

THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE ACADEMIC TRAINING IN REAL ESTATE AND FACILITY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *Internationalisation of higher education has been part of the modern world development for several decades. Every country and higher education institution develops and implements its own internationalisation strategy taking into account the specific context of its existence – regional and social specifics, national stereotype, culture and traditions, mission. Working on the improvement of the internationalisation of a particular university, the authors set out to examine how internationalising a university entity – a department – can affect the whole university and contribute to its successful functioning on a global level, as well as to coping with challenges that every university is faced with. The University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in Bulgaria has an economic profile and a history of one hundred years which means that its international relations and cooperation have been through periods of different political regimes and hence through different influences providing experience that can be used to facilitate university management and public authorities in the efforts to internationalise effectively and impactfully.*

Key words: internationalisation; higher education; internationalisation of higher education; academic training; real estate and facility management

Introduction

In the modern context of globalisation, internationalisation as its manifestation in the field of higher education reflects in all activities of a university as a higher education institution (HEI) – a view shared by a number of scholars (Ellingboe, 1998; Altbach, 2002; Bartell, 2003; Knight, 2004; De Wit, 2011; Cantu, 2013).

In order to be competitive and respond to the socio-economic challenges in the global community, a country, a university, a programme needs to develop relevant policies and implement them in everyday academic practice.

Historically, the internationalisation of higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is only possible after nations and national self-awareness are formed. Nations are the product of modernising societies and it is not correct to speak of internationalisation in ancient times regardless of the fact that there were educational institutions and students of different ethnic origin. At the same time, the centuries-old history of higher education inevitably influences the directions of its internationalisation today. In this particular case, a specific issue is considered – the academic training in real estate and facility management. It will be demonstrated that this training cannot be considered outside the context of the global issues in the system of higher education. What is more, the investigated process is affected by a complex set of social, cultural and historical factors.

Internationalisation is a matter of approach, educational profile, national and regional stereotype.

Hence an exhaustive and insightful analysis of its nature and development can result in meaningful measures that would contribute to an enhanced and thorough internationalising process. This is the rationale behind the authors' research, while the focus on the training in real estate and facility management is due to their narrower professional interest and academic expertise.

Internationalisation in the modern socio-economic and educational context

Over the last several decades, internationalisation of higher education gained popularity and became a researchers' focus due to the increased interest of all stakeholders and with relation to facilitated transborder communication, as well as movement of people and goods. Internationalisation can be commonly defined as "the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment" (Ellingboe, 1998, p. 199), "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, p. 11), "the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions - and even individuals - to cope with the global academic environment", (Altbach and Knight, 2007, p. 290), "a response to diversity and multiculturalism

in an effort to create global competencies” (Cantu, 2013, p. 1). This dynamic process and vision goes through different phases and is shaped by particular environments, circumstances and leadership. The variety in the approaches to it implemented by governments and HEIs are based on academic experts’ policy-making and discretion in terms of the emphasis on certain values, policies, elements of the educational system and its management.

While doing research on the internationalisation process in the University of Minnesota, Ellingboe (1998) identifies and enumerates five integral components of the process: college leadership; faculty involvement in international academic activity; study abroad programmes that students can afford and HEIs can transfer; integration of students and faculty into campus life; and international co-curricular centres. Bartell (2003) proposes a wider set comprising eight elements:

- “(1) international student participation;
 - (2) curriculum change;
 - (3) international partnerships;
 - (4) mobilizing financial, human and technological resources for internationalization;
 - (5) university-private sector partnerships;
 - (6) faculty contributions to internationalization;
 - (7) contribution of research to internationalization;
 - (8) contribution of university internationalization development projects to internationalization”
- (Bartell, 2003, p. 58)

It is noteworthy that Bartell establishes four phases of internationalisation based on research of the process in the USA: a domestic focus aimed at achieving global competitiveness of local universities; a study-abroad wave involving Americans choosing to study abroad, and the foundation of research centres encouraging bilateral cooperation; international, usually bilateral, cooperation in all academic activities; and global partnership meaning multinational teams, distance learning and multilateral participation.

Taking into account the processes of globalisation, scientific advance, social and demographic developments, and economic trends countries, international alliances and universities started developing strategies and implementing policies for internationalisation over the last three decades (De Wit, 2011; Altbach and Knight, 2007). A negative impact on the process is observed by these researchers as well and it is the commercialisation of education and the view that it brings profit and is

traded like all other goods on the market. One more facet of internationalisation is revealed by Cameron (1984) who notes the need for adaptation of universities. This adaptation process means innovation and organisational change, the latter depending on the organisation’s culture and involving internal changes with regard to both internal and external environments.

For the countries in Europe and the member-states of the European Union in particular, the key documents influencing local authorities and institutions in decision-making are the Bologna Declaration (1999) and the Lisbon Strategy (2000) aimed at the building of a Europe of Knowledge functioning in a knowledge-based economy and society.

The internationalisation of the academic training in real estate and facility management

Following the world and institutional trends related to internationalisation and being committed to the implementation of novelties ensuring high-quality training, the University of National and World Economy developed its Internationalisation Strategy 2020-2025 (UNWE Internationalisation Strategy 2020-2025, 2020). Since the university is the largest economic university in South-Eastern Europe, it is committed to becoming a recognized leader among the universities of the same profile. To achieve this objective, it sets the following strategic goals:

- fostering the internationalisation processes in both education and research (Strategic goals 1 and 2) – they involve increased mobility of students, faculty and researchers, update of programmes; participation in international academic and research networks and projects, attraction of a growing number of foreign doctoral students and researchers;
- improving the institutional ecosystem of internationalisation (Strategic goal 3) by enhancing administrative capacity, institutional infrastructure and culture, international cooperation;
- creating societal value at home and abroad (Strategic goal 4) – increasing the international transfer of knowledge and innovations and contributing to international social commitments (UNWE Internationalisation Strategy 2020-2025, pp. 1-2)

UNWE is a university with a history of over one hundred years. Throughout this period, its mission has been to foster innovation, leadership, pioneering and a spirit of shared social values and responsibility. Hence its dedication and commitment to

the education of professionals with a vision of the future, foresight and perseverance. Most of the Bulgarian prime ministers, ministers and members of parliament have been UNWE alumni along with a number of foreign counterparts, which provides evidence for the long-lasting internationalisation process in the university and is the reason why the authors set out to study five decades of its development. The study is part of a project aimed to investigate the challenges UNWE has been faced with in the global context for a period encompassing the university activity in the times of socialism and democracy. Thus apart from tracing the phases in the university internationalisation process, insightful comparative analysis could be made leading to more innovative and effective measures that would contribute to cutting-edge policies.

Presenting the current state of the internationalisation of the academic training in real estate and facility management provides a glimpse at a particular area of educational and research activity within the institution and is indicative of its overall internationalisation. What is more, it reveals how the academic management has implemented UNWE's strategy and what achievements has it resulted in.

In the socialist era, or if we use the economic terminology – in the period of centralised economic planning in Bulgaria – there is no training in the field of real estate. This may sound strange, but this phenomenon has its logical premises which are related to the ideological specifics of the so-called socialist economies of the second half of the 20th century. It is only in the end of the 20th c. that we can talk about real internationalisation of higher education in general and in the field of real estate in particular.

In the conditions of centralised planning of the economy during the so-called real socialism, housing policy is a key component of the social policy of the state. The real estate market is practically absent and is not the subject of research of economic science. Housing is built mainly by the state and is distributed centrally according to a complex system of criteria which include indicators such as the importance (from the point of view of state policy) of the applicant's profession, their marital status, number of children, etc. Of course, how objectively and impartially the specified system of criteria and their indicators is applied is a debatable issue.

It should be noted that apart from the centralised system, there is also a possibility for self-initiative of citizens in order to solve their housing problems.

This is the so-called building in an economic way. In this case, the citizens interested unite in a housing construction cooperative (HCC) and independently manage the design, construction and operation of the residential building.

Both approaches are widely used with housing construction cooperatives prevailing in the smaller settlements. The relative share of centralised construction, though, is huge. However, HCCs are used to a limited extent, only to meet the personal needs of the cooperative members, and they do not actually contribute to the emergence and development of a real estate market. There are real estate deals between citizens, but these deals are so strongly regulated by public authorities, namely the state and municipalities, that there is no reason to define them as market ones.

This context reveals why regardless of the intensive housing construction, which is a major component of the state social policy, economic science is not interested in studying the real estate market in general and the housing market, in particular. The subject taught is construction economics which deals with the overall investment process in the context of the rational centralised allocation of resources within the national economy. The programme "Construction Economics" is offered to students of the University of Economics – Varna, which in those years was called Higher Institute of National Economy "Dimitar Blagoev". After the democratic changes in the country, a real estate market started to form gradually. This is the most dynamic sector of the Bulgarian economy. The academia responded to the needs of the business immediately. The beginning of real estate education was set at the University of Economics – Varna in 2006 with the bachelor's and master's programme "Real Estate Economics". The University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Sofia, started the training of students in the same programmes in 2007. In accordance with the university traditions, in Varna the focus is on construction entrepreneurship, while in Sofia the emphasis is on real estate operations and the specific services offered by the industry. Facility management training was first introduced at UNWE in 2009. An interesting detail is the fact that this concept is not popular in Bulgaria and has no analogue in Bulgarian. This is why the programme was called "Management of the exploitation of buildings (facility management)". In 2011, the profession of facility manager was included in the National Classification of Professions and Job

Positions of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the discipline gained popularity with this traditional name. Later on, the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University started offering a master's programme in facility management.

During the period of centralised planning of the economy, the Higher Institute of National Economy "Dimitar Blagoev" was the only one in which the issues of construction and investment were studied. In this field, the university partnered with higher institutions from the ex-socialist countries and the former Soviet Union in particular. After the democratic changes and the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union, international cooperation changed and focused on EU member-countries, especially Romania and Poland. The Department of Real Estate at UNWE has been cooperating with EU universities since it was founded. Over the last five years, the faculty teaching and research mobility under EU programmes and projects has been mainly to universities in Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Greece. It is outgoing and involved four lecturers, but the faculty has been making effort to encourage incoming mobility as well. Student mobility is outgoing and even though one student only took advantage of this opportunity, the department has organised meetings to provide its students with more information about the benefits of studying abroad under a mobility measure. At the same time, special attention has been paid to the intensification of the international relations with partner universities in order to stimulate incoming student mobility. There are two doctoral students from Germany which is a new development in the internationalisation of the department and UNWE.

The courses "Real Estate" and "Facility Management" taught in English are offered as elective subjects to UNWE students and to students under the "Erasmus +" mobility measure.

Within the 18 years of its existence, the Department of Real Estate at UNWE has succeeded in internationalising and implementing the UNWE internationalisation strategic goals by encouraging student and staff mobility, adjusting syllabi, introducing courses taught in English, offering doctoral programmes to local and foreign graduates, cooperating in research and teaching activities, including the organisation of international events, such as an annual conference and the publication of a journal which is indexed and refereed in world scientific databases (CEEOL and EBSCO). Additionally, it

has been working on joint initiatives with faculty from partner universities and local companies specialising in real estate and facility management. Thus and in line with the world views and university policy of internationalisation discussed so far, the department faculty activity has contributed to research and teaching improvement at all levels both within the organisation and globally.

Conclusion

Internationalisation of higher education is a world phenomenon opening new horizons to all stakeholders. It has negative aspects as well, but developing and implementing a flexible and quality-oriented internationalisation strategy ensures a motivating and rewarding process. Exemplifying it with a case focused on a university department offers an insightful perspective indicative of both the university global mission and response to challenges. An analysis of a department internationalising activity reveals how each level of the academic hierarchy contributes to the overall effect of a common goal and, ideally, reaches like-minded professionals who might be interested in networking and cooperating.

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