



INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A TOOL FOR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

The University of Maribor approached the formulation of an international institutional strategy with its own priority guidelines. By taking into account the guidelines of the National Higher Education Programme 2011 – 2020, it aims to integrate Slovene higher education into the global higher education area by 2020. Internationalization is not merely a supplementary activity in higher education – it is the main quality indicator of institutions in line with European quality standards, internationally comparable and internationally competitive. In 2013, the University of Maribor will formulate an internationalization programme on the basis of the guidelines adopted by the Senate on June 2012.

The objectives of the proposed strategy of the University of Maribor are in line with the objectives of the National Higher Education Programme 2011 – 2020:

- contributing to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, cooperation with neighbouring regions and the most developed countries from various parts of the world;
- conducting both teaching and research in cooperation with foreign institutions, higher education teachers, researchers and students;
- increasing the number of joint degree programmes conducted in cooperation with foreign institutions (priority will be given to postgraduate programmes).

The University of Maribor will follow national standards laid down in the National Higher Education Programme 2011 – 2020:

- 20 % of mobile graduates by 2020 (short-term mobility);
- a minimum of 10% of exchange students for the entire duration of study by 2020;
- one fifth of doctoral students studying under joint degree programmes conducted in cooperation with foreign universities by 2020;
- a minimum of 10% of foreign nationals among higher education teachers, researchers and other employees in higher education by 2020.

A high priority will also be placed on the proposed measure of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia – encouraging research conducted within the framework of transnational projects and activities (gradual increase by 2020).

The internationalization of higher education depends on quality assurance and vice versa. In addition, internationalization represents a tool for strengthening and enriching our national system as well as developing a global one. However, such a system requires quality as added value, which must be assured if internationalization is supposed to be developed. Both internationalization and quality development must be taken into account and considered a challenge contributing to the expansion of knowledge, the acquisition of interpersonal communicative and cultural competences as well as the development of new degree programmes. Internationalization is a continuous process that cannot be stopped, and therefore it must be considered effective by all partner institutions and other stakeholders. In order to implement internationalization, the basic conditions must be fulfilled (participation of students as well as teachers, researchers and other employees).

The International Association of Universities (IAU) and the European University Association (EUA) have come to the conclusion that internationalization is taking place in a radically different, complex, differentiated and global context, which causes a change in goals, activities and attitudes of participants. Therefore, terminology, conceptual frameworks and our understanding of internationalization must be reviewed. Most importantly, greater attention must be paid to internationalization in various fields and the related “healthy” method of identifying values, aims, objectives and an adequate manner of carrying out different activities.

In the past, internationalization was in general understood as something positive. However, nowadays our attitude has changed due to discrepancies between purposes and expected results. The greatest differences arise between institutions that can “afford” to develop internationalization and between those who cannot. The largest discrepancies do no longer occur between the north and the south but between various institutions within a country. Due to their reputation and resources, certain academic communities can afford to host top students, professors and researchers. Thus, they benefit at the expense of others and widen the growing gap between institutions.

Experts of the International Association of Universities (IAU) are studying global internationalization trends, analyzing the advantages of internationalization and exploring the most common elements of internationalization strategies (Global Surveys on Internationalization of HE 2003, 2005, 2010). On the basis of the findings, IUA is developing an internationalization database and platform containing key trends, which will be available to all institutions.

Global internationalization trends in the field of higher education (Global Surveys on Internationalization of HE 2010):

- Internationalization is of central importance for quality development and its role is more influential than ever.
- Students and their preparedness for living in a globalized world are the main priorities.

- Internationalization is related to the development policy and other activities.
- The relationship between reasons for supporting internationalization and the expected benefits must be as balanced as possible.
- Within the framework of internationalization, key priorities and goals of individual institutions (promoting scientific research or expanding the knowledge of students) must be laid down.
- International activities are conducted in various regions, among which Europe appears to be the most interesting one.
- Student mobility is still reserved for privileged students despite the fact that it remains one of the central activities of internationalization.
- The economic crisis has a negative impact on internationalization all around the globe since it represents one of the most important internal and external obstacles.
- Two thirds of institutions have formulated an internationalization policy/strategy, but merely half of them possess relevant resources and an adequate monitoring system.

The most important benefits of internationalization as indicted by universities themselves:

- access to degree programmes and contents missing at the home institution;
- increased quality of both the teaching and learning process;
- promoting scientific research;
- innovative curricula;
- new knowledge and skills for students as global citizens and productive members of society;
- promoting the development of institutions' policy, management, student services and quality assurance through the exchange of experiences outside the national borders;
- international solidarity;
- a wide range of programmes and participation in international networks;
- higher income.

Internationalization requires a joint effort of the University of Maribor and its members who must ensure that institutional procedures and programmes will be conducted successfully. In addition, academic goals and financial conditions must be brought in line. Thus, the University of Maribor will be able to raise its international visibility. For this reason, the University must follow the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility in various fields since it is obliged to create a global higher education system valuing academic integrity, quality culture, equal opportunities and cooperation.

PROGRAMME OF INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR AND ITS MEMBERS

The University of Maribor is an internationally recognized educational and research institution. On the basis of successful international cooperation and concluded agreements, new partnerships, programmes and projects developed, which has put the University on the global higher education map.

International activities conducted by the University and its members are based on the National Higher Education Programme 2011 – 2020, selected elements of international strategies (Global Surveys on Internationalization of HE 2003, 2005, 2010), the Work Programme of the University of Maribor until 2015 as well as the Annual Work Programme for 2012.

When drawing up the programme, international activities of the University in various fields were taken into account and defined on the basis of European programmes, bilateral agreements and institutional obligations under international networks.

The University of Maribor began to implement its internationalization strategy on the basis of the Senate's decision adopted in June 2012. In the academic year 2012/13, a comprehensive programme of international activities will be drawn up. The realisation of the programme and quality indicators will be assessed in 2014.

Relevant departments and offices of the University will be responsible for conducting international activities. Thus, the implementation of activities, responsibility and supervision will be ensured.

Objectives and measures

One of the key objectives of the programme is to promote internationalization of the University of Maribor and its members. This objective will be achieved by introducing the following measures:

1. All types of higher education activities conducted by the University and its members must be organized in a manner as to ensure availability, international comparability and integration into the international higher education area.
2. Priorities for academic matters, research and arts must be determined (development of an internalization programme in Slovenia and abroad).
3. Financial and other resources for development periods must be ensured.
4. The development of joint degree programmes and their components must be promoted in order to foster competition and increase employability.

5. The active participation of students in all types of internationalization must be ensured.
6. Values, principles and goals must be defined, including intercultural learning. In addition, the principle of solidarity and respect must be taken into account, and new partnerships must be established (university, regional, local ...).
7. International cooperation in the region (Central Europe, Danube Region, Southeast Europe and Western Balkans) must be promoted.
8. New promising partnerships must be formed (BRIKS and Third World countries).
9. Considerable attention must be paid to international benchmarking, which is of the utmost importance in times of the economic crisis.
10. Online databases for internationalization must be set up.

For its long-term development and the realization of its internationalization strategy, the University of Maribor requires a stable, adequate and internationally comparable funding system, which has to encompass various mechanisms for the improvement of quality and effectiveness of degree programmes and their integration into the international higher education area.

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