" (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, p. 320), is relevant for the case of the European Universities Initiative. Authors also distinguish between power through ideas, power over ideas and power in ideas. Particularly interesting in the case of European University Alliances is the EU institutions' power in ideas. According to this notion, ideas enjoy authority in structuring other actors' thoughts. These ideas recede into the background as knowledge systems that actors are unaware of (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016).

The starting point of discursive institutionalism (DI) is that ideas and discourses among actors in an institutional setting affect actors' preferences, strategies and normative orientations and are therefore a dominant variable in explaining endogenous political change in an institutional context. Ideas are generated, deliberated and legitimated by public actors and they exist at different levels of generality from philosophies to programmes or policies. They are viewed as dynamic and malleable rather than structurally determined and engrained. Discourse is understood in DI as an all-encompassing term that entails an interactive exchange of ideas, the meaning of which depends on the content of those ideas, the actors involved in the interactive process and the context of the exchange. In DI, agents engage in

"coordinative discourse" in shaping ideas in the political fora and in "communicative discourse" when those ideas are brought to the public for deliberation and legitimation (Schmidt, 2010). Concrete examples of venues where such discourses take place are provided in Table 7.1.

The framework used by discursive institutionalists differentiates between three levels at which ideas are formulated and exchanged: (1) the level of public philosophy or worldview, (2) the programmatic level and (3) the level of policies (Schmidt, 2008). To operationalise this framework for the purpose of this study and to facilitate the identification of these levels in the discourse analysis, a definition of how the levels translate to the case of EUI and a set of corresponding guiding questions are provided for each of the levels and outlined in Table 7.2. An abbreviated version of the dominant ideas appearing in the discourse analysis for each of the levels is also added to Table 7.2 for the sake of completeness.

Table 7.1 Examples of policy and political spheres where ideas are exchanged in coordinative and communicative discourse

The policy sphere: examples of "coordinative discourse" applied to EUI	*Ad hoc* stakeholder consultation meetings convened by the European Commission (in the run up to European University Initiative calls for funding of alliances, on the European Strategy for Universities, on the European Degree package); meetings of the Erasmus+ committee responsible for the budget of the initiative; official consultations; meetings of the Education committee of the Council of the European Union, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meetings; meetings of the EDUC committee of the European Parliament; public statements of stakeholder organisations; meetings of the FOREU 1 and FOREU 2 informal groups of alliances; Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) of Erasmus+ agencies, policy experimentation project meetings; meetings of the Directors General for Higher Education and others.
The political sphere: examples of "communicative discourse" applied to EUI	Public events organised by the European Commission (e.g. Education and Innovation Summit, Final event of the European degree and statute policy experimentation projects); Council Presidency-run summits on Alliances, multiplier events organised by Alliances; websites and social media pages of European University Alliances; events organised by various embassies on the topic of alliances; public communication and events by national Erasmus+ agencies; media and press releases of European Commission, ministries and alliances.

Source: adapted from Schmidt (2010)

Table 7.2 Examples of three levels of ideas found in the EUI discourse ⏎

Level	*Definition and application in the case of EUI*	*Guiding questions*	*Dominant discourse*
The level of public philosophy or worldview	Norms and values about the ultimate purpose of higher education	What is the key contribution of higher education to the EU, key indicators of success of higher education, values that higher education should uphold, what is the ideal relationship between teaching and research, etc.?	Universities solving the "grand societal challenges" and contributing to the green and digital transitions
Programmatic level	Ways of achieving the desired goal of higher education and norms, methods, and instruments to be applied	Which level of government is best placed to regulate higher education, who should fund higher education, which reforms of governance and organisational models are needed, etc.?	Transnational collaboration, incl. joint educational provision, mobility of students and staff, microcredentials, community engagement
The level of policies	Concrete policy measures to meet the goals for the higher education sector	Which policy measures are perceived as concretely contributing to the programmatic goals?	European degree, European statute, Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, Framework for academic careers, inter-university campuses

Source: adapted from Schmidt (2008)

Research protocol

The sample for this discourse analysis is formed of all the policy documents (Commission Communications, Council Conclusions and Council Recommendations) of the European Commission, Council of the European Union and the European Council that directly refer to the European Universities Initiative and where European University Alliances have a high salience. The reports of the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, while interesting, are excluded from this study due to the minor role of these institutions in the policy-making process in this field of supporting EU competence. Equally, the legislative documents that only briefly mention the EUI or EUAs, for instance, the Commission Communication on "A new ERA for Research and Innovation" which makes passing mention of the role of the European Universities Initiative in research and innovation ecosystems, are not included in the sample.

The final sample are nine documents spanning the period between 2017 and 2024, of which five are Commission-issued policy documents and four are Council-issued policy documents. While acknowledging that there may be differences in the discourse propagated by the different EU institutions (Alexiadou & Rambla, 2022), the policy documents were treated equally in this analysis, regardless of the issuing institution. This is because this research treats EU discourse holistically as one entity, in the sense of Fairclough (1995), who treats discourse as

> a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective. In this sense, the concept refers to any discourse that can be distinguished from other discourses such as, for example, a feminist discourse, a neoliberal discourse, a Marxist discourse, a consumer discourse, or an environmentalist discourse.
>
> (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, pp. 66–67)

A bird's eye view of all the policy papers provides a complete picture of the themes in the overall EU discourse.

The coding was guided by a set of three questions, outlined in Table 7.3, corresponding to the three levels of ideas previously outlined. Each of the questions had three codes assigned to it, which were identified based on the expectations in the literature. The codes were analysed based on their frequency of appearance, with the most frequently mentioned themes considered most salient or most important.

The challenge of the coding process was that the codes are necessarily reductive, especially when it comes to cross-cutting themes such as sustainability or innovation, which could be coded as reflecting both an economic rationale and a social one or even a political one. In this particular case, the choice was made to include sustainability and innovation under the economic argument.

Table 7.3 Guiding questions and codes for the discourse analysis ⏎

Guiding questions	*Codes*
What is the ultimate rationale and purpose of higher education?	1. Economic growth and competitiveness (including sustainability and innovation) 2. Social cohesion, inclusion, welfare 3. Democracy, identity, culture
What method shall be used to achieve the goals in higher education?	1. Internationalisation of universities 2. Integration of the European (higher) education space 3. Alternative methods
What concrete policy measures should be employed?	1. Policy measures at EU level 2. Policy measures at national level 3. Policy measures at institutional level

Analysis

At the level of the public philosophy or worldview, we find the norms and values about the ultimate purpose of higher education. The dominant normative idea around the purpose of higher education in the surveyed documents is that universities have the responsibility to help solve "big societal challenges." Three explicit goals of the higher education sector are intertwined in the policy documents at similar levels of importance – the economic goals, the social goals and the political goals. In all three cases, universities and their missions are seen as a means to an end, and that end is a more sustainable economy, a more political union and a more resilient society.

When it comes to the economic goals, European Universities are characterised as vehicles driving the green and digital transitions with their production and circulation of knowledge and skills and are therefore placed at the core of Union's highest-level economic and development strategy. They are expected to "secure Europe's capacity to boost technology-driven competitiveness" (European Commission, 2022b, p. 8) and support "lifelong learning and contribute to professional reskilling and upskilling to meet new and emerging needs in society and labour market." Their role in regional development is also recognised as well as the expectation that they "contribute to the vitality of their regions and communities, helping to overcome disadvantage and geographic disparities." In most recent policy documents, the role of universities in ensuring Europe's "open strategic autonomy" in key areas is emphasised (European Commission, 2024a, p. 2).

In relation to the political goals, European Universities are instrumentalised for internal cohesion and external geopolitical purposes. In terms of contribution to the European Union internally, they are depicted as "a condition and foundation for open, democratic, fair and sustainable societies" (European Commission, 2022a, p. 1) and as "lighthouses of our European way of life" (European Commission, 2022a, p. 4), preserving democratic practices, fundamental rights, academic values and freedom of scientific research. In addition, their contribution to fostering a sense of a common European identity and a stronger European sense of belonging is also emphasised (European Commission, 2024a, p. 2), as well as their task in promoting "active citizenship, tolerance, equality and diversity, openness and critical thinking for more social cohesion and social trust" (European Commission, 2022a, p. 10). Externally, universities need to serve the role of preservers and promoters of "a European model in line with EU's interests and values: rule of law, human rights and international norms and standards" (European Commission, 2022a, p. 1). They are to attract and retain talented students and staff from abroad in order to "maximise Europe's global influence when it comes to values, education, research, industry and societal impact" (European Commission, 2022a, p. 3).

In relation to social goals, which are overall less visible in the EU policy documents, universities are expected to experiment with innovative student-centred teaching formats that cater to the needs of a more diverse group of learners, in

order to address the inequalities and disparities in the student body and more widely in the society. They are to play a role in implementing the "European Pillar of Social Rights," the EU's strategy for a fairer and more social European labour market and welfare system, and to provide "fair access to high-quality education, training and research" (European Commission, 2022b, p. 8). Universities are made responsible for rendering international mobility of students more accessible to underrepresented groups by offering flexible, virtual and blended learning opportunities and embedding them into educational programmes. They are also made responsible for addressing the gender gap in their midst, for instance, in leadership positions and in certain fields of studies (European Commission, 2022a, p. 2).

At the programmatic level, the discourse gives clues about the most promising ways of arriving at the desired goals of higher education and the policy paradigms and ideals that will eventually guide the more immediate policy solutions. In the policy documents analysed, there is a very dominant programmatic idea, which is that internationalisation and transnational cooperation of universities are the strategy through which universities can individually and collectively achieve the higher education vision outlined earlier. The European Universities Initiative is seen as "a powerful enabler for the deep transformation towards excellent, inclusive, competitive, sustainable and attractive higher education institutions accounting for all their missions" (European Commission, 2022b, p. 10). The logic is that internationalisation of universities not only leads to internal institutional reforms of universities but also at the same time empowers universities in their service to society, in particular the European society. In addition, universities participating in the EUI are to "act as role models for European higher education transformation" and act as multipliers, sharing "their good practice and experiences with all higher education institutions across Europe, ensuring that the reforms, outputs and innovations triggered by the 'European Universities' are fully accessible for those that do not participate in these alliances" (Council of the European Union, 2021).

Furthermore, there are some implicit and some explicit ideas expressed in the programmatic discourse. First, the universities are portrayed as progressive, agile, innovative, ambitious entities willing to transform further, were it not for the external forces such as lack of sufficient funding and regulatory barriers that are stalling their progress. They need to be "strengthened," "supported," "empowered" and "reinforced" (European Commission, 2024a, p. 4). There is also an implicit understanding that international cooperation of universities primarily occurs among countries of the European Union, and while there are references to the Bologna process and to cooperation with non-EU countries, the primary ties that should be strengthened are those with other EU-based universities. More explicit in this programmatic discourse is the idea that the internationalisation of universities is the concern of both the national and the EU authorities as enablers and facilitators of international mobility, transnational cooperation and integration of universities across borders. The role of the European Commission is therefore to "support the development of 'European Universities' as

'testbeds' for interoperability and promotion of cooperation between Member States regarding European research, teaching and staff career development practices" (Council of the European Union, 2021).

At the level of policies, the focus is on specific policies or "policy solutions" proposed by policymakers (Schmidt, 2008), embedded in the value system of the programmatic level of discourse, which as outlined earlier, values internationalisation above other potential focus areas (alternatives could be service to society, civic engagement, scientific output or contribution to regional ecosystems, or others). The policy ideas are almost exclusively framed as solutions to the policy problem of universities being too constrained by national, legal and administrative "barriers" and are therefore mostly policies that need to be facilitated by the EU and implemented in a coordinated fashion by all EU Member States. This in turn requires coordination mechanisms at EU level and some degree of harmonisation of policies among EU Member States. Absent from the policies are internal policy measures that need to be taken by higher education institutions as well as prescriptions of how and when the national policies should follow the EU policies. Nevertheless, concrete policy measures are proposed, repeated and reiterated across different policy documents, including virtual inter-university campuses, the joint European degree (label), European legal statute for European Universities, the Framework for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, a European framework for attractive and sustainable academic careers, the European Student Card, the roll out of micro-credentials and others.

Conclusion

The analysis of EUI policy documents reveals that the EU discourse operates at three different levels. These broadly correspond to the three indicators that Walkenhorst (2008) assumes to be significant for EU higher education policy change: (a) a declaration (and justification) of new policy objectives; (b) a modified policy reference frame; and (c) a visible turn in the underlying philosophical or ideational paradigms.

The vision for European higher education in the discourse in the policy documents of the European Union since 2019 advances a worldview that values universities which are focused on skills development, innovative and flexible, interdisciplinary, inclusive, excellent in either research or applied research, regionally connected, civically engaged, which uphold European values, and contribute to European identity and a sense of belonging. This corresponds to a justification of the policy objective of universities working towards "solving the grand challenges" of the 21st century and accompanying Europe on its green and digital transitions.

At the programmatic level, how universities will achieve this is through transnational collaboration, which acts as a policy reference frame (Walkenhorst, 2008). Angouri (2023) explains that "transnational collaboration" appears in the EUI discourse as

> a) a way for universities to produce the knowledge necessary to address society's wicked problems, b) to create infrastructural capability and capacity

> for the future and c) diversify the pedagogic offering which is associated with quality and personal growth, societal development and competitiveness.
>
> (Angouri, 2023, p. 5)

Another angle which this chapter takes is that the transnational collaboration of universities is framed as a programme through which the worldview will be achieved, justifying the introduction of a number of EU-level policy measures to foster and facilitate internationalisation.

Overall, the discourse analysis of EUI policy documents revealed that while the current discourse does not fully move away from the previously predominant goals of economic prosperity and global competitiveness, it engulfs economic concerns with concerns of a more social and political nature. The emphasis on the "grand societal challenges of the 21st century" in the EUI policy documents, such as digitalisation, climate change, threat to democracy, declining European sense of belonging, aging populations and others, evokes the need for universities to pool their resources, play on each other's strengths and work jointly across borders. Transnational collaboration is therefore imposed by the European policymakers as a natural way forward and as a way to further other policy goals. At the same time, the discourse also legitimises the role of the EU in enabling transnational collaboration and ultimately furthering "Europeanisation" of national policies in higher education (*cf.* Chapter 1, this volume).

As the policies surrounding the EUI advance, further research into the dynamic elements of EU discourse on EUAs and how it is constituted among actors as they coordinate and communicate ideas may unearth mechanisms through which discourse can lend ideational power to certain actors and not only shape policies but also bring about institutional change.

Appendix I

Policy documents for the empirical analysis

Key policy area	*Title of policy document*	*Date of publication*	*Corresponding bibliographic entry*
Establishing European Universities	European Council Conclusions – Education and Culture	14.12.2017	(European Council, 2017)
European Universities Initiative	Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education 2021/C 221/03	10.06.2021	(Council of the European Union, 2021)
European Strategy for Universities	Strategy for European Universities	18.1.2022	(European Commission, 2022a)
	Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future 2022/C 167/03	5.4.2022	(Council of the European Union, 2022a)
Building bridges in higher education	Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for European higher education cooperation	18.1.2022	(European Commission, 2022b)
	Council Recommendation on building bridges for European higher education cooperation	5.4.2022	(Council of the European Union, 2022b)
European degree	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A blueprint for a European degree	27.3.2024	(European Commission, 2024a)
	Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education	27.3.2024	(European Commission, 2024b)
	Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education	27.3.2024	(European Commission, 2024c)

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8 Mechanisms of Alliance Formation across the European Universities Initiative

Agata A. Lambrechts

Introduction

Within management and organisational studies, rich literature is available on inter-firm alliances, including examination of both the rationales and basis for the formation of alliances (e.g. Ahuja et al., 2009; Anand & Khanna, 2000; Franco & Haase, 2012; Gulati, 1998; Kim & Higgins, 2007; Li & Ferreira, 2008). Considerable attention has also been given to interorganisational arrangements, including strategic alliances, consortia and networks within the higher education (HE) research field. Here, however, the focus has been primarily on the reasons for entering such arrangements, including their strategic goals and expected operational outcomes (e.g. Antonowicz et al., 2023; Antonowicz et al., 2024; Deiaco et al., 2009; Denman, 2002; Fehrenbach, 2023; Gunn & Mintrom, 2013; Karvounaraki et al., 2018; Maassen et al., 2023; Musselin, 2018; Olds, 2009; Teather, 2004; Vukasovic & Stensaker, 2018), on understanding the differences between types of inter-organisational arrangements and membership confines (e.g. Beerkens, 2002; Brankovic, 2018; Vukasovic & Stensaker, 2018; Zapp et al., 2021), and on establishing the standards of good practice for such alliances, associations, partnerships and networks (Matross, 2015). Fewer attempts have been made thus far to describe and explain the *mechanisms* and *dynamics of the formation of alliances* between higher education institutions (HEIs) in particular in Europe (for relevant recent examples, see Brankovic, 2018; Fehrenbach, 2023; Zapp et al., 2021), and especially in relation to the alliances built within the framework of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) (Antonowicz et al., 2024; Charret & Chankseliani, 2022; Craciun et al., 2023; Maciejowska et al., 2023; Stensaker et al., 2023).

Within this chapter, we contribute to a rapidly growing but currently still limited body of evidence in this area, examining the possible mechanisms at play during EUI alliances formation.[1] We borrow a perspective from management and economic sociology literature and identify three core observable theoretical mechanisms for the formation of ties among the HEIs that comprise the alliances: complementarities, similarities and pre-existing network ties. We argue, building on our recent quantitative exploration of the makeup of the alliances (Lambrechts et al., 2024), that all three mechanisms play a role, albeit to a different extent. Here, to extend this previous primarily quantitative analysis, we draw conclusions

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based on qualitative directed content analysis of publicly available information published on alliances' websites and in Alliance Factsheets published by the European Commission.

Higher education alliances

HEIs have been, of course, forging more or less formal links with each other, both within and across nations, long before the inception of the EUI. HEIs have been coming together to exchange knowledge and capabilities, cooperate in education and research, build capacity or establish a collective voice to represent the interests of member institutions (e.g. Gunn & Mintrom, 2013; Olds, 2009; Vukasovic & Stensaker, 2018). Several types of such interorganisational arrangements have been described in the literature, including consortia, networks, partnerships, alliances, joint ventures and associations (Beerkens, 2002; Brankovic, 2018; Sandström & Weimer, 2016), although some of the terms are now used interchangeably. In particular, HE consortia, strategic alliances and university networks have been defined as "multi-point groupings of higher education institutions which have a limited amount of members and where membership is restricted to particular institutions that are allowed by the other partners to enter the arrangement" (Beerkens & van der Wende, 2007, pp. 61–79).

Although alliances created within the framework of the EUI fit this definition, they are a somewhat different organisational form of regional, transnational HEI alliances. The novelty of this inter-organisational arrangement lies in the long-term (external) funding model for the alliances and the concurrent existence of a large number of these so-called European Universities that form a "network of networks" (Gunn, 2020). The current goal is to have 60 European Universities in place, involving more than 500 HEIs by mid-2024. The aims and objectives of the initiative are set top-down by the European Commission and include boosting European competitiveness, promoting a stronger European identity, attracting students and researchers from around the world and revolutionising education delivery. The alliances are, however, built bottom-up by HEIs themselves and test different approaches and activities to achieve these overall goals. The relatively short list of formal requirements creates a large tie pool of some thousands of institutions[2] within a broad geographical area. According to these requirements, alliances must include a minimum of three HEIs (each holding a valid Erasmus Charter of Higher Education), located in different EU member states or third countries associated with the Erasmus+, agreeing to work together on a long-term basis across all of the HE missions, and the encouragement of applications by all types of HEIs.

Mechanisms of Alliance Formation

Within the management and economic sociology literature, three primary theoretical mechanisms for tie formation between potential alliance members can be distinguished: similarities, complementarities and pre-existing network ties.

Similarities

The most commonly cited mechanism of tie formation is the mechanism of attribute-based homophily, that is, the tendency for alliances to be formed by organisations that share, or are similar in terms of, some attributes (Siciliano et al., 2021). Such attributes can include reputation and status (Burris, 2004; Podolny, 1994; cf. Collet & Philippe, 2014, who argued that in particular during up market ["dominated by an emphasis on upside risk (i.e. where uncertainty is framed in terms of potential opportunities)," p. 408], this natural tendency to form ties with similar organisations can be overridden if organisations do not want to miss out on high-potential opportunities) but also values or features such as size, age, geography and social environment, or clients' demographics.

The literature on HEIs highlighted similar levels of research reputation as a core dimension of similarity explaining the formation of HEI networks, including HEIs research cooperation consortia/networks (Lepori et al., 2013) or associations which represent members' interests to policymakers (Brankovic, 2018; Dusdal et al., 2021; Zapp et al., 2021). However, the EUI is focused on a broader set of cooperation rationales both in research and – primarily – in education. Therefore, we might expect that also other dimensions of similarity come to the forefront, such as disciplinary identity (e.g. arts or business schools) or subject focus, or geography.

Complementarities

Rooted in the resource-based view of organisations lies the alternative belief that organisations come together to exchange resources and complementary capabilities (Cobeña et al., 2017; (Hamel et al., 1989; Kim & Higgins, 2007) in order either to gain market advantage through vertical integration across the production value chain or to forge alliances to gain a stronger competitive position in markets (see also Gunn and Mintrom, 2013, and Stensaker, 2018, on university alliances). To achieve complementarity and create greater value, organisations must find partners that are somewhat different from themselves. Such heterophily (Cobeña et al., 2017; Siciliano et al., 2021) in alliances appears to lead to more successful outcomes (Gulati, 1995; Hamel et al., 1989; Mitsuhashi & Greve, 2009).

Developing cooperation and synergies in education and research across Europe is the key and explicit goal of the EUI. Therefore, we can expect the alliances to – at least for the most part – preferentially include HEIs involved in both types of activities (research and education) and representing different geographical areas. Second, we might expect that the possession of complementary assets that allow the development of novel products and services, such as interdisciplinary curricula or research activities, plays a core role in how individual alliances have been formed.

Pre-existing network ties

Much research also suggests that organisations are more likely to form alliances with actors with whom they already have ties, with organisations they trust and with

whom they share a history of a rich exchange of information. This helps to reduce the search costs and mitigates the risks associated with opportunism (Anand & Khanna, 2000; Gulati, 1995; Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999).

As for the EUI, therefore, we expect that alliances are preferentially formed between HEIs already having ties, such as research collaborations or being part of the same groups or associations of HEIs (Zapp et al., 2021). In the European context, we also expect that alliances are formed preferentially between HEIs already cooperating within the European Framework Programmes (Paier & Scherngell, 2011) or the Erasmus+ programme (Fumasoli & Rossi, 2021).

We note that the tendency to seek out partners who are different but similar and search among previous connections all at the same time is not uncommon, as actors seek to "optimise convergence or divergence with potential partners along different aspects" (Kim & Higgins, 2007, p. 500) to secure long-term success (see also Beerkens, 2007). We expect, therefore, to observe a mix of the three mechanisms in at least some of the alliances. We aim to identify, however, which of the mechanisms appears predominant, or which of the mechanisms are more often operating in tandem.

Methods

As noted in the introduction, this chapter builds upon a larger study investigating alliance formation in the framework of the EUI, which employed mixed methods. The findings from the quantitative arm of this broader project were previously published in Lambrechts et al. (2024). There, we used statistical analysis to compare the characteristics of HEIs participating in the EUI with those of the whole population of HEIs delivering at least a bachelor's degree in European countries, as provided by the European Tertiary Education Register (www.eter-project.eu). We also tested whether alliances have been preferentially formed among previously collaborating HEIs by using data on European Union Framework Programme collaborations from CORDIS' publicly available datasets. Finally, we examined a dataset of previous joint participation in other associations and networks created by the author.

To complement findings from the earlier quantitative analysis, here, we delve deeper by presenting the qualitative component of the study. We focus on public texts, such as the European University Factsheets (European Commission, n.d.) and information published on alliances' websites, including, for example, mission statements or "about our members" sections, where the alliance member HEIs express what they themselves consider as the basis for their compatibility.

We employed directed content analysis to seek supporting or non-supporting evidence for the mechanisms proposed by theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We first deductively coded relevant passages into three macro-categories: similarities, complementarities and pre-existing network ties. Subsequently, inductive coding identified 13 sub-codes that disaggregate the specific axes of connection between institutions. Frequencies of both sub-codes and main categories are reported.

The findings support and extend or enrich the existing theory by identifying the prevalence of the three theoretically grounded mechanisms in the context of alliance formation across the EUI.

Sample information

Our sample is composed of the 44 alliances funded under 2019, 2020 and 2022 calls, involving a total of 356 HEIs in 33 countries that participated in the initiative as of spring 2023 (time of analysis). While most of the alliances discuss the basis of their collaboration on their website and/or in the Factsheets, we have not been able to locate any specific mentions for two of the alliances at the time of analysis. Hence, the following analysis is based on information for 39 out of the 41 European Universities.

Findings

Our findings from the statistical analysis and a review of a dataset of previous collaborations (Lambrechts et al., 2024) have indicated that the principal mechanisms for alliance formation in the framework of EUI have been *similarity* and *pre-existing network ties*. The HEIs participating in the alliances are mostly large, research-oriented universities with a right to award PhDs, with half of participating HEIs included in the top 1,000 institutions in the world in the ARWU Shanghai Ranking. Although relatively homogeneous during the early stages, the enlargement of alliances in 2022 extended participation in terms of geographical location, status (operationalised as position in international rankings) and, to a lesser extent, type of HEIs (Lambrechts et al., 2024).

The HEIs with similar characteristics, in particular similar status, were joining together, although there has also been a significant degree of mixing between ranked (in the top 1,000) and non-ranked HEIs in the EUI alliances. In addition, the alliances were clearly formed between HEIs which have had long-standing cooperation through other institutional networks, associations or alliances (as opposed to research collaborations or student exchanges). This has been true in particular for the alliances formed during the first pilot phase (Lambrechts et al., 2024).

Analyses of members' profiles, as described by the HEIs themselves on the alliances' websites and in the Factsheets published by the European Commission (n.d.), largely corroborate these earlier findings but also reveal further details and nuances not visible through statistical analysis. These include the relative importance of complementarities between member HEIs, not easily discernible through quantitative analysis.

Notably, only one alliance, SEA-EU, described in detail the process of formation of the alliance – beginning with two HEIs with a long history of collaboration joining together and setting on a quest to identify and contact other potential candidates with a similar teaching and research profile (in terms of subject focus) to join the consortium (*SEA-EU Origins*, n.d.). In all other cases, we have selected passages where alliances characterise themselves by describing their membership

for our analysis. We have identified 13 different axes of connection, although the distribution of these was somewhat uneven.

More than half of the alliances (21) listed the *subject orientation* as a common feature among their member HEIs: most alliances do not have a specific thematic focus and offer a comprehensive range of education opportunities (although our quantitative analysis did show that member HEIs have on average a stronger STEM orientation than non-allied HEIs; Lambrechts et al., 2024). Others focus on specific themes and disciplines, such as brain research (NeurotechEU), engineering (EELISA, EUT), global health (EUGLOH – now EUGLOH 2.0) or space (UNIVERSEH). While the majority (16) of the alliances described their subject orientation as being similar, five alliances talked explicitly about complementarities of their teaching and research foci, providing valuable pointers for understanding what motivates institutional-level cooperation. For instance, the ENGAGE.EU alliance stated on its website (n.d.):

> *Each member university brings its individual perspective – as shaped by its academic areas of specialisation . . . for the sake of collective value creation that surpasses the potential of single players.*

Fourteen alliances have described their members' *activity profile* as "research-intensive" or "research-based." This correlates with the findings from our quantitative analysis, where we have shown that around half of the alliances included a core of ranked HEIs, a feature which in turn is highly correlated with research activity (Lambrechts et al., 2024). Only four alliances referred to being composed of "education driven" (or both research and education) HEIs. Other alliances (5) reported being composed of a *specific type of institution*, such as universities of technology (EuroTeQ, Eut), entrepreneurial (ECIUn – now ECIUn+) or reform universities (ERUA), while the rest have not referred to activity profile at all (16).

Some member HEIs of alliances (4) have similar *geographical* characteristics, such as their location in medium-sized cities (ARQUS – now ARQUS II) or in rural and mountain regions (UNITA! – now UNITA) or post-industrial cities:

> *"The exceptionalism of our [European] university resides in our locations, our histories and traditions . . ." ". . . eight universities situated in different countries throughout Europe, representing eight different post-industrial cities."*
>
> *(UNIC, n.d.)*

However, most (17/18) alliances that mentioned geography have reflected on their composition in terms of balance, regional diversity and Europe-wide coverage. As such, we have categorised these as evidence of complementarities.

Twelve of the alliances highlighted the high national or international standing (*reputation)* or position in international ranking (*status)* of their members. This again correlated with the findings from our quantitative analysis. Another 12 alliances (with only a small overlap with the ones mentioning reputation/status) reported being composed of *locally and/or regionally engaged* institutions,

including, for example, the EUt+ alliance, which in its Mission Statement, available online (EUt+, n.d), stated:

> *We are proud to be the workshops of our cities rather than their cathedrals, proud that our impact is more important to us than our international visibility. At the global level we lie within the 500+ quartile of world universities. Each of us is a well-established institution at the regional level, and we are perceived as the "applied science" university in our respective cities when the city is large enough, or the university of a secondary city in the other cases.*

A smaller number of alliances mentioned *common values* (6), such as "sustainability, expertise, bravery and novelty" (CONEXUS – now EU-CONEXUS) (UTCB, n.d.), "inclusiveness, gender equality, non-discrimination and social equity" (CIVIS – now CIVIS 2) (CIVIS, n.d.) or "democracy, academic freedom, inclusiveness, connectivity and planetary wellbeing" (EUTOPIA) (YERUN, n.d.) and only a few explicitly refer to their members' *international orientation* (4). Other alliances reported similar (4) or diverse *age* (3), similar (1) or diverse *size* (2), (similarly) *diverse student bodies/focus on inclusiveness* (3), or the same *legal status* (2) of their member HEIs.

Nineteen alliances stated explicitly on their websites or in the Factsheets that they are building on their *past* experiences of (often long-lasting) bi- or multilateral *collaboration* in research, education or mobility programmes (14) or note that they have evolved directly from previous networks (Aurora, ECIUn+, EuroTeQ, Unite, YUFE2030):

> *Our Alliance can thus draw on the experience, tested models and methods of collaboration at different academic levels in the various predecessor arrangements, scale these up to the level of the new confederation and enhance them by developing new structures and processes to make a quantum leap in cooperation.*
>
> (ENHANCE, n.d.)

Three alliances characterise their members as "like-minded" (i.e. similar) HEIs, while five others talk (non-specifically) about their "collective strengths" or "synergies," and diverse or individual perspectives (indicating complementarities).

Altogether, 33 alliances mentioned similarities as the basis of their members' compatibility (with similarities found in additional alliance through quantitative analysis). While rarely cited in isolation, some of the alliances clearly leveraged existing similarities (indeed, often linked to a previous joint collaboration as well) as a foundation for forming the alliances, as exemplified by YUFE which, through previous collaboration through YERUN network, fostered collaboration among young, research-intensive universities:

> *All YUFE members are united by a common profile, shared beliefs and interests, mutual trust and excitement to work together on innovative solutions.*

> *Their prevalent characteristics include that: All included academic partners are young universities; All academic partners are research-intensive; All members are student-centred and non-elitist; All have close ties to local and regional governments and businesses . . .; All put specific emphasis on European mobility for both staff and students; All are greatly involved in career development processes . . ..*
>
> (YUFE, n.d.)

In contrast, other alliances emphasised the value of complementarity. ENGAGE.EU, for example, highlights the diversity of the members in a positive light:

> *Each member university brings its individual perspective – as shaped by its academic areas of specialisation as well as geographical and economic context – for the sake of collective value creation that surpasses the potential of single players.*
>
> (ENGAGE.EU, n.d.)

Similarly, in CHARM-EU the "*diversity of educational systems and the differing geographical, regional, cultural, lingual, economic and historical perspectives/ challenges"* is seen as a strength, contributing to a shared vision for a "*university of the future"* (CHARM-EU, n.d.). In total, 22 alliances referred to complementarities on their websites or on Factsheets, although in ten instances, these relate to geography only (NB: complementarities were hardly visible through the quantitative analysis).

Finally, while 19 alliances reported past collaborations or shared membership in other networks, 20 such past collaborations between the majority of the members were actually identified, with further 7 alliances including at least a small proportion of member HEIs with pre-existing institutional ties (see online resources accompanying Lambrechts et al., 2024). An overview of these results is presented in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Mechanisms of Alliance Formation in the EUI ⏎

Alliance	*Mechanisms of Alliance Formation – Qualitative Evidence Combined with Findings from Quantitative Analysis as reported in Lambrechts et al. (2024)*
Una.Universitas	**Similarities** *(reputation, age, activity profile)*, **Complementarities** *(non-specific)* **& Pre-existing Network Ties**
1 CORE	**Similarities** *(activity profile, legal status, subject orientation, reputation)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* **& Pre-existing Network Ties**
ARQUS II	**Similarities** *(age, activity profile, subject orientation, geography–mid-size cities, local and/or regional engagement)* **& Pre-existing Network Ties**
ATHENA	**Similarities** *(size, geography–non-capital cities and peripheries)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only, with further non-specific statements indicating complementarities)* **Pre-existing Network Ties**

(*Continued*)

Table 8.1 (Continued)

Alliance	*Mechanisms of Alliance Formation – Qualitative Evidence Combined with Findings from Quantitative Analysis as reported in Lambrechts et al. (2024)*
Aurora	**Similarities** *(activity profile)* **and Pre-existing Network Ties**
CHARM-EIGHT	**Similarities** *(activity profile)*, **Complementarities** *(geography, with further reference to diverse education systems, cultural, lingual, economic and historical contexts)* and **Pre-existing Network Ties**
Circle U.	**Similarities** *(activity profile, subject orientation, reputation, common values)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only, with further non-specific statements)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
CIVICA	**Similarities** *(reputation, subject orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
CIVIS 2	**Similarities** *(reputation, activity profile, local and/or regional engagement, common values)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
CONEXUS	**Similarities** *(common values)*
E3UDRES2	No evidence identified
EC2U	**Similarities** *(age, activity profile, local and/or regional engagement)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ECIUn+	**Similarities** *(type of HEIs, international orientation, activity profile, local and/or regional engagement, subject orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EDUC	**Similarities** & **Complementarities** (*size, age, languages, subject orientation)*
EELISA	**Similarities** (*reputation)*, **Complementarities** *(geography, type of HEIs)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ENGAGE.EU	**Similarities** *(subject orientation, reputation)*, **Complementarities** *(geography, with further references to diverse areas of subject orientation/specialisation and economic contexts and additional non-specific statements)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ENHANCE	**Similarities** *(reputation, subject orientation, type of HEIs, activity profile)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ENLIGHT	**Similarities** *(subject orientation, activity profile, common values)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EPICUR-SHAPE-IT	**Similarities** *(reputation)*, & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ERUA	**Similarities** *(subject orientation, student profile, type of HEIs)* & **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)*
EUGLOH	**Similarities** *(subject orientation)*, **Complementarities** *(non-specific)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EUNICE	**Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EUniWell	**Complementarities** *(non-specific)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EURECA-PRO	No evidence identified
EuroTeQ	**Similarities** *(reputation, type of HEIs, subject orientation)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
EUt+	**Similarities** *(activity profile, subject orientation, local and/or regional engagement, reputation, type of HEIs)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**

(*Continued*)

Table 8.1 (Continued)

Alliance	*Mechanisms of Alliance Formation – Qualitative Evidence Combined with Findings from Quantitative Analysis as reported in Lambrechts et al. (2024)*
EUTOPIA MORE	**Similarities** *(regional engagement, common values, "like-minded" HEIs)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
FILMEU	**Similarities** *(subject orientation, international orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
FORTHEM	**Similarities** *(legal status, regional engagement, subject orientation, activity profile)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
INVEST	**Similarities** *(international orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
NeurotechEU	**Similarities** *(reputation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
RUN-EU	**Similarities** *(local and/or regional engagement, "like-minded" HEIs)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
SEA-EU	**Similarities (***subject orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
T4E	**Similarities** *(local and/or regional engagement, "like-minded" HEIs)*, **Complementarities** *(subject orientation)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
ULYSSEUS	**Complementarities** *(age, subject orientation, geography)*
UNIC	**Similarities** *(student profile/inclusiveness*, *geography–post-industrial cities)*, **Complementarities** *(related to geography only)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
UNITA	**Similarities** *(subject orientation, activity profile, geography–rural and cross-border mountain regions)*, **Complementarities** *(geography, size)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
UNITE!	**Similarities** *(regional engagement, subject orientation)*, **Complementarities** *(geography, subject orientation – a "broad spectrum" beyond "common core")* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**
UNIVERSEH	**Complementarities** *(age, geography)*
YUFE 2030	**Similarities** *(international orientation, local and/or regional engagement, subject orientation, age, activity profile, student profile/inclusiveness, common values)* & **Pre-existing Network Ties**

Conclusion

Our findings as reported in this chapter confirm the presence of all three alliance formation mechanisms in the EUI – similarities, pre-existing ties and complementarities – as outlined in the theoretical framework. However, as expected, the relative prevalence of each mechanism differs. Indeed, while all three mechanisms appear concurrently in more than a third of the alliances, the key finding is the dominance of similarities in particular in relation to activity profile and subject orientation (as well as size and reputation as reported in our previous publication; Lambrechts et al., 2024).

Further, our findings also show a relative dominance of pre-existing ties as a mechanism for alliance formation – particularly those established through past, whole-institution collaborations or shared network memberships, as also reported by Antonowicz et al. (2024), Charret and Chankseliani (2022), Stensaker et al. (2023)

and Maciejowska et al. (2023). Interestingly though, studies by Antonowicz et al. and Maciejowska et al. also highlight the important role of personal relationships between researchers from member HEIs who carried out joint research or didactic projects in the past (both in the context of Polish HEIs participating in the EUI). Additional evidence building on interview or survey data from a wider selection of HEIs/alliances will enrich our understanding of the relative role of diverse pre-existing ties between member HEIs.

Finally, qualitative analysis of alliances' own descriptions of their membership suggests that in more than half of the cases, the search for complementary attributes did play a role in how they were formed. The complementarities, which, as mentioned early on, appear most common and lead to the most successful outcomes in the private sector inter-firm alliances and thus far relate predominantly to the geographical balance, likely a direct result of how the calls have been framed. This highlights the potential tension between achieving geographical spread and fostering more strategic, resource-based complementarities that could lead to innovative educational or research programmes.

Looking ahead, the dominance of pre-existing ties and homogeneity in alliance composition could have long-term implications. While these ties can facilitate collaboration, they might also limit opportunities for new partnerships and perspectives. Since 2023, further alliances have been established, with additional ones due to join the EUI in late 2024. Future research should examine whether the same patterns of alliance composition and mechanisms of alliance formation are repeated across the now much larger set of alliances, or whether a more diverse and potentially more innovative landscape is emerging as the European Universities initiative matures. Further, research that explores the long-term impact of different alliance formation mechanisms would be valuable.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1 It should be noted here that an earlier draft of this work published online as a pre-print contained both the findings as presented in this chapter, and those now published elsewhere (Lambrechts et al., 2024). Both the ongoing work presented at various events and this earlier pre-print have been cited by other researchers (Antonowicz et al., 2023; Craciun et al., 2023; Stensaker et al., 2023), as now referenced here.

2 According to the information on the European Commission webpages, in 2024, the European Education Area comprises close to 5,000 higher education institutions (https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/about-higher-education).

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9 Future perspectives for European Universities

The challenges of implementing a governance model for the European Universities Initiative

Manuel José Damásio, Barry Dignam, Veerle Van der Sluys and Sophie Quin

Introduction

FilmEU – The European University for Film and Media Arts[1] – was launched in 2020 by four European Higher Education Institutions in the field of the arts: Lusófona University from Lisbon (henceforth, LU), Portugal; BFM/TLU – Baltic Film and Media School at Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia (henceforth TLU); LUCA School of Arts from Brussels, Belgium (henceforth, LUCA); and Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, from Dublin (henceforth, IADT), Ireland. Together,[2] these institutions aim to collaborate around the common objective of jointly promoting high-level education, innovation and research activities in the multidisciplinary field of Film and Media Arts and, through this collaboration, consolidate the central role of Europe as a world leader in the creative fields and promote the relevance of culture and aesthetical values for our societal well-being.

FilmEU's ambition is to become a distinguishable and highly relevant provider of education, innovation and research across all domains of the creative and cultural industries by having in place a full-fledged European University before the end of this decade.

FilmEU[3] is one of the 50 existing EU-funded "European Universities" and one of only two existing European Universities that operate in the domains of the Cultural and Creative Industries. This flagship initiative of the EU was launched in 2019 with the purpose enunciated by the Commission of designing and implementing the trans-European universities of the future.[4] The idea is that through original forms of institutional cooperation and the development of differentiated pedagogical and scientific endeavours, these European Universities can pave the way for profound transformations of the European higher education system, its competitiveness and overall impact in Europe and abroad. But this ambitious initiative faces a clear and complex problem: the lack of a European legal status for transnational cooperation that can help fulfil the high ambitions of European cooperation in education, research, innovation and service to society, which European Universities represent. Although different pilot projects and initiatives have tested and evaluated different alternative trans-European (i.e. The European Grouping of

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Economic Interest) or national models (i.e. the Belgian AISBL – *Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif*), for these statutes, the lack of a definitive legal status for European Universities raises a myriad of questions about the future sustainability of this initiative and the potential to implement governance models that ensure these universities are a cornerstone of Europeanisation and the transformation of higher education in Europe. One can easily see how daunting the task is for all those implementing these "European Universities," and who are asked to conceive and implement something that does not have a legal status and that does not fit in any existing regulatory framework and empower it with a governance model sustainable in the long term and fit for purpose in relation with extremely ambitious and complex objectives.

In this chapter, we will discuss the proposed governance model for FilmEU and how it highlights the challenges European Universities face but also the alternatives ahead. We will present results of our initial research on how to design a fit-for-purpose governance model for European Universities and the contributions this implies for other European Universities, and more broadly for the Higher Education sector in Europe, and the understanding of ongoing processes of Europeanisation.

In order to pursue its objectives, FilmEU proposes an innovative governance and management model relevant to the needs and aims of a European University but which can be customised for FilmEU's mission and needs, while adhering to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

In our research, we started by analysing several existing models and approaches, starting with the internal governance models in each of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that are involved in FilmEU. At the same time, we conducted an analysis of relevant models in place in other European Universities. For this we resorted to the analysis of secondary information, namely, the European University Association's (EUA's) report on "Universities without Walls" (EUA, 2021), besides conducting interviews and meetings with other European Universities Alliances. These were used to collect primary information on the models being developed by other Alliances. Following this, a number of case studies were conducted, namely, on the governance model of one European University – UNA Europa – and other existing models at EU and European level. One in particular, "The Case of the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology," was highlighted by us as exemplary for potential future statutes and governance models of European Universities. In parallel, the research design also included exploratory research via a number of focus groups with external experts, namely, stakeholders coming from different related domains. Desk research was carried out in parallel in order to identify key challenges and problems that developing these future governance models entails. Complementary descriptive research on internal and external data analysis was also conducted in order to make more robust the identification of these challenges and opportunities. Figure 9.1 summarises the research design that was followed for the overall process.

The discussion of our research results is followed by the presentation of the main traits of our proposed governance model, labelled as a "dynamic project-based expert model." We then discuss its implications not only for the HEIs involved but also for the ongoing discussion around the EU transformative Agenda[5] that includes the

Figure 9.1 Research design "Defining the Governance Models of European Universities" ⏎

"European Universities" as its spearhead initiative. The chapter concludes with the case study of a possible governance model for FilmEU based on the model of the "FilmEU VZW," a non-profit association ("VZW – *vereniging zonder winstoogmerk*"/"ASBL – *association sans but lucratif*") we set up in accordance with Belgian law.

Stage 1 – Analysing secondary data: existing local governance models in the FilmEU participating HEIs

The initial stage in our research consisted of the analysis of secondary information on the existing governance models of the different HEIs that participate in FilmEU. The objective was twofold: to identify commonalities and differences between these different models and to evaluate if they were, even if only partially, fit for the governance of a Trans-European Higher Education Institution, such as the ones foreseen under the "European Universities" initiative.

Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) – www.iadt.ie

Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) is Ireland's only Institute of Art, Design and Technology with a specific aim to lead and inform the creative, cultural and technological industries through learning, teaching, research and innovation. IADT was established on 1 April 1997, and it is one of the publicly funded Institutes of Technology in Ireland.

IADT claims to comply with the highest standards of corporate governance. In IADT, any function that is not a Reserved Function is an Executive Function[6] and all Executive Functions are performed by the president, or by members of staff of the institute to whom such functions have been formally delegated by the president. The other core governance body is the Academic Council **(**for detailed IADT's governance structure, see Figure 9.2).

LUCA School of Arts – www.luca.be

LUCA is the only university college in Flanders exclusively dedicated to art and design, making it unique in the region. The art school combines the strengths and

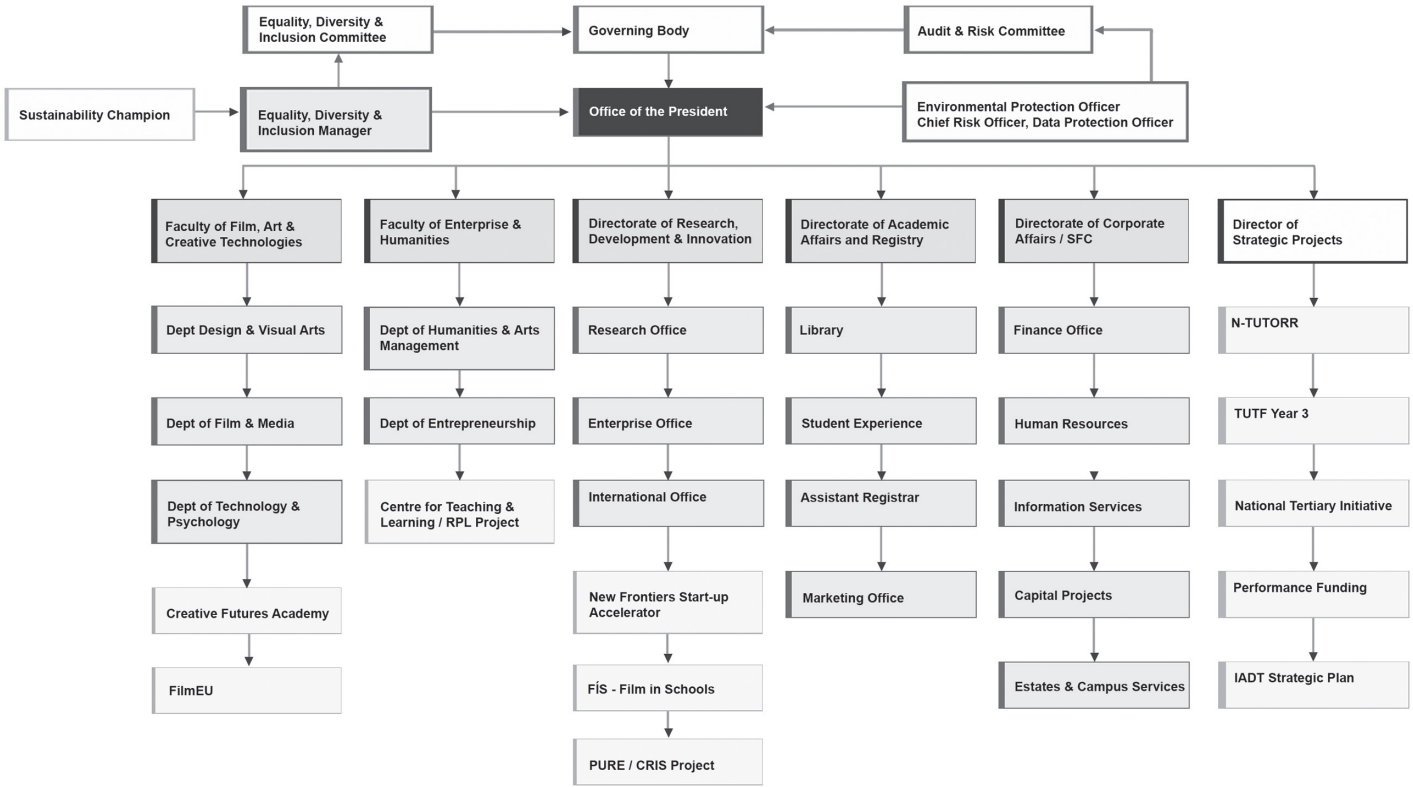

Figure 9.2 IADT governance structure[7]

expertise of five renowned Flemish higher education institutions for art and design, spread across Brussels (Schaarbeek and Vorst), Genk, Ghent and Leuven. LUCA functions as the "school of arts" of the Association KU Leuven. LUCA fulfils its mission in close collaboration with this association and the university KU Leuven.

LUCA VZW (Non-for-profit association) was established as a non-profit association under Belgian law consisting of the following four governance bodies:

I. the General Assembly
II. the Executive Board
III. the Executive Committee
IV. the Council for Student Facilities (the STUVO Council)

The day-to-day business of the association is delegated by The Executive Board to the Directorial Committee or the Executive Committee, which is chaired by the executive manager or general director of LUCA (see Figure 9.3, and for more details, see LUCA (2018, 2020)).

Lusófona University – www.ulusofona.pt

Universidade Lusófona (Lusófona University) is the largest non-state-run university in Portugal. The university is managed by a not-for-profit "*cooperative*," a specific type of not-for-profit collective organisation common in Portugal and this fact determines the governance model of the HEI.

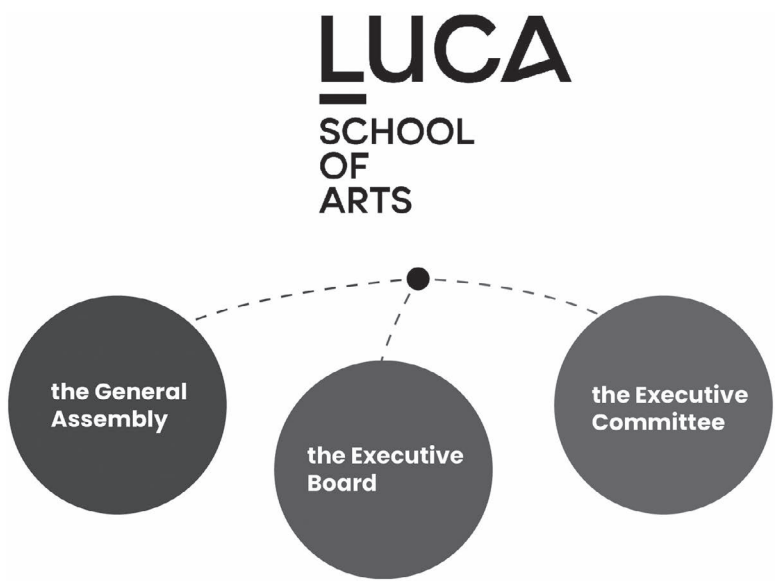

Figure 9.3 The governance model of LUCA

Permission granted by LUCA for use of logo.

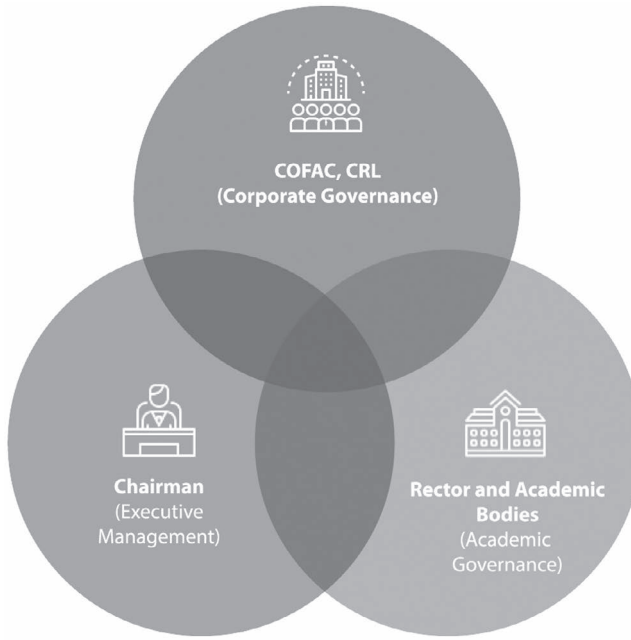

Figure 9.4 Lusófona tripartite model of governance ⏎

The responsibility for the administrative, economic and financial management of Lusófona University lies with *Cooperativa de Formação e Animação Cultural* – COFAC – which, under the terms of the law and the statutes, organises and manages its resources, without compromising the University's autonomy. The Rector is ultimately responsible for the supervision and control of the academic affairs of the University. Under current law, academic governance bodies are the University Council, the Scientific Council and the Pedagogical Council.

The Lusófona University has a tripartite governance structure as shown in Figure 9.4.

Tallinn University – www.tlu.ee

Tallinn University defines itself as a modern and dynamic research university in Estonia, with a leading role in promoting an intelligent lifestyle through education, research and a unique collaboration across disciplines. Figure 9.5 provides an overview of the structure of the university.

From 2020, the university has three governing bodies: the Council, the Senate and the Rector. The Council involves more external members in the management of the university. The competencies, work organisation and legislation of the Council, the Senate and the Rector are provided in Tallinn University Statutes.

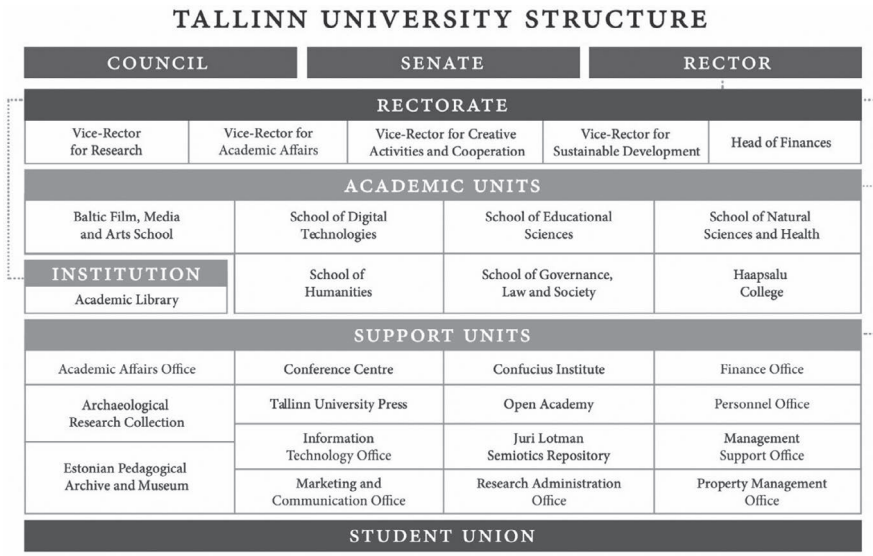

Figure 9.5 Tallinn University structure of governance

Adequacy of national models

All four studied models share some important characteristics: they are all fully aligned with the mission of the HEI at stake, and that "Mission" has in all cases a clear "national or regional" dimension; they all envision multiple participatory mechanisms in view of ensuring representativeness and participation by all stakeholders, and they are all closely tied to national regulations and principles. This means that none of these models is adequate or even adaptable when one looks for a governance model that puts international cooperation at its centre. Such a model must allow for the facilitation of transnational initiatives supported by swift decision-making and a "project-management-type" short- and medium-term orientation that is not compatible with the institutional stability all these models strive for. Our initial analysis of existing governance models in the partner institutions also highlighted something we had yet not identified: the importance of defining the way "local" HEIs participate in the "international" European University and how this can be done while ensuring compatibility between the missions of all institutions and a proactive cooperation between all governance bodies, which include the ones of the existing partner HEIs and the ones of the emerging European University. To better understand how such an innovative model that balances local missions and international ambitions could be designed, we turned our attention to the theoretical framing of governance models in higher education.

Stage 2 – Theoretical framework: "boardism" versus "organized anarchy"

The mapping of the existing governance models in the four HEIs involved in FilmEU highlights the differences in the governance models of these four HEIs.

Instead of trying to strive for similitudes, our research exercise tried to critically highlight what these four models tell us. From that analysis, a theoretical framework emerged that points to a general tension in existing models of higher education governance in Europe, between what some call "boardism" (Magalhães & Veiga, 2022), and a pre-existing state we can label as one of "organized academic anarchy" (Magalhães & Veiga, 2022). If we want to promote an original governance model for European Universities that adheres to the EU HE transformative agenda, but that is also flexible enough to accommodate all the intrinsic particularities of the different national models we have just described, we need to understand these two theoretical approaches and what they entail.

From "organized anarchy" to "boardism" – changes in the higher education sector governance models at the end of 20th century and beginning of 21st century

In their inspiring 1972 paper, Michael D. Cohen, James G. March and Johan P. Olsen introduced a new, critical notion for the governance and management models of the higher education sector in the United States – they called it *organized anarchy*. They compared academic institutions and business-corporate organisations. Cohen et al. (1972) concluded that when governance is based on the academic sphere, it can be considered as a disruptive technology (*garbage can model*). Management actors and the academic bodies of HEIs must be nimble in this old-fashioned model to cope with organisations characterised by:

a) uncertainty (problematic, unclear preferences, absent guidelines, the HEI's identity consists of a loose collection of ideas, despite a coherent structure and well-defined goals),
b) unclear decision-making technology (processes are not clear even for the members of the HEI since it operates in "trial and error" circles; pragmatic inventions are based on learning from accidents and past experiences), and
c) fluid participation (a wide range of participants in how much time and effort they offer for the several domains and processes in which they are involved; their involvement depends on their time and interests).

These challenges cumulate – such as the three authors argue – when a choice opportunity arises.

The characteristics of boardism

Many scholars stressed that to optimise the strategic planning and decision-making process, it would be essential to have a clear management structure, governed by a board of experts set up by the stakeholders (Veiga et al., 2015; Magalhães & Veiga, 2022). This theory suggests that for a more successful HEI, the governance structure needs to reconfigure into a new form, where the strategic decisions (budget, strategic planning) are made by a board of organisational experts in economics, law, politics, etc. delegated by the stakeholders. This invention of "corporatisation"

turned HEIs from a self-governance of "scholar-ship" to a market- and profit-oriented management-ruled "business-ship."

Structural change as a new phenomenon was installed in more and more countries since the end of the 20th century. The development of corporate-like organisational features (in a move corresponding to the term "boardism," suggested by Amélia Veiga and Alberto Amaral Magalhães), caused:

a. a decline in the power of teaching staff (decrease of academic self-governance),
b. a reinforcement of clear hierarchies (organisational top-down hierarchical decision-making),
c. the growing influence of external stakeholders (an increase of external managerial governance), and
d. a market-based competition between the HEIs (financial factor and non-academic ranking indicators played a more important role than before).

Supporters of this theory had much confirmatory feedback from HEIs which became successful in the worldwide competition but – after a temporary heuristic aura – also received serious criticism from the academic field. The model change was started in the United States, then adopted in more and more European countries (the trend, in general, was spreading from North/West to South/East). The "front runners" were the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, followed by many countries (like Norway in 2002/2003 and Portugal in 2007). Nowadays, this model is present across many European countries keeping in most cases some rights for the academic sphere with checks and balances. The board managers and the supporters of the model and similar approaches such as NPM (*new public management*; Kalimullah et al., 2012) claim more potentials for quality improvement while promoting more innovation, and a greater efficiency in both education and research.

Contemporary challenges

It is far from obvious how to balance the relative independence of the academic field with optimised decision-making, in order to create a more useful and successful governance model between the "organised anarchy" and "boardism." Academic criticism of boardism is articulated in many references, such as Damtew Teferra (2014). The author argues that both models have benefits and detriments, but we should not forget that the higher education sector has different goals and values than the business world. He also claims boardism does not incorporate core aspects of higher education, such as the fact it deals with intangible outputs (knowledge creation and dissemination is hard to measure; this makes the outcome/output quite different when compared with the business sphere) and a binary structure (in contrast with the business world, HEIs consists of two parallel governance spheres: the academic one and the financial and administrative one), not to mention the core values of academic freedom or the fact academics usually have more loyalty to their disciplines and intellectual curiosity than to their institutions. Any future

governance models should wisely balance the interests of the stakeholders (the management) and the academic sphere.

From the discussion so far, two core ideas emerge: (a) any future governance model of European Universities must balance the interests of the national participant HEIs with the international mission of the European University, and (b) a balance must be found between the interest of the management (in our case, the stakeholders are the national HEIs participating in the European University) and the international and multicultural academic sphere that composes the university. In order to identify a possible model to address these challenges, we then looked at existing models from other European Universities that started earlier than FilmEU.

Stage 3 – Existing governance models in European Universities Alliances and in other higher education systems

Following European Universities Association (EUA) studies (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Estermann et al., 2021), we analysed three case studies of other Alliances' governance models to illustrate the diversity of their governing bodies, their composition and the complex interactions between them.

Interestingly, two of three alliance case studies selected by Estermann et al. (2021) were based on cooperation structures that had existed prior to the emergence of the EUI – AURORA and Una Europa. Finally, the UNIC University Alliance demonstrates an example of an alliance where governance is embedded within the institutional governance of member institutions, with each partner establishing a "UNIC University Executive Office" which ensures the alliance is aligned with the governance of each individual institution.

Case Study 1 – Una Europa Alliance: 1Europe project

Established in 2019, the Una Europa Alliance pre-dates the EUI as a permanent collaboration connecting various project-based structures. One of these, the "1Europe project" selected during EUI's first call aimed to create a "European living lab developing education and mobility through Joint Innovative Formats (JIFs)" (Una Europa, n.d.). Significantly for FilmEU, Una Europa was registered as an association under Belgian law (VZW). The Una Europa "Project Team Approach" adopted in 2020 aimed to boost efficiency and provide development opportunities for professionals and appears central to their model of collaboration and governance (Una Europa, 2021, 2022). The "1Europe project" is responsible for EUI project delivery and is managed by a 1Europe Executive Committee, 1Europe Project Steering Committee and a Project Coordinator. These 1Europe bodies significantly overlap with the UNA Europa Alliance's governance model.

Estermann et al. (2021) acknowledged the establishment of new legal entities following the EUI calls and refers to Una Europa as an association formally registered under Belgian law (VZW). Through this legal structure, the consortium can hire staff and manage funding, but it is observed that this can clash with the EUI's varying degrees of staffing autonomy and with public and private labour law

frameworks. Furthermore, the report observed the need to understand how these legal structures may assist in leading to sustainable collaboration and governance in the long term. In 2024, the 1Europe project appears to have stalled but the original governance architecture with a legal association established under Belgian law remains valuable in FilmEU's model development.

Case Study 2 – Aurora Universities Network: Aurora University Alliance

The Aurora University Alliance, selected in the 2020 EUI call, is based on the pre-existing collaboration "Aurora University Network" created in 2016. The Aurora University Alliance governance structure includes Aurora Alliance Board; Aurora Alliance Board Committee; Aurora Alliance Management Team; Work Package Leaders and three Technical and three Substantive WPs and Task Leaders. The "Alliance Board Committee" is a unique alliance structure, operating on the executive leadership level involving four presidents and one student representative. The "Alliance Board" leads the project and includes each member HEI's president/rector and two student representatives from the Aurora Student Council.

Case Study 3 – UNIC University Alliance

Part of the UNIC (The European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition) University Alliance governance is embedded within the institutional governance structures, with each member creating a "UNIC University Executive Office" that draws on personnel from various existing areas of the university (e.g. the Registrar, ICT, or city partners). This appears to allow for flexibility in collaborations and a diversity in membership (as observed by Estermann et al.), and is a novel way of ensuring the alliance is aligned with the governance of each individual institution. Aside from this local structure, there is the UNIC Management Board, Coordinator of the Alliance (who connects UNIC and the funding authority), UNIC General Executive Office, Unic Student Board, UNIC Stakeholder Board, UNIC University Building Taskforce that all generally include representatives from each institution.

These case studies show how complex the situation is within existing Alliances seeking to implement European Universities. Some of the key elements of these models are not fully applicable to FilmEU and most other European Universities. On one side, our European University and most of the other existing ones are not founded upon a pre-existing structure, and secondly, following our analysis of our own existing national models and the definition of our strategic plan, it is clear that we do not wish to embed the governance model of the European University in that of each of our own institutions but, on the contrary, set up a model that allows for autonomy but also clear strategic dependency in view of effective decision-making and more agile operationalisation. Considering this, we decided to look outside the scope of the EU in order to identify possible existing models that could fit our needs better than the ones already studied. We identified the case of the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology as a good benchmark.

The Swiss case study – higher education in Switzerland

The Swiss Higher Education landscape is a good example of a system where there is no shared institutional framework and where a multiplicity of bodies, laws and funding systems supervise different institutions.

Today's Swiss higher education consists of three types of institutions: the two Federal Institutes of Technology (FIT), the ten Cantonal universities and the seven universities of applied sciences (UAS). All these institutions have three-year bachelor's and two-year master's programmes (International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED levels 6–7). Doctoral degrees (ISCED 8) cannot be pursued at the UAS, which are oriented towards professional education and applied research. The system is rather regionalised and limited in scale: the largest university houses a little over 20,000 students, while many HEIs do not exceed the number of 10,000 students and thus would count as small institutions by international comparison. Of the ten Cantonal universities, seven are broadly generalist, covering most scientific domains, while three of them are specialised in a few fields; the FITs cover only natural sciences and technology, while the UASs are nowadays covering most domains in professional education (Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011, pp. 163–164).

Underlying these institutions are three models of institutional governance: a council-centred model, a president-centred model and the FITs' governance model, all of which vary in terms of the different roles they ascribe to the primary agents of institutional governance (Fumasoli, 2008). In the first model, which is essentially that of Basel, Luzern, Lugano, St. Gallen and Zürich, the council operates as the main governing and acting body. Its members are appointed by the political power, the cantonal governments. The second model can be found in Bern, Fribourg, Genève, Lausanne and Neuchâtel and considers the president as the main governing authority. Appointed by the political power, the president almost acts as a chief executive officer. On the other side, the councils in these universities have members elected among the academic community and act as supervisory bodies. Lastly, the third model relates exclusively to the FITs and is somewhat unusual in form (see Figure 9.6). At the highest level, there exists a unique FIT Council, whose members are appointed politically. The FIT Council acts outside the perimeters of both the *École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne* (hereafter EPFL) and the *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich* (hereafter ETHZ), and both EPFL/ETHZ presidents report to this council. The political power delegates governance and administration tasks to the FIT Council. In particular, the FIT Council coordinates and allocates resources among EPFL/ETHZ and has a similar role to any National Science Foundation.

Our analysis indicates that the FIT model possesses one characteristic that is highly relevant for our future model: the existence of a council that is independent of the institution whose members are appointed by a higher entity. In our view, this can be emulated in the context of the European Universities by conceiving a council or body (i.e. a not-for-profit association) where all members are nominated

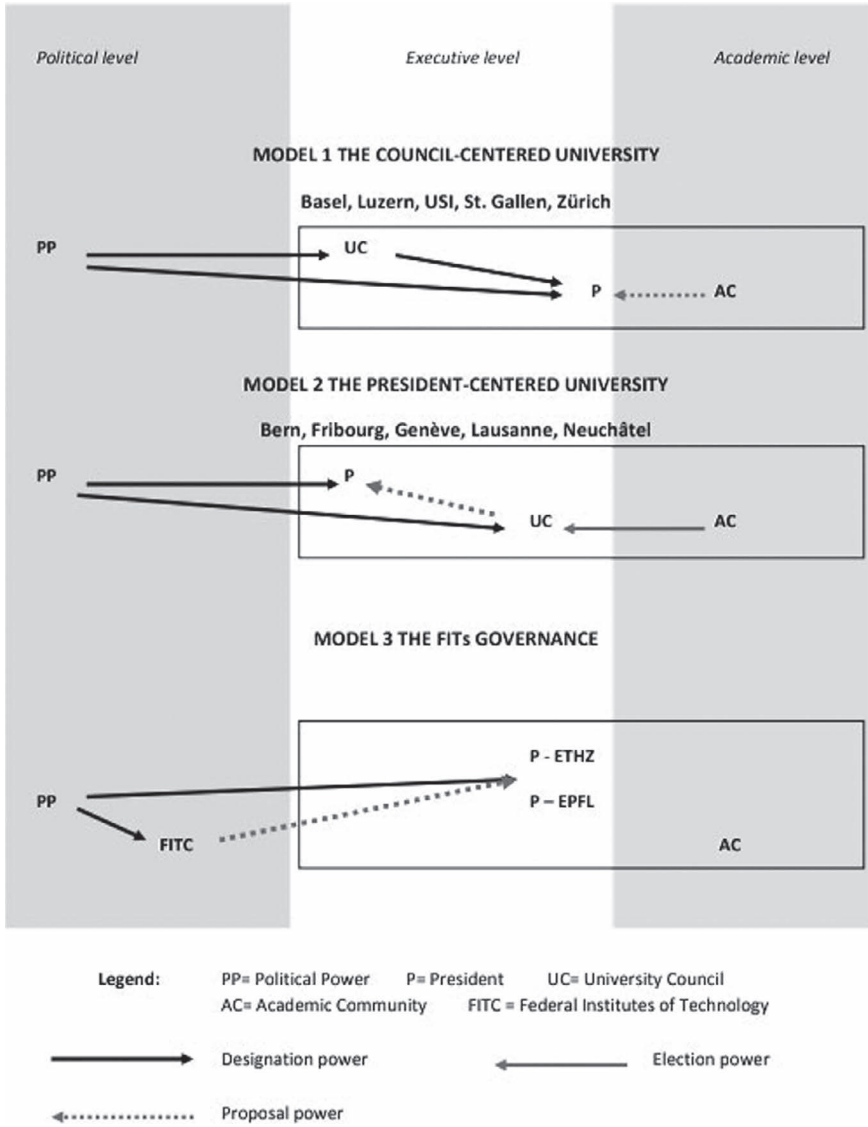

Figure 9.6 The Swiss model of governance of the FITs ⏎

by the HEIs that form part of the European University, and then this entity has delegated powers from the participating HEIs to coordinate the allocation of resources and the coordination of the activities of the European University. We advocate that a model such as this one could overcome most of the challenges we have already identified, namely, the tension between national and trans-European levels and the tension between each HEI mission and the broader international ambitions of the European University.

Stage 4 – Designing a governance model for European Universities

While all of the existing and studied governance models of other European University Alliances highlight the complexity of distinguishing between the governance models of the entity that promotes and manages the future European University and the actual governance model of this "still to exist" Higher Education Institution, they also point to the need to balance the interests of the "Managerial body" with those of the institution. We introduced the Swiss model of the FIT as a potential solution to this, and this adds a third criteria to the ones we have already identified: the governance models of European Universities must balance not only the national with the European and the academics with the other stakeholders but also the status of the legal entity that is responsible for the financial and administrative management of the European University with the status of the European University as an academic institution in itself.

We postulate that the FIT governance model contains some characteristics that resemble those of the Alliances promoting European Universities and that might help FilmEU in attaining the balance required. If we look at the European Universities Initiative as the first step towards the formalisation of the concept of "European Universities" with supranational legal status, then the analogy with the Swiss case can be captured through Table 9.1.

From this, follow three core ideas:

a) Successful governance models of European Universities will only be sustainable if a supranational governance structure with a European legal status and equal participation of all member HEIs is in place that is responsible for the coordination and allocation of resources among the Alliance members. This structure must be legally responsible for the management and development of the European University. A large part of the actual governance of the European University would be concentrated in this legal entity. This would avoid conflict with the individual constituent institutions while allowing for equal participation of all partners and stakeholders, though balancing managerial and academic interests.
b) The legal status and governance model of the European University is at the same time dependent on a European-level quality assurance and accreditation mechanism and the collective decision-making power of the participating HEIs. This implies no top leadership bodies are established (i.e. the European Universities will not have a rector) and a single collective academic body is established with equal representation of all members. The European University is supranational but depends on the national stakeholders.

Table 9.1 Stakeholders and dimensions of governance across studied models ⏎

Federation	Switzerland	European Union
States	Cantons	Member States
Local HEI	EPFL, ETHZ	UL, LUCA, TLU, IADT
Local Governance	2 Presidents	4 Presidents
Global HEI	EPFL + ETHZ	FilmEU EUI
Global Governance	FIT Council	Legal Entity/European University Council

c) European Universities will only be successful if their mission both supplements and reinforces that of each of the participating national HEIs. For this to be possible, future governance models of the EUI must be anchored in autonomous legal entities with a clear legal status and equal participation of all national HEIs.

Conclusion

Our work highlighted several obstacles to the definition of adequate governance models for European Universities. Most of these obstacles result from external factors, ranging from the lack of an existing legal status for European Universities to the incompatibility between different aspects of their mission (i.e. the provision of European degrees) and existing national legal and regulatory contexts. Our analysis identified the following critical obstacles to the design of FilmEU future governance model:

a) Problems with multi-level structures: 1. national level (member universities of the consortium that are legal entities on their own) and 2. supranational (federal/common/joint) level of it (i.e. FilmEU as a legal entity). These multi-level structures require a strategic choice about which decisions shall be kept at the national/member level and which shall be delegated to the higher, common decision-making body, expecting a joint decision.
b) The degree of representativeness of member universities in the common legal entity: *i.e.* how many board members shall the member universities delegate/nominate for the common level (legal entity) decision-making body? Should this issue be linked to financial participation or other factors?
c) The absence of a common and European-level quality assurance in art (and education of arts), which is a very special area, hard to rank using objective indicators, which needs to be taken into account in benchmarking and setting up goals. Another obstacle comes from the absence of a fully implemented common European accreditation procedure.
d) How to invent a common brand (values, principles, and objectives), while keeping the character of each member university (such as its special values, traditions and contributions in education).
e) The problem of cancellation, how to terminate the membership, and exit the joint university.
h) Clarifying the status of stakeholders of FilmEU (whether the member universities or their stakeholders will keep the direct influence, and – last but not least – whether the European Union remains only a provider of financial support, or claims a position of co-stakeholder, alongside the members).

In general, all these obstacles can be applicable to any other European University.

In order to overcome the identified problems, or at least test a possible governance model that could accommodate many of the problems we have highlighted so far, we looked at the case of the VZW (a non-for-profit association under Belgium legislation) as a potential model for a governance body that could deepen the commonalties between the four HEIs, without threatening the individuality of each of them.

Based on the previous discussions and findings, we know implementing a new governance model for European Universities faces the following challenges:

- Absence of a clear legal status for the European Universities: this is probably the main challenge. Until now there is no clear indication of what the legal status of the future European universities will be. Considering higher education is a prerogative of the member states, we can assume it will be extremely difficult to reach a consensus on this in the short term.
- Institutional balance: each future European University will be a joint initiative resulting from the efforts of a number of partners. The new institution will not replace existing institutions but rather add value to their international dimension.
- Several obstacles and hurdles in relation with the common recognition of degrees and qualifications.
- Lack of existing structures that can support the creation of a common sense of belonging/identity.
- Lack of joint elements that can facilitate common activities – that is, joint acquisition of funding – and support mechanisms of common governance beyond the limited scope of project management.

In order to surpass some of the identified obstacles and facilitate long-term cooperation, FilmEU decided to create the FilmEU Association, a not-for-profit entity under Belgium legislation (VZW).

In our view, the proposed model of primarily setting up a single joint central governance body is the best approach, as long as two aspects are covered:

- The broad inclusion of leadership teams, at various levels within the institutions, which will be instrumental in sheltering the alliances from shifting foci and differing leadership cycles. Close connection between the alliance governance and that of its members must be sought. This will allow for a solid link to be maintained between the alliance's vision and activities and the institutional strategies of the alliance members, though surpassing some of the obstacles we have identified.
- The second is the engagement with, and involvement of, representatives from all levels of the university governance. Nurturing a bottom-up approach of transformation remains an important mechanism to ensure that this initiative is not imposed top-down but comes through motivated and inspired people from all levels of the institution who believe in the alliance vision. This must be supplemented with a clear centralised leadership model through overcoming the tension we described between "Boardism" and "Academic Anarchy."

Ensuring the buy-in of the diverse university community and continued leadership commitment, in the long run, also matters enormously when considering finances, which is in general an essential aspect of the sustainability of any collaboration. Developing and maintaining the Alliances requires and will continue to demand significant resources, primarily human resources. In addition, depending on the

funding framework, universities may have to consider medium-term financial trade-offs, for instance, with regard to the influx of EU students compared to higher fee-paying international students.

Following the discussions and the proposals put forward in this chapter, it is clear to us that viable future governance models for European Universities must balance "boardism" with "organized anarchy" while striving for the fulfilment of the mission of the Alliance and the attainment of the diversity it implies. Based on these insights, we postulate that the best fit-for-purpose governance model for European Universities should be a combination of the institutional leadership model of the different partner institutes and a more dynamic project-based expert model. Future governance models must offer a clear separation between the areas of intervention of each one of the levels (national and supranational) but also an operational model that allows for flexibility and quality. In the light of the preceding analysis, the following recommendations were formulated by the authors regarding FilmEU's future governance model:

- In the project-based component of the governance model, every project (from idea to afterlife) should be assigned to one of the partner institutes. This means each institute takes the lead of the project and, therefore, builds on the services of its own institute, constituting a potential win-win situation.
- The Academic council of the FilmEU programme should also be the General Assembly of the FilmEU Association not-for-profit association, corresponding to the "Council" in the case of Swiss FIT model. The General Assembly is composed of all effective members, as represented by their rectors, presidents or directors. The Steering Committee of each specific project contributing to the implementation of the FilmEU University is the board of directors of the FilmEU association that is the executive body of the association. Each effective member proposes two candidates as directors to be appointed by the General Assembly. A candidate proposed by an effective member should be an employee of that effective member. Figure 9.7 depicts these future governance arrangements.
- The Board of Directors should have the most extensive powers to manage the Association and have the power to carry out all actions necessary or useful for the realisation of the objectives of the Association. All residual powers are thus granted to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors operates as a collegiate body.

The proposed model balances existing central structures and services with flexible joint task forces. The assumption is that the HEI of the future is one that constantly responds to calls and needs emerging from the external environment where it operates, and not a closed institution that does not respond to societal needs and challenges.

Our assumption is that the VZW status proposed for FilmEU is a suitable governance structure that jointly supports the described dynamic project-based expert model since it integrates all individual institutions, balances the commitment of the leadership with the involvement of representatives across the HEI and allows for joint activities to be carried out by task forces that act independently of each

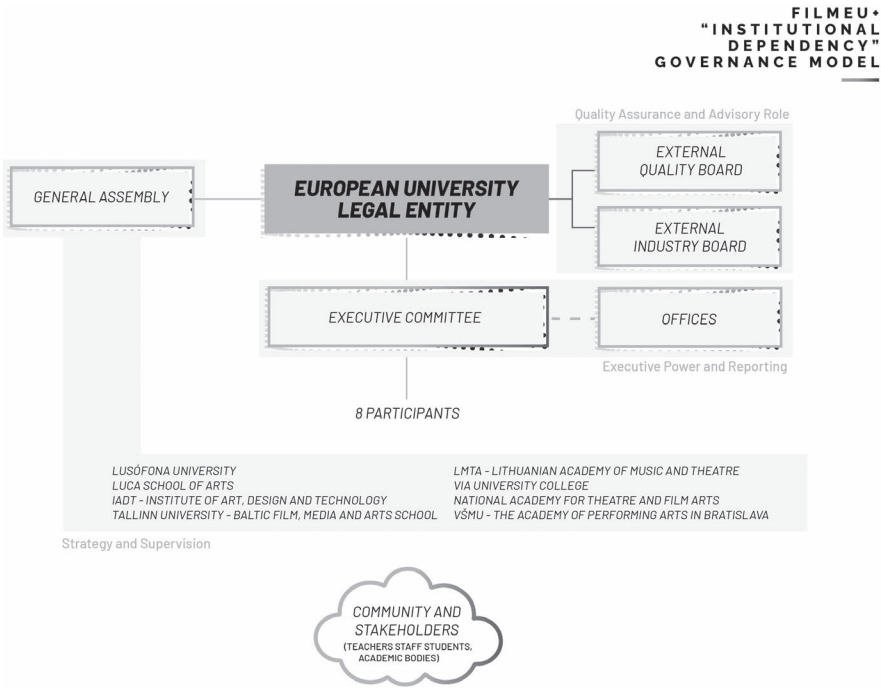

Figure 9.7 Governance model of the FilmEU association VZW ⏎

institution but in accordance with their joint interests and resorting to their services and expertise, while ensuring the balance between the national and international dimensions.

FilmEU is currently implementing the model discussed in this chapter, and recent developments at EU level point to the emergence of a legal status for European Universities. The future will tell us if our or any of the different models discussed in this chapter – or an alternative one that might emerge and that we have not identified – establishes itself as the most sustainable governance model for European Universities. Our experience and the discussion in this chapter highlighted how complex and risky guessing a definitive solution can be.

Notes

1 Project: 101004047, EPP-EUR-UNIV-2020 – European Universities, EPLUS2020 Action Grant.

2 Disclaimer – The authors of this chapters are all members of the steering committee of the Alliance implementing the European University FilmEU

3 From 2023 on the FilmEU European University has been enlarged with four new partners: VŠMU – The Academy of Performing Arts, Slovakia; LMTA – The Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania; VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark; NATFA – The National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts "Krustyo Sarafov", Bulgaria.

4 See Communication 2020(700) of the Commission to the European Parliament
5 *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030)* (EEA strategic framework Resolution), *Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030)* (Governance Resolution).
6 Following Irish legal determinations.
7 (IADT Governance structure 2023 available at https://iadt.ie/about/iadt/corporate/governing-body/?cmplz-force-reload=1716913935834) – accessed 26 April 2024

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10 The impact of the European University Initiative (EUI) on non-academic university employees in Poland

Dominik Antonowicz, Marta Jaworska and Rafał Muster

Introduction

European Universities are relatively new institutional actors in the European higher education field. The old idea of European universities was revisited and rejuvenated by Emanuel Macron in 2017 (Gunn, 2020). The French President envisioned them as institutions that would soon not only revolutionise higher education (HE) but also affect the internal organisation and governance of universities. The triumphant tone of the political vision was met with a somewhat sceptical reception (perhaps also disbelief) from the academic community that often pointed to several previous failed political attempts (Lehmann, 2019). To the surprise of many, the first call for the European University Initiative (EUI) was successfully made in 2019, immediately drawing public and scholarly attention to this new phenomenon in European HE, as the concept of supranational universities appeared rather foreign and odd in nationally organised HE systems. Thus, due to the prominence of policy issues and the feasibility of the empirical studies, the prime focus was drawn to policy ideas behind these transnational structures (Maassen et al., 2022), the composition of the alliances (Lambrechts et al., 2024) and the structure of governance (Marques & Graf, 2023).

The idea of strategic partnerships is a new, though already well-defined, concept in the field of HE. Previous studies define it as the close collaboration of at least two higher education institutions (HEIs) from two countries (Beerkens, 2002; Karvounaraki et al., 2018). Strategic partnerships vary, considering the number of institutions involved and the intensity of collaboration, as there are also less bounded multilateral partnerships that frequently take the shape of alliances, consortia or associations (Beerkens & der Wende, 2007; Fehrenbach & Huisman, 2024). The studies show that the main reason HEIs form strategic partnerships is to increase institutional capacity to perform a more central role in a highly competitive environment. To this end, as judiciously noted by Fehrenbach and Huisman (2024), HEIs invest substantial human and financial resources to engage and foster transnational strategic alliances, largely because modern HEIs are naturally driven by the pursuit of academic excellence, institutional prestige and legitimacy (Crăciun & Orosz, 2018; van der Wende, 2010). The ample work on strategic alliances is focused on the relationship between institutions and their external environment.

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An interesting, though still relatively under-researched aspect of strategic alliances is their impact on the participating universities. The relevance of this question is accompanied by an assumption that Polish universities can change only due to external factors/pressures; hence, it becomes particularly relevant to explore how the EUI has affected their organisation and institutional culture. This is predominantly true for Polish HEIs, as they not only stand out because of the conservative model of university governance (Kwiek, 2015b; Dobbins, 2015) but also joined the EUI in considerable numbers, with great enthusiasm. Concurrently, with the increase in financial, personal and emotional investments, important questions arise as to what the EUI has brought to their functioning. The question is all the more pertinent, given that the main purpose of the EUI was to create international programmes of study, which are not yet realistically in place. To this end, this chapter tries to bridge the knowledge deficit by presenting the results of a study on the impact of the EUI on administrative staff employed at Polish public universities. The choice of non-academic staff (Collinson, 2006) is purposive and motivated by the fact that it is (a) the least internationalised category of employees, as most of them deal with local bureaucratic procedures and therefore (b) frequently described as invisible, absent, but at the same time necessary for the smooth functioning of HEIs (Anielska & Mielczarek-Taica, 2020; Cywińska et al., 2022; Górak-Sosnowska & Piwowar-Sulej, 2023)

This chapter is organised thus: first, a broad analysis of the situation of non-academic staff is presented. The second section offers a short description of the research project, focusing on the methodology of the study of non-academic staff. The third section outlines our empirical findings and concludes with final remarks.

The invisible

Since 1990, the Polish HE system has undergone a major transformation, from a relatively small, homogeneous and publicly run system to a rather large (massified) and diversified one, comprising hundreds of HEIs. The tumultuous changes affecting the HE system in Poland attracted scattered research attention. Major issues researched relate to HE policy (Antonowicz et al., 2020; Kwiek, 2017), HE expansion (Kwiek, 2014; Simonová & Antonowicz, 2006), governance reforms (Urbanek, 2021; Donina et al., 2022), the rise and fall of the private sector HE (Duczmal & Jongbloed, 2007; Kwiek, 2015a; Antonowicz et al., 2017), changes in publishing patterns (Kulczycki et al., 2019) and the development of academic professions (Kwiek, 2003) and students (Herbst & Rok, 2014). A separate stream of literature follows changes in university governance (Urbanek, 2020; Donina & Jaworska, 2022; Antonowicz et al., 2023), which shows that Polish universities are still very much historic institutions (Dobbins, 2015), built on Humboldtian foundations. They are still very much loosely coupled organisations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000), with professors (collegially) controlling most of the institutional power (Kwiek, 2015b). The recent wave of reforms was designed to modernise the institutional governance to facilitate changes in the institutional logic (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999) from a community of scholars to an organisational actor (Urbanek,

2021). It has attracted considerable academic attention (Shaw, 2019; Krawczyk et al., 2021), but in the numerous studies, very little attention has been paid to non-academic staff, contrary to the increasingly popular line of research in Western European countries with a focus on non-academic staff (Stage & Aagaard, 2019; Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2013; Kehm, 2015)

In Poland, there are only a few exceptions (Górak-Sosnowska & Piwowar-Sulej, 2023; Cywińska et al., 2022) that explore the situation of non-academic staff, with a seminal report by Anielska and Mielczarek-Taica (2020). Formally, non-academic staff,[1] comprising 71.845 personnel (GUS, 2023), is a distinguished category in the HE sector, whose salaries (unlike in the case of academic staff) are determined by individual HE institutions. Such a symbolic difference has dramatic consequences, as many non-academic staff effectively earn the minimum wage. Considering their status, they are regarded as the most marginalised group in academia (Cywińska et al., 2022, p. 209), whose historically formed, disadvantaged position has never been acknowledged as a policy problem. It is rather astounding because, in the last two decades, Poland has witnessed an intense discussion concerning HE reforms, involving a broad spectrum of actors, views and principles underpinning HE. However, the major political spotlight of reforms (and discussions thereon) has been directed at the structure of institutional governance (Donina & Jaworska, 2022) and the distribution of authority between external and internal stakeholders. None of these reforms has tried to address non-academic staff even remotely, probably because they are perceived as a part of academic (feudal) tradition (Cywińska et al., 2022). Undeniably, it is not only a Polish case, as studies in other countries, for example in Australia by Dobson (Dobson, 2000, p. 209), summarise the situation of administrative staff in the following words:

> It is probably fair to say that most general staff both 'know their place', and realise that their role is not the 'main game', but perhaps some academic staff haven't caught up with the fact that a professional general staff does much to support and to enhance the student experience at university.

However, beyond doubt, Polish universities are also characterised by a particularly strong notion of a university as "the republic of scholars" (Kwiek, 2015b), which, by definition, marginalises internal stakeholders other than professors. Further, the subservient position of the non-academic staff is due to this profession being strongly feminised (unlike the professors, who are predominantly male).

In the institutional power structure of the HE system in Poland, students and junior academics have managed to get their (small) share in university senates (and often in other collegial bodies) of respectively 20% and 25%, while administrative staff have 5% of all seats. Such a distribution of power perfectly illustrates the formal and informal position of non-academic staff in university governance. It is hence worth acknowledging that non-academics demonstrate above-average attachment to their universities (Górak-Sosnowska, 2020). Interestingly, non-academics remain largely faceless and invisible as long as everything goes as planned; otherwise, they are easily victimised (Szekeres, 2004). This is why the non-academic staff are frequently presented as "those who are not," "invisible,"

"outcast," etc. but are nevertheless critical for universities (Anielska & Mielczarek-Taica, 2020; Cywińska et al., 2022). Their significance is due to universities having become complex organisations over the last years, with budgets of hundreds of millions of euros and a broad spectrum of sophisticated financial and administrative tasks. These involve the administration of not only increasingly complicated research projects, knowledge transfer and third-party funding but also housing, travel, events, facilities and estates. In the early 1960s, Clark Kerr (1963) coined the term "multiversity," underlining the great dynamics of American universities as organisations driven by increasing specialisation, differentiation and heterogeneity, with new areas of business activity, such as intellectual property and patents, complex partnerships with industry, international research contracts and enrolment of international students. These new tasks required highly skilled professionals, ready to assume an active role in institutional governance and management.

In Europe, according to Enders and Naidoo (2022, p. 89), this transformation began in the 1990s but became a research topic only in the mid-2000s (Schneijderberg & Merkator, 2013; Gornitzka et al., 1998; Rhoades, 2009, 2016; Kottmann & Enders, 2013a, 2013b; Whitchurch & Harvey, 2013; Enders & Naidoo, 2019). This process coincided with universities progressively relinquishing the public realm and governments choosing a steering-from-a-distance mode of HE policy (Kickert, 1995). This has surely impacted the role of non-academic staff, as "their role rather spans boundaries between academic, administrative and management domains and they provide expertise to a wide range of areas within increasingly managed organisational contexts" (Enders & Naidoo, 2022, p. 90).

Additionally, universities were provided with more organisational and financial autonomy, though frequently limited by a list of performance indicators (Enders et al., 2013). Such transformation has had far-reaching consequences for institutional governance because it breaks the silo structure resting on the division between academic and non-academic staff. It replaces simple line-item budgeting and administration with quality management, performance and evaluation. In a sense, the traditional division between academic and administrative work becomes increasingly blurred, as successful performance requires both groups (academics and non-academics) to work together towards a common end on various levels of governance. It comes with the rapid emergence of some hybrid (academic and administrative) roles and the rise of new academic professionals who have broken the divide between academic and non-academic staff (Kehm, 2015).

Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project titled "Polish Universities in European Alliances" funded by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE), conducted between October 2021 and September 2023. The major premise of the project was to identify how Polish universities were affected by their membership in the European alliances. To this end, we focused on 11 Polish universities that are members of the EUI alliances, with funding awarded in the first two European Commission calls (2019 and 2020).

The empirical investigation was qualitative, and several techniques were used to collect empirical evidence, including individual in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group interviews (FGI), critical text analysis and study visits. For this study, three groups were particularly targeted: (1) institutional leaders (rectors and vice-rectors) and those directly involved in coordinating the European alliances, (2) staff managing specific tasks or having some responsibilities within the EUI at Polish universities and (3) students participating in the EUI governance bodies.

The initial parts of the project focused on seeking the rationale behind the alliances, the structural and cultural changes they have triggered on campuses and students' perception of the EUI. For this purpose, the IDIs were conducted in two rounds. The first involved the university management alone and, due to the COVID-19 restrictions (in winter 2021), was conducted fully online. The second round (concluded in spring 2022 with all targeted groups) was performed in person, during campus visits. These visits served to apply the ethnography method, which enabled the assessment of the visibility of the alliances in the university area, proximity of the EUI administrative project offices from the rectors' bureaus, and natural conversations with various staff involved in managing EUI at their universities. Finally, the critical text analysis included the study of EUI call documents, programme reports, and any information provided by the participating universities.

The final part of the project – the empirical foundation for this chapter – focused on the non-academic staff of universities, identified earlier by various internal stakeholders (including institutional leadership) as the biggest and most unexpected winners of EUI at Polish institutions. To understand better the impact of the EUI, the third phase of the project was designed to learn more about how the EUI has affected the non-academic staff. Accordingly, we conducted seven (n = 7) Focus Group Interviews (FGI) in seven different HEIs. All interviews were conducted in Polish, recorded and transcribed accordingly. The transcripts were then analysed by three researchers independently to identify recurring themes and answer the research question – how non-academic staff benefit from the EUI.

Analysis – internationalisation for all

The study has clearly shown that the organisation of European alliances at Polish universities not only involves institutional leaders and key administrators but also diffuses horizontally and penetrates deep into the fabric of academic institutions. To achieve its fundamental goals, it requires the engagement of a broad spectrum of internal stakeholders, including academics, students and all sorts of professionals and administrative staff. Initially, the EUI was introduced as another international project, one of many that Polish universities administer with no specific goals, timeline or governance structure. The tasks related to the implementation of the EUI were considered additional, possibly even temporary.

As the process continued and evolved, it began to involve not only a single specialised administrative office (as in the case of student/staff exchange) but also a wide range of various offices across universities, on various levels of governance, depending on their scope of work and expertise. Therefore, the scope and

horizontal nature of the EUI and its impact on universities came largely as a surprise and posed many challenges. During the initial phase, the initiatives undertaken under the umbrella of the EUI spread across different organisational units and, to the surprise of many, began to involve those who had not been included in the internationalisation process so far, namely the non-academic staff.

The EUI requires the involvement of administrative staff supporting education and research, as these are the core elements of collaboration within the alliances. So far, many Polish institutions have been embedded in the European Research Area (ERA), taking an active part in research projects and related activities. Further, the Bologna process made the education structure and its outcomes fairly comparable across Europe, though it is not necessarily what Polish academics particularly like. However, most of the non-academic staff supporting these activities (besides those supporting international collaboration) were excluded from internationalisation. Frankly, the staff were never reformed or modernised, and their role was to merely "serve" the research and education staff (Anielska & Taica, 2020). Cywińska et al. (2022, p. 209) acknowledge that "Polish HEIs are hierarchical institutions with clearly defined boundaries between academic and non-academic staff empowerment, including epistemic violence and multidimensional power relations." This largely results in the fact that most of the non-academic staff have only witnessed internationalisation, without being directly engaged in the same. The interviewed non-academic staff tend to admit that internationalisation was very much limited to international offices, insofar as they were often called travel agencies because of their frequent absence from the office. Further, these (often exotic) travels, of mostly official nature, have had hardly any significance or impact on the performance of their institutions.

Unexpectedly, the EUI turned out to be a fundamentally different type of partnership and the non-academic staff were among the first to embrace it. For many Polish universities, it challenged the prevailing norms and values of the organisational culture including the relationship between the academic and the non-academic staff, often called the "other" group. As noted by one of the non-academic staff interviewees,

> *If someone "was born at the university," has worked here from the start and will retire from here, they do not know that there is a different world out there, different people they need, to make something happen for them [U-5].*

Polish university leaders were confronted with a new account of the role of non-academic staff, often regarded as new academic professionals (Kehm, 2015), who were assigned managerial positions in the alliances. Overall, it has been a massive change which, according to our respondents, has begun to redefine their informal and formal positions and their role in the governance of the EUI. One of our respondents observed,

> *It seems to me that we got this huge chance to change the way we think about the role of administrative staff, to use the potential of those working there, which extends beyond the core areas [U-8].*

The alliances are primarily projects with assigned goals, timelines and responsibilities that require the non-academic staff (from across the university) to be involved in the agenda regularly. This sheds light on many employees, whose expertise, knowledge and skills have so far been largely invisible. Suddenly, they began to be fully involved in the works of the EUI and their contribution started to be acknowledged by the institutional leaders at their universities. Of course, not everyone was able or willing to use such an opportunity and we were informed about a broad spectrum of attitudes toward the EUI among the non-academic staff.

The need for fluency in English means that the EUI remains inaccessible to many employee (academic and non-academic), doctoral students and students. However, for those who can freely communicate in English, many initiatives developed under the EUI serve as potential leverage for professional careers in their respective universities. The EUI symbolises a different account of internationalisation, which is both horizontal and inclusive and goes deeper into the institutional fabric, creating opportunities for those previously excluded from internationalisation and its benefits. One of the university leaders provided us with an interesting insight:

> *From my viewpoint, the administrative staff who participated in internationalisation have gained a lot. Each of the offices involved in the alliances had to enter the international project management mode. We invested in this, so that the administration staff learn the know-how, and are able to work and run a project in English [U-8].*

Breaking the binary divide

FGIs with administrative staff conducted for this study revealed considerable satisfaction with the teamwork within the EUI. However, the interviewees were recruited from those who wanted to share their experiences, which indicates a bias towards optimists. Nevertheless, the EUI is perceived as breaking the binary divide between "them and us" (Dobson, 2000). The following statement from a non-academic employee during an FGI illustrates this bold claim:

> *In the traditional approach, there is a chasm between the administrative and academic staff at Polish universities. However, we use foreign patterns – for example in Germany, administrative staff are really managers, separate units, who take on independent initiatives [U-5].*

This is because the participating universities do not select special administrative units exclusively for EUI affairs but various specific units (e.g. quality of education) work together, depending on their field of expertise. Further, the EUI frequently (but not always) brings together individuals of very different statuses within their institutional environment. Many specialised teams consist of non-academic and support staff from various professional fields and positions, depending on the topic, availability and institutional culture. These teams (from different universities)

were created within the alliances to execute joint operational tasks, which are very important for many interviewees.

The new way of thinking about university administrative staff seems to be greater at institutions where the EUI has made a significant impact on the university. To illustrate this process, in one of the universities under study, there is a specially hired manager focused on the horizontal implementation of the EUI project, who is not a faculty member. This is the first person from outside the academia to hold a position of such prominence, hired explicitly to facilitate institutional adaptation to the logic of their particular alliance. This is only one (though spectacular) example of the changing institutional logic; there are many more in the not-so-high-profile positions and tasks. All of them make a substantial contribution to the changing perception of the role of non-academic staff and their impact on university performance. Thus, the EUI breaks the binary divide between university employees and lifts the non-academic staff out of the shadow.

Opportunity for professional development

The first of the aspects directly impacted by the EUI was the professional development of non-academic staff. During the FGIs, our interviewees pointed to numerous opportunities presented to them due to the membership of their HEIs in the EUI. Most of these concerned the development of soft skills that have been historically absent (and unnecessary) in bureaucratic organisations. As noted by Anielska and Mielczarek-Taica (2020), "[m]ost of the public universities do not have effective motivation tools and qualification improvement systems for staff of administration, and the content level of available training and courses varies and does not fully meet the expectations of administration representatives" (p. 13). However, with the arrival of the EUI, numerous opportunities have emerged for improving language skills. The lack of fluency in English (and other languages) was identified as a major lacuna among the non-academic staff; the alliances do all that is required to eliminate the language barrier, at least among those directly involved in the EUI. This was directly acknowledged by one of the interviewees:

> *The development of language competencies among the administrative staff is significant [U-7].*

Language courses, casual small talk between employees of the partner universities and the everyday use of working English during frequent online meetings have contributed to reducing the language barrier. This has increased not only fluency in English but also self-confidence among employees, who are normally not required to communicate in foreign languages. The following observation illustrated this:

> *We are gaining practical language skills, necessary for the implementation of these exact projects [U-7].*
>
> *In the beginning, we were sure we had to be perfect and speak fluently to start collaborating. None of the participating universities in our alliance*

> *come from a country with English as the official language. It turned out our partners do not necessarily use perfect English. From the conversation with our colleagues from other universities we know they face the same problems, i.e. basic English skills among the administration staff. At first, it was making our contact difficult, but with time, we realised that even with English at the A2 level, you can communicate successfully [U-10].*

Somehow fulfilling the vision of a multilingual Europe mooted in President Macron's 2017 speech, our respondents also turned to languages other than English to communicate with their counterparts within the alliances. According to one of our interviewees,

> *If one learns French, they can communicate with the French; if one learns Italian, they can communicate with the Italians. This not only increases language competencies but also strengthens the personal bond between people. It makes working together easier [U-7].*

Overall, it represents an important change in the role of non-academic staff in university governance. Suddenly, the non-academic staff, their individual skills and expertise have turned out to be pivotal for the EUI and, therefore, need to be developed. With time, the non-academic staff have progressively come to be seen less as a bureaucratic machine that streamlines the circulation of documents, the so-called "messengers of bureaucracy" (Collinson, 2006), and more as human capital. The emerging possibilities for the professional development of non-academic staff symbolise and facilitate this new approach, which is echoed in our respondent's observation:

> *Working on the European Alliances gives me access to an international environment, which allows me to develop on many levels. These are not exclusively language, but also interpersonal and cultural skills [U-13].*

The members of the administrative staff also pointed to the increased possibility of attending very good and useful courses and training to which they otherwise had limited or no access, as such programmes were available only to faculty or students. Learning new things and developing existing competencies in the form of lifelong learning courses (LLL) also became (or even primarily) accessible to employees whose work has been historically invisible. So, it is not so much about learning opportunities for the underprivileged group of employees, as it is about being visible as an organisational asset, as noted by one of our interviewees:

> *There are courses in leadership, motivation, time management or general competencies, which are useful to everyone. In our alliance, we rely on lifelong learning – not only students but everyone who feels the need to learn something can develop themselves [U-13].*

Such change seems to benefit the university, for the respondents saw their professional development as directly related to their work at the university. With additional knowledge and skills, as well as training (for example in cultural differences), they were sure to become more competent and offer more to the university and the alliance. It was well summarised by one of the respondents during FGIs, who offered a personal take on the impact of the European Alliance.

> *The Alliance allows me to develop personally . . . Thanks to it I can build new competencies and learn something new. It is amazing. I look to this alliance with high hopes. I also have significant expectations, but it also gives me confidence that they will be met. It all translates to the well-being of our university and mine, personally [U-7].*

Changing the working culture

The study also indicates the change in the working culture as a direct result of the EUI. Working within an alliance requires flexibility for all involved because of cultural differences in performing professional tasks as well as various divergences in national regulations. The need to search for consensus, an ever-present feature of the EUI networks, is also something our respondents had to learn:

> *Everything in the European Universities is a result of a compromise. Each process and each budgetary agreement has to consider all interests. [U-14]*

It is also a challenge for those used to performing more routine tasks, now faced with the differences in the organisation of a workday at partner universities. For example, it concerns such small things as different office hours, which requires organisational flexibility among partners. As one of our respondents noted,

> *I was surprised by how very difficult it was to foresee, how the additional tasks would occupy me within a week or two [U-10].*

In addition, the non-academic staff directly involved in the EUI are assigned new and often different tasks. The respondents did not complain about the increased workload this project entailed because (apparently) it came with financial benefits. Working in a new and often challenging environment appears oddly attractive, even if it requires investing extra effort and spending longer hours at work. However, the internal and external rewards largely compensate for personal sacrifices. Such a paradox is reflected in the following statement.

> *I knew from the start that there would be a lot of work. And it was true. However, we are in contact with our supervisors, who inform us every two to three weeks if our involvement in the project will be more or less significant. The communication in this matter is practically permanent [U-10].*
>
> *Trying to fit in [with the tasks for the alliance] in the standard working hours, we complete our usual duties during overtime work [U-7].*

As often declared by the respondents, the working culture began to change mostly for the better. Teamwork, task-oriented performance and good interpersonal communication were listed among major changes introduced in the university's work culture. Although this situation might appear to concern only administrative units working directly with partner EUI institutions, the significant size of the project mentioned earlier, involving multiple offices across a single university, makes the initiative impactful in the area of work culture. Perhaps these past four to five years of the EUI have not totally overhauled the institutional culture at Polish universities, but the respondents clearly had hopes that this rather scattered influence could eventually lead to a more systematic change in the work culture.

Softening the traditional hierarchical structure

Finally, the respondents acknowledged that the aforementioned outcomes collectively result in a more cooperative mode of work. Perhaps unintentionally and indirectly, the EUI makes the academic and non-academic staff collaborate on a relatively equal footing. One of the respondents described the nature of the relationship between academic and non-academic staff, which additionally contains a gender factor.

> *This is a bigger problem of the higher education system, of which everyone should be made aware. It is worth asking this question loudly: Is the lady from the dean's office a second-class staff member? [U-12]*

The daily communication within the alliances is conducted in English – equally foreign to both academic and non-academic staff – which is considered to be more direct and less hierarchical. Consequently, fluency in English ultimately builds a new (informal) hierarchy, benefitting those who have a better command of English and communicate freely in both professional and private scenarios. In many reported cases, it put the non-academic staff in a privileged position over some academics who struggled with their English. This impacts the relationship between academics and non-academics on a microscale, but the respondents indicated that it slowly flattens the traditionally hierarchical structure. One of the respondents offered an interesting observation; even if it represents only some isolated situations, it holds a strong message about the understudied aspect of international strategic partnership relations.

> *International contacts flatten this hierarchy because, firstly, [the firm distinction between groups of staff does not exist] in the majority of the partner countries, and secondly, the English language does not foster division – all forms of courtesy are downgraded to "you" [U-14].*

However, the shift in the mode of collaboration between academic and non-academic staff within the EUI does not seem to change the overall situation of the latter. They are still underpaid and marginalised in institutional governance, and

should the change come, it will most likely arrive from the outside. The EUI offers such an opportunity at least for those involved in the work of the alliance, acknowledged by our respondents gladly and with relief:

> *Previously, I used to experience this hierarchy very much. I was to simply be of service to the academic staff. Now I feel that I am their partner. [U-14]*
>
> *It hurts a bit that we keep discussing the overgrowth of administrative staff; however, the European Universities proved that nothing can be done without them. I hope that thanks to this [EUI], everyone will see that the administration staff is important and that even the best researchers and educators do not stand a chance of finalising a good project without proficient administrative staff [U-5].*

Being aware of their expertise and engagement in the EUI endeavours, the non-academic staff manifest their contribution to the success of the overall project more openly. They make it abundantly clear that collaboration with European partners increases their prestige and creates many opportunities for their professional development. The non-academic staff overtly express their pride in being part of the EUI, a large and prominent international project that opens the window of opportunity for Polish universities. One of the interviewees shared with us a rather optimistic observation about the EUI.

> *It makes us enthusiastic that we are a part of something really significant – an endeavour that builds us as a community [U-7].*

The EUI makes the work of non-academic staff visible and shines the spotlight on those who deliver it. Such a cultural change is naturally welcomed by those who directly benefit from being noticed and whose work becomes appreciated. It may also positively influence the universities themselves. The flattening of the organisational structure reinforces internal cohesion, integrates various staff groups and improves information exchange, all of which eventually benefit the institution. It can also make universities more attractive places of work for trained professionals, whose newly discovered potential has just been unleashed.

Conclusion

A few years after the creation of the EUI, there is a well-established feeling at Polish universities that most universities in Western Europe do not differ that much from their Polish counterparts regarding research and teaching. However, the study reveals a notable difference in how universities are organised and managed. Obviously, this creates some tensions in the organisational cultures at Polish HEIs.

This study finds that the non-academic staff see the EUI as a window of opportunity for their professional development but also acknowledge that the concept of European, transnational universities considers non-academic personnel a key asset, necessary for the project's future success. Thus, the EUI openly acknowledges and

appreciates the non-academic staff's contribution. Further, it brings them to the centre stage of university governance, as this is how modern organisations function. This is primarily why non-academic staff appear to be the main beneficiaries of European Universities in Poland.

The empirical findings reveal that those involved in the EUI are fully aware of the differences in the organisational roles played by the non-academic staff at Polish universities and their European counterparts. This is because, at those partner universities, there is a new category of employees, namely the new academic professionals, who can enjoy professional authority and can perform more significant roles in university governance (*cf.* Enders & Naidoo, 2022; Kehm & Teichler, 2013). They could be also quite powerful figures within the EUI networks, with significant managerial discretion and responsibility.

Two questions resulting from our study remain unanswered and require further investigation. Firstly, how sustainable is the change of the organisational culture at Polish HEIs, considering the well-embedded and continuously reproduced academic tradition of sustaining two clearly hierarchical categories of university employees? Secondly, it is to be seen whether the identified change in the organisational culture remains limited to the units directly involved in the pursuit of the EUI goals or spills over to other parts of universities and becomes leverage for an extensive transformation.

The participation of Polish universities in the EUI undoubtedly disturbs a well-established image of the university as a republic of scholars and (at least temporarily) breaks the hierarchical division between academic and non-academic staff. It may accelerate the development of a new academic profession, as many of the EUI tasks require a highly skilled and fully committed workforce. Though these professionals may hold high-profile roles in the EUI, they expect similar recognition reflected in their salaries and authority within their domestic institutions. Only time can tell whether this challenge will be resolved. Regardless of the long-term consequences for the university organisational culture, the EUI clearly shows that the modernisation of university governance is not limited to structural revamps and must include a cultural change too.

Note

1 The HE Law formally defines non-academic staff as "those who are not academics" [*niebędący nauczycielami akademickimi*].

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11 Where next? Mapping future directions and perspectives for EUI-related research

Barbara Curyło and Alexander Frame

Introduction

Following several European Commission calls, the landscape of Higher Education (HE) in Europe has been enriched by "the emergence of innovative models like the soon-to-be 60 European Universities alliances, involving around 500 higher education institutions from all parts of Europe" (European Commission, 2024a, p. 2).[1] These transnational alliances are presented by the European Commission as "trailblazers for the entire higher education sector" (*ibid*.) and by the Council as "testbeds for innovative teaching and for research" (Council of the European Union, 2021)

While each contribution to this volume helped shed light on different aspects of the European Universities Initiative (EUI), or on the Euro-internationalisation context in which it emerged, this final chapter maps future perspectives for the EUI and for research relating to it, in light of challenges it now faces and of others which may arise in the future. As indicated in Chapter 1 of this volume, the EUI can be considered in the context of top-down and bottom-up activities. From a top-down perspective, the decision-making process surrounding the initiative itself, the roles and aspirations of European Union (EU) institutions in the area of higher education and the approach of Member States to these ambitions stand out as particularly challenging. At the other end of the scale, staff working for the European University Alliances (EUAs) must rise to meet various types of challenges, be they (i) top-down and external, (ii) those generated within the alliances themselves, (iii) in relation to other alliances or (iv) to restrictions coming from national regulations.

Differentiated Europeanisation and evolving constraints and challenges

Since Europeanisation is itself a dynamic process (*cf*. Chapter 1, this volume), both on a given level and between levels, alliances are exposed to a complex set of processes, mechanisms and initiatives which may have more or less impact on them, depending on a range of factors. This suggests that the area of HE experiences differentiated integration to an extent comparable to common EU policies, despite not formally constituting a common policy itself. Schimmelfennig and Leuffen argue

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that differentiation is a systemic feature of European integration, and see the EU as a "system of differentiated integration" (2016, p. 14). In this approach, differentiation is not a temporary or accidental feature resulting from the current economic situation but a permanent feature that accompanies the deepening and enlarging of integration. Importantly, the complexity of the integration process generates several types of differentiation, including two basic ones: vertical differentiation and horizontal differentiation. The first type refers to varying degrees of integration in specific policy areas. The second concerns situations in which a specific policy is implemented to a varying extent in member states. These two basic types of differentiation can additionally be broken down into internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension of horizontal differentiation refers to the situation when not all member states participate in all EU policies, while the external dimension of horizontal differentiation refers to the situation when non-member states participate in selected EU policies (Schimmelfennig & Leuffen, 2016).

In the case of the EUI, horizontal differentiation is manifested in the fact that, within the HE sector, the level and advancement of integration is significant, as mentioned in a number of contributions in this volume, but that, against the background of holistically regulated European policies, the scope of this integration is defined by the Bologna process, whose implementation is largely based on national regulations. This, in turn, translates directly into vertical differentiation, whereby the implementation of the European dimension of HE takes place in national contexts and results in significant differences between the member states. Concerning the EUI, varying approaches to credit recognition, quality assurance and accreditation procedures, among others, can be observed. Internal differentiation is confirmed by the fact that not all universities in Europe participate in the EUI, while the involvement of non-EU partners contributes to external differentiation. These various levels of differentiation, in relation to the EUI, are further complexified by the nature and dynamics of EU decision-making, which must be taken into account when reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of the initiative.

The EU decision-making process is particularly unique, given its multi-faceted nature, within a complex institutional system (Meerts, 2015, p. 246). This means that decision-making takes place on several levels and consists of several phases: design (phase of policy design), negotiation (phase of policy negotiation), legitimisation (phase of policy legitimation) and implementation (phase of policy implementation) (Wallace, 2005, p. 29). Each of these phases requires the participation of different actors and is characterised by specific integration mechanisms, depending on the type of actors involved. For instance, the phase of policy design is usually dominated by supranational approaches to regulated areas whereas, in the phase of policy negotiation, intergovernmental actors mostly have the final say. For each phase, the interplay of interests, the degree of sensitivity of the issues raised, the map of political alliances and the scope of a given actor's potential may all be distributed differently.

In the context of the EUI, the decision-making process is even more complex because all the phases interpenetrate, condition each other and sometimes take place simultaneously. Each phase assumes the involvement of multiple actors,

starting from EU institutions and national authorities, mostly in the design, negotiation and legitimisation phases, but also academic institutions and academic organisations (e.g. the European University Association), mainly in the implementation phase. This complexity can be explained by the fact that, after the pilot call and the formation of the first 17 alliances, the European Commission opened further calls for subsequent alliances, bringing in new evaluation criteria which translated into even more ambitious goals, and at the same time expanding further the margins of expectations and opportunities for existing and new alliances. For this reason, the EUI design phase was not limited to a closed time perspective, and the phase of implementation of activities by the first alliances coincided with other phases, which introduced new challenges such as enlarging existing alliances, deepening harmonisation, establishing common foundations for quality assurance and micro-accreditation and building foundations of convergence between the European Higher Education and the European Research Areas. Moreover, with the announcement of pilot calls on legal status and the European degree, the European Commission added another dimension to the EUI design phase, which necessarily brought alliances themselves, and other relevant stakeholders such as national authorities, to the negotiating table.

This state of affairs appears to reflect the assumption that the EUI can be characterised by two major processes of Europeanisation: facilitated coordination and opportunity structures (*cf.* Chapter 1, this volume). These operate on two levels, political (top-down) and institutional/organisational (bottom-up), which contribute to generating challenges. The next sections will discuss some top-down and bottom-up challenges and suggest avenues for future research. In light of the complexity of the processes happening on different levels, the variety of actors involved, and the political sensitivity and uncertainty surrounding the education sector in European politics and its development, the chapter in no way aims to be exhaustive in identifying potential future research but rather focuses on indicating some major trends and possible associated lines of scientific inquiry.

Top-down challenges for the EUI and EUI-related research

When diagnosing top-down challenges for the EUI, it is indispensable to take into consideration the ambitions of EU institutions. Marina Ciño Pagliarello (2022) defines three types of strategies, visible in the European Commission's discourse, which set goals and challenges for the alliances' development. The first is a "pragmatic" strategy "aimed at resolving the shortcomings of the Bologna Process by strengthening the organisational capacity at the supranational level in a policy field that cannot be implemented via the traditional community method. This is done through the involvement of stakeholders in an integrated, transnational dialogue and policy exchange." Secondly, the author identifies an "economic" strategy which is based on "mobility – as one of the core freedoms of the single market – and on investment in industry, technology and innovation in order to address a more complex and more competitive knowledge-based economy." Thirdly, a "political" strategy, rooted in Europeanisation, emphasises that EUAs should act as catalysts

for integration processes. This strategy reflects the European Commission's strong ideological discourse on the "role of alliances as relevant to the social and cultural development of the EU in fostering common values and identity" (p. 158).

Each of these three strategies refers to mechanisms and relationships that are of interest to scholars of European studies and potentially other disciplines. For example, in subsequent calls from the European Commission, the emphasis placed on processes and mechanisms, which seem to correspond to the "pragmatic" and "economic" strategies outlined earlier, raise questions as to how and why this is being done. More generally, the Commission's pursuit of supranational EU policy solutions for the HE sector in Europe, in the face of member states' apparent sovereign interests, is a significant topic for scholars of European integration. Analysis of the Commission's discourse on the EUI and its apparent consequences is another potential area of research on top-down Europeanisation. For example, one of the most frequently used keywords in this discourse on the EUI is "European identity," which is of course the central concept of a popular, multi-faceted field of research animated by scholars of political strategy. All interactions within and between alliances can be studied in terms of their contribution to European identity, as illustrated by Chapter 6 of this volume, which employs Delanty's theoretical framework of critical cosmopolitism (Delanty, 2006) to suggest that mobilities abroad may enhance students' or staff's sense of belonging to Europe. However, identity is also highly contextual, and it is just as likely that (intense) exposure to a foreign Other who is perceived as different, especially if the experience is felt to be negative or threatening, will actually reinforce negative stereotypes and weaken the sense of belonging to a common European imagined community. In the same way, as Ulrich Beck suggested in his *Cosmopolitan Vision*, a strong cosmopolitan normative framework can encourage resistance (Beck, 2006). Thus, normative promotion of alliances within HEIs, unprecedented levels of integration in daily working practices and the Commission's strong pro-European political discourse and ambition for alliances may lead to tensions and ultimately a feeling of rejection, in turn likely to actually strengthen national, regional or local identities.

Other potential avenues for future research can stem from the way in which EU institutions link the EUI with current societal challenges. The Council of the European Union employs such discourse when it claims that

> The European Universities initiative aims to contribute to a more united, innovative, digital, connected and green Europe, open to the wider world by increasing the resilience, excellence, geographical and social inclusiveness, gender equality, attractiveness, and international competitiveness of European higher education institutions.
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2021, p. 17)

Secondly, the EUI is expected to

> promote a common European vision, including fundamental academic values contributing to a strengthened European identity for all learners, teachers,

> researchers and staff, thereby equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to drive the transformation towards a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive Europe, to cooperate and co-create knowledge within different European and global cultures, in different languages, across borders, sectors and academic disciplines.
>
> (*ibid*.)

Thirdly, European Universities are to be important accelerators for

> institutional transformations, research careers, science education, training, international cooperation and knowledge circulation as possible fields of a 'more determined cooperation' between the European Research Area, the European Higher Education Area and the higher education dimension of the European Education Area.
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 10)

The links the documents make between the EUI and the European vision or European values, in the context of Europe's role on the international stage and the concept of "Global Europe," can inspire studies to explore how this might work in practice. Similarly, scholars might want to investigate just how far the transformative potential of EUAs appears to play out in real terms to enhance coherence within the European HE system.

As regards the EUI's contribution to the global position of Europe, Stensaker et al. (2023) comment that "Strategic inter-institutional collaborations in higher education are not solely a European phenomenon and it would be vital to study European alliances from a more global perspective." This seems particularly relevant in face of challenges defined by the Council itself:

> World demographic trends and globalisation will challenge Europe's position as a prominent hub of knowledge creation. Global warming and environmental degradation, the acceleration of technological change and the growing race for digital technologies already affect HEIs' strategies and positioning within Europe and in the global context.
>
> (Council of the European Union, 2022)

The desire to meet these challenges, in line with UNESCO's sustainable development goals, is clearly a guiding policy element for the Council. By pursuing it through the logic of "facilitated coordination," it seeks to harness the internationalisation efforts of HEIs in order to further European objectives and positioning in relation to the "knowledge-based society." As such, this appears to be a good illustration of the concept of "Euro-internationalisation" proposed in the first chapter of this volume.

The European Commission's political agenda also seems to encourage alliances to internationalise beyond the borders of Europe, through networks established with global partners. Such global connections would contribute to the European Union's

soft power and, as such, would interest scholars working on EU public diplomacy (*cf*. Curyło, 2014). This could be framed in terms of how the EUI contributes to the EU's so-called charm offensive. Science diplomacy, as a subdiscipline of public diplomacy, has been identified by EU officials as a key area for development. For instance, the EU Commissioner for research, science and innovation, Carlos Moedas, argued, in an article published back in 2016, that

> Scientific cooperation has an indisputable role in effective European neighbourhood policy, international relations, and development policy. Therefore . . . I want to see the EU play an increasingly active and visible role in international science diplomacy. This can be achieved, namely, by using the universal language of science to maintain open channels of communication in the absence of other viable foreign policy approaches.
>
> (Moedas, 2016, p. 2)

Another element present in European-level rhetoric is transformation, referring both to the entire education sector in Europe and to the ongoing processes inside individual European HEIs. In relation to the European level, possible research questions range from the dynamics of convergence with and/or divergence from the interests and dominant academic traditions of member states to the future of the process of Europeanisation of HEIs and the degree to which the concept of Euro-internationalisation appears to be applicable in this context. Further transformation of the HE sector will possibly entail not only facilitated coordination as a mode of governance put into practice in the Europeanisation process of the EUI, but may lead to increased scope for bargaining and hierarchy (*cf*. Chapter 1, this volume) between the European Commission and multiple state-level and non-state-level actors. Regarding how the EUI can be positioned in the framework of Europeanisation, the interplay between top-down and bottom-up processes can, for example, shed light on its actual impact on transformations within HEIs and alliances, when it comes to governance and fostering institutionalisation, as this chapter will go on to suggest.

Raising the objectives for the EUI with subsequent funding calls: new areas for research

As previously mentioned, the European Commission has launched several further initiatives that raise new challenges for the EUI. After the pilot call and the formation of the first 17 alliances in 2019, the European Commission opened further calls for new, expanded, or refinanced existing alliances, meaning that there were 41 active alliances funded as part of the EUI in 2020, growing to 44 in 2022, 50 in 2023 and 64 in 2024. Each subsequent call expanded the criteria that were to translate into even more ambitious goals, further raising expectations and opportunities for existing and new alliances (European Commission, 2021, 2022b, 2023a). This involved deepening harmonisation within alliances, establishing common foundations for quality assurance and micro-accreditation, as well as building foundations

for some degree of convergence between the European Higher Education and European Research Areas, in respect to the twin missions of alliances.

With the announcement of targeted, thematic calls on the legal status of alliances and the European degree, the European Commission set further challenges for the EUI. Both the question of the legal entity and the European degree are outlined in the document "Strategy for European Universities," presented as flagship initiatives for boosting European higher education and research. The document states that "A legal statute for alliances of higher education institutions – for European Universities and other types of alliances – would allow them to mutualise their strengths together, make common strategic decisions, act together with a legal personality, and facilitate pooling together resources, activities and data. Such a statute would facilitate deeper, long-term and flexible transnational cooperation, allowing the sharing of capacities, exchange of staff and the implementation of joint programmes, with the aim to award at the level of the alliance joint degrees, including a joint European degree" (European Commission, 2022a). It sets out European ambitions relating to this European degree, which is expected to be delivered at the national level but

> would attest learning outcomes achieved as part of transnational cooperation among several institutions, offered for example within European Universities alliances, and based on a common set of criteria. A European degree should be easy to issue, store, share, verify and authenticate, and recognised across the EU. (*ibid.*)

Although the core objectives of these calls were very targeted and precise – that is, to test and facilitate the delivery of a joint European Degree label and the possibility of creating a European legal status for EUAs – they also became a tool in the European Commission's dialogue with alliances in areas that are highly sensitive to national governments. Subsequently, in 2024, the Commission launched a specific call for a "community of practice," described as "an ambitious mandate aimed to trigger and deepen unprecedented levels of institutional cooperation between higher education institutions, making it systemic, structural and sustainable" (European Commission, 2023c). The objective of establishing a "community of practice" between EUAs was to encourage them to foster synergies and share best practices and experiences on "on relevant academic, pedagogical, and administrative matters, for example linked to student and staff mobility, joint educational opportunities, pedagogical innovation, societal outreach, digitalisation, sustainability or governance" (European Commission, 2023a, p. 9).

As this book goes to press, the pilot projects are still running, but preliminary results from the first two already show developments that could be explored in future research. These two pilots are divided between ten funded projects: six dedicated to the European degree and four to the legal status. As summarised by the European Commission, these projects:

> bring together 100 full partners from all across Europe, amongst which 90 higher education institutions. They are joined by around 190 associated

> partners with a sound geographical balance, including all EU Member States, Norway, Turkey, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, 17 Ministries from 16 countries . . ., as well as 22 accreditation/quality assurance agencies from 17 countries . . . to work side by side with the higher education institutions on more effective European higher education cooperation. Higher education institutions from 21 European Universities alliances are participating in exploring the joint European degree label. Higher education institutions from 3 European Universities alliances . . . will explore a possible European legal status for their alliance, on top of UniGR (Université de la Grande Région). Several projects also include student unions amongst their associated partners.
>
> (European Commission, 2023b)

In the case of both European degree and legal status, the initial project results indicate that there is a strong need for close cooperation and harmonisation between the member states – in terms of changes needed to respective national regulations – and between the European institutions, so as to secure sustainable funding and to pursue the objectives set for the EUI in a coherent and efficient way. The projects dedicated to the European degree label are mostly organised around mapping and screening existing joint programmes and designing and testing the European degree label based on a common set of European criteria, frequently in the context of the desire from European institutions to increase the global attractiveness of European HE (European Commission, 2023b). The projects on the legal status are predominantly dedicated to testing existing formats of advanced international cooperation. Their ambition is to design an instrument that would be optimal for EUAs and similar entities, to facilitate common staff recruitment and common purchases, while making governance structures more sustainable and strengthening the alliances' credibility in their external environment. The initial results show, among other things, that a new instrument is much needed, but that setting one up entails further analysis of long-term perspectives, while alliances are currently still struggling to deal with internal challenges and need simple, rapidly applicable solutions which could also be based on existing legal structures (*cf*. Wessels & Craciun, 2024).

The projects bring together an array of different actors, who have joined forces to construct a kind of "hybrid" multi-level entity, in order to address the challenges of the European degree and the legal status. The European Commission seems to be using these calls as an instrument of dialogue and social consultation with academic partners and national authorities, in order to progress with the EUI towards supranational solutions while avoiding clashes with member states on intergovernmental premises. This is visible, for instance, in the way that the Commission reframed its discourse on both projects. The "European degree" eventually became the "European degree label" and the call concerning "legal status" evolved to focus on an "institutionalised EU cooperation instrument"! All these evolutions can usefully be studied to better understand the various logics at play, their European and national determinants, the motivations and interests of the actors involved and, finally, their consequences.

Indeed, the final results of these two pilots will very likely contribute to restructuring the context in which the EUI operates, also strengthening, to some degree, the supranational dimension of European HE and the integrity of the Bologna system. Yet, as some alliances actively pursue these ambitious projects, others see them as developments which are relevant and applicable in the future, but not necessarily current priorities. This may lead to another manifestation of differentiated integration, as embodied by this divide between alliances, in terms of their desire to get (or to be seen to be getting) actively involved in the pilots, and ultimately in terms of how integrated their members become within their EUA, thanks to the adoption or not of a legal status and the European degree label. An additional divide created by the initiative itself is that between the HEIs which are members of alliances and those which are not (Stensaker et al., 2023). This, in turn, together with tensions generated by ambitious goals of the EU for HE in Europe may ultimately result in pressures and tendencies towards re-nationalisation, given the predominance of national autonomy in this policy area, as previously mentioned (*cf*. Jungblut et al., 2020, p. 395).

Bottom-up challenges for the EUI and EUI-related research

While top-down pressures contribute to shaping the context in which alliances and their constituent actors operate, it should not be forgotten that these actors, be they individual staff members or students within HEIs, acting in an official capacity or as end users, also operate within their own logics and opportunity structures, and seek to reconcile the EUA with multiple other constraints relating to their work or study environment. Getting involved in alliances, at whatever level, can be seen by HEI staff members as an opportunity to develop actions in line with the objectives of the EUI but also as a chance for self-promotion, to travel in Europe, or alternatively as another passing top-down injunction, more-or-less strongly supported by the university leadership, as an EU-led political project disconnected from day-to-day concerns of academic life, as a labyrinth of complicated administrative procedures, or as an illegitimate imposition of foreign constraints and language limitations on their everyday practices. It is in the light of these different positions and many others, which may be more or less contextualised, relational and temporary, that the EUI is implemented within HEIs. Major challenges thus consist in communicating the initiative to the stakeholders, be they staff, students or external (associated) partners, trying to raise awareness and understanding of this complex and novel initiative which encompasses all domains of HEI activity, and trying to encourage stakeholders to devote time and energy to alliance-based activities in their already busy schedules. Naturally, the way this is best done will depend in part on the individual HEI, its strategy and policies, as well as on the national context in which it operates, which provides further legal constraints, possible extra funding opportunities and also representations and norms surrounding academic activity, which need to be taken into account. Because of their specificity, such bottom-up processes which can interest scholars of Europeanisation or of organisations, for

example, need studying through qualitative research, involving deep immersion into alliance activities, such as ethnographic participant observation.

On the alliance level, key interactions take place between representatives of different member universities whose job is to shape the way the alliance functions. These are typically elected or nominated representatives of the university in a particular capacity, for whom the EUA is generally not their main job, or part-time or full-time employees funded directly through the initiative itself. On this inter-HEI level, loyalties and the sense of belonging may be conflicting, between institutional identity (employees of a particular university), especially where this overlaps with national identity but also categorical (administrative vs. technical vs. academic staff), disciplinary (especially among academics) or status identities (levels of organisational seniority or professional status). Each of these categories of identity can be seen as salient in interactions, depending on the context and actors involved, and they may align in unexpected ways. Thus national logics may dominate in some discussions, where practices vary and some degree of compromise or coordination is needed, and power dynamics play out between individuals and institutions to "negotiate" a more-or-less acceptable solution, which may or may not then be fully implemented for various reasons. But in other situations, other dimensions of human interaction may come to the fore, as students, academic or administrative staff members "team up" across universities to defend a particular position linked to their categorical interests. Interpersonal relationships but also (real or perceived) competence (e.g. language skills) of individuals, as well as their perceived legitimacy (e.g. institutional mandates and internal support), can be as important as logical deliberation in such settings, when it comes to negotiation and formulating the process of decision-making. Here again, such grounded everyday practices, which underly the bottom-up implementation of alliance activity, can be of key interest to scholars seeking a complex view of Europeanisation in practice, or alternatively of the contextualised mechanics of "intercultural" communication.

Maassen et al. (2022) propose a distinction between external and internal processes affecting alliances, which they describe as "heterarchies": "where a number of interdependencies exist, characterized by complex collaboration and most likely competing principles of performance and worth. The implication is that there can be internal dynamics within alliances shaping developments" (Maassen et al., 2022, p. 957). The internal dimension thus results from the intrinsic structures, the social, technical and political configurations within HEIs and the alliances themselves, while the external aspect refers to opportunity structures originating from the European level and also national regulations and requirements. The authors suggest that these can be analysed according to four core aspects, "coordination," "conflict resolution," "commitment of members" and "cultural characteristics," which will now be discussed.

"Coordination" refers to the governance structure of the alliances. The practice of the alliances currently operating shows that "[a]lthough all alliances share this goal of embodying these "universities of the future" in the European Union, they do not necessarily have the same idea of what this means for the organisation of their governance structures" (Charret & Chankseliani, 2023, p. 34). As previously

suggested, this can be studied through comparative analysis of management models in national HEIs (*cf*. Chapter 9, this volume) but also with a focus on the (prior) socialisation of participants in both national and international HE environments. The European Commission expects alliances to constitute role models for other educational institutions, by setting up structures and procedures for cooperation which enable them to pursue the goals set for the EU, involving a wide academic community spanning several countries, in a harmonised manner. The pilot call to develop a legal entity, which may, in the future, result in an associated governance model, can also be interesting for scholars to examine in this context. Likewise, the "community of practice" project, which opens up a perspective for trans-alliance cooperation and learning, can be another stimulating case for study.

For Maassen et al. (2022), "conflict resolution" is also an essential element in deep, long-term cooperation between partners from different backgrounds, who may have different expectations and different potential. Research in this area might focus not just on the process of building conflict resolution mechanisms, be they simple voting procedures or conditions that contribute to a more cooperative and consensus-oriented environment in the alliances, but also the way in which such mechanisms function (or dysfunction) in practice, under what political or social pressures, with what strategies for manipulation, control or avoidance, etc.

The third aspect underlined by these authors, "commitment of members," relates directly to the sustainability of the alliance, especially in light of the fluctuations of EU and national funding for the EUI. It depends on several factors, including the added value of being an alliance member or other initial motivations to join the alliance in the first place, but it can also evolve as top management teams change within partner HEIs. Research has already been conducted on modes of alliance formation and HEIs' motivation to join (*cf*. Chapter 8, this volume), but there are still a number of topics to explore, related not only to various aspects of alliance membership but also to the conditions stipulated in alliance statutes or consortium agreements, by which members may leave an alliance and join another alliance or by which the alliance may be entirely dissolved. Moreover, the question of commitment of members also raises the subsidiary question of how "members" is to be defined, if we consider member universities to be themselves complex structures involving multiple actors. Going beyond the question of elected political leadership mandates (in HEIs and countries where this is the norm), scholars could also deconstruct the assumption that universities speak with one voice, whereas in reality, we could imagine very different levels of knowledge, commitment and motivation for alliance activities not only among different categories of stakeholders within HEIs but also between individuals and even contexts. Thus an individual may welcome an activity of the alliance in one area but find it superfluous in another, for example. If "commitment of members" is simply reduced to an aggregate score or a reflection of one particular category of institutional representative, some insightful complexity might be lost.

Finally, "cultural characteristics" relate to the impact of norms, values and historical trajectories of partner universities on the sustainability of the alliance and actual involvement of its partners. Here, broad research perspectives

can be related to intercultural interactions and dialogue, public diplomacy or citizen diplomacy, etc. This dimension is interesting in that it allows scholars to envisage not just national or organisational cultures, but possibly, in a grounded, bottom-up approach, the interactions between these, as they play out in interpersonal dynamics. The question of "negotiated cultures" (Brannen & Salk, 2000) can also make alliances an interesting object of study. In the light of pro-Europeanisation discourse surrounding the European vision or European values, scholars could observe in practice the ways in which individuals working or studying together within alliances actually embody their different identities and values, make sense of one another and their activity and co-construct a shared reality.

The key that connects all of the above aspects is the process of transformation, mentioned in the previous section, which in itself is an extensive research topic: what are the possibilities, limitations and scope of transformation linked to the qualitative evolutions that EUAs and their member HEIs are undergoing (Stensaker et al., 2023)? In European discourse on alliance objectives, the transformational aspect is very prominent. The concept of transformation even became a keyword in the pilot call title. Research on the transformative potential of the EUI could question critically this stated aim, raising a number of questions about two-way influence – of the alliance on partner universities and of the partner universities on the alliance. It can be applied to multiple levels, from working conditions, levels of competence and lived experiences of individual staff members, students or associated professionals, to institutionalised forms such as internal governance structures or procedures, credit recognition practices, integration of online learning platforms and possibilities into programmes of study, etc. This can be related to Europeanisation, as there is a specific convergence of top-down and bottom-up processes, that is, Europeanisation within the alliance itself.

Conclusion

In a speech delivered in 2019, Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, stated that the launch of the European Universities Initiative was to mark a key moment in history for the European Education Area and described it as "a real game changer for higher education in Europe" (European Commission, 2019). Indeed, looking at the original objectives of the initiative and its implementation so far, it is clear that the EUI has already impacted both practices in HE and political discussions on European and national levels, as well as between and inside alliances. We have seen that the context is still evolving, as alliances themselves develop their activities and as new goals are set by the European Commission in consecutive calls for projects. We have shown how the top-down and bottom-up dynamics of Europeanisation are reflected in the EUI, as alliances are exposed to pressures in terms of both "facilitated coordination" and "opportunity structures." Our discussion of the challenges faced by the EUI, and the way that alliances seem to address these, led us to the idea that the EUI exhibits differentiated integration in a way similar to any regular EU policy initiative.

Furthermore, we attempted to identify a certain number of EUI-related research perspectives arising from the initiative. From a top-down approach, based on analysis of documents and discourse produced by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, including the successive calls for projects, these potentially concern many topics. These include intergovernmental and supranational power play around future HE policymaking in Europe and its consequences; studies on the two-way impact of Europeanisation, looking in particular at the profiles and preferences of top-level actors involved; and studies focusing on European identity, both in terms of factors contributing to promoting this, and analysis of the EU's vision and global position. The thematic pilot calls on the topics of the European degree label and the legal status also seem to be potential "game-changers" of a top-down nature. They may lead to further supranational integration within European HE but also provoke resistance leading to further divisions and to re-nationalisation of some aspects. From a bottom-up perspective, referring to the way the alliances function in practice, directions for scientific inquiry range from the way HEIs adapt their internal institutional arrangements to function within the alliances, to questions of how different stakeholders react to or go about making sense of the intercultural dimension of such advanced transnational cooperation, in their everyday work or study practices.

Research on the EUI is already rapidly becoming more prolific, with dedicated panels in many international conferences in European Studies and other fields. We believe that this is set to continue in future years that the "game-changing" initiative will continue to have considerable impact on HE policy in Europe, on the way that member HEIs function in practice and, *in fine*, on Europeanisation as a whole. The nature of that impact on different levels remains to be seen and requires scholarly attention. Many questions remain to be answered, politically, between intergovernmental and supranational actors, but also socially, economically and professionally. We place our trust in the academic community to seize these questions and to accompany the initiative with critical distance and constructive analysis, over the coming years.

Note

1 At the time of publishing, the European Commission had announced funding for a total of 64 European University Alliances, covering more than 560 HEIs in Europe. Source: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative. Date accessed: 30/06/2024.

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