Abstract

The internationalisation of the Hungarian higher education historically based. After centuries of peregrinatio academica the Hungarian higher educational system fits to the Bologna Criteria and to the Magna Charta Universitatum too. The number of international students studying in Hungary raised in the last few years, but the country still has capacity to welcome foreigner students. The state has to support the higher educational system more to start new and new international programmes.

Keywords: higher education, mobilisation, globalisation, Hungary, students

“A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition; its constant care is to attain universal knowledge; to fulfil its vocation its transcends geographical and political frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other.”¹ As the citation shows, the supranational characteristic of the higher education appeared really early in Europe. The aim of this article is to show how the higher educational system became international is Hungary and to present the trends influencing the frameworks actually.

The international or supranational attribute of the higher education has been underlined by Henrik Enroth too while he described the Magna Charta Universitatum. “Thus, were it not for the fact that the university by far antedates the nation, it would be fair to say that the university has been an transnational institution all along. As it happens, the university may well be the most successful example in the whole of human history of a truly cosmopolitan institution. Arguably, insofar as the modern university has enjoyed tense relations to the institutions with which it has interacted, this is not so much due to some particular qualities inherent in our professional activities or ways of life, as to the simple fact that our activities and ways of life are inherently transgressive. As a global institution, the university transcends the political community and authority of the nation state, and many of the practices in which we engage professionally reflect this. Meanwhile, as residents of nation states we tend to adhere to their community and authority, and act accordingly.”² As we can see, this international characteristic has its own roots in the past but it’s still actual, and it will become more and more important in the future.

¹ Magna Charta Universitatum. Principles, 4.
The Magna Charta Universitatum declared three other principles. First the autonomy of the higher education and the universities. It always has to be independent from every political, economical or ideological authority to fulfil its main goal: the creation and transfer of cultural values. Second the Magna Charta Universitatum declare the unity of teaching and research. And the third declaration was the liberty of research, teaching and education respected by the states authority.\(^3\) The Hungarian higher education always used to be international on different levels. The students of the Debrecen College of Calvinist Reformed Church used to travel abroad (mainly to other Calvinist universities, for example in Wittenberg, Zürich etc.) from the 16\(^{th}\) century.

The process, which we also often call peregrinatio academica, had two ways: the Hungarian students travelled abroad (mainly into West-Europe) and later, after a few semesters they returned into Hungary. They brought and took the information, the letters and books with themselves and they played a very important role in the actual and new ideas reception in the Carpathian basin.\(^4\) This process also played a big role in the scientific and political life of Hungary, because for a long term there was only one university in the whole country: the University of Nagyszombat founded in 1635 by the Jesuits. During these years not only the protestant Hungarians travelled abroad to study but also several Roman Catholic students too.\(^5\) After the Second World War Hungary became a part of the socialist political block led by the USSR, which basically limited the possibilities of internationalisation. Hungarian students mainly travelled to other socialist countries to study there and the Hungarian higher education invited students mainly from other friendly countries.

After 1989 everything changed. The government opened the borders which meant the Hungarian students had the right to travel into new (“Western”) countries and students from other countries had the right to study in Hungary. The Hungarian higher educational system became very attractive for many countries: the students had the possibility to study for low prices, and they found a high quality of education. The most popular fields of sciences was the different medical degrees (including dentistry and pharmaceutics). The Hungarian medical universities, which later became parts of big united and multidisciplinary universities, started new international programmes – mainly in English (University of Debrecen, Szeged or Pécs), or partly in German (Semmelweis University, Budapest). Thousands of international students started their university years in Hungary.

Hungary is trying to keep its positions in the big competition of the higher education’s internationalisation. But what’s the situation globally? Is the internationalisation a hot topic abroad too? “Internationalisation of higher education seems to be a matter of procedure in some respects, but has remained exceptional in others. International globe trotting for research related purposes expanded with the affordability of


national and international air flights. An increasing number of publications co-authored by academics from more than a single country suggests that international research cooperation is on the rise. Growing numbers of internationally mobile students are often referred to as the most obvious indicator of internationalisation of higher education. But for several decades the growth in the number of foreign students has paralleled the overall growth of student numbers, with the rate of foreign students remaining fairly constant at about 2 percent. The international professional mobility of academics is by no means rare, but the mobility rates of academics have remained more uneven in economically advanced countries than has international student mobility. Finally, temporary international mobility for teaching purposes remains a marginal phenomenon.⁶

As we can see in many counties only the number of the international students grew the percentage not. But the situation is different in Hungary. In the academic year of 1980/1981 there were only 2700 international students in Hungary and they were the 4.21% of the total number of students. However till the academic year of 2000/2001 the number of the international students raised to 7751 the percentage didn’t change radically (4.4% of the total number of students). But in the next decade, till the academic year of 2010/2011 the number grew very much (15889 international students) and the percentage raised half times (to 6.6% of the total number of students).⁷ In an other table we can find different numbers and percentages of the international students in Hungary. It’s really interesting to see how these indicators moved between the academic years of 2005/2006 and 2010/2011. In 2005/2006 14491 international students studied in Hungary (3.4% of the total number of students), in 2006/2007 15459 (3.9%), in 2007/2008 16916 (4.4%) and 2009/2010 18154 international students (4.9% of the total number of students). In the next year 18850 international students studied in Hungary and they were the 5.2% of the total student number in the country.⁸ The interesting difference between the numbers may originate from the origin of the data series. The first table’s data came from OECD publications and from surveys made by the Central Statistical Agency of Hungary, the second table’s data originally published by the government.⁹

One of the most actual topics in the Hungarian higher education is the presence of the foreigner students in Hungary. We have to increase the number of international students and to reach this goal we have to make the Hungarian higher educational system more attractive for foreigners. It’s important because in the near future the full-term mobility programmes will become more typical and the credit-mobility will

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⁹ Unfortunately sometimes it’s really difficult to collect valid data about the higher education in Hungary. For example we don’t have exact data about the drop-out in PhD- or DLA-programmes, there are two different statistics about this interesting topic.
lose its popularity. We have to use the teaching capacities of the academic staff and start new international (mainly English) programmes for the new students.\textsuperscript{10} As József Berács and Erzsébet Malota published Hungary can become attractive for international students. Hungary can increase its attractiveness especially with new grants founded by the sender or the destination countries. In the academic year of 2009/2010 we were able to find 27 countries, from where more than 100 international students arrived to Hungary. More than 120 countries citizens were studying in Hungary that year.\textsuperscript{11}

There is another side of the international higher education which we have to examine: the international mobility rate of the academic staff. “Hungary has to increase the academic staff’s mobility rate and the administrative staff’s rate too. It’s an unequivocal aim to increase the total number of the international students studying in Hungary, where they can find a higher educational system with high quality and low prices. Offering a high quality and numerous programs in English the Hungarian higher educational system can be attractive for foreigners. (…) the essence of the mobility programs: to increase the quality level of the education. When a member of the academic staff starts any kind of program abroad (research program, teaching program) (…), her or his point of view will be renewed. And with this renewed point of view these professors will be able to fill the Hungarian higher educational system with the best practices collected abroad. We can make a special concentrate of these best practices.”\textsuperscript{12}

If we would like to create a to-do-list for the educational government of Hungary, we have to mention the following points. If Hungary completes these criteria the internationalisation level of the countries higher educational system will grow.

1. We have to raise the internationalisation level of the academic staff to collect international best practices.
2. We have to raise the number of international programmes and courses.
3. We have to show the quality of the Hungarian higher education for those students who only arrived for 1 or 2 semesters into Hungary with credit mobility. Maybe they will start a full (MA or MSc) programme in Hungary later.
4. The state has to found new grants for international students and has to subscribe contracts aiming new grants with other countries.
5. The higher educational system needs more fiscal support to start international programmes. It's much more difficult to teach or to learn in a foreign language and we have to respect the members of the academic staff this way too.

References

- Magna Charta Universitatum