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Review of Doctoral Thesis
submitted by **Mariano Martín Pérez**

**“One Path, Many Activities, One Pattern: Rhetorical Internationalization
Towards Understanding the Internationalization of Argentine Public
Universities”**

Submitted to: The Board of the Discipline of Culture and Religion Sciences
of The Jagiellonian University in Kraków
Doctoral supervisor: dr hab. Radosław Rybkowski, prof. UJ

The doctoral thesis prepared by Mariano Martín Pérez concerns the concept of “Rhetorical Internationalization” analyzed in the context of Argentine Public Universities that participated in the program Erasmus Mundus Action 2 and received governmental support to generate internationalization. The analyzed period stretches from 2005 to 2015. The approach to the analyzed topic is grounded in cultural studies rather than political science. The Author uses a critical methodology to conduct his multidisciplinary research and focuses on qualitative content analysis, which is open for individual interpretation and context-dependent.

The structure of the thesis is clear. The text is written on 237 pages, including 12 figures and 18 tables. The manuscript is divided into five chapters, consecutively analyzing: (1) theoretical assumptions; (2) the European path; (3) support for the internationalization process; (4) rhetorical internationalization; (5) conclusions and recommendations. The final part of the thesis comprises 4 appendices and a list of references. Appendix 1 lists public universities in Argentina; appendix 2 presents



Argentinian stakeholders; appendix 3 depicts European coordinators; and appendix 4 includes spreadsheets for analyzing internationalization performance. The research sources encompass documents, reports, books, and journal articles.

I appreciate the choice of the research topic for two reasons: (1) it is original, and (2) no monograph analyzing the same theme exists. The Author clearly formulates the research hypothesis and assumes an interdisciplinary approach and diverse theoretical perspectives. Undoubtedly, the strong sides of the manuscript concern a well-defined theoretical basis and methodology of the research.

Mr. Pérez identifies the difficulties in theorizing over international processes based on individual traveling experiences. Hence, he designs his theoretical approach to conduct a case study. The introductory section presents the hypothesis of the research, which is to analyze the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 project as a means to reflect upon the internationalization process in Argentine Public Universities. Here, as in further analysis, Mr. Pérez accentuates the cultural context of the academic communities, rooted in history and traditions. This tendency to keep a unique heritage may be interpreted as an obstacle to the global process of internationalization. On the other hand, it may be beneficial for international students who want to experience an unfamiliar culture. Mr. Pérez points to the complex meaning of culture in the academic environment, which emphasizes specific cultural values and the intellectual challenge of experiencing newness. I value this culture-grounded approach which acknowledges that the academic community encompasses the spaces of formality and informality. Those frequently clash, fostering the exchange of ideas and shaping new views, whether liberal or conservative. The Author notices that the impact of a multicultural environment frequently results in the liberation of institutional regulations and policies. Thus, the process of internationalization illustrates the cultural impact on universities. The introduction of this dissertation comprehensively justifies the cultural approach of the conducted research.

The dissertation has a clearly defined conceptual structure. Mr. Pérez repetitively emphasizes the link between internationalization and the intercultural dimension of the



teaching facilities. The first chapter provides the theoretical framework and methodology applied to the research. The Author analyses the internationalization models used in the construction of the internationalization policy of Argentine Public Universities. The research focuses on the European Union program, the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 (EMA2), and considers prevailing myths and misconceptions. The study analyzes the micro-level (departmental) and macro-level (national) implementation of internationalization policies. This approach aims at generating more comprehensive and objective research results. The term's 'internationalization' broad meaning is narrowed to its academic context and defined on p. 23 of the thesis.

The internationalization priorities are reflected in the theoretical framework, which combines the recent publications and recommendations of the European Association for International Education and the Association of International Educators. The terminology applied in the research is based on the book *Concepts, rationales, and interpretive frameworks in the internationalization of higher education* (2012), written by Jane Knight, a specialist in the international dimension of higher education. Mr. Pérez reviews the definitions of "higher education internationalization" and selects the one for his research. Then, he determines why some definitions have been rejected to justify his choice by stating a broader perspective, a conceptual framework of internationalization. The Author presents a critical approach by not only providing the answer to the question: "Why yes?" but also "Why not?".

Further, Mr. Pérez combines the theoretical framework with the instrument of rhetoric. The approach to analyzing "Rhetorical Internationalization" is based on the publication *What's in a Name? A Theoretical Exploration of the Proliferation of Labels for International Education Across the Higher Education Sector* (2014), written by two specialists in the field, Craig Whitsed and Wendy Green. J. Davies' publication "Developing a strategy for internationalization in universities: towards a conceptual framework" (1992) provides vital theoretical input into the concept of rhetoric. Finally, the Author examines the myths (such as global branding) and misconceptions (e.g., "higher education is international by nature") referring to the internationalization



process. Those theoretical concepts are analyzed on the bases of "Globalization and Internationalization of Higher Education" (2011) by Hans de Witt, and "Five myths about internationalization" (2015) by Jane Knight.

The presented hypotheses focus on answering whether it is possible to achieve higher education internationalization by following the national government's strategy. Hence, the analyses compare the available strategies, identify the successful ones and examine the national impact on individual institutions. The relationship between internationalization and rhetoric is examined in the context of adaptive institutional response to external changes, such as the turbulent global environment. The thesis also considers the "critical factors" or "institutional resources" as crucial constituents influencing the capacity of an educational institution for global changes. Those include environmental awareness of current trends, institutional financial tools, and leadership in implementing desired transformations. The Author considers multiple factors before constructing his research model to confirm the hypotheses.

Mr. Pérez acknowledges that "Rhetorical Internationalization" demonstrates a capacity for various terminology, perspectives, and meanings. The Author accepts that the individual cases usually differ from the described ideal; thus, he acknowledges a discrepancy between "ideal reality" and "grounded reality." The methodological approach presumes that Argentine Public Universities exemplify a case study existing within a broader national and international context. The thesis examines the complexity of the internationalization process and the comparability of individual cases with the national system. Nevertheless, the study's primary purpose is to identify the pattern of institutional behavior.

Chapter two lays out the ideas behind the Erasmus Mundus Program Action 2 (EMA2) and analyzes how this project operates within the internationalization policy of Higher Education. The historical overview of the Erasmus Program and its development is essential for understanding the cultural background of the project and its functioning. This section is supported by a thorough analysis of the documents establishing the cooperation of the project's consecutive members. This study indicates



that the program has been a qualitative means of internationalization strategies aimed at systematic cooperation and increased academic mobility. The Author accentuates a new initiative to include members from third countries, formalized by creating the Erasmus Mundus program, designed to generate and strengthen internationalization. By stating the primary purpose of the new program, the Author clarifies why this particular project became the thematic choice of his dissertation.

Mr. Pérez knows the particularities of the proposal received by the Argentine institutions and the different ways of implementing the program among the member partners. The illustrative tables provide details of the institutions involved in the project and reflect upon the volume of non-European members using the opportunity to upgrade their internationalization capacities. The thesis provides other details, such as the specificity of the academic fields targeted for scientific cooperation. The Author stresses that the program is culture-specific as it operates on a regional and international level, contributing to the mutual enrichment of academic communities. Those elements confirm the cultural scope of this thesis and justify the choice of the qualitative approach for the conducted analyses.

The study examines the effectiveness of the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 in improving the internationalization performance of Argentine Public Universities, taking into account the mobility of individuals. The Author compares the project's objectives with the degree of the obtained results. Carefully designed tables and a pie chart illustrate the analysis. Unfortunately, I find this section missing concluding remarks that would provide an interpretation of the data presented in graphics. Although the final chapter of this thesis contains conclusion, at the end of chapter 2, the reader may anticipate an immediate interpretation.

The third chapter examines the process of internationalization in the Argentinian context, carefully illustrating the process of strengthening the institutional units responsible for those activities. This section begins with a description of the institutional administrative structure and the evaluation and accreditation procedures. The Author makes a critical remark – the evaluation procedures do not incorporate any



items relating to the internationalization levels of the assessed institutions. Neither universities nor the national government conducts any evaluation of international activities. The thesis does not simply describe the obligatory procedures in Argentine educational facilities, but critically examines the present regulations and points out the weaknesses. Identification of weaknesses provides the space for initiatives aimed at generating improvement. The analyses focus on the governmental support and international impact generating institutional response and internationalization dynamic. Mr. Pérez rightly observes that the actual effect of those activities is not substantial; nonetheless, internationalization remains an essential issue in political speeches. This conclusion coherently leads the analyses into the notion of 'rhetoric'. Then, the Author observes the use of "Rhetorical Internationalization" to improve the mobility of international relations officers. Mr. Pérez assesses the particular agents involved in the internationalization process. He notices some negligence in the Argentine government's role as the project's leader and accentuates the fundamental role of international relations officers who became the drivers of the activities conducted.

Chapter four focuses on the use of rhetoric in incorporating an international dimension into institutions' activities. The Author's approach presumes that "Rhetorical Internationalization" implemented at the institutional level enhances the University's performance at the national and international levels. Rhetoric is an element functioning in the local/cultural context, but its effectiveness is visible from a broader perspective. Thus, rhetoric becomes a phenomenon transcending from the local to the global.

Mr. Pérez constructs his research model to analyze the "Rhetorical Internationalization" of Argentine universities. This analytical tool focuses on the activities undertaken to select the best path to internationalization. The research model is theory-grounded and adjusted to the specificity of the conducted analyses. The findings prove that institutions develop variable but integral ways to guide their internationalization processes. The Author's model of the analysis proved to be a well-constructed and practical research tool.



Chapter 5 provides the answers to the research hypothesis. The Author identifies the variables of "Rhetorical Internationalization" that facilitate the institutional performance regarding internationalization. The findings prove that several specific factors combine into one pattern of strategies undertaken by Argentine Public Universities. The thesis acknowledges the existence of the gap between the institutions' potential and reality. Nonetheless, the Author's intention is to analyze the problem and identify the factors advancing or hindering the internationalization process. Mr. Pérez accentuates that observation of institutional behaviors is vital in achieving permanent improvement of internationalization. Rhetoric proves to be an active component facilitating the process. Another conclusion points to internal evaluation procedures as necessary means to measure the improvement of the internationalization process.

Although the central theme of this thesis focused on the international aspect, the analyses demonstrate that a change in university culture is a vital component for substantial advancement in internationalization. The Author proves that local culture matters in a global dimension. The concluding remarks confirm the thesis' embedment in culture studies.

I appreciate the linguistic and editorial side of the thesis. Only one sentence needs correction:

Indeed, theoretical approaches and concepts of the higher education system in Argentina, were developed and applied in the research which is the fundamental the basis of this doctoral thesis. (p.22)

Mr. Pérez demonstrates the potential of the thesis for further analysis, such as a study conducted from the internal perspective of the project's participants. I have to indicate that the main weakness of this thesis is the external perspective of the research. The manuscript would benefit tremendously if it also reflected upon the internal position of the individuals participating in the internationalization process. Moreover, the subjective intra-institutional approach could provide additional



concluding remarks. Nonetheless, I value the outcome; the meticulous research, well-illustrated by the graphic material, provides a comprehensive view of the examined process. The Author transformed the case study into a grounded theory and demonstrated the thesis' potential for further research.

Mariano Martín Pérez exhibits the sensitivity of the cultural studies scholar. I find his project an original and informative scholarly work. Finally, I would like to emphasize that the Author's argument is coherent, and the findings are convincing.

Remarks:

I intend to invite the Author into the discussion during the Ph.D. dissertation defense:

1. At first, I was suspicious about the elaborate title of the thesis. After reading it, I realized the theme precisely fits the analytical content. Nonetheless, the title does not accentuate the cultural context of the research. I wonder if the Author considered alternative titles reflecting the thesis's embedment in cultural studies.
2. I am interested in the reasons behind selecting the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 program as the main focus of this research. Erasmus+ operates among non-EU countries, e.g., Turkey, Kazakhstan, or Ukraine. It would be good to know if the Erasmus Mundus is the only EU program available in Argentina and to identify the possible factors that stop the accessibility of other programs for Argentine universities.
3. I realize that the analysis focuses on Argentina and the EU program, but I miss the American context. Thus, my question concerns the availability of any U.S. programs for Argentine students. If cooperation between American and Argentine universities exists, what influenced the Author's decision to choose the EU project?



Stwierdzam, że przedłożona do recenzji rozprawa doktorska spełnia kryteria stawiane kandydatom w Ustawie o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki (Dz.U. z 2016 r. poz.882). Z pełnym przekonaniem wnioskuję o dopuszczenie mgr Mariano Martín Pérez do dalszych etapów przewodu doktorskiego.

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