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# Internationalization and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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## 1. Introduction

In our ever faster changing, highly interconnected and interdependent world, the future of our societies depends on the quality of the education that we deliver. The quality of education in turn depends on the level of adjustment of the contents of learning to the requirements of the constantly changing, global, multicultural environment. This text is about mutual development and close relation between two important trends shaping the organization of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the last 30 years – the internationalization and the quality.

It is the aim of the article to indicate the importance of both concepts, which usually appear as separate issues. Their interdependence is significant, especially from HE management point of view. Hence addressing them both holistically may be an important contribution. At the same time HE management structures the considerations and limits the issues discussed.

Internationalization is fraught with pitfalls, as it is filled with risk factors (Altbach 2012, Knight 2015), which may potentially endanger

the quality of the output of the university. To mitigate these risks, quality assurance (QA) is called to stage. In an open, global market, being a contemporary natural environment for HEIs, quality needs to be quantified and benchmarked, which is the task of QA, but QA itself needs to be developed with an international dimension. In this paper, we will first discuss the concepts and then highlight the interconnection of issues, showing QA as a set of tools and as a mechanism safeguarding the benefits of internationalization. We applied the semi-systematic literature review and analysis of literature as research methods (Snyder 2019).

## 2. Internationalization and quality assurance in higher education management

### 2.1. Internationalization and the HE market

Globalizing world and globalizing societies have global problems that can only be addressed by internationally open research and scientific effort. These in turn require communication between researchers and relations that can best be built in a process of internationally cooperative education.
Over the last 20-30 years HE appears as a politically, economically, and socially important subject of consideration in the global agenda.

The fourth goal of the 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development of the United Nations, states that the UN should: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations 2015). This indicates the importance of education and its international, worldwide impact.
But education is not only public responsibility anymore. As Altbach points out, as soon as it was included in the World Trade Organization's GATS, HE has officially become a commodity (Altbach 2004; Altbach 2015a).

Therefore, global capital is increasingly invested in knowledge industries worldwide, both in terms of education and training (Altbach & Knight 2011). With the expansion of the "knowledge society", education is becoming an important investment asset (Wysocka & Leja, 2017). Internationalization has also become, part of HEI's marketing strategy. As international rankings gain on importance, it is now a necessary mechanism to build prestige and international position and, as Hazelkorn states "keep the HEIs alive" e.g. by increasing the number of students (Hazelkorn 2015).

Within the scope of HE institutional activities, various new educational concepts based on international engagement have been developed, such as the Internationalization of curriculum (Leask, 2009) or the transformative

internationalization, being a holistic approach in which universities become internally-minded communities, not simply institutions with ever-increasing numbers of international students (Robson 2011). More recently, the Internationalization at home (IaH) and Internationalization of Higher Education for Society are gaining momentum (Brandenburg, 2020) followed by various concepts of blended and virtual internationalization caused by the COVID-Sars pandemic. The conceptual development is followed by collaborative degree programs with universities and business enterprises abroad and real investments in offshore and branch campuses in other countries.

Last but not least, internationalization is strongly connected with lasting trends in technology development of communication and distance learning technologies, which enable HEIs to deliver parts or all of the educational program to distant learners worldwide (Altbach 2016). The international research cooperation is increasingly based on satellite technology communication. International competition among HEIs is a consequence of globalization processes, massification, and commercialization of HE (Altbach 2015). Thus, the internationalization itself becomes an important quality indicator and a source of competitive advantage and reputation. In addition to this, some 15 years ago Van Damme noted : "… contemporary forms of internationalization in higher education have developed without much concern for the quality issue, which in other domains of higher education systems is becoming a central preoccupation …"(van Damme 2002).

## 2.2. Methodology of review

The article is based on a literature review. In the research, articles from Google Scholar were analyzed. Google Scholar provides ample topic coverage (Brophy & Bawden 2005). The importance and lasting vitality of the debate and academic discussion on the topic, are reflected in the growing number of publications. In the years 1995-2021 we found in total 1955 publications on higher education management in the context of internationalization and quality assurance, with a visible growth from 2010 to 2013, which was upheld until 2021. It should be noted that the first publication on the topic was in 1973, but the main scope of the research embraced the years 2015-2019. The following keywords were used to search for the database: "higher education management", "internationalization", and "quality assurance". The results are shown in figure 1. The literature was then limited to 81 positions, which at the moment of research, were most relevant.

Not all of the articles found were relevant for the study, due to the growing complexity and multidimensionality of the field of Higher Education Research (Viegels & Huisman 2021).
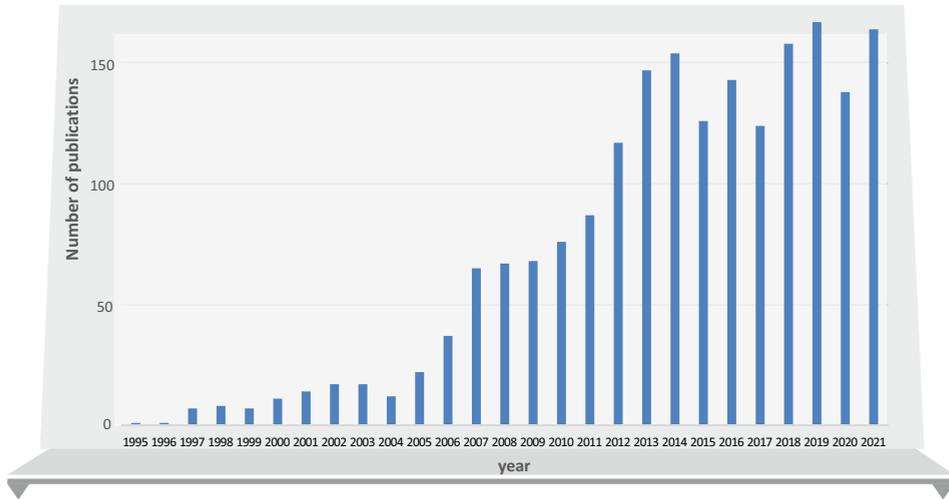


**Figure 1. Number of publications on with keywords "higher education management", "internationalization" and "quality assurance" per year, from 1995 to 2021, as shown in the Google Scholar search engine**

**Source:** own study

## 3. Internationalization–a phenomenon or a process?

### 3.1. Globalization imposed phenomenon of internationalization

Globalization is often presented as an external, largely ungoverned trend. It embraces the totality of changes relating to growing interrelationships, including the flow of information and communication, new technologies and other forces beyond the academic institutions (Altbach 2004; Teichler 2004). When viewed as the result of (western) imperialism, it awakes rather negative connotations (Yang 2002; Brandenburg & de Wit 2015), but it is also a source of new opportunities: "flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas…across borders" (Knight 2015).

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When it is governed – it becomes internationalization. We refer to internationalization as a conscious process, a set of actions undertaken to take advantage of globalization and to react on it. So the international trade contracts, policies, institutions and various worldwide activities make up the phenomenon of internationalization.

Globalization forces the internationalization of HE, shaping the institutional marketplace and the national regulations. We have the new lingua franca - English - as basis for scientific communication. We have international labour market for students, scholars and scientists and we have ever growing international business involved in research communication, publishing, and intermediation. The totality of international activities, institutions, organizations and endeavours constitute for the phenomenon of internationalization. Internationalization is also an attribute of quality and an indicator. Hence it is frequently being measured, benchmarked and compared (e.g. the foreign students quota is calculated, international research and publications) (Brandenburg & Federkeil 2007).

Knight argues that the relation between globalization and internationalization may be thought of as that of a catalyst and response, albeit a response in a proactive and positive way (Knight 2004). Later Altbach and Knight added that: "Globalization may be unalterable, but internationalization involves many choices" (Altbach & Knight 2007).

In the neo-liberal approach, international HE has been positioned as a commodity and freely traded (Geppert & Hollinshead 2017; Marginson 2007a; Teichler 2017). This attitude springs from the Anglo-Saxon educational world, treating HE as a private good, not a public (i.e. national) responsibility and is often questioned ideologically - especially by the European academe. The contemporary emphasis on free trade in the HE market is underlined by the fact that the international trade in education and service-related industries became part of negotiating the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Altbach 2015b). Commercial forces, therefore, have gained a legitimate place in HE worldwide (Kirp 2005) and the HEIs must adapt. Internationalization can be seen as such an adaptation (Hudzik, 2014).

The above would imply that the dominating (albeit seldom mentioned in the first line) motivation for the internationalization of HEIs is the market position and the ultimate financial profit (Altbach & Knight 2007; Knight 2015). In fact, in line with varying economic and social conditions in different parts of the world, the motives and patterns of internationalization are different

(Altbach & Knight 2007) and changing over time (Jooste & Heleta, 2015; Knight & de Wit 2018). The multitude of institutional and national motives and rationales for internationalization of HEIs, is falling under different categories: political, economic, academic social and cultural or even diplomatic (Knight & de Wit 2018). It is difficult to synchronize the institutional approaches, policies and systems. Hence, even in the micro scale, the understanding of internationalization from either the HEIs or the national HE system point of view differs. While the university aims at i.a. improving the quality of teaching and enriching its educational programs, the national HE system may be focused on e.g. achieving good relations or dialogue with other countries (Yang 2002). As worldwide phenomenon internationalization of HE fits therefore well in the VUCA1 World.

## 3.2. The microscale internationalization – a management concept

From the point of view of contemporary HEIs, internationalization is also an overreaching management concept or, as Knight and de Witt say: "a process of integrating international dimensions into teaching, research and service functions of a university. It embraces activities, competencies, ethos and processes of the university" (Knight & de Wit 1997). Even after updating the old definition (Altbach & de Wit 2018; H. de Wit 2017), and despite contemporary doubts and dilemmas (Pashby & de Oliveira Andreotti 2016; Yemini 2015) and recent turmoil of COVID pandemic (Locke 2021; Xu 2020), the importance and processual and overreaching character of the internationalization remains in place (Yemini & Sagie 2016).

Following Knight, who divided the organizational impact of internationalization into two groups of strategies: academic activities, referring to academic initiatives (teaching, learning, training, research, advising or supporting activities) and managerial activities including policies, procedures, systems and supporting infrastructures (Knight & de Wit 1997), we propose a similar approach to present internationalization activities. As can be seen in figure 2, the internationalisation-driven activities are present both in academic and administrative sphere.

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1   VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity.

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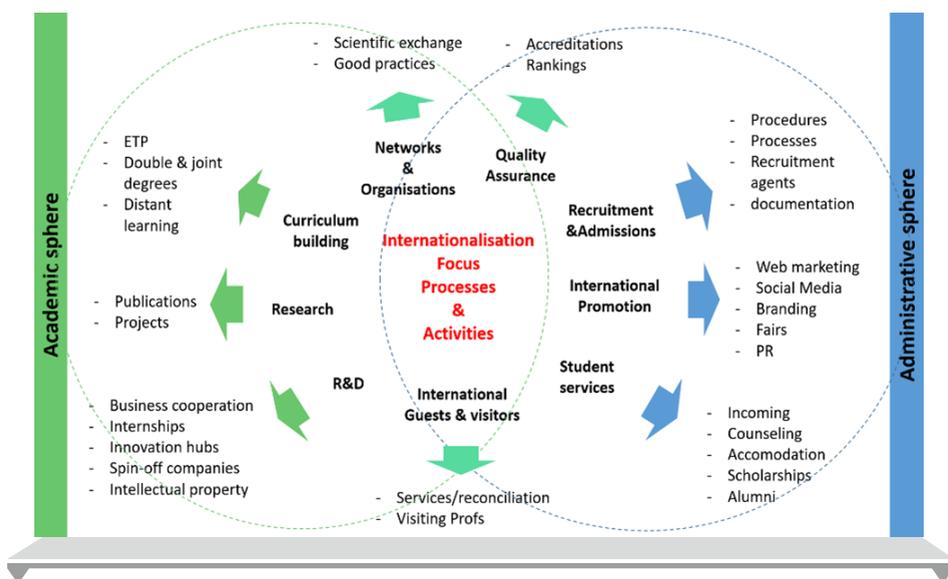KATARZYNA SZELĄGOWSKA-RUDZKA

**Figure 2. The circles of internationalization, highlight the complexity
and interrelations of activities and processes within an organization that bring
the international context into life**

**Source:** own study

Internationalization refers to such obvious institution-wide administrative activities as student recruitment and admissions, support services (domestic and foreign), marketing and promotion, cooperation with other HEIs, or dealing with guests and visiting professors. However, going further into the administrative sphere, we will see internationalization affecting even such "domestic" areas as human resource (HR) management or accounting and campus administration.

Employing foreign academic teachers, welcoming visiting professors and guests, require some intercultural expertise. Dedicated HR motivation systems are welcome to foster faculty and administrative staff contribution to internationalization (Brandenburg 2016), and finally, support for professional development in terms of international assignments and sabbaticals is a must (Marginson & van der Wende 2008). In financial and administrative services - regulations and procedures must be designed with an international view in order to avoid any disturbances in formal terms. Legal offices are affected

by increasing international convergence of HE regulations and complexity of international contracts.

Within the academic sphere activities, internationalization is present within teaching and curriculum building, but also in research, which proves to be especially challenging (Mihut 2017). Research, becoming international is also becoming more complex and challenging. Advanced infrastructure and specialized management in organizing international funding and coordinating work of international project teams is required. Hence, the activities connected with research such as international project writing, reconciliation, reporting, and disseminating are becoming crucial.

The preoccupation with internationalization, albeit to large extent unavoidable and inevitable for contemporary HEIs, leads us however to envisage some threats and risks arising on both national and institutional level.

## 4. Threats and risks related to internationalization

In the macroscale, international development of labour market, and export of education as a source of revenue is economically advantageous for countries with higher number of universities and academic tradition, treating internationalization as way of income generation. They usually offer better job opportunities for graduates. Hence, less developed economies whose HE systems are not capable of serving their national demand are losing talents to them. This effect is known as the "brain drain" (de Wit 2015; Knight 2015). Another problem is the elitism and social inequality in HE (Buckner 2019). Only those who can afford the tuition can study in the privileged, elitist HEIs, and consequently those HEIs which have the money to attract the best researchers and students (Altbach & de Wit 2018; Lee 2015). There are environmental concerns caused by the carbon footprint of international mobility (Arsenault et al., 2019) and various political problems reaching far beyond, but affecting the attitudes toward internationalization (Altbach & de Wit 2017).

Macroscale risks are hardly manageable from the point of view of a single institution, and will not be the subject of this article. The complexity and variety of developments in HE, e.g. a notion of obtaining more than one national degree, international cooperation in mobility or dual degree studies, offer chances to those less favoured countries to grow their own elites without losing them. The graduates and researchers from less favoured countries may be coming back to their countries even after even several years spent abroad (Altbach & Knight 2007). Finally, the growth of HE systems in developing countries as well as their

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activities towards the establishment of an internationally competitive position (e.g. in Russia, and China), shows that the balance of power on the international education market may shift in the next decades (Kemp 2016).

The International Association of Universities Global Survey on Internationalization conducted on various HEIs throughout the world identified three major microscale risks: International opportunities being accessible only to students with financial resources, difficulty in regulating locally the quality of foreign programs and excessive competition among HEIs (de Wit et al. 2015). According to Altbach (2015a) and Knight (2015), as the commercialization in HE develops, more and more derivative businesses appear around it. And so also do corruption and fraud. They are present in both HEIs themselves and various business organizations active on the international education market, disrupting the competition or polluting the classrooms with unqualified students. They can be seen in different areas and at different stages of the education process starting with the offering of educational programs and ending with the final degree. These risks can be managed on an institutional level. Hence they are much more interesting from the point of view of this paper.

The franchising of programs or the emergence of "degree validation" programs offered often by prominent HEIs is a perfect area of corruption. These degree validation programs are often misinterpreted or misused to earn additional money. Affiliates or satellite campuses of prominent HEIs are increasingly established in less developed countries. Ideally, the quality of education in these satellite campuses should mirror the main campus, frequently however the cycle of education is shortened and the only thing that is offered is the degree (Knight 2009). This is referred to as foreign degree mills, constituting satellite campuses of local and foreign universities, subdegree institutions serving as affiliates of approved universities, and programs run in universities without approval or accreditation. One could also mention online courses offered by rogue foreign providers. The candidates for such "easy path" degrees, are persons who want certificates and lack the basic entry requirements for admission into available spaces in approved institutions. Not surprisingly, the phenomenon leads to a decrease of competences on the market and loss of trust in the degrees offered. Thus the emergence of rogue foreign providers, and degree mills can be overshadow and jeopardize the added value that internationalization brings to higher education (Knight 2015).

Altbach goes even further, and calls the internet a "wild west" filled with fraudulent HEIs (Altbach 2016). The risk of misrepresentation and chicanery appears as it is easy to set up an impressive website and exaggerate the quality

or simply lie about the qualities of an institution. Some of the internet sites even include pictures of impressive campuses that are edited from other universities. In the settled European HE environment, rouge degree providers and fraudulent HEIs seem to be rather exotic and uncommon. Nevertheless, the issues linked to recognition of periods of study taken elsewhere remain a serious concern, and hence bothers the European HEIs the most.

Admitting students with substandard academic or language qualifications is endangering or even damaging the whole process of education. These students either lag behind or drop out. Weak students endanger the quality in the classroom and drop-outs are distorting the educational process. In spite of the natural complexity of the international admission process, embracing comparison and evaluation of a variety of degrees granted by different educational systems and in different languages, it is necessary to distinguish false documents from the original ones. This process is fraught with pitfalls, which may result in the admission of weak students. Several public universities have been caught admitting students, with substandard academic qualifications. There is evidence of a private unaccredited institution in the US that admitted and collected tuition from foreign students without requiring them to attend class. Consequently, it funneled them into the labour market, under the noses of US immigration authorities (Altbach 2012).

Other factors endangering the market of HE are dishonest agents (Altbach 2012). Recruitment agents are normally supporting students in finding and applying for a university abroad. Their commission depend on successful student placement, hence it is understandable that they try to deliver impressive students with impressive credentials. There is however a prevalence of agents and recruiters funnelling unqualified students by producing false credentials. Fraudulent documents have become a minor industry in some parts of the world, and thus a major problem in international admissions. This increases the cost of recruitment, as those responsible for checking the accuracy of transcripts, recommendations, and degree certificates face an increasingly difficult task. Also students who submit valid documentation are placed at a disadvantage since they are subjected to extra scrutiny.

In addition to increasingly costly process of candidate evaluation and admission, due to the risk of fraud, the HE market itself becomes more and more competitive, which forces universities to invest more to support international recruitment. This includes costs of international staff support, marketing and promotion, agent commission, and sometimes even overseas representative offices (Wysocka & Leja 2017).

The movement of internationalization rationales toward income production together with the growing risk of corruption and fraud has triggered the preoccupation with international quality control. Some national states (e.g. Russia and India), in an attempt to protect their economies from the negative impact of risks connected with internationalization, have announced that they will be using the international rankings, as a way of determining the legitimacy of foreign universities for recognizing foreign degrees, determining eligibility for academic collaborations, and other aspects of international higher education relations. Continental Europe seems to have been less affected by shady practices as compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries. Partially because international HE there is less commercialized and profit-driven in Europe, and thus less exposed to the neoliberalist market orientation (Altbach, 2015b).

The above risks are making internationalization more difficult and costly for the entire HE sector. Therefore the concept of Quality Assurance (QA) appear on the stage. Can it be an effective remedy for internationalization risks?

## 5. Quality and Quality Assurance (QA) in HEIs

*"While everyone is in favor of providing quality education, the arguments start when we attempt to define what quality means."*

Eduard Sallis

Traditionally the quality itself was an internal issue of the university, deeply rooted in academic values – the academic freedom, constructive criticism, peer discussions and foremost the search for truth (Merton, 1973; Backhaus, 2015) and inherent for the European universities for hundreds of years.

There are several ways of defining quality in the context of HE, as shown in figure 3. The most elitist and traditional concept of quality is based on 'excellence', which implies that the exceptionally high standards of academic achievement are surpassed (Harvey & Stensaker 2008). The quality in this context is mostly represented by high positioning in HE rankings (e.g. Times Higher Education Ranking, Shanghai Ranking etc.) and based on research achievements. Most HEIs cannot aspire to compete in this elitist sphere which makes such educational experience, available to a marginal number of students.
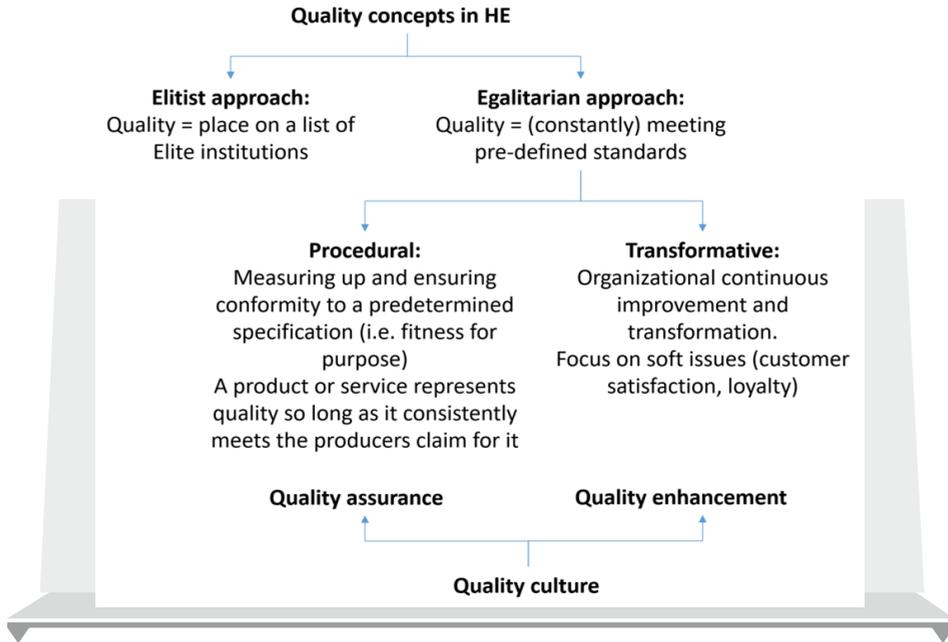
**Figure 3. Comprehensive approach to quality concepts in HE,
differentiating the elitist from the egalitarian**
**Source:** Sallis 2014

Other quality concepts, however, can be derived from the imperatives described in previous section of this chapter. This, more relative, egalitarian way of defining what quality is, includes: processes aimed to meet perfection or consistency with set specifications ("zero defects") in areas such as consistency of academic judgement and reliability of management information, 'fitness for purpose' meaning the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose This is often allied with 'fitness of purpose', evaluating whether the (quality-related) intentions of an HEI are adequate. These concepts of quality are more adequate for most HEIs since they are more achievable.

Quality is also defined as level of return on investment or expenditure ("Value for money"). As public services including education, are expected to be accountable to their funders - the governments and students who are considering the value for money of their investment in HE.

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Finally, quality can appear in context of organisational change, which constantly adds value to students by an ongoing transformation of learning experience. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing and empowering the stakeholder (Harvey & Stensaker 2008).

Summing up, therefore, quality as a comprehensive concept, is present in the cast for excellence (as a competitive tool), the processes of education and management of education and in the overall accountability of the institution.

The highest incarnation of quality is the Quality Culture (fig 3.). The term is less technocratic than the TQM, and it reflects the modern development of management science. If we accept that culture is a way of life, then quality culture becomes a tool for analysis, questioning and dialogue in HE (Leisyte & Westerheijden 2014). QA can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all, from the students and academia to the institutional leadership and management.

QA in the HE context is a generic term referring to the processes of evaluating (assessing and monitoring), maintaining, guaranteeing, and improving the quality of the HE system, institution or program. Furthermore, it denotes the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced (Woodhouse 2004).

The contemporary approach to quality introduces a notion of quality assurance (QA) includes institutional, be it internal, or external processes – being conducted by the HEI itself or by an external body. Internal QA are policies and practices monitoring and improving the quality of education provision used by HEIs, while external QA refers to supra - institutional policies and practices of external bodies to assure the quality of HEIs and programs (Dill, 2007). Both processes are strongly correlated, (Rhoades & Sporn 2002).

The rationale of QA differs for different stakeholders. Using the classification proposed by Leisyte and Westerheijden, we can define internal stakeholders as the students and employees of HEI, while the external stakeholders being founders (state, donors, and sponsors), the parents and the society as a whole (Leisyte & Westerheijden 2014). In addition to that relatively obvious relation, there is a mutual interdependence of researchers due to the communal and open character of science (Merton 1973). Hence other HEIs can be seen as each other's external stakeholders.

Internally (within the HEIs themselves), first and most obvious is a professional, moral imperative, as a duty of educational professionals to provide the best possible educational service and for researchers to excel in the search for knowledge and solutions. At the crux of quality is the focus on the needs of the

student, which in fact is one of the most effective means of facing the competition and surviving. As the nation states gradually withdraw from financing of HEIs, there is a need for effective management of diverse financial sources (Billing, 2004).

Externally imposed motivation for QA is the requirement of publicly available information on quality and standards as well as public accountability: for standards achieved, and for use of money. Another imperative appears with a growing competition in the world of education which requires strategies that clearly advance institutions ahead of their competitors. Here quality may become a differentiating factor (Sallis 2014). However, at the same time HEIs must cooperate and consciously select their partners (among growing number of institutions) – they need some proof of quality to select the right one.

Dealing with the instrumentary, we are again distinguishing between the external and internal QA. External QA is an audit or other evaluation by an external institution or a peer-group. The traditional instrumentary of external QA includes: Audit, Assessment and Accreditation (Woodhouse 2004). Internal QA is the evaluating of quality of the teaching and learning, the processes and programs or in some cases the quality of service and management. When applied on an ad-hoc basis, it may provide some hints to the management. Applied systemically it becomes a management tool, or rather a management philosophy as it is in case of total quality management (TQM) (Sallis 2014).

Forerunners of the present internal QA processes at HEIs were the instruments of the so called second management revolution in 1980s and 1990s – Business Process Reengineering, TQM, Management Based by Objectives and the Strategic Management. The first application of these at HEIs took place in the US in the 1990s, with the aim to increase accountability and force improvement, leading to more efficient public resource allocation by the States (the US public HEIs are underlying state jurisdiction). At US HEIs the governance is based on strong management combined with relatively weak academe and limited State intervention and is to a large extent controlled by business. Therefore, the application of management tools was a logical consequence of the governance system (Rhoades & Sporn 2002).

In case of the European HEIs, the adaptation of managerial tools accompanying quality management came (albeit hesitantly) along with the Bologna Process and the consequent establishment of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Sursock 2015). With the exception of UK institutions, which showed a similar attitude towards market based management as their US counterparts, the European Universities were structurally unprepared for application of the

abovementioned management tools. This was due the fact that the European HEIs were funded by the nation states, and governed and managed by collegial bodies (Neave, 2002) with limited accountability (Kwiek, 2015). Hence, the external evaluation of quality, combined with the necessity to conduct strategic planning and reengineering activities aimed at improvement of accountability, was difficult to accept by the Academia.

The processes of QA include various methods of evaluation, defining targets and measurement tools and most importantly benchmarks. A typical QA process includes the internal elements such as the definition of targets and measures, the processes and units involved as well as the commitment to external inspection and the assessment and analysis of its outcomes. The process of external quality assessment is usually initiated by a report delivered by the institution itself and addresses issues interesting to the external evaluating body - a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). It is then conducted by the QAA and includes the analysis of a self-evaluation report, on-site visits and final report usually including recommendations as to improvements and changes required in order to fulfil specific targets or requirements.

## 6. The QA and internationalization – mutual evolution and interdependence

We already mentioned, that as an overreaching process or management concept, internationalization touches every aspect of HEI functioning and so does the QA. Hence there are interactions of these phenomena observed in the area of HEI governance, competitive position and cooperation with external partners. The mutual evolution of internationalization and QA can best be followed showing the development of three dimensions: the institutional (HEI management and governance), the systemic (legal regulatory framework) and market (development of accreditations and the development of rankings). Each of these three reflects a facet of tools used and actions undertaken.

In terms of management and governance, major trend observed over the last three decades was deregulation, and enhancing of institutional autonomy. In return, HEIs became accountable to society (and international institutions) for their results. The underlying assumption was that it would improve their performance and that autonomous HEIs would better control and steer their outcomes (Kwiek, 2015). In aid of this, was also New Public Management (NPM) a set of public sector reforms carried out from the eighties across most OECD countries involving 'the attempt to implement management ideas from business and private sector into the public services' (Alonso et al. 2015; Greenaway and

Haynes 2003). And so, the legislative reforms in many countries turned the national laws of HE into 'framework laws', i.e. providing general instructions or guidelines for HEIs that leave significant leeway to make their own choices (Billing 2004). This all strengthened the institutional leadership and resulted in change of its style. Traditional notions of collegiality and consensus-based decision-making have increasingly come under pressure, making room for 'business-like' management and the 'professionalization' of administrative structures (Boer & File 2009; Kwiek 2015). In consequence of the above, the HEIs started to introduce and apply (albeit sometimes hesitantly) managerial instruments, adapted from business models (Rhoades & Sporn 2002). On the top of this came the opening to the external world and the acceptance of global competition.

As consequence of the above, the scope of information requirements in the process of QA, increased significantly and so did the popularity of internationally acknowledged Audits and Accreditations among the HEIs (Jarvis, 2014). Reporting and data management became increasingly important for the management of HEI. Along with the establishment of unified (and correspondingly complex) qualification frameworks (QF), standards of data collection and reporting and even the risk management, the HEIs have to develop dedicated, internationally feasible administrative systems and procedures of permanent data collection (Jarvis 2014).

The legal and regulatory framework shaping mutually Internationalisation and QA, can be best presented in European context. Along with the establishment of EHEA and in course of consequent legislative actions, mutual recognition, convergence of educational systems and numerous incentives for international cooperation followed, richly funded by the EU. Hence, the European internationalization, is sometimes called Europeisation (Teichler 2004). Albeit sometimes claimed to be largely cooperative internally, it still acknowledges global market pressures and demographic trends that increase the global competitiveness in HE, which is clearly manifested in the Bologna Declaration and the consequent Communiqués (de Wit 2015). A clear manifestation of convergence in terms of QA is the establishment of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in 2005 and then in 2015.

The contemporary, worldwide tendency in HE (even in Europe), is to acknowledge the relative importance (relative to state funding) of tuition fees for the overall university. International students are considered as a viable source of tuition fees. For these funds HEIs must compete globally, as the market of

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HE grows not only in terms of students but also in terms of providers. Hence the promotion and marketing activities are designed internationally (Altbach 2015c), and so must the quality. HEIs must present their quality worldwide and more importantly - prove it. Usually, the most reliable source of information is an independent, external expert. In the context of HEIs the internationally acknowledged Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs) are regarded as such experts.

International scope of QA processes is of importance in case of admitting foreign students, where the credentials of candidates from different educational systems and cultural backgrounds require verification. Consequently, HEIs must address the risks connected with the quality of teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms. Moreover, as internationalization is often connected with the application of modern methods of learning such as massive open online courses, small private online courses, or blended and distance learning (Kaplan & Haenlein 2016), a wide range of internal QA tools, must deal with quality concerns they are rising. Based in the managerial tradition of TQM, methods such as teambuilding, brainstorming, empowerment, monitoring, cost calculation etc., can diminish or hedge those risks occurring, and so does the development of a quality culture (Houston 2007).

Cooperation with international partners is another area where QA in terms of proof of quality and certification is highly desirable. The development of internationalized curricula either in the form of joint degrees or just as a consequence of student exchange semesters built into the curriculum, requires convergence of learning programs and outcomes. And to create a joint program, with an institution which is well ranked or whose quality is accredited, is often a matter of strategic importance for the brand building of a HEI Internationalization and Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

## 7. The international university rankings and Quality Assurance

Rising commercial and international trends in HE, the growing number of internationally studying young people and the increasing monetary value of education (Pucciarelli & Kaplan 2016) called for comparable and reliable, but most importantly – comprehensive –information. This is how the educational rankings emerged.

Interestingly, in course of the last 20 years, rankings have developed from simple league tables of elite universities (Hazelkorn 2011) to international search engines for the students but also to benchmarks for government funding and even to determinants of cooperation for the HEIs themselves. Once intended as

comparison tool to facilitate consumer decision making, they turned into widely acknowledged and accepted institution of HEI stratification. Thus they also became an element of quality determination.

Despite criticism (Benítez 2019; Hazelkorn 2011; Hazelkorn 2017; Knight 2012) and objections as to their capability to represent the real quality of research and education (Pietrucha 2018), the number and diversity of academic rankings is growing constantly. Simple weight-and-sum approach, despite spurious precision (rankings overestimate small differences in the total score), weight discrepancies, indicator redundancy, an inter-system discrepancy, negligence of indicator scores, and an inconsistency between changes in ranking and overall scores (ibid), are comprehensive enough to students, parents, governments and other HE stakeholders.

Rankings shape the contemporary, neo-liberal HE market (Marginson 2007b) setting standards and requirements as they become benchmarks for scientific endeavor and increasingly also educational excellence (Marginson & van der Wende 2016). The performance indicators used by the rankings are becoming Key Performance Indicators chosen by the managers of universities worldwide.

Whether or not can rankings be treated as QA tools, is disputable. On the one hand they are in many points consistent with the QA (Dill & Soo 2005), and the empirical evidence shows that rankings are often used in this way. On the other hand it is stated, that rankings should not be treated as QA tools because of their systemic incapability to handle the diversity of aims and missions (Billing 2004).

The usefulness of ranking systems for both academic and research performance and quality improvement was evaluated by Vernon, Balas and Momani in their systematic review of publicly available university ranking systems(Vernon, et al., 2018). According to the findings of their study, valid measures of academic quality are not universally standardized. Only eight of thirteen analyzed ranking systems included indicators to measure academic quality (peer reputation, faculty achievement, student-to-faculty ratios, and the number of awarded doctorates).

Many ranking systems are marketed either for academic choice/comparison, yet, these indicators do not sufficiently reflect the teaching and learning environments of students. E.g.: measures such as the number of Nobel Prize winners could be considered "luxury" indicators, applicable to elite universities but completely invalid for most other universities.

There are also issues of time consistency of rankings (U-Multirank), innovation culture (patents or intellectual property disclosures), manipulation with publication/patent to increase rankings without actually increasing

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contribution to science, focus on bibliometric sources biased towards English language journals and research expenditure2.

Before we consider rankings as quality tool, there is a need for improvement in ranking methodologies.

## 8. Discussions and Conclusions

Summing up, there is an agreement that substantial changes have taken place in Europe since the 1980s as far as steering national higher education institutions and the administration of the individual higher education institutions are concerned (Teichler, 2004). Given the context in terms of general trends in HEI governance (NPM) and regional development (e.g. Bologna, Europeisation), along with the increase of international competition and regional cooperation there is a clear evidence that internationalization and QA, as mutually dependent, comprehensive concepts in HEI management must be treated simultaneously as important issues shaping both institutional and national policies. The article contributes to the holistic, interdisciplinary steering approach in HE management. By showing parallel development of quality assurance and internationalization of Higher education it highlights mutual interdependence, which is often forgotten in the procedural specialization of various HE management areas.

In order to compete internationally, HEIs must display and publish the value of their services on a global marketplace. At the same time, in order to cooperate internationally, the HEIs must prove to each other the quality of their research and organizational feasibility. This requires a common language, which is delivered by QA in terms of standards that allow for global comparisons.

It should be mentioned however, that despite regional attempts to synchronize and converge the HE systems in Europe, due to still varying political and economic contexts, the scope and timing of adoption of managerial tools for QA and internationalization by European HEIs differs. There are also profound critics to the managerial approach in HEI governance and thus also to the managerial methods and tools used to measure the quality of universities raised by part of academia (Geppert, 2017).

What we have seen is the increasing complexity and interconnection of internationalization and QA both in terms of HEIs and the external institutions

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2 Research expenditure is often used an indicator of the strength and quality of an institution's research capabilities. However, no correlation has been found between more research expenditure and better quality research.

dealing with them. Taken the assumptions for future development it will only become more complex. The relationship between internationalization and QA is causal and mutual. As both concepts are comprehensive (Hudzik 2014; de Wit & Knight, 1999), the internationalization impacts QA in numerous aspects. We have outlined the ones with most obvious and profound impact; the matters of management at HEIs (recruitment and admission of foreign students, international cooperation and mobility, and joint programs), issues of convergence for the external QA institutions (processes, guidelines, and methods), and finally the appearance of institutions whose main goal is the international HE "market analysis".

In all those areas, the development of internationalization enhanced the scope of activity of the institution and increased the complexity of methods and processes connected with QA. Starting with the introduction of managerial methods of QA at HEIs, through shaping their information policy and data gathering, up to brand building and development of marketing concepts. With internationalization, the scope of activities usually associated with external QA widened beyond the traditional audit, accreditation, and assessment of programs or HEIs to embrace also global benchmarking, market positioning, and consulting services.

We are facing a development of a new, "derivative" market, dedicated to the provision and enhancing of quality on international scale. Exporting QA services has become an aspiration for many European governments. Hence, the systems and institutions dealing with QA are likely to converge further and develop with the observance of international developments and global trends, of which the European Association for Quality Assurance in HE (ENQA) is a good example. But the economic developments shift the weight of the economy from previous protagonists (Western Europe, and North America) into new directions (East Asia). According to Eaton (Eaton 2015) these result in emerging dilemmas including development of regional structures, while retaining national structures, and continued debate on the nature, role, and future shape of QA in international HE.

Since HE has a crucial role in shaping the future of our societies, maintaining the quality of HE is essential for our future. Therefore, the increasing complexity resulting from the mutual evolution of QA and the internationalization of HEIs has to be addressed and managed effectively.

It should be a subject of concern and activities on the part of HEIs authorities, it should be included in their university development strategies as one of the key goals.

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The risks related to internationalization in general, as well as in the context of its connection with the need to ensure the quality of education at HE, presented in the study indicate the need for further in-depth research on these issues. Competition between universities in seeking foreign students, building recognition and prestige as well as competitive position on the domestic and international market, competition in national and international HEIs rankings are issues of key importance for modern universities, as well as an interesting subject of research.

There is also a need for credible, international quality assurance both in research and education worldwide. For HEIs- to evaluate and improve not only their performance but also their societal value. For the students –to receive guidance and information on where to study. For the researchers - to accurately evaluate research perspectives and outcomes.

In international QA, we are balancing between the quality and quantity, on the one hand trying to evaluate research performance and outcomes in a standardized way, to meet standardized criteria. On the other trying to compare unequal worlds of peripheral and elite universities in different national education systems.

International HE rankings are for commercial use. They are overemphasizing research and elite universities. Therefore their value as QA tool should not be overstated. Clearly, to maintain the academic values and foster quality education, the governments and international organizations should be driving towards more sophisticated methodologies, to focus on student experience, learning gain and added value, engagement and "third mission", sustainability, etc.

But the world is changing and the technological advances open new opportunities. The open-access data combined with social networking has the potential to transform the approach the assessment and interpretation of HE quality and performance in the future – placing such information in the hands of students and other stakeholders, and beyond the reach of the academy and governments. Will it be the new way to completely international knowledge society?

Or maybe we are moving into even more exclusive and elitist knowledge regime with data ownership becoming topical and controversial subject as (commercial) organizations are busily monetizing the data they have acquired. As evident in other global sectors, consolidation is becoming evident with companies such as Reuters and Elsevier moving from publishing to monetized data, and Microsoft and LinkedIn moving into rankings (Hazelkorn & Gibson 2016; Hazelkorn 2017).

How to manage the quality and internationalization of HEIs under such conditions? Will there still be a need for internationalization and QA?

This important question should be of concern to university authorities, as well as to further in-depth research by scientists dealing with the higher education sector on a local and global scale.

**Abstract**

Internationalization is an inevitable phenomenon among all contemporary higher education institutions (HEIs) in a globalizing world. It is the driving force for development and progress. In course of the last 30 years, it became an inevitable element of HE management. However, it carries along a number of risks, pitfalls, and organizational challenges. To hedge those, quality assurance (QA) is called to the stage. HEIs therefore need not only to search for chances but also to increase the advancement of methods to safeguard the quality of education and research. It is for this reason that a discussion on the mutual evolution and impact of internationalization and QA is required, and this is the aim of this article to combine the issues dialectically. There are tools and institutions within the internationally and nationally developed QA concepts that have the potential and aim to secure the benefits of internationalization.

**Keywords:** *internationalization, higher education management, quality assurance, rankings*.

**JEL:** M160, I23, F53, F55

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