

**RESEARCH ISSUES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD
IN TIMES OF CHALLENGED GLOBALISATION¹**

Abstract. *The article examines the deliberation of higher education (HE) scholars and practitioners on research issues in the HE field, which has taken into account the complexity of current trends of deglobalisation and changing characteristics of globalisation. More precisely, the article offers a systematic review of the ideas developed by focus group participants (FGPs) from different parts of the world while debating internationalisation, globalisation and Europeanisation with respect to the field of HE. These FGPs agreed that: 1) theoretical definitions used by academics and practitioners are currently socially constructed in a biased way (in favour of the Anglo-North American point of view); 2) academic research (notably conceptual definitions) must better take into account the issues contextually and dynamically across time and space; and 3) that HE research is in the stage when a more theoretically refined and a methodologically stronger new global wave of empirical research is required for further advancement of theorising and practitioners' work.*

Keywords: *higher education, methods, theory, definitions, globalisation, internationalisation, Europeanisation*

Introduction

The globalisation wave starting in the 1990s has not only contributed to the global science (science as pan-national knowledge flow and collegial collaboration which has partial autonomy from science developed within

* Danica Fink-Hafner, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; Tamara Dagen, PhD, University of Zagreb, Croatia; Mitja Hafner Fink, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

¹ This article is based on research work in the framework of the Political Science Research Programme (P5-0136) financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) and of the Slovene Public Opinion Research programme (P5-0151).

DOI: 10.51936/tip.59.2.443-463

national borders) (Marginson, 2021) in general, but also specifically in the higher education (HE) field. However, the real-life context has been dynamically changing. Today, it is a mixture of globalisation, deglobalisation (Behera, 2021; Madhok, 2021; Paul, 2021), regionalisation (Knight, 2012; Robertson et al., 2016; Chao, 2018) and neo-nationalisation processes (Van der Wende, 2020).

Researchers have pointed out that globalisation may still be quite important, although we believe it is better understood in form of a 'marble cake', as shown when studying the potential of world-class universities in Africa (Mutinda and Liu, 2020) or the internationalisation of Chinese academics (Han, 2021). Still, more recent research especially stresses the importance of local contextual factors, particularly taking into account globally distinct contexts (non-Western contexts such as Hong Kong) (Li and Li, 2021). Macro regions can be identified in terms of similarity of some HE characteristics, as well as cultural variations and different historical trajectories, including the relations within colonisation processes, position in the global system and gender issues – as shown, for example, in analysing doctoral studies around the world (Yudkevich et al., 2020). The context of crises, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, adds to diversification, including not only variations in globalisation but also the reconceptualisation of temporal and spatial concepts (Gravett and Ajjawi, 2021; Jung et al., 2021).

In such a dynamic context, the ever-growing and diverse literature on HE (Macfarlane, 2012) increasingly requires various epistemological and methodological problems to be solved, particularly the relationship between theory and the real-world implementation of HE, and the consistency of research methods for a certain research subject (see, for example, Tight and Huisman, 2013; Fumasoli, 2019). Indeed, the literature in the HE field has shown growing interest among scholars in analysis of the various methodological approaches used in recent HE studies (e.g. Barnat et al., 2017; Broucker et al., 2017; Van Vught et al., 2018; Hofmann, 2020; Kosmützki and Nokkala, 2020), and in the question of individual academics' development and the development of an academic discipline (Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2016; Barnat et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, some key concepts have remained challenging territory. This is particularly the case with conceptualisations of internationalisation, globalisation and Europeanisation in HE. Analyses of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation in HE have been fluid among scholars in the last 20 years. Although it remains an important topic in the field (e.g. Jones and de Wit, 2021; Lee and Stensaker, 2021), the focus of research in the last years has more often shifted towards analysis of these processes' effects (e.g. Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017). Key issues regarding conceptualisations relied on in HE include defining internationalisation in HE (e.g. Knight,

2003, 2013; Teichler, 2004; de Wit, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, globalisation and Europeanisation in HE (Van der Wende, 2004; Teichler, 2004; Zgaga, 2008; De Wit and Hunter, 2015; Fumasoli et al., 2019). Despite considerable efforts, these conceptualisations only rarely include definitions of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation (GIE) in such a way that the relationships between them are clearly distinguished. Alongside attempts to clarify the main words used by scholars and practitioners to ensure mutual understanding, there is a need to enhance the methodology in both basic and applied research.

Besides the lack of consensus on the three concepts in the HE field, our previous in-depth literature analysis, as well as research undertaken using the Delphi method among a community of scholars and experts (Fink-Hafner and Dagen, 2017; Dagen, 2018; Fink-Hafner et al., 2019; Dagen et al., 2019), indicated not only the broad fragmentation of the HE field but also tensions among researchers' and experts' perceptions of the HE field depending on the parts of the world they come from. In line with our research question – How do academics and practitioners from different parts of the world perceive research issues in the higher education field in times of challenged globalisation? – in this article, we present the contextualised reflections of scholars and practitioners collected with the focus group research method. We focused on researchers' and experts' views on definitions of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation in the HE field.

Moreover, the idea is not to present how scholars' and practitioners' ideas fit within the existing structure of debates in the HE field. Instead, the key points in their debates are presented. The main interest in the article concerns how HE issues are debated by scholars and practitioners from different parts of the world because their various personal insights into different contexts may help in understanding the theoretical and methodological aspects of the HE field. Indeed, the focus group participants (FGPs) contributed several ideas, hypotheses and practical suggestions regarding research and practical work in HE, encouraging further academic and practitioner engagement.

Research material and methods

As stated in the Introduction, we present research findings from focus groups. The focus groups were initially used for debating the definitions, especially the disagreements and methodological issues presented in the Delphi study results. Nevertheless, the focus group discussions brought valuable insights regarding HE as a research field, its methodology, and the variations in understanding, conceptualisations and approaches to analysing various HE topics and issues.

Two focus groups were conducted – one that included scholars and practitioners who had not participated in the Delphi study, and another that included those who had participated in the Delphi. This research design was implemented in order to: 1) resolve several contrasting elements in constructed definitions of three terms based on the results of the Delphi survey, which gained low consensus and many comments from the participants; 2) obtain deeper insights into the reasons for the profound different understandings of specific elements in the definitions, as indicated to have their roots in the HE field and its fragmentation; and 3) further discuss the existing misunderstandings among experts and scholars.

In the group of Delphi non-participants, six participants were active – three male and three female scholars from younger, middle and senior generations, from five countries (England and Scotland, UK; Ethiopia; Hong Kong; Mexico; Slovenia) and involved in teaching and/or research in the HE field in institutions of various kinds – national, but also one institution active on the global level. In the Delphi participant group were four male and three female scholars from younger, middle and senior generations, from seven countries (Finland, Hong Kong, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, UK, USA) and involved in teaching and/or research in the HE field in institutions of various kinds – national, yet also two institutions active on the global level. We succeeded in including a variety of disciplines which participants felt to be their ‘main’ one when doing research in the HE field (educational sciences, including higher education and science and technology studies, political science, sociology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, history, public policy, organisational studies). Each focus group session lasted 90 minutes.

Research material and questions for the focus group participants (FGPs)

The focus group debates were organised separately for Delphi participants and non-Delphi participants. During the session, participants were asked to comment on three definitions which had emerged through the Delphi method. We asked them to pay particular attention to the elements in the definitions that had evolved as a result of the Delphi method which had not attracted any strong consensus (they were coloured grey). The Delphi method definition of globalisation was rather complex:

Globalisation in higher education is: external processes of growing, widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness, interdependence and convergence of higher education in the context of economic, technological and scientific changes, which are characterised by: (i) the emergence of global institutions; (ii) commercial knowledge transfer; (iii) the rise of marketisation and competition; (iv) the increase

of mutual collaboration among HE institutions globally; and (v) the development of a variety of new transnational education activities that are disembedded from national contexts, and directed to the development of new forms of internationalisation policies in the higher education field.

Similarly complex is the Delphi method definition of internationalisation in higher education:

Internationalisation in higher education is: (i) a process of integrating an international/intercultural/global dimension into the teaching, research, service functions, purpose and delivery of higher education; and (ii) the interconnectedness between national education systems and international dimensions of higher education characteristics of the twenty-first century, which rely on: (a) the mutual activities of governments, higher education institutions, students, faculties, citizens, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other institutions in contexts which vary substantially from country to country; and (b) the policy level connection with the development of strategic objectives, new strategies and multitude border-crossing higher education activities broadly applicable to students and researchers from all backgrounds and countries; and (c) on the level of higher education institutions, it is an important driver of quality improvement and a sign of quality, a potent catalyst for the development of new missions and new models of institutional organisation and governing so as to develop a new set of cross-border activities and a potential source of income.

The Delphi method also led to the definition of Europeanisation in HE:

Europeanisation in higher education is a process of the regionalisation of higher education based on education policy measures and recommendations that are: (i) created on the supranational European Union (EU) political level by mutual cooperation and an integration policy chosen by national governments; (ii) turned into practical education policymaking on the level of institutions in higher education; and (iii) provided in response to the claims made by interest organisations, in order to: (a) increase mobility; (b) strengthen the European higher education area; (c) develop European economies globally; and (d) adjust higher education to the needs of the European labour market.

Participants were not given any written materials in advance and were not asked to prepare in any way. They were only informed of the general discussion topic of each session.

The only limitation on conducting the focus groups was to coordinate the discussion in such a way that all speakers were given time to speak. In the words of one FGP, “the focus group discussion was enriching as it allowed for the exchange of ideas and brainstorming on the spot, rather than presenting individual papers prepared in advance (like at conferences) and not having a real chance to take part in high quality debate with colleagues” (Mexico, FG1).

Results

In this section, we present the voice of the FGPs discussing theoretical issues concerned with definitions of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation². Analysis of the focus group transcripts revealed the key common thoughts expressed in the focus group debates may be identified by the following key words: context, actors, time, values and causality.

Context

Focus group participants on defining globalisation. The FGPs stressed that the definition of globalisation depends on who is creating or building the concept. For example:

...it could be a different definition if you look at it from a Western perspective versus from, for example, an African perspective. (Ethiopia, FG1)

They agreed that globalisation is not disembedded from national and local contexts. For example:

And the whole process of converging and this embedment from national contexts is in fact a very, very conflicting process in which certain places disembed from their national contexts and adapt to another one... The energy behind is actually, is actually the tension between the centres and peripheries, and peripheries are those which are disembedded from national contexts and try to adapt to what is the trend, and this is called convergence of higher education. (Slovenia, FG1)

Instead, as the FGPs stressed in the discussion, it is always contingent on the contexts (national, local) and also in relation to what is being defined. Although certain policies may be imported (e.g. benchmarking, a tenure

² FGPs' citations were only technically edited for better understanding.

system in place in many countries around the world), they are still interpreted and adapted to the local circumstances differently so as to conform to the local realities. Disembeddedness from the national context may be an outcome, but opposite outcomes are also possible.

While certain places do disembed from their national context and adapt to another one, these processes are very conflicting since they involve tensions between the centres and peripheries (peripheries are those which are disembedded from the national context and try to adapt to the convergence trend). With a strong global influence, the Anglo-Northern American model of HE tends to rule, and has been guiding the reality of certain nations gaining and other nations not gaining from these processes of interconnecting and relationships of interdependence. These tensions are leading to new social problems generally and problems in the HE field in particular.

Furthermore, since the world is constantly changing, the trends are not always in the direction of increasing globalisation, but may involve deglobalisation processes or mixes of the two. FGPs pointed out several examples of a particular country's arbitrary halting of its students' international mobility (e.g. India preventing Indian students moving to Chinese universities; China calling on all Chinese students in Canada to immediately return from Canada), and a whole country leaving behind a complex web of institutional and policy integration (Brexit). These processes are not what was expected about 25 years ago.

FGPs exposed an additional phenomenon: regionalisation. For example:

...the process of regionalisation does not necessarily come to a homogeneous entity. There is not only the homogenising process, but also the differentiating. (Hong Kong, FG1)

It's not only about the region itself, but it's also about the macro regions... let's call them north-south,... the centre and peripheries. The peripheries do not want to really cooperate with each other. They want people to come in from the centre. And that is something that should be reflected when we look at internationalisation... and globalisation. (Ethiopia, FG1)

...it might be useful really to speculate more about the world of regions... we are seeing them both as a response to globalisation and as a response to national deficiencies. (England – UK, FG1)

Ideas and concepts as global contexts. The FGPs agreed that ideas matter, and pointed to the historical example of the social democratic idea which broadly impacted both theories and policies. It predominated in the

Western world after the experience of large violent conflicts in the context of economic, social and institutional restructuring. It included the massification of education, which became a trend in HE after WWII and offered greater opportunities for the underprivileged classes to achieve a better life. For example:

...globalisation is a contextual concept... but I would also add that it is a disputed concept. It is not a neutral concept. First of all, I think it is very important to look into this issue from two possible viewpoints. One of them is understanding globalisation as a millennium-long process of humankind, and the other one is globalisation in the discussion of the last 20 years or 25 years. I think this gives two very different philosophies of globalisation. (Slovenia, FG1)

There has also been a strong tendency for the globalisation of ideas to impact university management with the support of international organisations like the OECD, a notable example being New Public Management (NPM). For example:

...the audit culture is the tendency to count everything and then to assign economic value to it. (USA, FG2)

The FGPs stressed that marketisation and competition are concepts that today do not particularly apply to a very large number of HE systems. While competition for tuition fees is a very American, British and Australian characteristic, in Nordic countries, for instance, there is no especially strong drive to participate in the global competition for students. This is because HE in Nordic countries is not one of their national industries. The FGPs suggested that the idea of rescaling the role of the nation state also needs attention in this context. For example:

...empirical evidence has indicated states are so skilful by adopting globalisation as a kind of driver for making reforms in higher education, for fuelling national agendas. The contextualisation of this concept is extremely important, and how far different parts of the world or nation states would respond to globalisation. (Hong Kong, FG1).

Different levels and functions in HE as contexts. FGPs pointed to variations among different levels (countries, HE systems and individual HE institutions) and among various functions in HE (teaching, research). By interiorising and accepting globalisation together with marketisation/competition, universities and HE systems themselves are starting to become

agents of these phenomena and thereby contributing to the marketisation/competition. FGPs stressed that the revenue obtained from the sale of educational services is so big and the services are so profitable that they also attract business, which in turn alters their substance. In research, the competition may be primarily linked to the inclusion of HE in industry, which is expected to create revenue. Otherwise, in the globalisation of research, both competition (including competition for funding) and collaboration/cooperation are important.

Globalisation and internationalisation. The FGPs agreed that, like globalisation, internationalisation needs to be contextualised. Different parts of the world or nation states are responding to globalisation in particular ways, either in the form of pure rhetoric or with an actual (perhaps even substantial) response. This is why FGPs called for empirical research to reveal internationalisation as it occurs in real life, in real contexts.

The FGPs agreed that globalisation is being imposed and that a particular concept of globalisation (including market, competition, neoliberalism) being imposed on some parts of the world may be perceived as an ideological concept.

In contrast, FGPs exposed that internationalisation includes the active participation of actors. It does not tend to be something that is disseminated from stronger to weaker partners, but is more about negotiations among partners acting on a more equal footing and bringing about what both sides regard as a more balanced engagement in international learning. Internationalisation is what universities are deliberately, proactively and strategically creating in response to globalisation. Still, one finds cases where it is difficult to clearly distinguish the two terms.

According to the FGPs, internationalisation strategies are also not simply different but are co-determined by varying contexts, such as historical, geographical (bordering states, etc.), economic, and links between university departments with certain industries based in other countries. Internationalisation is also a response to particular national policies on HE internationalisation.

Furthermore, the FGPs stressed that internationalisation is neither a linearly expanding process nor the same kind of a process in the centre and at the periphery.

Higher education organisations as internationalisation contexts. FGPs agreed that internationalisation is not a homogeneous phenomenon even within a single HE organisation. There may be very big differences between disciplines and fields within a university when it comes to interests and levels of proactive strategies. Moreover, universities choose to have a mainly local, national or international orientation. As a rule, universities in capital cities and metropolitan areas are considered to be the most international,

while they also still have a strong national role and are locally important. The idea of a global university (as a rule, a research university) puts such an HE institution directly into a global milieu. However, the FGPs pointed to problematic notions in this frame also. For example:

There is still this idea of some kind of global model of what a university should be, or how our education should be... for certain countries, that can be seen as an imposition, or at least an inevitability. (Ethiopia, FG1)

Internationalisation and Europeanisation. The FGPs found internationalisation and Europeanisation to be quite complex and in practice often confused with one another. Europeanisation may be understood as part of global regionalisation processes. Further, in the context of the EU, internationalisation in HE may also be seen as an Europeanisation issue since it is associated with the development of quality assurance (QA) and accreditation procedures across Europe. However, it also includes implicit socio-political aspects. For example:

...because the Bologna process is one of the ways of trying to make Europe more homogeneous, trying to create social change in Europe. Erasmus students exchange programmes are the same kind of social engineering, too. (Finland, FG2)

FGPs from EU countries stressed that Europeanisation is also about the EU's economic policies and a host of steering mechanisms, learning mechanisms in the form of policy coordination, and the activities of EU regulators like the European Commission and the Court of Justice, which intervene in education from the perspective of free trade. Indeed, the EU constitutes a specific context in which national, subnational and supranational institutions interplay, while at the same time there is a direct connection between the European and institutional levels without the nation state's interference. Europeanisation concerns the impact of these supranational policies on the national and institutional levels, and vice versa.

All in all, the FGPs agreed that more research is needed to clarify the differentiation between globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation (in HE).

Actors

Actors in the context of globalisation. The FGPs agreed that a very important role is held by the agents – people, institutions, students, international organisations (e.g. OECD) and associations, as well as economic actors

(business sector, big corporations and private investors) – that participate in making revenue from the sale of educational services globally. But there are also non-actors. For example:

...it is a huge part of the world that isn't influencing globalisation. So that would have to be in the definition. (Ethiopia, FG1)

That is to say, actors who are aware of globalisation adjust to the process and position themselves according to globalisation waves while at the same time finding strategic responses. Still, some FGPs pointed out that globalisation has not been shaped equally by all actors (e.g. HE institutions), but by certain key players in the globalisation of HE (as noted in the paragraphs below).

Even within the same national context, actors may embrace the globalisation concept and decide to respond or basically to ignore the whole idea. Furthermore, the organisational actors (agents) of globalisation are not internally homogeneous. Their response to globalisation and even their proactive participation in globalisation are “very internal battles among different identities” (attachments to various disciplines, teaching or research), encompassing external links with industry, ideas and interests within organisations – e.g. within universities.

Actors in the context of Europeanisation are multiple. The FGPs exposed actors ranging from national, subnational and supranational governments and transnational political institutions to HE institutions and civil society associations related to HE (as described above).

Actors in the context of internationalisation. The FGPs agreed that actors in the context of internationalisation can be found at many levels (macro global, macro international, macro national, meso and micro levels), including public actors (those who form part of the state) and various social actors, like universities, with internal academic cultures and interest differences (as described in the section on actors in the context of globalisation); students, who demand or seek knowledge of other languages and other realities in order to be competitive in the global labour market and to obtain better job positions in their own nation states; or families, which demand or seek to keep and/or create tremendous positional power in a social, economic and political milieu. Still, the levels of their engagement may vary significantly.

The FGPs noted the importance of national actors, particularly nation states, when internationalisation is defined as the actions of nation states (between nations), states and governments acting on their national internationalisation policies and collaborating on the establishment and functioning of international organisations. Yet nations may be self-focused as well. The FGPs also pointed out that nation state actors may develop scientific

diplomacy in line with certain interests of their nation states. In a domestic context, policymakers have tended to believe strongly that competition as such is beneficial for HE, with many HE policies now relying on this assumption.

Time

In a way, these phenomena may be seen through the dimension of time. For example, at the outset, globalisation was an external force which came and started to apply pressure to HE systems, countries and HE institutions. However, the timing of reactions may differ considerably. For example, a country may be considered to be a delayed follower of certain trends, although even within the same country individual HE institutions may react with different timing or not at all.

The FGPs also stressed that, as in the case of different geographical positions, over time, definitions also reflect changes in HE systems and institutions caused by the impact of globalisation.

Values

Globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation are value-loaded processes because they relate to particular goals. The reasons for internationalisation may vary radically. They might primarily include an academic goal like improving the quality of HE (e.g. by attracting foreign academics and the best talents among the student population, especially doctoral students and young researchers), or it might chiefly be a cultural or economic exchange. Different academic milieus have a different understanding of internationalisation on the individual and institutional levels. While the Anglo-North American tradition sees internationalisation as an instrument for creating an income and a framework for greater competitiveness, other traditions are more strongly oriented to establishing cooperation and collaboration connections. Europeanisation was pointed at as much more than the European Union being an economic enterprise. For example:

Because we had the... say the European Union is an economic enterprise... it was about services and goods, and free travel... and if you want to achieve that, you need to have a degree of harmonisation ... you also need a European identity, European awareness, to support that economic area development ... That was actually why the European project was moving beyond economic collaboration and also into higher education. (Scotland – UK, FG1)

Last but not least, values also matter in research. For example:

... the crucial methodological challenge for higher education researchers is that we are part of the social phenomena we are researching. And this is... I think that this is a methodological challenge. (Finland, FG2)

Causality

The FGPs formed a consensus on the following causal observations, which can be understood as scientific statements or as hypotheses for further empirical research on the relations among the described concepts:

- Internationalisation in HE is a response of higher education to globalisation.
- Globalisation is both an external steering force and the product of agents' (the national HE system, HE institutions) internal forces.
- Certain resources (financial capabilities) enable richer universities to disembed themselves from the national context, while many universities cannot do this because they depend on state funding.
- Context (regional, national, local milieus, an HE institution's internal characteristics) matters: it partly determines the large differences seen among developed and developing countries, especially those now in the process of building up their national HE systems (e.g. in specific African regions).
- Values strongly influence the development of certain rationales that foster internationalisation on the institutional and sub-institutional levels (e.g. historical and traditional paths, language issues, joint curricula, digitalisation and online learning, etc.).

455

Discussion

It is noticeable that the FGPs coming together from different parts of the world have expanded the horizon for thinking about conceptual and methodological issues in the area of HE.

In general, the elements of definitions created based on the previous Delphi research which did not gain big support from Delphi participants are also questioned by the FGPs. Firstly, the FGPs raised questions on who is building definitions/concepts and related this issue to their contingency on the contexts. Secondly, the FGPs pointed to an issue in relation to what definitions/concepts are developed. Thirdly, disembeddedness from the national context was questioned as this may be one among other possible outcomes (even opposite ones). Fourthly, the fil rouge of FGPs' debates is a call for empirical research to reveal the real-life processes, contexts and outcomes.

More specifically, these are the FGPs' main common thoughts on several issues discussed in the FGs. They are summarised in the following two clusters of thoughts.

1. *With regard to definitions of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation in HE:*

- It is necessary to look at the bigger picture – historical processes and current processes of globalisation, deglobalisation and regionalisation. As the current world is very dynamic, greater refinement is needed in understanding the complexity of globalisation, deglobalisation, global regionalisation and peculiarities of various regionalisations (especially the EU and Europeanisation) compared to internationalisation and globalisation.
- There is a need for greater precision in the HE field in defining and using the terms internationalisation and globalisation. Although internationalisation refers to relationships between nations, in the HE field it is very often used inconsistently for phenomena in which nation states (governments) are not involved. Further, distinguishing internationalisation from globalisation strategies has been shown to be very important for understanding processes inside HE – globalisation may and does take place through the direct engagement of micro-level entities with transnational (global) endeavours. Indeed, the literature reveals universities' different approaches to developmental policies concerning, for example, the building of world-class universities.
- There is no single process of internationalisation or globalisation; internationalisation is neither a linearly expanding process nor the same in the centre and on the periphery.
- Causality and time must be taken into account when constructing definitions.
- In constructing the definition, it is hugely important to determine whether the definition is supposed to describe what is happening, or should it be consensually abstract, actually an integral part of the studied processes (e.g. globalisation). The FG discussions indicated that it would be a good idea to search for a definition of globalisation if that would actually constitute a description of globalisation in HE based on ever richer empirical insights.

2. *With regard to the perception of HE research*

- A critical approach to Western-centrism reaffirms the thesis concerning Western-centric development, which has been described in the world polity theory developed by John W. Meyer and colleagues at Stanford (Meyer, 1980), was pointed out in the FG discussions.
- Macfarlane's map (2012) of the HE archipelago with multiple disciplines

and schools as islands is interesting, but the bridges between them are missing.

- The HE field must engage more so as to connect further theoretical and methodological development, including mixed methods empirical research combining inductive bottom-up and theory-driven top-down approaches, for which more empirical research is needed.
- In analysing HE institutions, further contextualisation needs to be considered with regard to the idiosyncrasies of teaching and research within HE institutions. Also, since there are globalised universities and a global milieu of their activities, it would make sense to distinguish HE institutions' direct globalisation strategies from HE institutions' internationalisation strategies embedded in the (nation) state.

Recent critical debates in the HE field echo the FGPs' criticism of Western-centrism, recently also termed "firm Anglo-American hegemony" by Marginson (2021:15); it has even been argued to be an expression of whiteness as futurity (Shahjahan and Edwards, 2021). While the FGPs actually did not support the development of new definitions, the majority of research is currently conducted with the goal of analysing certain different aspects of, for example, globalisation and does not focus on defining the concept itself (e.g. Luijten-Lub et al., 2005; Van Vught et al., 2018). This may be a consequence of globalisation becoming an ever more complex phenomenon (as noted by the FGPs). Indeed, a look at recent history shows that time (with the related contexts) has indeed been a critical factor and has thus far led to a variety of conceptualisations of globalisation. During the 1990s (e.g. McGinn, 1995; Scott, 1998), and then from the 2000s as a special research sub-field (e.g. Scott, 2000; Knight, 2003; Yang, 2003; Enders, 2004; Teichler, 2004; Marginson and Van der Wende, 2006), globalisation became even more complex and has become much more connected to the research topics in recent years (e.g. Dzvimbo and Moloj, 2013; Youssef, 2014; Dobbins and Kwiek, 2017). At the same time, the literature has become increasingly fragmented, as noted by the FGPs and affirmed by Daenekindt and Huisman (2020) based on large-scale content analysis of HE texts published between 1991 and 2018. Even in studying world-class universities' literature fragments, the presented conceptual and methodological issues persist (e.g. Deem et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012; Aithal and Aithal, 2019; Baryshnikova et al., 2019).

Conclusion

In line with the literature presented in the introduction, our research is based on theses that the real-life context has been changing dynamically,

including a mix of globalisation, deglobalisation, regionalisation and neo-nationalisation processes (Van der Wende, 2020; Behera, 2021; Madhok, 2021; Paul, 2021; Knight, 2012; Robertson et al., 2016; Chao, 2018) and also that the context of crises, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, adds to diversification, including not only variations in globalisation but also the re-conceptualisation of temporal and spatial concepts (Gravett and Ajjawi, 2021; Jung et al., 2021). Use of the focus group method based on the results of the previously modified Delphi method and engaging FG participants from different parts of the world allowed the complexity of the research issues in the context of the ongoing processes of globalisation, deglobalisation and regionalisation to be effectively taken into account in the deliberation.

Our expectation that focus group participants from different parts of the world would contribute to variation in perceptions of research issues in the higher education field was met. Indeed, the FGPs demonstrated that the theoretical definitions used by academics and practitioners in the HE field are currently socially constructed in a biased way in favour of the Anglo-North American point of view and its academic research (especially conceptual definitions). The FGPs believe that the HE field must better consider the contextually and dynamics across time and space. They also agreed that HE research is at a stage where a more theoretically refined and a methodologically stronger new global wave of empirical research is required to further advance the theorising and practitioner work. Indeed, the FGPs contributed several ideas, hypotheses and practical suggestions regarding research and practical work in HE, encouraging further academic and practitioner engagement.

The FGPs made it clear that to develop further what is known in the HE field, greater clarity and precision are required in research and in practitioners' work. Such a goal is not considered to be a field for tension among the various (re)interpretations of theoretical definitions. Rather, it is embraced as encouragement for 1) more new inductive empirical research for revealing real-life processes; 2) academic research collaboration across the world and across the disciplinary boundaries; 3) greater effort in enabling communication among academic researchers and practitioners; and 4) greater development of academics' and practitioners' self-awareness of the roles they play in the context of geopolitical fragmentation, differentiation and socioeconomic inequalities around the world. The FGPs effectively pled for more complex understanding of spatiality, which goes beyond what Beck (2002) called methodological nationalism, taking into account how this evolving knowledge is used and with what impact.

Our research is also politically and policy relevant because it does not only show that the academic segment of HE and practitioners' activities are

socially constructed in quite a biased way (on the global level, favouring the English-North American point of view), but also that this can be fruitfully deliberated when HE academics and practitioners from different parts of the world come together and engage in a debate enriched by contributions rooted in very different social (world) contexts.

The presented findings are also highly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, which escalated the previously already existing issues of scapes, including the time scape (Gravett and Ajjawi, 2021) and uncertainty (Jung et al., 2021).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aithal, Sreeramana P. and Shubhrajyotsna Aithal (2019): Building World-Class Universities: Some Insights & Predictions. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMIE)* 4 (2): 13–35.
- Baryshnikova, Marina, Elena Vashurina, Elza Sharykina, Yuri Sergeev and Irina Chinnova (2019): The Role of Flagship Universities in a Region: Transformation Models. *Educational Studies* 1: 8–43.
- Barnat, Miriam, Elke Bosse and Caroline Trautwein (2017): The guiding role of theory in mixed-methods research: Combining individual and institutional perspectives on the transition to higher education. *Theory and method in higher education research* 3: 1–19.
- Beck, Ulrich (2002): The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society* 1–2: 17–44.
- Behera, Navnita Chadha (2021): Globalization, deglobalization and knowledge production. *International Affairs* 97 (5): 1579–1597.
- Broucker, Bruno, Kurt De Wit and Jef C. Verhoeven (2017): Higher Education Research: Looking Beyond New Public Management. *Theory and method in higher education research* 3: 21–38.
- Chao, Roger Y. Jr. (2018): Regionalism, regionalization of higher education, and higher education research: mapping the development in regionalization of higher education research". In Jisun Jung, Hugo Horta and Akiyoshi Yonezawa (eds.), *Researching Higher Education in Asia*, 73–109. Singapore: Springer.
- Daenekindt, Stijn and Jeroen Huisman (2020): Mapping the scattered field of research on higher education. A correlated topic model of 17,000 articles, 1991–2018. *Higher Education* 80 (3): 571–587.
- Dagen, Tamara, May Doušak, Danica Fink-Hafner, Mitja Hafner-Fink, Meta Novak (2019): Defining Internationalisation, Globalisation and Europeanisation in Higher Education. *Teorija in Praksa* 56 (2): 643–659.
- Deem, Rosemary, Ka Ho Mok and Lisa Lucas (2008): Transforming higher education in whose image? Exploring the concept of the 'world-class' university in Europe and Asia". *Higher education policy* 21 (1): 83–97.
- De Wit, Hans (2013): Internationalisation of higher education, an introduction on the why, how and what. In Hans de Wit (ed.), *An introduction to higher education internationalisation*, 13–46. Milan: Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

- De Wit, Hans and Fiona Hunter (2015): Understanding internationalisation of higher education in the European context. In Hans de Wit, Fiona Hunter, Laura Hunter and Eva Egron-Polak (eds.), *Internationalisation of higher education*, 41–58. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Dobbins, Michael and Marek Kwiek (2017): Europeanisation and globalisation in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe: 25 years of changes revisited (1990–2015). *European Educational Research Journal* 16 (5): 519–528.
- Dzvimbo, Kuzvinetsa Peter and Kholeka Constance Moloi (2013): Globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 33 (3): 1–16.
- Enders, Jurgen (2004): Higher education, internationalisation, and the nation-state: Recent developments and challenges to governance theory. *Higher Education* 47 (3): 361–382.
- Fink-Hafner, Danica and Tamara Dagen (2017): Globalisation in Higher Education Policies: Multidisciplinary Insights. *Teorija in praksa* 54 (3–4): 572–591.
- Fink-Hafner, Danica, Tamara Dagen, May Doušak, Meta Novak and Mitja Hafner-Fink (2019): Delphi Method: Strengths and Weaknesses. *Advances in Methodology & Statistics/Metodološki zvezki* 16 (2): 1–19.
- Fumasoli, Tatiana (2019): Learning from internationalisation scholarship in higher education: commonalities, divergences and possible research directions for internationalisation in schools. In Laura C. Engel, Claire Maxwell and Miri Yemini (eds.), *The Machinery of School Internationalisation in Action Beyond the Established Boundaries*, 165–178. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fumasoli, Tatiana, Giovanni Barbato and Matteo Turri (2020): The determinants of university strategic positioning: a reappraisal of the organisation. *Higher Education* 80: 305–334.
- Gravett, Karen and Rola Ajjawi (2021): Belonging as situated practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–11. Advance online publication.
- Guzmán-Valenzuela, Carolina (2016): Connecting Theory and Practice in Qualitative Research. *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research* 2: 115–133.
- Han, Shuangmiao (2021): Empowered or disempowered by mobility? Experience of international academics in China. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–15. Advance online publication.
- Hofmann, Riikka (2020): Dialogues with Data: Generating Theoretical Insights from Research on Practice in Higher Education. *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research* 6: 41–60.
- Jones, Elspeth and Hans de Wit (2021): A Global View of Internationalisation: What Next?. In Hilligje van't Land, Andreas Corcoran and Diana-Camelia Iancu (eds.), *The Promise of Higher Education. Essays in Honour of 70 Years of IAU*, 83–88. Cham: Springer.
- Jung, Jisun, Hugo Horta and Gerard A. Postiglione (2021): Living in uncertainty: the COVID-19 pandemic and higher education in Hong Kong. *Studies in Higher Education* 46 (1): 107–120.
- Knight, Jane (2003): Updated definition of internationalization. *International Higher Education* 33: 2–3.

- Knight, Jane (2013): The changing landscape of higher education internationalisation – for better or worse?. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* 17 (3): 84–90.
- Knight, Jane (2012): A conceptual framework for the regionalization of higher education: Application to Asia. In John N. Hawkins, Ka-Ha Mok and Deane E. Neubauer, *Higher education regionalization in Asia Pacific. Implications for Governance, Citizenship and University Transformation*, 17–35. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kosmützky, Anna and Terhi Nokkala (2020): Towards a methodology discourse in comparative higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly* 74 (2): 115–217.
- Lee, Jenny J. and Bjørn Stensaker (2021): Research on internationalisation and globalisation in higher education – Reflections on historical paths, current perspectives and future possibilities. *European Journal of Education* 56 (2): 157–168.
- Li, Danling and Yongyan Li (2021): Preparing for RAE 2020 in Hong Kong: academics' research, writing and publishing trajectories in a neoliberal governance landscape. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–13. Advance online publication.
- Luijten-Lub, Anneke, Marijk Van der Wende and Jeroen Huisman (2005): On cooperation and competition: A comparative analysis of national policies for internationalisation of higher education in seven Western European countries. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 9 (2): 147–163.
- Macfarlane, Bruce (2012): The higher education research archipelago. *Higher Education Research & Development* 31 (1): 129–131.
- Madhok, Anoop (2021): Globalization, de-globalization, and re-globalization: Some historical context and the impact of the COVID pandemic. *BRQ Business Research Quarterly* 24 (3): 199–203.
- Marginson, Simon (2021): What drives global science? The four competing narratives. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–19. Advance online publication.
- McGinn, Noel F. (1995): The implications of globalisation for higher education. In Lene Buchert and Kenneth King (eds.), *Learning from Experience: policy and practice in aid to higher education*, 77–93. Hague: Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries – CESO.
- Meyer, John W. (1980): The World Polity and the Authority of the Nation-State. *Studies of the modern world-system*. In Albert J. Bergesen (ed.), *Studies of the Modern World-System*, 109–137. New York: Academic Press.
- Mutinda, Gladys and Zhimin Liu (2020): Perceptions on the internationalisation of higher education in public universities in Kenya and the implications for practice – a phenomenographic approach. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1–20.
- Paul, Thazha V. (2021): Globalization, deglobalization and reglobalization: adapting liberal international order. *International Affairs* 97 (5): 1599–1620.
- Robertson, Susan L., Kris Olds, Roger Dale and Que Anh Dang (eds.) (2016): *Global Regionalisms and Higher Education: projects, processes, politics*. Cheltenham – Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Scott, Peter (2000): Globalisation and higher education: Challenges for the 21st century. *Journal of studies in International Education* 4 (1): 3–10.

- Scott, Peter (1998): Massification, Internationalization and Globalization. In Peter Scott (ed.), *The globalization of higher education*, 108–129. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press.
- Shahjahan, Riyad A. and Kirsten T. Edwards (2021): Whiteness as futurity and globalization of higher education. *Higher Education*, 1–18. Advance online publication.
- Teichler, Ulrich (2004): The changing debate on internationalisation of higher education. *Higher education* 48 (1): 5–26.
- Tight, Malcolm and Jeroen Huisman (eds.) (2013): *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research. International Perspectives on Higher Education Research. Volume 9*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Timans, Rob, Paul Wouters and Johan Heilbron (2019): Mixed methods research: what it is and what it could be. *Theory and Society* 48 (2): 193–216.
- Van Vught, Frans A., Marijk C. Van der Wende and Don F. Westerheijden (2018): Globalisation and differentiation in higher education systems. In Malcolm Tight and Jeroen Huisman (eds.), *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research 4*: 85–101. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Van der Wende, Marijk (2004): Introduction. In Jeroen Huisman and Marijk van der Wende (eds.), *On Cooperation and Competition: National and European Policies for the Internationalisation of Higher Education*, 9–15. ACA Papers on International Cooperation in Education. Bonn: Lemmens.
- Van der Wende, Marijk (2021): Neo-Nationalism and Universities in Europe. In John Aubrey Douglass (ed.), *Neo-nationalism and Universities: Populists, Autocrats and the Future of Higher Education*, 117–140. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wang, Qi, Ying Cheng and Nian Cai Liu (eds) (2012): *Building World-Class Universities. Different Approaches to a Shared Goal*. Boston: Brill Sense Publishers.
- Yang, Rui (2003): Globalisation and higher education development: A critical analysis. *International Review of Education* 49 (3–4): 269–291.
- Youssef, Leila (2014): Globalisation and Higher Education: from within-Border to Cross-Border. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning* 29 (2): 100–115.
- Yudkevich, Maria, Philip G. Altbach, Hans de Wit and Victor Rudakov (2020): Doctoral Education Worldwide. Key Trends and Realities. In Maria Yudkevich, Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit (eds.), *Trends and Issues in Doctoral Education. A Global Perspective*, 467–490. SAGE Studies in Higher Education. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington and Melbourne: Sage Publications.
- Zgaga, Pavel (2008): Mobility and the European Dimension in Teacher Education. In Brian Hudson and Pavel Zgaga (eds.), *Teacher Education Policy in Europe: A voice of Higher Education Institutions*, 17–41. Ume: University of Umeå, Faculty of Teacher Education.

SOURCES

- Dagen, Tamara (2018): Utjecaj globalizacije na internacionalizaciju javnih europskih sveučilišta. Doctoral dissertation. University of Zagreb. The Faculty of Political Science. Accessible at https://www.fpzg.unizg.hr/_download/repository/Doktorski_rad_Tamara_Dagen%5B1%5D.pdf, 4. 11. 2021.
- Marginson, Simon and Marijk van der Wende (2006): Globalisation and higher education. Prepared for OECD. Accessible at <https://www.oecd.org/education/research/37552729.pdf>, 22. 11. 2021.