

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

Summary

The concept of *rhetorical internationalization* and its particular terminology invoke its close connection with the national and institutional culture. As the literature mentioned prove, the internationalization of higher education in general and higher education institutions (HEIs) in particular is not only the result of some political decisions accompanied by adopted regulations. As the author aims to prove in this research, the actual outcomes of internationalization are based on culture rather than on organizational framework alone. Therefore, the justified approach in analyzing internationalization must be based on the achievements of cultural studies, overcoming the deficiencies of analyses based exclusively on a political science approach (i.e. objective, rational, and systematic manner).

One of the main aims of this dissertation is to appreciate the role of informal norms that shape everyday activity of any given university, also affecting its strategic decisions towards international collaboration and its willingness to devote necessary resources make internationalization working. Many of universities' decision concerning international collaboration are mainly made because of the cultural environment influencing people's behavior. Influence of university culture is not diminishing. The present and realities of internationalization of higher education are a perfect illustration that these are not only regulations and policies that shape modern universities. The rhetoric of internationalization is not the same as the practice of internationalization. The success of some institutions (and failures of the others) is more depended on cultural factors than on economic or political ones.

The choice of the topic was the possibility of filling the gap observed between those descriptions created outside the HEIs' internationalization process and the *present* on the HEIs' ground. This, in turn, sought to explain the process' life and countries' realities up to a certain point, putting aside the unmeasured weight applicable for measuring time and managing selections. The objective the author proposes is to analyze the dynamic of the Public Universities' (PUs) internationalization process during a period of ten years, by incorporating the idea of rhetorical internationalization. The goal of this is to describe said time period's dynamic and thus be able to search for the presence or absence of advances within it.

Considering that what is done within the HEIs rather than what is said is the investigative and analytical aim of this research, the initial position was modified to consider in which direction the HEIs were moving and if they were moving at all. This included Argentina's HEIs in terms of internationalization; their location in order to explore whether they moved at all and where they moved to); what type of internationalization management was being carried out - with the existence or lack thereof of variations in the actors that collaborated in this process - and in what institutional

locations the actors were found to understand the general picture and thus making it possible to compare between the different pictures. Potentially, researchers would be able to consider observing this dynamic in the future, comparing it with the same dynamics in other countries, or specifically within Argentina.

It was assumed that the present and the future situation are both linked to: 1) whoever will manage or carry out the process; 2) whoever it is carried forward for; and 3) with the amount of time necessary to make decisions that measurably modify the degree of commitment the HEI has with respect to the internationalization process. The search for the response to this assumption is what motivated this research, considering that internationalization is a dynamic and managed step, where the HEI assumes control of internationalization itself, while managing over time the steps to improve its own process of internationalization.

Different postulates, theoretical approaches, and study cases have been developed, researched, and presented in order to create a perfect fit for the term of 'Internationalization'. This word can represent the complexity of a process which promotes the growing interest, not only on the part of scholars, but also on the part of politicians, managers, rectors, international academic associations, international organizations, professors, students, etc.

'Internationalization' it is defined and understood within the dissertation "as the process of integrating the international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education which the HEI manages in a more or less steered cycle, from an actual status of internationality at time X towards an envisioned status of extended internationality at time X+N", while the term 'Internationality' describes either HEI's current status or the status discernible at the time of data acquisition with respect to international activities.

The work starts examining various concepts of the internationalization of higher education constructed by several authors (e.g. Davies; Rudzki; de Wit; Knight; Brandenburg & Federkeil; Hudzik; etc.) Later, analyzes the process of internationalization, myths, and misconceptions of the internationalization, as well as the construction of the concept of internationalization among Argentina's public universities and the conceptual foundations of Erasmus Mundus Program Action 2 (EMA2), in a broader context of internationalization policy.

Continuing with the context of policies for the internationalization of higher education in Europe is presented as the basis to contextualize the EMA2. The result is not solely a contextualized revision of the EMA2 Program from the EU perspective, but rather an in-depth search for the objectives of non-EU states regarding HEIs and their internationalization.

Then, focusing within the Argentinean context of the selected period continues the analysis of the scant existent body of literature, with the aim of generating conceptualizations which incorporate the Argentinean present reality regarding the internationalization of HEIs. Analyzing as well the Argentinean national first call for projects for developing or strengthening the international relations and cooperation areas of PUs in 2006, and the second call for a strategic plan for the development of international relations in 2010. Both, made to strengthen spaces belonging to the PUs

responsible for carrying out the internationalization process. Aiming to reconstruct the path to provide a working tool with which to measure the level of rhetorical internationalization within the current process.

Using these criteria during the collecting phase of the dissertation was in retrospect one of the main challenges. On the one hand, due to the autarky (i.e. national economic self-sufficiency) and autonomy (i.e. acting/functioning independently) of the PU in Argentina, the development of each structure in the group was considered equal from the beginning of this research, even though structures receive different names and the main activities are directly or indirectly related to the Internationalization process. On the other hand, to develop this research, the Author made the decision to focus on the managerial level, in consideration of the fact that, to the best of our knowledge, scholars tend to internationalize themselves with or without the support of the Faculties or the University.

However, in this dissertation the focus on the Managerial level was the guidance towards understanding the types of decisions and movements undertaken within the PUs in their internationalization process. Further, each University develops and manages its own ‘window to the world’ which appears to be reliable due to the fact of institutions having a Web page (Cohen, Yemini, & Sadeh, 2014).

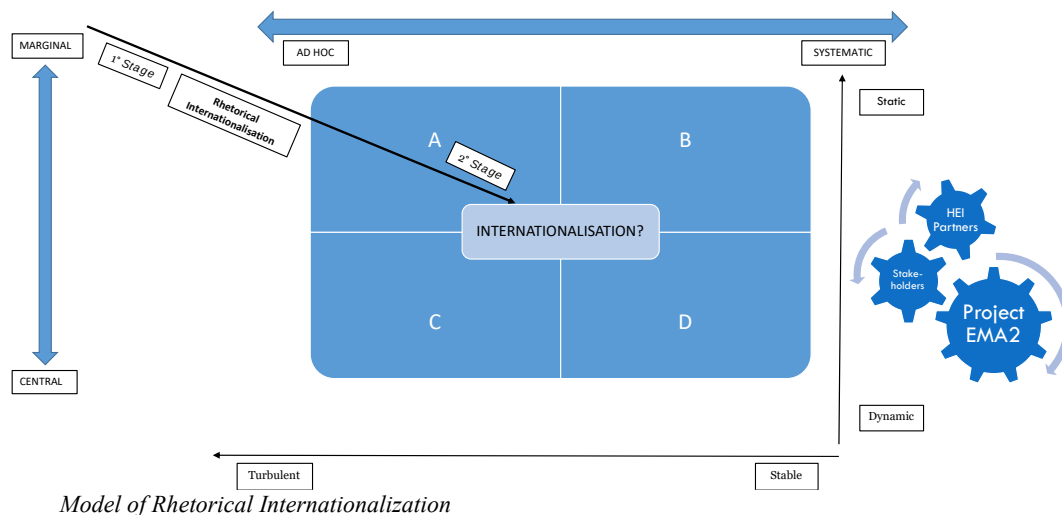
Management is a decisive factor for the process of internationalization, defining not only the management staff of the HEI but it also comprises all tasks and structures associated with the management of a HEI (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007, p. 13). The path built throughout by the managers is not replaceable. One should reflect upon whether each specific step will or will not improve the link to the internationalization of the institution.

While faculties, units, and institutes might develop their own processes, in order to develop a comprehensive process crossing the whole institution, one must find this definition embedded in and shared by the HEI. However, during the earlier research stage of this dissertation it was common to find via its absence whether or not a public strategy or an institutional strategy was communicated by the PU.

The result of the research conducted is achieving an analysis of the real/present internationalization process, knowing that it is a model which does not fit every situation equally. The main objective of the methodology used in this thesis, through the study of social phenomena in natural contexts, is to generate theories that explain the studied phenomenon.

Finally, characteristics of the model are presented and used to identify and explain the term “rhetorical internationalization”. Explaining the *model* and the way it can facilitate comparisons of the analyzed HEIs.

The Main result of the dissertation is the *Model of Rhetorical Internationalization* developed to analyze and assess the “internationalization discourse” within the HEIs, as a first step in the Argentinean context, but to be extended to other countries.



Considering rhetorical internationalization as an active component in the process of internationalization per se, facilitated an understanding of the sphere which is analyzed in this research. As was observed, the national contextual elements and the external international context should have led to an advance or modification in the status of the units responsible for carrying out the process, as a probative element of the value assigned to the internationalization within the PUs.

According to the time slice/period analyzed for retrieval and analysis of the scant information referring to the reality of the IROs in the PUs as a sample element of the reality of Argentina's HEIs' internationalization, the data generated along with the identified elements allow to assert that it is not possible to identify a change or improvement in the process of the HEIs' internationalization, and by default in the specific weight of the internationalization within the said process, if it is not an internal decision in the first place. It is the process that is defined not only by national and institutional policies but that is shaped by culture of people involved in supporting (or, unfortunately, preventing) internationalization.