

Vassiliki Papatsiba

University of Sheffield, UK

What drives academics to engage in internationalisation? Motives and 'logics of action' in cross-national collaborative study programmes (0241)

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Introduction

In this presentation, I consider the ways in which academics extend their teaching activities to the international stage of Higher Education (HE) by engaging in cross-national Joint Master's programmes. Drawing on a comparative study in different HEIs settings in England, France, Norway and Spain, I focus on forms of internationalisation in the making which assume intensive cross-institutional collaboration across Europe with a view of creating 'world-class' programmes, arguably apt to attract global talent. I examine what academics, leading these programmes in a wide range of subject areas, seek to achieve with reference to sociocultural and professional contexts that surround them, in their material and symbolic realities. What are the contexts, practices and cognitive frames that become their reference points when they account for their involvement in cross-national Joint Master's programmes? What 'logics of action' do they emerge from their accounts? My aim is to provide insights into how internationalisation policies promoting collaboration/competition and excellence/selectivity permeate HE contexts and are then shifted into academic action. Hence the task at hand is not to explore academic perceptions of Internationalisation policies and strategies per se, but to understand how, in the process of producing internationalisation, academics bring imperatives, priorities, interests and values associated with internationalisation into social worlds with which they have a sense of familiarity and coherence.

Background and context of the study

Cross-national programmes, offered jointly by several HEIs, are effortful enterprises. Whilst their growth in Europe has been driven by policy calls (e.g. Prague Communiqué, 2001; EUA, 2004; Bucharest Communiqué, 2012), HEIs' strategic transnational alliances (e.g. Kuder and Obst, 2009), and student demand for skills, credentials and experiences acquired internationally, academics' role is central (e.g. Crosier, et al., 2007). On the ground, joint programmes are often initiated and sustained by personal initiative, perseverance and dedication of individual academics. These programmes build on their professional and research networks, require negotiation and coordination with national and European policy bodies, entail internal 'championing', and generally necessitate continuous commitment to their existence. However, the ways in which Internationalisation policy goals and strategic interests dovetailing around collaboration/competition and excellence/selectivity are affecting academic thinking and outlook, and whether goals and agendas defined by disciplinary and professional allegiances would frame and move individual action are poorly understood.

Within a context of increasing cross-national collaborative developments, examining individual courses and rationales of action is timely and important. According to Knight (2008, p. 10) 'virtually all regions of the world have institutions seeking out opportunities or responding to requests for international collaborative programmes'. A survey of more than 900 HEIs in Europe for the 2007 EUA report, the so-called 'Trends V' states that 60% of Higher education institutions (HEIs) had already developed joint programmes, in at least one of the three cycles, with the majority being in the second cycle that is at Master's level (Crosier et al., 2007, p. 33).

Interestingly, the majority of the surveyed HEIs claimed that they had plans to develop new or more cross-national collaborative forms of study, and finally, only a minority of institutions (i.e. 4%) expressed no interest in developing such programmes.

Theoretical approach

The conceptual framework offered for this examination draws mainly on classic references based on the sociological writings of C. Wright Mills, and of the higher education scholar B. Clark. Well established concepts such as the 'layering of the academic profession' and 'the vocabularies of motives', as well as the more recent one 'logics of action' are used in an effort to conceptualise individual action. Clark (1983; 1987) contends that the 'layering' of the academic profession is being produced by disciplinary, institutional, national contexts and the profession at large. These four institutional contexts have a structuring effect because they are positioned within the academic system. External contexts, found in the surrounding society, have been considered less powerful. Similarly, C.W. Mills (1940) highlights the influence of social institutional contexts in which individuals are embedded and which provide the material for action, rationalization and meaning-making. The 'vocabularies of motive' that actors give to account for their actions are historically and culturally situated and thus carry the imprint of contexts which structure the availability of certain discourses. Not only do they provide acceptable public reasons which legitimate conduct, but more importantly they give access to shared social experience and their professional and institutional frameworks within which the vocabulary operates. The concept of 'logics of action' refer to enlarged concept of *rationality*, whereas choices can be expressive and axiological, led by feelings, values and norms, as well as strategic considerations (Van Zanten, 2009). Logic 'does not refer to an explicit reasoning, structuring a discourse, but to an implicit coherence between a series of practices which ultimately constitute a certain stance' (Remy, Voye, and Servais 1978, 93).

This conceptual framework provides ways of understanding situated meaningful action and allows for the emphasis to be placed on the HE contexts rather than supposedly inner psychological states of the actors. Not only individual action is located within a range of contexts, be they societal, policy, institutional, and professional, but these contexts shape its emergence, direction and significance through relationships that individuals develop of adhesion, resistance and transformation.

Findings

Academics are drawing upon three sets of 'vocabularies of motive' while accounting for the 'what' and the 'how' of their involvement in joint programmes:

- the vocabulary of the 'academic field' and connection between research and teaching;
- the vocabulary of association and linkage: networks, recognition, resources and collegiality;
- the vocabulary of positioning and differentiation in a competitive environment.

In order to conceptualise the relationships that individuals develop of adhesion, resistance and transformation with contexts that are permeated by Internationalisation goals and practices, five 'logics of action' were derived from the analysis. These are:

- *the logic of growth* when the growth of the field through international academic collaboration is at the heart of the action.

- ◆ *the logic of transformation* when radical change is sought against conventional academic classifications and practices.
- ◆ *the logic of recognition* develops within 'pockets of excellence' where research competence and potential are not fully appreciated and realised.
- ◆ The *logic of correction* highlights a direct adaptive and future-oriented response to Europeanisation/Internationalisation within a globalised context.
- ◆ The *logic of keeping pace with* draws attention to tempered (yet voluntary) adaptation in order to prevent from future, potentially unfavourable, developments and show loyalty to important partners.

Finally, the presentation will conclude by opening up a space for reflection on the axiologic and strategic components of individual action in academia, and the complex work of policies as a driver for change but also as a subjectification force.

[Word count approx 1096]

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