MARKUS LAITINEN

EMBEDDING INTERNATIONALISATION:

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CROSS-CUTTING TASKS

Humboldt Ferngespräche – Discussion Paper No. 10 – August 2016
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Summary
The history of internationalisation can be structured into six eras: the “prehistoric era 1”, the “prehistoric era 2”, the “student mobility era”, the “era of international degree seeking students”, the “era of accelerated broadening of the agenda” and the “embedded era”. In the current “embedded era” mainstreamed internationalisation is getting more and more important. This means that the marginalisation of internationalisation is ending and the responsibility is spread beyond International Offices. In fact, internationalisation is now supposed to permeate all aspects of university life and concern everybody at the university. Mainstreamed internationalisation at the University of Helsinki means that there is no distinct international strategy but yet an overall strategy with a strong emphasis on internationalisation. Also, there is no committee for internationalisation but it finds itself on the agenda of all university-level committees and there is an International Advisory Board as well. Furthermore, there is no International Office, however, there are internationalisation specialists all throughout the administration. There are co-ordination mechanisms which support internationalisation, shared tools like IT systems and a university-wide language policy. In the future the challenges of an increasing global demand for higher education and research as well as increasing costs and lack of public funding have to be faced. The question remains whether multinational universities will emerge during times like this.

The text is based on the “Humboldt Ferngespräche” lecture held at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on 13 June 2016.
I have been known to speak about comprehensive “mainstream internationalisation”, sometimes what people refer to as deep internationalisation. But I prefer to call it embedded internationalisation. The terms are really interchangeable so there is no great difference. First of all, I would like to tell you two stories.

You may know that Finland is doing very well in the so-called PISA studies, where school learning outcomes are measured globally. This is an initiative by OECD, and Finland used to be at the top. We have slipped back slightly, but only because we don’t want the rest of the world to feel bad. You may know those results - but what you may not know is, that also according to OECD statistics, Finland has among the least days of school per year, and also among the least hours of school per week. Why am I mentioning this to you now? It’s because sometimes the obvious is not the best answer - sometimes less can be more.

The second anecdote is that before I became elected as the Vice President of EAIE, my university – the University of Helsinki – won an award from EAIE in 2013, in Istanbul: an award for “Innovation in Internationalisation”, and actually that award was solely based on the concept of “embedded internationalisation”. I was very privileged and proud to receive the award, and what do you normally receive when you win an award? You receive a trophy. But in an embedded setting, if internationalisation is everywhere: Where does this trophy
then belong? Where should I have placed it? Since in our University there is no one particular place where internationalisation should reside, therefore I decided to take it on a tour throughout the university. I used my trusted smart phone and took pictures of the award throughout the university’s four campuses in Helsinki and put together a slide show. In my opinion that was a better reflection of what should be the case. Indeed I do believe that internationalisation belongs anywhere and everywhere, and with everyone at the institution.

A couple of disclaimers: This breakfast talk is based on personal experiences but also professional experiences at the University of Helsinki and beyond, so this is not research-based, it’s not research driven, but my interpretation of the existing reality at my university and beyond. Of course, that also means that most of my ideas come from a Finnish setting, but I do believe that they have a more European and indeed a global applicability to them. I also come from a research-based university; the University of Helsinki is pretty much like Humboldt. My presentation will be divided into two separate sections. One will be maybe more historically, philosophically, conceptually driven and the other more practical in nature.

**A HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONALISATION**

What is higher education internationalisation? What constitutes higher education internationalisation? You may know a short history of time from some other contexts. Stephen Hawking of course, I am shamelessly piggybacking on this and him, since this is the historical, philosophical, contextual part of my talk. I think that the internationalisation of higher education has come through various stages. The first one I call the “prehistoric era part 1”. That, to me, started with the establishment of the first universities in Europe, in Bologna, Sorbonne and beyond, and went on until the latter half of the 19th century. Of course, everything you did then was international. People roamed around Europe and went to Bologna and Sorbonne from all over the world, even from Finland. So internationalisation was at the heart of universities and higher education at that time. But it was not
recorded, it was not organised, you did not have databases to track it and you didn’t have airplanes which makes it, I think, even more remarkable.

We come to the “pre-historic era part 2”. Little over one hundred years ago, the universities in Europe, I believe, became inward looking and served more the purposes of the nation states that also emerged at that time. In a way, we still feel the shackles of this today; many of our activities and many of our actions are driven by the fact that higher education universities are a part of the society where they reside. Universities during this era could be called “nation state” or “national projects”.

At this point internationalisation was limited and only towards the end of the 1980s you could see international offices really emerge at universities. That of course was related to the next era, which is “student mobility”. Shortly after I started working at the university; I was hired by the University of Helsinki first in 1991, Finland became part of Erasmus that same year. Student mobility, first the outgoing mobility, grew very rapidly and later on we started seeing a more balanced exchange. At that time you could put an equation mark between the concepts of internationalisation and student mobility. Not much else was discussed in my view. And in our case, it was also connected to courses now also being offered in English and those catered for the needs of the incoming exchange students. Finnish is quite an obscure language, as you may know; not too many people outside our borders speak it. In a way it was a survival strategy for us. That era also saw the expansion of international offices. In the beginning they were one or two person offices and because of the increase in volume of mobility more people were hired for internationalisation.

The next phase, or the next era I would call the “international degree-seeking students’ era”. This was a departure from student mobility, although we are still talking about students and we are still talking about international mobility. Closer to the turn of the millennium, we began to see in Finland and in many other places that the strategic importance of international degree-seeking students increased.
And in our case around 2005-2007, fully English-taught masters’ pro-
grammes and doctoral programmes were introduced. You were also
able to notice that international offices at various universities across
Europe were starting to become stretched. They were not able to in-
crease their manpower, they were not able to increase their staffing to
the extent maybe needed.

This development is further highlighted with the next era, which
I call the “accelerated broadening of the agenda” for the international-
isation of higher education. To me this has started quite recently, less
than ten years ago, but it is truly distinct from the degree seekers. In
the past we had student mobility, then came degree-seeking students
and the development of English-taught courses, but the agenda for
internationalisation has since broadened. You notice more and more
institutions talking about the recruitment of international academic
staff, non-citizens, joint degrees. Although those were happening a
bit earlier there is a special emphasis on them now - transnational ed-
ucation, branch campuses, fees (Finland is introducing fees next year
for non-EU students), rankings, strategic partnerships, global social
responsibility, and the list goes on.

This explosion of topics poses the question of whether interna-
tional offices at universities can actually cope with such diversity of
issues. Another anecdote: we had a delegation from Germany at our
university last week, organised by HRK, the German Rectors’ Con-
ference, and it consisted of rectors and vice rectors. I put a question
to them initially, at the start of my presentation, asking if they would
get an email concerning internationalisation would their first instinct
be to send it to the international office, or to the office of the subject
matter or deal with it themselves. I believe that in many cases, interna-
tional offices have become, either willingly or unwillingly, too much of
a dumping ground for everything that could be labelled international.
This is, of course, not sustainable. That simply doesn’t work in the
long run, especially if you believe like myself that the broadening of
the agenda is a current reality.
The final part, the final era is also a bridge to the second section of my presentation. It can be called the “mainstream” or “embedded era”, and I believe that’s upon us right now. If you look at the institutions which specifically claim that they practice embedded internationalisation or mainstream internationalisation, there are still not that many. But if you talk to international offices and officers and even rectors and vice rectors of institutions, you realize that the reality of the broadening of the agenda is about to hit them or has hit them already. This requires the institutions to adopt more holistic approaches to internationalisation. I think this is also a stage where internationalisation becomes truly important for higher education and not only something that every vice rector or rector puts in his opening speech of the academic year, saying “oh, we are international and internationalisation is very important etc.”. But if one goes the embedded mainstreamed way, I believe that this sort of rhetorical emptiness must come to an end and universities must really start adopting embedded or mainstream internationalisation practices.

The dictionary definition of the English word “to embed” is “to place something firmly within something else”, and that’s why I actually prefer the term “embedding” – because it suggests that internationalisation is placed firmly in the universities’ other activities.

The competition for best brains, be that students or researchers, is increasing, and this further highlights the importance of being strategic about internationalisation. I am sorry for anybody working in an international office, but I believe that the issues we have now are still becoming more and more important and too complicated just to be left to the international office. I’m not saying that the international offices and officers should be disbanded, or that we no longer need internationalisation experts. But I am suggesting that the offices and officers cannot be allowed to be the sole custodians of internationalisation practices at the universities. Therefore, I do believe that embedding of institutionalisation is called for.
WHAT IS “MAINSTREAMED INTERNATIONALISATION”?
Moving onto the second part, what is “mainstreamed” or “embedded internationalisation” in practice? Again, it is the fact that responsibility for internationalisation extends much beyond the traditional international offices. It also suggests a demarginalisation of internationalisation within institutions and indeed that internationalisation permeates and is embedded in everything at the university. So, if it has to do with teaching, if it has to do with research, it also has to do with engagement or even support services. I think that is vital, because we often overlook the fact that, in a way, the first responders, people who meet international visitors and new professors, are support staff - janitors, people at the receptions and such. So if they are not on board for internationalisation, you lose the opportunity to make a good first impression, and that’s why I want to underscore the importance of also internationalising your support services.

MAINSTREAMED INTERNATIONALISATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
Everybody needs to be involved in internationalisation. A few highlights from my own university: The University of Helsinki doesn’t have an internationalisation strategy. It hasn’t had a paper document or any other kind of document since 2006, which would have been labelled “international this or that”. Yet, our main strategy is almost thoroughly international. So, we do not have a separate document but our strategy is embedded with internationalisation. In our current strategy for the years 2017 to 2020, which was approved earlier this year, we set ourselves targets, aims and goals for international activities. It includes international strategic partnerships, as well as mobility and the recruitment of academic staff. We actually aim to increase the share of our non-Finnish staff to 30% by 2020, currently we are at around 22-23%. That would mean that close to every third person on our staff would be a non-Finn. That has huge consequences of course – language policy is one of my favourite topics as well. We don’t have a committee for internationalisation, we haven’t had this for a number
of years. We tried and tried and tried, but we were not able to get it to work. It was basically a discussion club - a very good-natured discussion club where the participants represented themselves and their own views and experiences. As an institution this didn’t lead us anywhere. However, we do have other university-wide committees at my university; we have a committee for research, we have a committee for education, we have a committee for engagement, or societal interaction as we call it, and all of these, of course, have internationalisation on their agenda. For example, when we introduced the fees – we are still in the process of introducing fees for non-EU students - the committee that oversaw the development of these fees was the education committee, it was not an international committee because it concerned international students and international fees, but a committee for education because it is related to our education mission.

At the University of Helsinki the engagement committee or the societal interaction committee is responsible for engagement or as I mentioned global social responsibility, in a way our solidarity work. We also have what we call an International Advisory Board, this is an international body that advises the university on issues of strategic importance. But there is a distinction: It doesn’t give advice on internationalisation as such, or internationalisation only. It has given us advice on fundraising (both domestic and international), it has given us advice on the reform of doctoral education, and it has given us advice on our educational reform we recently planned. The International Advisory Board has played a huge role in this, and you will be happy to know it’s currently chaired by a German, a director general from Volkswagen Stiftung, Wilhelm Krull. This body has been tremendously important to us because our board regular, the highest decision-making body at the university operates in Finnish only, so they cannot have that international experience or international members among them.

We don’t have an international office, so you may start asking yourself: “Who the heck is that guy then, if they don’t have an international office?” And indeed, that’s a valid point and a valid question.
Who am I? What is my role at the university? Sometimes I have trouble falling asleep myself, but if you put it very simplistically, I am just like any other director of internationalisation except I don’t have staff, management and budgeting responsibilities. But other features at our university are important too; we do have, across our administration and across our organisation, internationalisation specialists. They just don’t form a single office. For instance, in 2007 we established a team which supports incoming international staff members within our Human Resources function.

You will remember that I mentioned that already more than 20% of our academic staff are non-Finns, and it’s rather curious that for decades you would have an international office that served students but there was no support for researchers – nothing of the same scale or even close, and yet these are the people who are crucial to our institutional success. We saw the error of our ways and established this service, and again, it is not part of the international office; it’s part of the HR department. When I started my university career, our Academic Affairs were really domestically oriented. We looked at all kinds of rules and regulations that were related to the Finnish higher education system. Of course this has since then changed, partly because we recruited some people and embedded them within our academic affairs. Over the years they have been able to, and I use this word very hesitatingly, contaminate their surroundings with internationalisation and today you wouldn’t believe how internationalised academic affairs really are – I don’t know if they realise it themselves either.

There is definitely an increased commitment to internationalisation across our administration. I would not say that we are there yet – I’m not sure if we are ever going to be there. I think it is an on-going process and it also has a lot to do with how the world is changing and how the agenda for internationalisation keeps changing. But the commitment is definitely there, as well as an understanding after 12 or 13 years of this practice that there is no dumping ground at our university where all things that are international can be pushed. No – that simply cannot be.
My role also has to do with coordination, because it is not enough to have all the pieces of the puzzle in place. You need someone who sees the whole picture, and oversees the whole; that is part of my duty. To put it in very practical terms: if the rector of the University of Helsinki receives the ambassador of Germany next week and the rector wants to know how we are collaborating with Germany to support that discussion, he will not go to the student services, to the HR department, to Communications, or here there and everywhere. No, he comes to me and asks. It’s my job to provide that coordination – that coherence of information, and also partly the development of projects that extend beyond a single office. We have a three-person team at my university which is called International Affairs and it has the role of glue or oil, I’m not sure which is more suitable.

We also have joint tools. For instance, student mobility remains the cornerstone of internationalisation for our university – we still have mobility targets, we still monitor student mobility and teaching staff mobility very closely. Because this is so crucial, we have developed a tool, an IT tool – a database system used throughout the university for both sending and receiving students. These kinds of things, especially in the embedded approach, are very much needed. I mentioned the language policy already; we have a second edition of our language policy, which speaks very highly of what you would call a parallel peaceful coexistence of languages. We are officially bilingual in Finnish and Swedish, but of course the use of English for various reasons has grown tremendously and that is why we feel we need a coherent and operational language policy, which we have in place. My unit, International Affairs, was again responsible for the coordination work that went towards the writing of this policy.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?
I think that global demand is only going to grow. Currently there are 4.5 million students mobile in the world, and this is projected to grow until 2025, maybe to 12 million. There is an increasing cost for higher education and research in the world, and apparently a lack of public
funding or a lack of political will to use this public funding for higher education. I wonder if these trends will somehow result in the emergence of truly and fully international universities – not ones that do student mobility and recruit staff and do research collaborations – but maybe even multinational universities. This could take place through mergers and acquisitions or strategic alliances.

I love analogies, and if you look at current car manufacturers, you have Volkswagen and you have Seat. They use parts in many cases interchangeably, even though we are talking about different car brands. Or if you look at airlines: I fly mostly with Finnair, the Finnish airline. I took a Finnair plane - which is actually not owned by Finnair; it is leased by an international company, but it’s operated by Finnair. On the way back I am flying with Air Berlin. You see the Star Alliance and the One World alliance, and I wonder if that is also going to be happening with universities. The advantages, I think, are in a way obvious. You could have all kinds of synergies, you could have complementarity, you could have savings, and you could have a stronger brand. I think universities are stuck in an era still by and large which was the case for airlines back in the day, When Finnair flew Finnair flights and Lufthansa flew Lufthansa flights. But I do wonder if indeed we are going to go this multinational way. Since nowadays Harvard is still Harvard, it is based in the United States, LMU is based in Munich, Helsinki is based in Helsinki. We have our strategic alliances and we have our networks, but let me predict that in 25 years we will already see quite a different world in this respect.

I am always careful to say that I am not suggesting that the model Helsinki has adopted is the best one. Actually, to tell you the truth, in a way we stumbled upon it. It was more of a by-product of a larger reform. It came about not by design, but we have since then, over the last thirteen years, seen the benefits of this approach. Because, among other things, we are able to add staff working towards internationalisation without increasing staff – I mentioned the contamination.

One of the most difficult questions that I get these days is “how many people do you have working for internationalisation?” An
international office director at another university might have a different answer but I cannot really answer it, because some people are doing 100%, others are doing 10%, some anywhere in between, and I think that’s the way it ought to be. But I think that this is not a one-size-fits-all type of approach. Whatever approach you choose for your internationalisation efforts, it has to be based on your own strategy and it has to be based on the mission of the institution. For a research-led university that aims to be even better in the future, I believe embedded is the way to go.
QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Wolfgang Deicke, Co-ordinator of the bologna.lab, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin:

My initial question: How do you achieve decentralisation of internationalisation? What are the tools that you use to contaminate departments and other offices? You talk very much about the central administration, but what about the faculty? Do you use recruitment policy for key roles? Did you identify key roles where international background and knowledge are a prerequisite? Do you offer staff training? What’s the trick behind making an accident work so brilliantly?

Markus Laitinen:

In another presentation that I have on this topic, I list success factors and challenges that go towards it. One of the items on this is where I say that in my experience, central administration (maybe because I work in central administration) is much easier than faculties, faculties are much easier than departments, departments are much easier than at least some academics. But indeed, we have had most of the success at central administration level. I should also maybe point out that the University of Helsinki is currently facing tremendous budget cuts. We expect to have our core budget hit by 20% by 2020, and that has led to the reorganisation of the whole of our administration. After this summer we will be a single service structure - the faculties and departments will no longer have their own administration. And in some ways, I think this will help spread internationalisation.

I also said that we are by no means complete: I actually believe that we are at the end of the beginning after 12 years. But we have been organic about it. We stumbled upon the whole concept as a result of an administrative reform, which was not designed with internationalisation as the central concept. Since then, we have utilised opportunities that arose which is also part of my role at the university, to spot these opportunities and then take advantage of them. The establishment of the International Staff Services, for instance, was a result of such an opportunity. We have some academic units which were highly
internationalised and had up to 50% of their faculty from outside of Finland, and they were really frustrated because they had to reinvent the wheel the whole time. During that time it started to make sense to establish a centralised service, which we did. There are other examples of this. But we also need to pay more and more attention to hiring practices. If we even talk about cafeteria workers or janitors, whoever, language is one thing; they need to have at least a basic level of service English. But also people within finance departments, HR, or wherever need to be more comfortable with using English. One part is recruitment, the other part is offering in-service training. Of course, the problem with in-service training for internationalisation, language or intercultural awareness is that sometimes the people who most need it are not interested in getting it. Therefore, leadership matters as well.

‘Dominique Le Cerf, Embassy of Chile in Germany:
I am interested in knowing what are the measures of success or impact of such a disseminated strategy, since it’s not centralising one particular organism inside the university. How do you measure success?

Markus Laitinen:
There are of course different kinds of impact and they are measured slightly differently. We go by the strategy, and whether we accomplish the goals that we set ourselves in the strategy. I mentioned the key performance indicator of 30% international staff by 2020, so that’s quite easy to measure. We have target numbers for student mobility, we have target numbers for international degree-seeking students, and we now of course, with the introduction of fees, have some financial goals for the institution, to increase the number of international co-authored publications and double the amount of funding from abroad. Thus, there are all kinds of key performance indicators and quantitative goals that you can measure yourself against. But as to the sort of service function, whether we are able to serve the institution so that it can actually get to these goals is perhaps a bit trickier, you need some more qualitative work.
Michael Knoll, Director of the office of Gemeinnützige Hertie-Stiftung in Berlin:
Is it possible to think about the end of internationalisation of universities because it’s getting too expensive, especially for smaller universities?

Markus Laitinen:
No. And I’m not just saying that because I’m a practitioner and that would mean I would no longer have a job. I really believe that that’s the case, because internationalisation is not a goal in itself; it’s a means to a goal or actually a set of goals. If you can afford not to want to improve the quality of your research, not to get the diversity for your educational programmes, then and only then could you imagine having an end to internationalisation. Nothing in the current trends from the short to medium term suggests to me that this would be the case. I think that it would be really short sighted for an institution to look at the external extra costs that internationalisation comes with and use that as an excuse to end it.
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