

Chapter 12

Internationalization of Polish Higher Education within Knowledge Transfer and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of higher education in Poland is a relatively new subject which has been gradually gaining its importance. The economic and political transformation of Poland opened new opportunities for Polish universities. The accession to the European Union enabled the educational and research units to apply for European funds in this respect. Despite numerous difficulties, the universities reform their strategies and search for new solutions to increase the level of internationalization and thus their competitiveness. These actions are necessary and crucial for their further development. The chapter describes general issues of internationalization of Polish higher education and shows that the level of internationalization may be achieved successfully by various forms of cross-border cooperation. Polish-Czech cooperation in the field of knowledge transfer and innovation carried out by two partner universities located in the Polish – Czech borderland is a case study illustrating this process.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education around the world is changing rapidly and internationalization at the moment should be the part of the development strategy of each university. The economic crisis and the lack of financial resources resulting from it affected

the process of internationalization of higher education in the European Union. This trend is also visible in Polish universities which are the least internationalized academic centers in the European Union and in the OECD. Undoubtedly, this situation is influenced by the lack of a coherent development of internationalization strategy as

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well as Polish higher education and insufficient scope of research and scholarly debates in this respect. Despite these unsatisfactorily low results a gradual improvement can be seen recently in the presence of foreign students at Polish universities. The highest rate of internationalization is achieved in the largest and oldest Polish universities in biggest Polish cities - Warsaw University, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Łódź University.

However due to demand of equal and free access to education smaller academic centers, especially those operating in cities and regions of cross – border nature can play an important role in the process of internationalization of Polish higher education. Such an institution of higher education is the University of Bielsko-Biala operating on the Polish-Czech-Slovak border creating a unique market for cross-border cooperation in the economy, employment, knowledge transfer and innovation. Taking the advantage of these opportunities the University of Bielsko-Biala and Technical University in Ostrava have carried out a project in years 2010-2013 named: „The vocational training for specialists-leaders for innovation and transfer of new technologies into companies in the Czech-Polish border”. The project was co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget in the framework of the Operational Program “Cross-Border Cooperation between Czech Republic and Poland in years 2007-2013. The main goal of the project was to support more dynamic economic development and to increase the international competitiveness of the Polish-Czech border by improving the quality of vocational education and especially the technical knowledge and practical skills of students as well as the neighbor’s language. Tasks implemented in the project were directed not only at the professional support of future graduates of both universities but also at the mutual transfer of knowledge and access to innovation and new technologies.

The aim of the article is an analysis of the process of internationalization of Polish higher education with particular emphasis on knowledge

transfer and innovation. The case study will be the above-mentioned project carried out in this field by two cross-border institutions: University of Bielsko-Biala (Poland) and Technical University in Ostrava (Czech Republic). The chapter will be enriched with the results of research carried out under the project within a group of 60 students and 60 entrepreneurs from Poland and Czech Republic.

BACKGROUND: CONDITIONS AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF POLISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Due to the fact of permanent crossing the borders by the science which also includes crossing the national borders it can be stated that higher education is constantly internationalized. On the basis of research on higher education no single and universally valid definition of higher education internationalization was developed. Below selected key definitions will be presented. One of the first position in which the internationalization of higher education was mentioned was the International Encyclopedia of Education by Torsten Husen and Neville Postlethwaite of 1985, which defines international education, among others as a prism of all educational efforts aimed at supporting international orientation in knowledge and attitude (Hussen, Postlethwaite 1985). As the main means of implementation of the internationalization the authors indicate the exchange of students and academic internationalization of textbooks and research as well as teaching foreign languages. Philip Altbach in “International Higher Education: an encyclopedia” analyzes educational systems in different countries in terms of international flows of students, types, levels and areas of study (Altbach 1991). Rather general definitions of internationalization of higher education have also been made by Marijke Van der Wende and Simon Marginson. First author put the issue of internationalization very generally as any systematic, consistent efforts

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