

Embedding internationalization in European higher education institution's strategies: easier said than done?

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Fecha de recepción: 16 de junio de 2020 / fecha de aceptación: 7 de noviembre de 2021

Abstract. This paper portrays the findings of a joint mixed-method exploratory Survey (JIPS) carried out among 85 European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in 18 countries. Its aims are to identify common problematic issues in European internationalization Higher Education strategic designs and practices, through exploring the perceptions of international administrative and academic actors.

The study reveals a contradiction between internationalization as an institutional vowed priority and what HEIs do in the practice. Three main weaknesses are detected: lack of planning, scarce internal quality review practices, and deficient bi-directional internal communication and participation of staff in decision-making processes.

Keywords: Internationalization, Higher Education, Strategies, Mixed-methods, Staff

[es] Integrar la internalización en las estrategias de las IES Europeas ¿Más fácil de decir que de hacer? Visiones desde la perspectiva de los actores administrativos y académicos

Resumen. Este artículo muestra los resultados de un sondeo exploratorio de metodología mixta (JIPS) realizado a 85 Instituciones de Educación Superior (IESs) en 18 países europeos. El estudio aborda el proceso de internacionalización en las IES europeas a través de las percepciones de sus actores administrativos y académicos, con el objetivo de identificar problemas comunes tanto en los diseños estratégicos como en la práctica de la internacionalización.

Los resultados revelan contradicciones entre lo que las HEIs declaran como prioridad institucional y lo que, en la práctica, ocurre, detectándose tres principales debilidades: falta de planificación, escasa práctica de la evaluación interna de la calidad, y deficientes comunicación bidireccional interna y participación del personal en los procesos de toma de decisiones.

Palabras Clave: Internacionalización, Educación Superior, Estrategias, Metodología Mixta, Personal

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. Literature review. a. Internationalization strategies. b. Operational instruments: Mobility, IaH & IoC. c. The human factor: competence and attitudinal approach to the role of staff. 3. Methodology. 4. Findings and discussion. a. Strategic development. b. Operational instruments: Internationalization at Home (IaH) & Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC). c. Quality review processes. d. Perceptions of academic and administrative staff about the role they play in internationalization. 5. Conclusions. References.

Cómo citar: González-Bonilla, A. *et al.* (2020). Embedding internationalization in European higher education institution's strategies: easier said than done?, en *Papeles de Europa* 33(2), 57-67.

JEL: I23

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1. Introduction

The role and character of internationalization in the context of Higher Education has significantly evolved in the last 30 years. From being a marginal desirable possibility, it has become a central issue of the utmost strategic importance. Today, internationalization is imperative for universities if they want to comply with current standards of academic quality and maintain institutional status in the global educational arena (Buckner & Stein, 2019; L. C. Engel & Siczek, 2018; Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, & Paleari, 2016). This drift towards strategic internationalization has been particularly intense in Europe, stimulated by strong top-down European Union (EU) initiatives such as Erasmus, the Bologna process, or the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Curaj, Matei, Pricopie, Salmi, & Scott, 2015; Zmas, 2015).

Recent research shows a positive correlation between progress in internationalization and systematic strategic planning, whereas those institutions that have not established a targeted plan for internationalization are perceived as lagging behind (Leonard Engel, Sandström, van der Aa, & Glass, 2015; Sandström & Hudson, 2019).

Some voices, however, offer a word of caution, warning that, despite the rhetoric of many institutional statements, proclaiming internationalization as an institutional strategic priority does not always mean that it is comprehensively embedded in the institutional organizational culture (Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Hunter, 2017; Marinoni & de Wit, 2019).

Literature has acknowledged, also, that both the impact of internationalization on employees and the influence of employees' perceptions on internationalization processes have been little and unevenly examined topics (Ramathan, Thambiah, & Raman, 2012; Warwick & Moogan, 2013). In this respect, most studies have focused mainly on the academic actors, whereas the role of administrative staff has remained quite unexplored by researchers and little attended by HEIs until recently (Brandenburg, 2016; Casals, 2017; Gacel-Ávila, 2009; Hunter, 2017).

The overall objective of this study is to identify common problematic issues and lines of concern through the perceptions and points of view of two sets of staff particularly linked to the internationalization processes in European universities: Academic International Coordinators (AICs), and International Administrative Staff (IAS). Academic International Coordinators are the academic staff designed within the departments to ensure the efficient organization of academic matters pertaining to exchange students, as well as liaising with current and potential future partner HEIs abroad. The International Administrative Staff are the workforce not engaged in academic and/or scientific work, but employed in International Relations Offices (IROs), who perform a wide range of support services at various levels in the HEIs.

The paper portrays the results of a mixed-method Joint International Partner Survey (JIPS) designed as an exploratory tool in the context of an International Erasmus Partners meeting held by Complutense University of Madrid (UCM).

The combined quantitative-qualitative approach allows to perceive major trends in the European Higher Education context, serves to identify commonalities and differences, and provides valuable insight into common problematic issues and shared lines of concern through staff members' points of view, which are not often received from other studies. The study can be useful for HEIs governing bodies and Human Resources managers to design improved strategic internationalization approaches. Scholars and researchers will gain insight into the factors affecting the development of internationalization in Higher Education, and may use its findings as a basis to pursue further research on other variables not included in this exploratory survey.

The paper has been structured in four parts. The first section sets the theoretical and conceptual framework through a selection of relevant literature. In the second part, methodology, sample and research instruments are described. In the third part, findings are reported and discussed. Finally, in the fourth section conclusions are presented along with suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

a. Internationalization strategies

When the international dimension is considered a stimulating but relatively marginal component of Higher Education, HEIs tend to improvise, making superficial changes, and keeping them by force of habit. This symbolic approach often relies on the voluntarism of a small group of international enthusiasts within the staff, rather than on the development of a consistent internationalization commitment throughout the whole community (Davies, 1992; Warwick & Moogan, 2013).

In contrast, when internationalization is understood as a central priority, embeddedness of the international dimension into the organizational culture of the institution becomes a holistic institutional project, rooted in the institutional ethos and values, that needs to be comprehensively embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students and service units (Hudzik, 2011; Knight, 2015). In this advancement, strategic planning outstands as one of the cornerstones of the continuously ongoing multifaceted internationalization cycle, whose success requires explicit embeddedness of the international dimension into the institutional strategic designs, so that specialized professional

and organizational resources are coherently blended in pursuit of explicit objectives (Knight & de Wit, 1995; LeBeau, 2018).

Quality, efficiency, and efficacy of internationalization plans and projects depend on the attention paid to three crucial elements: operational instruments, revision processes, and people, with fluid communication transversally underpinning the whole project (Castle & Kelly, 2004; de Wit, 1995; Knight, 2004; Sandström & Hudson, 2019; Taylor, 2004).

b. Operational instruments: Mobility, IaH & IoC

Student cross-border mobility has traditionally been the catalyst *par excellence* of educational internationalization (Teichler, 2017). In European universities more particularly, mobility has been since the 80s at the core of EU policies fostered by programs such as Erasmus, and is also one of the declared axial action lines of the EHEA (Brooks, 2018; Curaj et al., 2015; Urquía-Grande & Campo, 2016).

The second pillar of internationalization is what has been coined as Internationalization at Home (IaH) (Crowther et al., 2000; Jones, Coelen, Beelen, & de Wit, 2016; Nilsson, 2003; Willis & Taylor, 2014), which has grown to be a dominant theme in the recent specialized literature on internationalization in Higher Education (Yemini & Sagie, 2016). Among IaH initiatives, the most prominent is Internationalization of Curriculum (IoC), which attends the content, teaching methods and learning outcomes of academic programs of study (Leask, 2015; Soria & Troisi, 2014; Wächter, 2016). The use of foreign languages in formal and informal educational activities is the instrument more often applied to positively influence students' international skills and competencies through IaH and IoC. English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in particular has become one of the most visible and expanding trends worldwide of the last decades (Dafouz, Camacho, & Urquía-Grande, 2014; Dafouz & Smit, 2016): only in Continental Europe, degrees taught in English rose from 725 in 2001 to 2,389 in 2007 and multiplied to 8,039 in 2014 (leading countries in this dynamic are The Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden) (Mitchell, 2017).

Both IaC and IoC need distinct skills and abilities in the workforce involved, such as command of foreign languages or ability to perform in intercultural contexts; also, it demands strong motivations and differentiated committed personal attitudes (Lemke, 2012; Taylor, 2010). Curricular designs, in turn, require careful consideration and strict and complex validation processes before they can legally be implemented by HEIs. Therefore, little can be achieved in this respect without institutional strategic planning providing guidance, encouragement, and support (Hénard et al., 2012; Leask, 2015).

One of the basic precepts of strategic management states that the effectiveness of the operational instruments adopted is to be periodically reviewed so that flaws in strategic design can be detected, changes in internal and external factors can be elicited, and adjustment can be adopted in consequence (David, 2011). Review and quality assessment is also essential in the internationalization cycle (de Wit & Knight, 1999; Knight, 1994; LeBeau, 2018), and has been object of much theoretical production and proposals addressed to the development of evaluation instruments and the setting of measurement indicators (Aerden, 2017; Beerkens et al., 2010; de Wit, 2010; ENQA, 2015).

Internal quality evaluations are not fully exempt from the suspicion of tolerating complacency, and there is no agreement on the best way of measuring and assessing quality in internationalization (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007; Haug, 2010; Knight, 2001). This notwithstanding, there is general accord on the benefits and convenience of periodical monitoring and review, whereas, when no regular evaluation exists, weakened priority and slower progress in internationalization are reported (Deardorff, 2014; Leonard Engel et al., 2015; van Damme, 2001). Recent research points to strategy evaluation and systematic quality assurance activities as key areas positively influencing institutional internationalization success. Also, it has been detected that the way in which internationalization is designed, delivered and evaluated has an impact on the confidence of staff and the way the individuals at HEIs perceive their performance with respect to internationalization (Rumbley, Hudson, & Sandström, 2019; Sandström & Hudson, 2019).

c. The human factor: competence and attitudinal approach to the role of staff

Much of the success of internationalization depends on the Institution's human resources because it is the people working at every HEI who make internationalization happen with their daily work. This daily performance is very much influenced by the factors that shape individual attitudinal responses to institutional policies (Sugden, Valania, & Wilson, 2013; Taylor, 2010).

Theory connects attitudes toward internationalization with the attention paid by universities to professional development, which is to be operated on a twofold sphere. On one hand, by promoting the employees' skills and competencies that allow effective international performance, since staff's lack of commitment to internationalisation, and lack of staff's internationalization expertise are generally considered as key barriers in the pursuit of internationalisation goals (Beelen & de Wit, 2012). On the other, by motivating staff to willingly make the extra effort that internationalization demands through professional reward and recognition (Hénard et al., 2012; Xing, 2009).

Recent research connects individual international motivation with the way in which institutions design and manage their priority internationalization activities, providing adequate funding, supporting training for staff and un-

dertaking systematic quality assurance reviews, which seems to have a direct impact on individuals' confidence, engagement and sense of commitment (Sandström & Hudson, 2019).

Also, motivation is very much fostered by the institutional ability to create communicative environments where the workforce involved feel their opinions are valued in decision-making on the academic and the organizational aspects (Budjanovcanin, 2018; Castle & Kelly, 2004; Muindi, 2011).

Literature warns that defective communication dilutes staff's compromise with the institution's internationalization guidelines; by not paying attention to the actors' perceptions, universities renounce to many a valuable insight about the best approaches to be adopted, while failure to meet staff's expectations of appraisal and reward is frequent cause of frustration and disillusion (Dartey-Baah, 2010; Franco-Santos & Doherty, 2017).

3. Methodology

Joint International Partners Survey (JIPS) was carried out by a multidisciplinary research team of experts in internationalization, located in three Faculties of Complutense University: Social Work, Psychology and Economics. It was developed with a sequential exploratory design structured in three successive stages, where quantitative and qualitative approaches were used with a complementary purpose, so that qualitative results help to further interpret the data gathered in the quantitative phase (Hesse-Biber, 2010; McKim, 2017).

Stage 1 was devoted to quantitative data collection. Due to accessibility criteria, the target population was circumscribed to 258 individuals in 116 Universities in 29 different European countries, who were invited via e-mail to voluntarily participate.

13 Likert-type grading scale of five points (where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest; a "don't know" response category was also included in all items-

The first section focused on institutional internationalization strategies and policies (19 items) and inquired about the importance of internationalization for the Institution, the existence (or not) of institutional internationalization plans, their communication to the community, and their motivations and rationales (e.g. Does your institution have a defined institutional internationalization policy and strategy, with defined goals, objectives and outcomes?).

Stage 2 was devoted to quantitative multivariate statistical analysis of inputs, which was carried out using the SPSS v. 25 statistical package. Statistical results were also qualitatively analysed by the research team so that gaps, controversial issues or contradictions emerging from the statistical approach could be identified and dealt with in the next stage.

In Stage 3 quantitative results were used by the research team as guidelines for discussion and debate in a focus group. The group meeting was to be held in Madrid within the context of an International Partners Fair. Calls for participation to the Fair were e-mail distributed to the same target population (258) as the online survey, despite the assumption that participation in the meeting would be much lower.

(AIC_n for Academic International Coordinators, IAS_n for International Administrative Staff).

4. Findings and discussion

a. Strategic development

The survey asked participants if, to their knowledge, their institutions had developed internationalization strategies. Most declared "Yes" (93.2%), whereas 4.5% answered "No" and 2.3% admitted "don't know" (dk).

Next, they were asked how the strategies were communicated (multiple response checklist). The 73% of the sample affirmed that internationalization was explicitly mentioned in the Institution's Vision and Mission Statement; 54.1% said that internationalization strategy was included in institutional yearly plans and programs; 67.6% admitted that internationalization strategies were collected in dossiers and reports, but only accessible to experts and for internal use. A small proportion of participants (2.2%) reckoned that the internationalization policy was not documented. A box was added for attachments or links. Very few participants (8.23%, n=7) provided links or documents as examples of publicly-displayed internationalization strategies.

In line with recent surveys (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015; European University Association [EUA], 2013; Hunter, 2017; Sandström & Hudson, 2019), findings show that internationalization is an avowed priority for most European universities.

Contradictorily, it was unexpected to find a high amount (67.6%) of Institutions whose Internationalization strategic plans are not displayed to the general public scrutiny, or are available only to a minority. This practice was confirmed by many participants in the focus group, who, despite having very several years of experience in international affairs, were not able to locate their institutions' internationalization policy documents, or even did not know whether such strategies existed.

This detected lack of public display of Internationalization policies and/or strategies indicates unequal advancements in European HEIs towards the achievement of defined internationalization plans.

Also, the fact that the plans, even when existing, are not openly communicated even amongst the staff daily and directly engaged in international actions reveals important flaws in institutional internal communication.

b. Operational instruments: Internationalization at Home (IaH) & Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC)

JIPS enquired which operational instruments were more often employed for the achievement of internationalization (multiple-choice checklist). Most participants (95.1%) pointed to mobility, followed by IaH (75.6%), IoC (70.7%), and integration of international dimension into the institutional policy (58.5%).

The use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction was accredited in 69% of the institutions, whereas 31% of the institutions use their native languages only. Most institutions use foreign languages in optional courses (43.2%), in specific modules (40.5%), and/or in extra-curricular activities, such as seminars (32.4%) or summer schools (48.6%); only 21% provide fully bilingual degrees. English is by far the dominant foreign language (87%), followed by French (31%) and Spanish (27%). Tuition in two or more foreign languages is found in 26% of the institutions.

When asked about the factors that, in the participants' personal opinions, most positively (promoting) or negatively (hindering) influenced the development of IaH and IoC initiatives, answers were as shown in Table 1.

Table1. Five main factors influencing the development of IaH and IoC.

Positive (Promoting)	percentage	Negative (hindering)	percentage
Interested teaching staff	78.4%	Not interested teaching staff	57.9%
Presence of international students in the classroom	75.7%	Lack of skills in foreign languages (teaching staff)	55.3%
A multilingual and eager team	67.6%	Lack of skills in foreign languages (students)	50%
Institutional internationalization policy and strategy	67.6%	Too much bureaucracy (concerning curricular reforms)	44.7%
Institutional and national support	62.2%	Not interested students	34.2%

N.B. multiple response checklist, since the options offered were not mutually exclusive. (N=85)

Data show that the positive influence of institutional engagement items such as institutional strategies and institutional support rank higher (receive more ticks) than the negative influence of individuals' attitudinal disengagement or lack of multilingual skills.

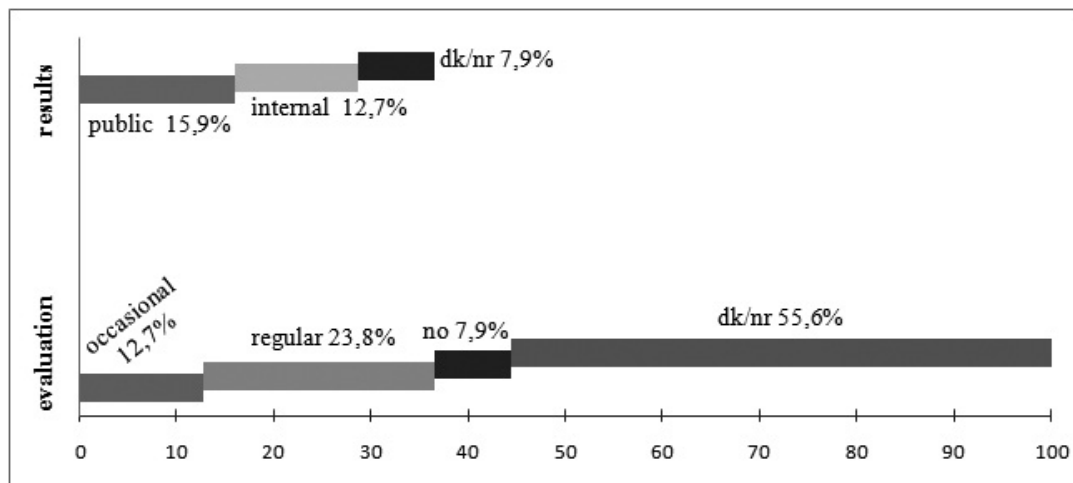
Additional witness as to the determinant role played by institutional commitment in the curricular transformations was provided at the focus group when analysing EMI: In countries where the native languages have little external expansion (such as Danish or Flemish) institutions have long engaged in a clear policy of establishing EMI on a regular basis, with the double objective of both providing their local students with skills allowing to profit from EHEA opportunities and of attracting incoming (either exchange or fee-paying) students. In contrast, this approach is not to be often seen in France, Italy, Germany or Spain, and hardly ever in the UK, where the dominant use of their national tongues in academia rather attracts than discourages incoming students, thus foreign languages being approached as an additional attraction, not as a necessity.

c. Quality review processes

JIPS asked participants about the existence of specific offices or bodies in charge of quality assurance (QA) in their Institutions; if internationalization was internally evaluated; and how quality results were communicated to the public. Most participants (95.3%) were positive as to the existence in their institutions of Offices or instances in charge of quality affairs. Only 3.5% answered not to know whether such instances existed. Incidentally, 1 person said there weren't any institutional QA structures.

In contrast, the response rate decreased significantly when asked if internationalization was being internally monitored and/or evaluated at their institutions: Only 36.5% were certain that internal evaluations were made, although not always on a regular basis. In many cases, the results of such evaluations are not disseminated, but rather "they are kept for the use of internal experts" (says AC₃).

It was most unexpected to find that, despite being internationalization an avowed strategic priority for the huge majority of Institutions -as declared in section a)-, internal evaluation and monitoring of quality of Internationalization was not a common or generally extended practice in European Universities. The high prevalence of ignorance and/or lack of response (dk/nr) (see Figure 1) of our informants in this respect was, besides, disquieting for two reasons. The first, because it was in stark contrast with the overall tone of the survey (where response rates to the rest of items exceeded 90%). The second, because it is not coherent that experienced practitioners would not know about institutional practices which directly concern the evaluation of their daily activities and professional performance.

Figure 1. Internal quality evaluation of Internationalization in European HEIs.

It is to be acknowledged, however, that internationalization QA activities are likely to adopt diffuse forms (as part of other educational or institutional quality evaluations, for instance). Therefore, JIPS figures can alternatively be interpreted as indicating that evaluations are somehow made by institutional QA bodies, but international practitioners are not aware because their results are not widely communicated, which leads to a second unexpected finding: the fact that the results of the evaluations are often not openly displayed, even amongst direct international actors.

In either case, our data show insufficient and/or defective institutional intercommunication, which not only casts doubt on the actual evaluations' validity and reliability, but also calls scepticism as to the centrality and comprehensiveness of the internationalization process for the institutions affected.

d. Perceptions of academic and administrative staff about the role they play in internationalization

JIPS enquired how were the participants' perceptions of their own role in the internationalization process in comparison with the role of the students (who are, eventually, those in whose sake the internationalization efforts are made).

The survey asked the participants' views about their respective level of knowledge about internationalization initiatives, their interest in internationalization, their influence in the design of internationalization activities, and the importance of their involvement and support in the internationalization process.

The quantitative findings concerning attitudes and perceptions were, as expected by the research team, very much commented at the focus group, where relevant qualitative information was supplemented.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and Friedman's test on the perception of internationalisation held by academic staff, administrative staff and students according to ACs & IAs perspective.

Question	Academic Staff			Administrative Staff			Students			χ^2 (g.l.=2)
	M	Md	SD	M	Md	SD	M	Md	SD	
How good is their knowledge on internationalization activities?	4.05	4	.93	3.90	4	1.36	4.98	5	.85	21.65***
Are they interested in internationalization activities?	4.44	4	1.00	4.05	4	1.36	5.10	5	.86	24.46***
How much weight is given to their points of view when internationalization activities are designed?	4.49	4	.76	3.73	4	1.40	4.59	5	1.12	15.98***
How important is their direct involvement in and support for internationalization?	5.05	5	1.01	4.51	5	1.00	4.97	5	5.99	8.70**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. (N=85)

To compare the opinion of both academic and administrative internationalization practitioners about the four issues in pairs, several Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were run.

Students were perceived to have a significantly better knowledge about the internationalization activities carried out in universities than academic staff ($Z=3.08$, $p=.002$) and administrative staff ($Z=3.91$, $p<.001$), respectively. Also, the academic staff was felt to be better informed than the administrative staff ($Z=3.04$, $p=.002$).

Interest in internationalization activities was also rated statistically higher among students than among academic ($Z=3.40$, $p=.001$) and administrative staff ($Z=4.14$, $p<.001$), respectively. Again, academic staff had a statistically significant higher interest level than administrative staff ($Z=2.80$, $p=.005$).

The influence and weight of academic staff's points of view on the design of internationalization raked statistically higher than administrative staff's ($Z=3.19$, $p=.001$). Also, students seem to have a statistically greater influence on the design of activities than administrative staff ($Z=3.19$, $p=.001$). No significant differences were found between the influence attributed to academic staff and to students.

The importance of academic staff's involvement and support for the development of internationalization was statistically perceived as significantly higher than administrative staff's ($Z=2.61$, $p=.009$). No significant differences were found between the importance attributed to administrative staff and to students.

Finally, variables which determined the internationalization strategy of the HEIs were analyzed with a backward stepwise logistic regression analysis. It was found that interest and weight given to internationalization by academics and researchers', as well as the use of international materials in teaching, were directly associated with the HEIs' internationalization strategy. However, students' involvement and quality issues were inversely related to each HEI (see Table 3).

Table 3. Predictors of internationalization strategy in Higher Education Institutions.

Variables	Institutions with defined internationalization policy		
	B	SE B	β
Constant	1.15	.22	
Interest of academic staff in internationalization activities	.09	.04	.41*
Impact of Academic staff views on design of internationalization activities	.07	.03	.42*
Level of Administrative staff internationalization involvement and support	-.09	.04	-.39
Student involvement in design of internationalization activities	-.07	.04	-.41
Specific HEI-level analysis of quality of internationalization	-.39	.11	-.63***
Curriculum Internationalization strategies	.23	.10	.39*
R ²		.34	
Adjusted R ²		.22	
F change		2.49	

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Our results detect that employees are aware of the significance their respective roles have along the whole internationalization process, and of the importance that their personal motivation and direct involvement have in the development of internationalization. However, the staff feels that their opinions and points of view have little influence when it comes to the institutional design of internationalization strategies or proposal of activities. These numerical findings were reinforced by focus group qualitative inputs such as:

"[In my Institution] they make a lot of student satisfaction surveys, but they never surveyed me" (AIC₄).

"We proposed [some years ago] an Erasmus welcome session, with games, gymkhana, a picnic, you know, 'bring some food from your country', things like that... but only 3 faculties wanted to join. We did it a couple of years, then it faded out" (IAS₂).

Statistical figures indicating administrative staff's mid-low knowledge of and lukewarm interest in internationalization were called into question and aroused vivid debate at the focus group. It was argued that IROs not only were usually well informed about internationalization activities but often had better and more extensive knowledge about mechanisms, partnerships, funding, etc. than students and academics. It was underlined also that both AICs and IROs were in general genuinely interested in internationalization activities, although it was acknowledged that *"In the informative [mobility abroad] meetings, we are always the same"* (AIC₁₅), many feeling very much prevented from more active participation by lack of multilingual skills. Other important discouraging factors mentioned were: work overload, the nature of their jobs allowing little flexibility (administrative staff), and shortage of [mobility] opportunities (few for academic, and even fewer for administrative employees). It was often desired institutions

would seriously help their staff to radically improve their English. Also, it was acknowledged that it was difficult to stimulate participation when the extra effort of internationalization is not incentivized (with professional recognition, reduction of teaching hours, etc.).

Focus group pointed to a lack of clear guidance or little previous analysis of the available resources as important inhibitors of international advancement particularly affecting IoC:

"We are left to our own devices, which is cool because I'm free to do what I think best, but we are not coordinated" (AIC₃).

"My university wanted to launch a bilingual summer-school; interested teachers were invited to apply as 'volunteers'. My English was a bit rusty, but nevertheless, I decided to join. I assumed we would be previously receiving some coaching and also some English-for-academic-purposes in the international classroom, but they never did... In the end, with some colleagues, we hired (and paid) a private teacher some weeks before the summer school started. It was probably not enough, but It was the only thing we could do not to embarrass ourselves in front of students who probably spoke English better than us" (AIC₇).

All the above qualitative and quantitative inputs have been interpreted by the authors of this paper as symptoms of institutional inattention to the perceptions and needs of the actors/agents involved, of excessive reliance on individual zeal, and of absence of fluid and bi-directional communication paths between those responsible for designing the policy and the agents who are to put it in practice.

5. Conclusions

The study confirms strong institutional awareness in European universities of the importance of internationalization and steadfast institutional commitment to its advancement and development. Operationally, European HEIs appear to be decidedly energetic in adopting internationalization initiatives, amongst which students' mobility is still- as in the 80s and 90s- the main instrument, complemented by IoC through tuition in foreign languages (mainly English) as a dominant trend at the local level. This shows increasingly mindfulness of the mutual necessity and complementary character of the cross-border and at-home spheres, although the curricular approach still meets much reluctance.

However, inconsistent signs of progress are observed in the setting and development of internationalization strategies, a trend already assessed by recent surveys (de Wit et al., 2015; EUA, 2013; Hunter, 2017). Internal monitoring and quality evaluation processes seem to be predominantly overlooked, and there seems to be much institutional unwillingness to make the results of quality reports available even to the employees (ACs and IROs) more directly involved in internationalization activities. Although in this respect our data are to be taken cautiously because non-conclusive input was received, our inferences seem reasonable in the light of similar long-standing warnings about internal revision processes being generally neglected (de Wit, 2009; Deardorff, 2014; van Damme, 2001).

In general, both AICs and IROs employees appear to be very much interested in internationalization and genuinely committed to its advancement. Faculty members are aware -even proud- of the significance of their individual performance and personal engagement, although the study detects they often feel overwhelmed by institutions' excessive reliance on their individual voluntarism. In contrast, institutions seem to be little concerned about administrative employees, who tend to feel undervalued and disregarded, despite playing an essential role. There's a widespread perception that the staff's opinions and points of view have little influence when it comes to the institutional design of internationalization strategies or proposal of activities (Brandenburg, 2016; Casals, 2017; Gacel-Ávila, 2009; Hunter, 2017). Institutional failures to provide steady guidance and support, to implement operative bi-directional communication processes, to evaluate performance, and to implement adequate professional development measures seem to be at the roots of the disillusion recorded among both ACs and IROs.

All the above considered, JIPS findings can be interpreted as revealing a contradiction between what is said about internationalization as a priority in institutional declarations, and what institutions do in the practice. Many institutions are detected to maintain internationalization activities by force of habit, or led by external pressures, but with poor strategic planning (Hénard et al., 2012; Hudzik, 2011; Hunter, 2017).

The study reveals three main weaknesses in European Universities' institutional approaches to internationalization: lack of planning and guidance, failure to develop adequate quality reinforcement practices, and deficient bi-directional internal communication and participation of staff in decision-making processes.

Lack of planning may lead to misuse of resources, misdirection of efforts, and loss of impulse. Underplayed quality assessment is a problematic issue because it precludes adjustment (when necessary) and reinforcement (when convenient). Deficient communication is disquieting because it casts shade on the priorities and transparency of universities' internationalization approaches. Also, it can be interpreted as an indicator of objective-setters and policy-makers assigning little attention to the role played by the academic and administrative employees in charge of daily international performance. Consequently, the Institution's vision and policies become incongruent with the views and needs of the workforce involved, which leads to staff discouragement and job dissatisfaction.

It is therefore incumbent for European HEIs to promote a holistic approach of their internationalization efforts. Planning, evaluation, communication, and participation should be seriously addressed, so that internationalization grows comprehensively embedded and built upon solid foundations.

Nevertheless, the study serves its purpose as an exploratory tool, whose findings add to general understanding about what is really happening in Higher Education institutions' internationalization processes. The study aids to raise awareness of key problematic issues and common areas of concern, as well as to stimulate discussion and critical thinking among researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and HEIs governing bodies. Its combined quantitative and qualitative approach allows grasping the human factor hidden behind the statistical figures reporting the active participation of administrative staff, whose role and points of view are not easy to find in research.

To fill this research gap, further research on the active role played by administrative staff is suggested. Further studies should also consider exploring the impact of internationalization on organizational administrative structures (units, offices, services, etc.) and the professional profiles connected with such structures. Also, it would be interesting to examine institutional internationalization developments in relation to budgetary and financial variables.

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