

Internationalization Of Higher Education In The Light Of Some Indicators

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Abstract

At all the conferences held by the actors involved in the provision of Higher Education internationalization is seen as a new and indispensable dimension which must be considered within the mission of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Several reasons, of national as well as international nature, support this recommendation. Among the first ones, the development of human resources; the creation of strategic alliances; the generation of income/commerce and transactions; the construction of Nation and institutions; social and cultural development; and mutual understanding are worth mentioning. Whereas the enhancement of the international image and reputation; quality improvement; human resources development; income generation; the creation of strategic alliances; research and knowledge production are among the institutional reasons that lead to the internationalization of HEIs (Knight, 2005). Likewise there are several different higher education internationalization modalities that may be adopted by a HEI such as students and teachers mobility; distant education or education delivered by institutions located abroad; the design and strengthening of strategies and programs which are oriented to regional integration and international cooperation; formation of nets and projects for international cooperation and the celebration of inter institutional alliances, and the incorporation of the international dimension in the study programs. This presentation intends to assess the degree of internationalization of three Argentine HEIs by means of a group of indicators.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions- Internationalization- Strategies

Introduction

Although during the first decades of the 20th century international mobility of teachers has been found to take place in some degree, especially from Europe to USA, it is from the second half of that century onwards that the internationalization of higher education started to grow. (Gracia Guadilla, 2005)- Certainly, at all the conferences held by the actors involved in the provision of Higher Education internationalization is seen as a new and indispensable dimension which must be considered within the mission of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).. Precisely, the chapter devoted to the analysis of the *Internationalization, regionalization and globalization* of higher education of the declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education held by UNESCO (2009) highlights the importance of this process pointing out that HEIs are responsible for designing strategies to foster the transference of knowledge so that all countries are able to reach developmental aims. In addition, the aforementioned declaration indicates that access to quality education must be guaranteed so that the benefits of the globalization of education are spread over the whole society. Besides the importance of the promotion of academic values, the respect for human rights, diversity and national sovereignty, always taking into account the pertinence of each institution, that is to say, its anchorage to its own historic, cultural and socio political reality, is recognized. (Morresi, 2015)

Along the same lines, the creation of the Iberian-American Space for Knowledge was boosted at the XV and XVI Iberian-American Summits. The development of this space is the aim of the countries in the region to strengthen the creation of postgraduate university nets, students and teachers' mobility and the cooperation of Iberian-American researchers who are working outside the region. Their main pillars are the increase of the number of researchers in each country and their mobility as well as the sustained increment in the investment for research and development (OEI (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos-Organization of Iberian-American States-, 2010)

Internationalization of Higher Education is defined by Knight (2005) as a process consisting of the design and implementation of policies and programs which have as their goal, on the one hand, incorporating the international and intercultural dimensions in the missions, objectives and functions of teaching, investigation and extension of university institutions, and, on the other hand, channeling the benefits derived from international cooperation (Knight, 2005). This process involves several actions such as students and teachers' mobility, curriculum internationalization, double degrees, joint teaching as well as investigating activities and the formation of nets, among others.

Internationalization is understood as a means which allows HEIs to develop activities tending , on the one hand, to improve the quality and pertinence of university functions-teaching, research and extension- and, on the other hand, to link and project institutions within the world of higher education.(Sebastián, 2011)

This presentation aims to analyze the extent of internationalization in three public management Argentine universities –Universidad Nacional del Centro (UNICEN-National University of the Centre), U. Nacional de San Luis (UNSL-National University of San Luis), U. Nacional del Sur (UNS-National University of the South)-. To that end, firstly we will briefly describe the internationalization decisions and actions implemented by each of the selected institutions. Then these decisions and actions will be analyzed and quantified, using some of the indicators developed by several National Universities grouped up in the National Universities International Cooperation Net (RedCIUN) (Mérrga, 2014). Then, the obtained results will be interpreted and, lastly, a synthesis will be presented so that some conclusions of general nature may be reached.

The internationalization dimension in the selected HEIs.

Internationalization decisions and actions

At UNSL, especially in the most consolidated areas and disciplines, international cooperation activities have taken place since the university's very beginnings. They were materialized in the formation of postgraduates abroad; joint investigations and scientific productions within the framework of agreements or calls for international programs.

In 2008, with the creation of the Inter-institutions Relations Office, in charge of, on the one hand, facilitating the publicity and management of the international cooperation activities and, on the other hand, generating an updated and pertinent regulative framework for them, international relations have intensified, with special emphasis on students' mobility. (Pedranzani, 2010)

Thus, UNSL participates, on the one hand, in diverse multilateral programs, such as the Programa de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA) (the Program of the American States Organization), the Programa Iberoamericano de Ciencia y Tecnología (CyTED) (the Iberian-American program of Science and Technology), Programas de Cooperación de la Unión Europea (Cooperation Programs of the European Union), the Programa de Cooperación Interuniversitaria (PIC) de la Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI) (the Program for Interuniversity Cooperation of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation) On the other hand, it promotes and manages projects within the framework of the

PPUA and PIESCI¹⁰¹ calls through different work groups which participate in or direct the said projects.

Also, teachers and students of the institution take part in mobility programs within the framework of the Projects of Programa JIMA (JIMA Program), AEI, Fullbright, Fundación Carolina, Mobility Short Time Program for Teachers of the Mercosur as well as in the reciprocity program of Academic Mobility within the framework of the agreements signed with the universities of Colombia-U, Pedagógica (Pedagogic U.); from Spain-U. de la Laguna, U. de Almería, de Valencia, Politécnica de Valencia- Universities from Italy-U. Perugia-, from Venezuela-U. de los Andes-, universities from Brazil-U. de Sao Pablo-, universities from Chile- U. de la Frontera. U. de Temuco and U. de Valparaíso- (Pedranzani, 2010)

In addition, the UNSL participates in International Macro Nets as the OVI, and in the AUSA (Asociación de Universidades Sur Andinas-South Andes Universities Association-) and in the CIUN Net (Red de Cooperación Internacional de Universidades Nacionales-International Cooperation Net of National Universities) and, together with other Argentine HEIs in the Spanish for foreigners Program whose aim is to institutionalize a recently developed disciplinary area such as the teaching, assessment and certification of Spanish as a Second Language and Foreign Language (Español como Segunda Lengua y Lengua Extranjera-ELSE).

The teachers, researchers and students at UNS have not only participated in different activities in foreign institutions but have also received teachers and students from the rest of the world for a long time now. Since these activities were arranged by the interested parties, it could be assumed that the internationalization process, conceived and designed as a strategy tending to renew and improve the quality of education by means of opening towards abroad, took shape as from the creation of the International Relations Department in 2007.

The participation of students, teachers and non-teaching staff in programs of mobility is arranged and facilitated by this Department, with the purpose of promoting the participation of the whole university community in the different modalities of internationalization and cooperation. Agreements with institutions of well-known prestige are signed, agreements are also formalized to get joint degrees and to carry out joint investigations with foreign groups, participation in regional and international nets is encouraged, and the international educational offer is publicized. (Universidad Nacional del Sur, 2013).

¹⁰¹ A detailed analysis of the aims and actions of the PIESCI was made by this group in *La Internacionalización de la Educación Superior: una mirada desde las políticas públicas* at the II Jornadas de Estudios de América Latina y el Caribe. Desafíos y debates actuales. Buenos Aires, 2014

Among the internationalization activities the attendance to courses and research stays by members of the UNS in institutions abroad are outstanding, as well as the presence at UNS of students and teachers from foreign institutions within the framework of different programs-JIMA, MARCA, IEASTE, ARFITEC- or of bilateral agreements celebrated with Latin-American and European institutions (Universidad Nacional del Sur, 2013).

On the other hand, we can mention the participation of teachers in the Mobility programs to Paris and Madrid as well as the movement to universities abroad of teachers to complete doctoral studies, most of them with *Erasmus Mundus* scholarships

Moreover, several groups have presented projects which resulted to be satisfactorily assessed in the successive calls for the Program for the Strengthening of Postgraduate Studies (CAFP- BA), for the Program of Associate Postgraduate Studies (CAPG-BA) and for the Program of Joint Research Projects Association of Mercosur (PCCP)

Furthermore, some teachers from UNS participate as coordinators and members in the Academic Nets and Missions Projects which are presented at the Promotion of the Argentine University Program (PPUA).

The UNICEN, via the Area of International Relations dependent of the Institutional Relations Department, in line with the institutional policy in recent years, has carried out a sustained policy of internationalization. To that effect it has participated in an active and joint way with International Institutions, and with the Governmental Organisms, in the present national public policy of internationalization of Argentine Universities.

At the international level, links of bilateral and multilateral cooperation are kept by means of numerous agreements with foreign Universities and other Educational Institutes, Development and Research Centers, Foundations-Foundation for Chinese-Argentine Educational Exchange (FIECA) and Iberian-American Foundation for Occupational Security and Health (FISSO)-, Governmental Organisms, Organizations, among others.

These links together with the participation in the internationalization programs of the Argentine Universities have secured and consolidated mobility as one of the pillars of the international area. At present there are programs of mobility in force, which allow students, teachers and non-teaching staff to be inserted in the different universities around the world. The following programs can be mentioned: Iberian-America-Santander Scholarship, Teacher Mobility Madrid/Paris, Mexico-Argentina Scholars and Managers Mobility Program (MAGMA), Missions Abroad Program dependent on the University Policy Office, Regional Academic Mobility Program (MARCA), Academic Mobility Program for undergraduates in Art

(MAGA), Argentina. France Engineers Technology Program (ARFITEC) among others.

Also, teachers from the institution, as its representatives, take part in different Projects of Academic Nets either as coordinators or as participants, and the UNICEN is a full member of the International Cooperation Net of National Universities of the National Interuniversity Council (Red-CIUN).

Internationalization indicators

If we understand internationalization as a process formed by the incorporation of international variables within the activities of the university, it is possible to consider the evaluation of the extent of this process by means of a group of indicators. Selecting as well as obtaining these indicators is not an easy task. The members of the RedCIUN, after months of debate, proposed a group of indicators which make possible a quantitative diagnosis.

The suggested indicators form two clearly differentiated groups. One group aims at identifying the penetration of internationalization in the organization, objectives and planning of the institutions by answering nine questions.

The others, twenty-five altogether, cover the academic, research and development level, the transference dimension, the extension dimension and the international cooperation dimension. All of them are quantitative indicators and result indicators and they are expressed as percentages over a total. (Marega, 2014).

The estimation of the first group is relatively simple and the information is accessible, whilst the calculation of the second group requires a clear definition of the units of analysis and a strict systematization of information, which is not always available.

For this reason, and, to quantify the extent of internationalization of the HEIs under study, in this paper, we will only use the indicators of the first group from those suggested by the members of the RedCIUN and we will complement them with others which may show the participation of the HEIs in activities developed within the framework of the PPUA and PIESCI programs.

Based on the analysis of the first group of indicators, it can be stated that in the HEIs under study internationalization and cooperation constitute one of the pillars of their institutional plan, incorporating them as a strategic activity for the fulfillment of their mission. To this end, the three institutions have an area devoted to promote and foster activities proper of internationalization

The consolidation of the links with foreign universities as a key tool for the generation and growth of the exchange, mobility and interuniversity cooperation activities, the progress in the development and strengthening of

scientific-technological research, teachers' specialization, and the improvement of undergraduate and postgraduate formation as well as the promotion of their academic offer, are among the objectives of the three institutions.

Furthermore, these departments accompany and lead the members of the university community in the search of opportunities for scholarships to go on research stays or to take undergraduate or postgraduate courses in foreign institutions and to participate in teacher and non-teaching staff mobility programs either to take courses or to take part in research groups among others (Table 2).

Table 2 Selected HEIs. Internationalization indicators

	UNICEN	UNSL	UNS
There is an area responsible for international relations	YES	YES	YES
There is an internationalization strategy at the University including a list of defined actions.	YES	YES	YES
The internationalization process is incorporated within the strategic aims/guidelines of the University.	YES	YES	YES
Specify the aims of the institution in relation to the regional and international integration processes	Generation of activities functional to the development and strengthening of scientific technological research. Human resources formation and their transference	Increasing the academic and research formation of students and teachers with exchange and collaboration experiences with foreign institutions.	Improving the substantive functions of the UNS and generating employment opportunities for graduates, deepening the capacities of its members to face regional, national and global problematic situations.
List the actions proposed in the Institutional Plan for strategic development in relation to internationalization.	Support to mobility Signing cooperation agreements with foreign institutions. Promoting the participation in national programs of internationalization.	Materializing actions based on current agreements in force and signing new Cooperation agreements at international level. Encouraging the participation in Nets of international cooperation and in the programs designed and evaluated by the SPU.	Internationalization of the study programs Internationalization at home..
List the ones that are being carried out and the estimated degree of achievement in percentage.	Participation in Programs evaluated and financed by the SPU. Signing agreements with foreign institutions. Students, teachers and non-teaching staff mobility	Participation in Programs evaluated and financed by the SPU. Signing agreements with foreign institutions. Students, teachers and non-teaching staff mobility	Participation in Programs evaluated and financed by the SPU. Signing agreements with foreign institutions. Students, teachers and non-teaching staff mobility

	Participation in fairs and other events.	Participation in fairs and other events.	Participation in fairs and other events.
Human resources in the area of international relations		4/5 persons	
Does the University have an infrastructure offer at the service of mobility?	NO	NO	YES
Does the institution have a plan of continuous self-evaluation of the internationalization process?	Yes, at the level of faculty./college.	The development of a system of information enabling the monitoring of the different international activities has been contemplated.	Yes. Based on the generation of indicators in line with those used at national level which include the peculiarities proper of UNS.

Table 3. PIESCI. Accepted quality improvement programs(in absolute values)

		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
CAPG-BA							
Institutions ¹⁰²		21	20	14	13	12	
Projects ¹⁰³		36	33	24	21	25	
	UNICEN	2	2	2	2	2	
	UNSL		1	1	1	3	
	UNS					1	
CAFP- BA							
Projects		13		21	25	37	26
Institutions		9		11	13	14	
	UNICEN	-		-	-	-	
	UNSL	1		1	1	1	
	UNS	2		3	2	2	1
CUAA							
Projects						15	
Institutions						14	
	UNICEN					-	
	UNSL					1	
	UNS					-	
PPCC							
Institutions						9	8
Projects						26	24
	UNICEN					-	-
	UNSL					-	-
	UNS					2	2

Source: our own elaboration based on SPU-Ministry of Education.

¹⁰².The total number of institutions participating in the call is registered¹⁰³ It corresponds to the current projects in force.

Table 4. PIESCI. ARCUSUR Program. Accredited programmes of study. (absolute values).

Accredited study programmes	2012	
Total	45	
UNICEN	1	Medicine Veterinary
UNSL	-	-
UNS	3	Agronomical Engineering Chemical Engineering Electronic Engineering

Source; Our own elaboration based on Ministry of Education.

Table 5. PPUA. Strengthening of Interuniversity Nets

Calls	II		IV		V		VI	
	Coordinator	Participant	Coord.	Part.	Coord.	Part.	Coord.	Part.
UNICEN	1	3	2	1	4	4	7	8
UNSL	3	3	3	3	4	5	2	8
UNS	1	6	-	4	1	5	2	6

Source: our own elaboration based on SPU-Ministry of Education.

Based on the reduced number of quantitative indicators presented, together with a revision of publications and comments on the different actions related, either to the presence of the university abroad or the reception of representatives of foreign institutions, to the signing of agreements, to the participation of its members in different mobility programs, at least two comments can be made. On the one hand, although in absolute terms the number of projects presented at the SPU calls by the HEIs analyzed is not big, in relative terms it is important if we take into consideration that less than half of the total number of HEIs in our country present projects at these calls (Tables 3, 4, 5). On the other hand, we should consider that year after year the incorporation in internationalization activities of members of the institutions under analysis is greater (López, et al 2015, Morresi, 2015)

Final considerations

In line with Pablo Beneitone, who holds that “*From the internationalization perspective, it is not enough to have international activities in the spheres of teaching, research or extension, the concept implies the development of a process of incorporation of the international aspect in the actions that the University performs in those spheres*” (2014:30) we can confirm that the process of internationalization is already installed in the three institutions analyzed. Although the progress achieved in the activities could not be fully measured because the data was insufficient, the numeric indicators obtained make clear that the process is under way-and that it shows a tendency to build up in the future. The declarations made in

institutional communications by the authorities of each institution as well as by the agents in charge of the international relations area, confirm this evaluation.

It is made clear all along this work that, although the development process of the international areas of the universities analyzed has been promoted by the actions of the PIESCI and PPUA programs, among others, a genuine and consolidated internationalization policy has already been installed in the genesis of the educational project of each institution, which is passed onto university teaching as well as research. Some of the indicators analyzed confirm this statement.

The importance of this paper resides in the fact that it is the first diagnoses comparing three Argentine HEIs of public management and similar size. Nevertheless it must be warned that it should be complemented by a qualitative analysis to be able to check if the aims listed in the strategic plans are fully accomplished.

It should be pointed out that the fact of studying internationalization and its benefits does not mean that we agree with the concept of its commodification. On the contrary, it is considered a strong element present inside the institutions, where the process of promoting, making known and establishing academic, scientific and cultural links with other institutions around the world, integrated with the development aims of the region where the institutions are inserted, would result in the improvement of the quality of their functions and would give “the graduates the international, intercultural and global profile the new century requires” (Fernández Lammara, 2014).

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