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MANIFESTATIONS OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF ECONOMICS IN POLAND REGARDING STUDENT MOBILITY – FINDINGS*

DOI: 10.15611/pn.2022.2.10

JEL Classification: I 23

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Quote as: Teneta-Skwiercz, D., and Sobińska, M. (2022). Manifestations of internationalisation of public universities of economics in Poland regarding student mobility – findings. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 66(2).

Abstract: The article’s main objective was to identify the propensity of students to participate in foreign exchange programmes and the expectations they formulate towards the HEI (Higher Education Institution) in creating conditions conducive to foreign mobility. The article presents a broader context of this mobility, presenting in the first part considerations concerning the essence of the process of internationalisation of HEIs and the strategies created for this process. The research used a multi-method approach (survey method and desk research method), with data triangulation. The assessment of the models of the range of internationalisation of these universities indicated the use of elements of the ‘import’ and ‘export’ models. An important aspect of internationalisation is the foreign mobility of both employees and students. Although students perceive the importance of international exchange, their level of knowledge about exchange programmes and interest in foreign mobility is low.

Keywords: internationalisation strategy of a university, student mobility, university of economics, Poland.

* Funding: “The project is financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland under the programme “Regional Initiative of Excellence” 2019-2022 project number 015/RID/2018/19 total funding amount 10 721 040,00 PLN”.

1. Introduction

The conditions for the functioning of higher education institutions are changing. As with the economy, both society and labour market are globalising, and the needs and expectations of all university stakeholders are evolving. Today's universities are expected to be actively involved in building and developing relations with the environment, educating future 'citizens of the world' predisposed to work in a culturally diverse environment. As a result, the pressure on the internationalisation of universities is increasing, which Knight defines as "... the process of integrating the international/intercultural and/or global dimension into goals, functions, teaching, learning, research and services, and service delivery in higher education" (Knight, 1994).

A manifestation of internationalisation is the mobility of university students and employees, the internationalisation of the curriculum, the recruitment of foreign academic and administrative staff, lectures by foreign scientists, cooperation and partnership with foreign institutions, and the creation of inclusive campuses, as well as academic joint-ventures. What motivates universities to internationalise are not only the financial benefits, acquiring knowledge, learning foreign languages, and developing intercultural competencies, but It also expanding research capacity. As noted by Qiang, the amount of investment necessary for some areas of research and development requires joint efforts and intense international cooperation from universities (Qiang, 2003).

The success of the internationalisation process requires university leadership, exercised by academic staff at various levels (chancellors, deans, heads of departments, heads of other units), having a strategic plan consisting of goals, activities and a schedule for their implementation, the institutionalisation of international education, the involvement of departments in international activities, the availability of professional staff and units responsible for specific aspects of internationalisation and creating a system for monitoring its progress (Paige, 2005). Cultural readiness to internationalise is also important, which depends on the compliance between the values professed and implemented by the academic community and the accordance of these values with the mission of the university, and in addition, also the extent to which university authorities perceive the community as local and/or global (Agnew and VanBalkom, 2009). Wysocka and Leja identified two groups of factors influencing the level of internationalisation, i.e. the so-called decalogue of internationalisation. The first group consists in the level of awareness of the importance of internationalisation among the university community, motivation to develop it, and commitment to it. The second group includes decentralisation, promotion, quality, the campus, the curriculum, and information flow. The strategy of internationalisation was considered to be the link between the two groups (Wysocka and Leja, 2018).

2. Key elements of the internationalisation strategy of universities

The European Commission recommends higher education institutions develop and implement comprehensive internationalisation strategies that should form an integral part of their mission (European Commission, 2013). What strategy the university chooses depends on its key values, human, financial, material, and intellectual resources, and formulated goals for internationalisation. The expectations of the key stakeholders regarding the expected effects of this process are also important.

When creating an internationalisation strategy, it is necessary to identify the related goals, areas, and activities, set priorities, conduct a risk analysis, and define key performance indicators (KPIs). It is also important to choose the scope of internationalisation. Hawawini defined five range models that are not mutually exclusive and non-sequential (Hawawini, 2012), namely: *the import model* (the university aims to “bring the world to its campus”, i.e. attracting students, faculty and staff from all over the world, with as many nationalities as possible represented in programmes, faculties, administration and governing bodies), *the export model* (the university sends its students abroad under student exchange agreements with foreign universities, implements curricula abroad, and encourages its lecturers to visit foreign universities to conduct classes and research), *the academic joint-venture model* (the university is transformed into an academic or programme joint venture in which HEIs located in different countries develop and implement joint programmes, and graduates receive either one jointly signed diploma, or two separate diplomas, one from each institution involved in the joint programme), *the partnership model* (two or more universities establish wider partnerships internationally, committing to cooperate in several initiatives, such as the exchange of students and lecturers, joint programmes, research in faculties), and lastly, *the foreign campus model* (the university rents facilities abroad that it uses to implement its curricula).

Knight showed in her research that among the most common initiatives serving the implementation of the internationalisation strategy of universities, they are (Knight, 2006): international agreements/networks, mobility opportunities for students, international research collaboration, mobility opportunities for employees, and visits by international scientists.

3. Polish universities facing up the challenges related to the internationalisation strategy

The internationalisation of higher education is a dynamic system that changes over time. What is researched and measured is just a static ‘snapshot’ of this constantly evolving process (Zhou, 2016). The study by de Wit and Altbach (de Wit and Altbach, 2021) summarised the internationalisation of universities over the past 30 years, and showed that it is usually ad hoc, fragmentary, and marginal, with more emphasis placed on internationalisation abroad than on internationalisation at home, and this

benefits a small, elite group of students, lecturers, and institutions, instead of creating conditions for global and intercultural results/outcomes for everyone. Moreover, it is driven by an ever-changing range of political, economic, socio-cultural, and educational rationale and national, regional, and global rankings.

Over the last two decades, Polish universities have made considerable progress in the internationalisation of their activities. Promoting the internationalisation of universities, especially the international mobility of students, is high on the Polish political agenda and receives unanimous support from all government institutions (Bryła and Ciabiada, 2014). The fastest-growing aspect of the internationalisation strategy is the short-term mobility of employees and students, while the slowest – the creation of publications indexed in international databases (ECORYS Sp. z o.o., 2020).

Polish universities are systematically expanding their educational profile with education programmes in English. This is due to the desire to add prestige to the university, the growing number of foreign students coming to Poland as part of the Erasmus student exchange program, as well as the increase in the number of foreign candidates for studies who are interested in the offered paid studies (competitive to those of universities from English-speaking countries). On the official website of the European Commission, in the Eurydice tab, it is stated that Poland has not developed a separate strategy for internationalisation or mobility at the level of education or higher education, but mobility and internationalisation are included in the priority areas of the “Integrated Skills Strategy 2030” (ZSU), adopted by the government in January 2019 (the general part of the strategy) and December 2020 (the detailed part). In addition, the internationalisation of higher education and science was included in the objectives of the Strategy for responsible development until 2020 (with a perspective to 2030) adopted by the government in 2016, assuming the creation of conditions conducive to the internationalisation of HEIs as well as the innovation and the commercialisation of research results, together with facilitating the employment of foreign scholars with academic achievements at Polish universities and encouraging students from outside the EU to study in Poland (European Commission, 2020). The Educational Foundation “Perspektywy” annually announces the ranking of Universities in Poland. One of the criteria for evaluating schools is their internationalization (Table 1).

Table 1. The “Perspektywy” ranking of universities of economics according to the internationalization criterion in 2017-2021

Specification	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
University of Economics in Krakow	34	40	50	-	50
University of Economics in Poznan	33	32	38	46	34
University of Economics in Wroclaw	30	32	42	44	44
University of Economics in Katowice	43	44	-	-	-
SGH (Warsaw School of Economics)	22	21	23	22	13

Source: <http://ranking.perspektywy.pl/2017/>; <http://ranking.perspektywy.pl/2018/>; <http://ranking.perspektywy.pl/2019/>; <http://ranking.perspektywy.pl/2020/>; <http://ranking.perspektywy.pl/2021/>.

The data contained in Table 1 clearly indicate the leader of internationalisation among public economic universities – the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) – which, over several years, has advanced by nine places in the ranking, compared to the other universities.

The activities, programmes and projects supporting the mobility of students and academic staff as well as the international cooperation of universities include, first of all, the European Union (EU) Erasmus + programme. In addition, at the level of higher education, there are multilateral, bilateral, and national programmes financed or co-financed by the Polish authorities and/or by other countries as well as foreign organisations, which include student and staff exchange, and wider cooperation between universities. Poland has signed bilateral cooperation agreements in the field of higher education and science with approximately one hundred countries from all over the world. Polish public universities can educate, not only citizens of other EU member states and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states which are parties to the agreement on the European Economic Area and Switzerland, on the same or similar terms as for Polish citizens, but also other foreign students may receive financial support, which may undoubtedly be a factor attracting candidates for studies in Poland.

4. Justification for undertaking research

The literature on the subject contains little reference to the internationalisation of universities of economics. Whereas business universities are responsible for educating ethical and entrepreneurial leaders who think globally, they also understand the systemic effects of business decisions (Business Education Jam, 2015). It is expected that they will conduct research to meet social and environmental challenges, such as those related to climate change and social integration, and will prepare the “leaders of tomorrow”, equipped with the skills needed to run a productive, inclusive and sustainable economy (Pitt-Watson and Quigley, 2019), who can effectively manage people and finances (CABS Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2021). As noted by MacIntosh, “scientific breakthroughs are important but not enough on their own – they need an interface with business research to ensure their transition to viable products and services for the benefit of society” (Chartered ABS and ITN Launch “Business Schools for Good” film, Chartered Association of Business Schools, n.d.).

This article’s main objective was to identify the propensity of students to participate in foreign exchange programmes and the expectations they formulate towards the HEI in creating conditions conducive to foreign mobility. The article describes a broader context of this mobility, presenting in the first part the considerations concerning the essence of the process of the internationalisation of HEIs and the strategies created for this process. The following research questions were formulated:

1. What aspects do universities of economics focus on when creating their internationalisation strategies? What is the internationalization range of the surveyed institutions (in terms of the Hawawini range models)?
2. What activities of universities of economics are part of internationalisation? In particular, what is the importance of student mobility?
3. What is the level of students' involvement in foreign exchange programmes?
4. What actions can be taken by the university to encourage students to participate in international exchange?

5. Research methodology

The research used a multi-method approach (survey method and desk research method), with data triangulation (primary data and secondary data). The sending of the questionnaires was preceded by obtaining permits for research from the rectors of all five public universities of economics in Poland, namely in Wrocław, Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan, and Katowice. They were conducted from October to December 2020. The respondents were students of the second year of full-time studies, both first and second cycle studies of two fields: Management and International Business. They were not offered any incentive to participate in the study. The questionnaires were sent by internal mail to all students of the studied years and faculties. Ultimately, 155 out of 202 completed questionnaires were selected for analysis. It was decided to reject the questionnaires from the EU Katowice and Warsaw School of Economics (15 questionnaires in total) due to insufficient numbers. Another 32 questionnaires were omitted due to the identified lack of data. Finally, questionnaires from three universities were analysed: 85 from the University of Economics in Wrocław, 35 from the University of Economics in Poznan, and 35 from the University of Economics in Krakow. Most of the respondents were women (65.8%); all the students surveyed were of Polish origin.

Using the desk research method, an additional analysis of the organisational documentation of the three above-mentioned universities was conducted, both online and those provided by e-mail to the authors of the study by the Departments of International Cooperation/International Cooperation Centres. In this way, secondary data on the universities' internationalisation strategies were obtained.

6. Research results

6.1. Desk research results

The University of Economics in Krakow (UEK), the University of Economics in Poznan (UEP), and the University of Economics in Wrocław (UEW) have been intensifying their activities related to internationalisation for a number of years. Each university has an internationalisation strategy with a developed monitoring

system of its progress. It is noticeable that the desire to strengthen the position in the international arena translates into the pursuit of new international accreditations, the intensification of international research and teaching cooperation, and the internationalisation of teaching. All three universities joined the PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) initiative, a global forum for responsible management education. PRME is an initiative established in 2007, enabling the United Nations to cooperate with business schools from around the world. Its vision is to implement the sustainable development goals through responsible management education, while its mission is to transform education in business and management and to develop responsible leaders of tomorrow.

Dedicated organisational units of the studied universities implement the educational assumptions of EU programs and multilateral agreements, such as Erasmus +, CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies), EMBS (European Master's in Business Studies), double diplomas, government scholarships, summer schools, Transekonomik, International Staff Weeks, etc. Students can take part in EUROSTUDENT, which is a transnational scientific survey project. Its main objective is to collect data on the social and economic conditions of students in Europe. In around thirty countries, students are asked about their study and living conditions, such as the type of access to higher education, characteristics of the study programme, time budget and employment, income, and expenditure, living conditions, and foreign mobility. Personal data of the students, such as their personal and social background and health status serve to better understand different student groups. PBS will conduct the survey – a Polish research Agency on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

A high priority in internationalisation strategies is to strengthen the research potential and foreign mobility of both employees and students. To promote and recruit students from abroad, the studied universities cooperate with recruitment agencies and portals from all over the world. However, mobility activities are those related to the implementation of the Erasmus + programme. Table 2 provides data on student mobility statistics from 2018 to 2020.

Table 2. Mobility statistics of students at Polish universities of economics in 2018-2021

Specification	2018/2019		2019/2020		2020/2021	
	incoming students	outgoing students	incoming students	outgoing students	incoming students	outgoing students
University of Economics in Krakow	405	231	353	205	192	205
University of Economics in Poznan	209	128	162	135	140	63
University of Economics in Wroclaw	412	156	381	151	236	69

Source: own study based on data obtained from universities.

The data included in Table 2 clearly show that in each case the number of students coming to study in Poland is higher than the number of those outgoing. This can be read as a confirmation of the effectiveness of activities aimed at making the educational programmes of these universities more attractive for foreign students, as well as being a response to the favourable conditions due to which students, including those from the EU and e.g. Ukraine and Belarus, obtain the so-called “Pole’s card”. However, the lower results regarding the mobility of Polish students may indicate that the information policy concerning student exchange programs is insufficient, there is a lack of motivation or unwillingness to take risks related to going to a foreign university among students, lesser knowledge of foreign languages, and a lack of incentives for this type of activity. In turn, the declining number of both outgoing and incoming students over the period 2018-2021 is the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented and/or seriously impeded all forms of travel between countries. Yet, considering the declarations, strategies, and communication plans for the development of the internationalisation of universities and the number of funds allocated to the Erasmus + programme in 2021-2027, it seems that along with the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, the interest in student and academic staff exchange programmes should increase. Moreover, it is important that universities undertake various promotional and informational activities, as well as support interested parties in preparing for the trip, both formally and organisationally.

The analysis of the scope of internationalisation shows that the surveyed universities use the elements of the import model (without significant national differentiation among students and university employees) and the export model (lack of implementation of curricula abroad).

6.2. Survey results

The first question concerned the foreign experience of the respondents (Table 3). One could choose any number of options. Most students had been abroad for tourist purposes (91.6%), while 60.6% of the respondents travelled to family/friends/acquaintances living abroad. A business trip was in third place. Only 24 persons stated that they had gained research experience abroad. The least frequently indicated form of foreign experience was voluntary work; four people had never been abroad.

Table 3. Foreign experiences of students ($N = 155$)

Specification	In total	
	number	% of N in column
Tourist trip	142	91.60
A trip to family / friends / acquaintances living abroad	94	60.60
Work trip	47	30.30
Research experience: studies / internship / scholarship / internship at a foreign university	24	15.50
Voluntary work abroad	5	3.20

I have never been / have not been abroad	4	2.60
In total	155	100.00

Source: own study based on research.

The research also tried to determine the level of respondents' knowledge of international student exchange programmes, as well as their degree of interest in participating in such projects. The distribution of answers to the first question is shown in Figure 1.

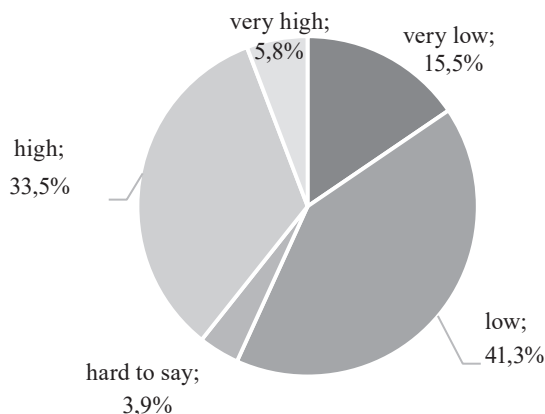


Fig. 1. Assessment of the level of student knowledge about international student exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus+) ($N = 155$)

Source: own study based on research.

The survey showed that 57% of the respondents assessed their level of knowledge about these programmes as “low” or “very low”, 39% as “high” or “very high”.

In response to the question about participation in the exchange programmes in the next three years, 45.2% of the respondents stated that they did not plan to participate in this type of initiative (the sum of answers “no” and “definitely not”), whilst 34.2% considers it in their plans. Attention can be drawn to the relatively high percentage of undecided people, 20.6% of students chose the “hard to say” option (Figure 2). Students were also asked what actions the university could take to encourage them to participate in exchange programmes, and to identify the five most important activities within a closed catalogue of answers.

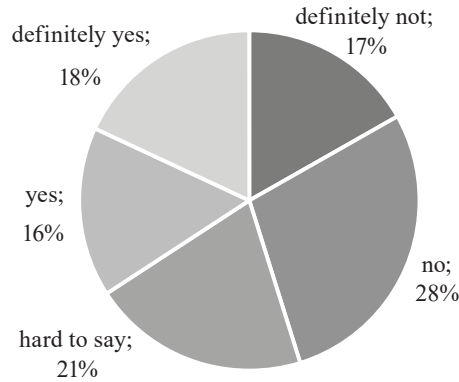


Fig. 2. Student responses regarding possible participation in exchange programmes in the next three years (*N* = 155)

Source: own study based on research.

Table 4. Perception of university activities in terms of encouraging participation in exchange programmes

Specification	Number	% of <i>N</i> in column
Reduce bureaucracy related to the organisation of the trip	136	87.70
Regularly organise integration meetings for domestic and foreign students	126	81.30
Increase the offered range of study trips to renowned universities not currently included in the exchange programmes	119	76.80
More actively promote exchange programmes in university media	104	67.10
Provide additional foreign language classes	102	65.80
Create a host family system where students will be able to stay with a family during their visit	96	61.90
Provide additional classes (training, workshops) on cultural differences	92	59.40
In total	155	100.00

Source: own study based on research.

The study revealed that to convince students to participate in exchange programmes, universities should: reduce bureaucracy related to the organisation of the trip, organise regular integration meetings for domestic and foreign students, increase the offered range of study trips to renowned universities which are not currently included in the exchange programmes, actively promote exchange programmes in university media and provide additional foreign language classes (Table 4).

7. Conclusions

All three universities of economics have ambitions to become modern and globally significant academic and research centres supporting the development of modern business. These HEIs have clearly defined internationalisation goals which they pursue through specific policies and procedures. These universities have special organisational units responsible for various aspects of internationalisation. The assessment of the models of the internationalisation range indicated the use of elements of the import and export models. An important aspect of internationalisation is the foreign mobility of both their employees and students.

Students understand the importance of international exchange, but their level of knowledge about exchange programmes and interest in foreign mobility is low. This may be a derivative of the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and the related limitations (the travel ban, and the distance learning, which made studying abroad less attractive), as well as the excessive bureaucracy connected with the organisation of the study trip, the lack of integrational meetings for domestic and foreign students, poor language skills, and finally insufficient promotion and problems with the channelling of information about the programmes. Under these conditions, it seems advisable to conduct activities increasing students' awareness of the benefits of the broadly understood internationalisation of universities, and in particular their own activity in the field of building cultural competencies during their university studies. It would be advisable to conduct parallel research to verify whether the changes introduced in the field of information policy and generally related to enabling the shaping of higher and higher cultural competencies of both students and university staff through an ever-wider range of possible activities (implementing various mobility programmes, organising language courses and training courses on multiculturalism, organising joint and international projects, creating a physical and virtual space to deepen intercultural relations, building an atmosphere of openness to diversity and encouraging joint meetings not only in the context of scientific development but also strengthening cultural intelligence, etc.), actually translate into higher indicators of internationalisation of each of the interested universities.

The "Perspektywy" ranking indicates that in the area of internationalisation, Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) may constitute a benchmark for other universities of Economics. Unfortunately, the research conducted by the authors did not consider data from SGH due to the limited number of returns. Undoubtedly, this is a severe limitation, and, in the future, it is worth conducting wider research that would allow to identify factors/activities which as part of broader internationalisation strategies of economic universities have the strongest impact on the university's position in the ranking regarding this criterion. At the same time, it is worth examining how the level of internationalisation influences their place in the general ranking of universities in Poland, as well as the international position.

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PRZEJAWY UMIEJZYNARODWIENIA PUBLICZNYCH UCZELNI EKONOMICZNYCH W POLSCE W ZAKRESIE MOBILNOŚCI STUDENTÓW – WYNIKI BADAŃ

Streszczenie: Głównym celem badań zaprezentowanych w artykule była identyfikacja przejawów internacjonalizacji publicznych uczelni ekonomicznych w Polsce oraz rozpoznanie skłonności studentów do uczestnictwa w programach wymiany zagranicznej, a także ich oczekiwań formułowanych pod adresem uczelni w kontekście tworzenia warunków sprzyjających wyjazdom. W badaniach zastosowano podejście multimetodyczne (metodę ankietową i metodę *desk research*) z triangulacją danych. Ocena modeli zasięgu internacjonalizacji badanych szkół wyższych wskazała na stosowanie elementów modelu „importu” i „eksportu”. Istotnym aspektem umiędzynarodowienia jest mobilność zagraniczna – zarówno pracowników, jak i studentów. Choć studenci dostrzegają istotność wymiany międzynarodowej, to poziom ich wiedzy o programach wymiany i zainteresowanie mobilnością zagraniczną są niskie.

Słowa kluczowe: umiędzynarodowienie szkoły wyższej, mobilność studentów, uczelnia ekonomiczna, Polska.