



## **Geographies of internationalisation: from policies to practice (0178)**

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Geographies of internationalisation: from policies to practice

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**Research Domain:** Higher education policy (HEP)

**Abstract:** This work in progress explores how internationalisation policies and instruments affect perceptions of quality, relevance, and learning in higher education (HE) and how these perceptions travel with internationally mobile students and academics. Inherent in the word *inter-national* is a focus on geography; this begs the question how geography can improve the quality of HE: how can the integration of a 'non-national' dimension or the mobility between countries enhance the relevance and quality of education? We propose that drawing on spatial theories help us tease out implicit understandings of geographies of internationalisation; i.e. what come to be seen as 'the right knowledge' when teaching in English, who becomes the 'good student' in a classroom with students from all over the world, and how perceptions of pedagogy is negotiated by international staff. After discussing arguments for a spatial approach to HE internationalisation, we present the ongoing empirical study and its first results.

**Paper:**

### Background

Through initiatives such as the ERASMUS programme, internationalisation of universities has been on the higher education (HE) policy agenda in Europe for more than 30 years. Internationalisation is regarded as a tool for enhancing the quality of education, research, and service to society (de Wit, 2015), yet we have no clear knowledge regarding how internationalisation affects ways of thinking about quality, relevance, and learning. Inherent in the word *inter-national* is a focus on geography; this begs the question how geography can improve the quality of HE: how can the integration of a 'non-national' dimension or the mobility between countries enhance the relevance and quality of education? In seeking answers to these questions, a spatial approach is useful as it can help move beyond the binaries of national/international, home/abroad, local/global (Larsen, 2016); it can unfold geographical differences (Brooks et al., 2012) and explore how ideas about quality and relevance move across countries and become hegemonic in HE policy and practice – or fail to do so (Gulson & Symes, 2007).

In this theoretical paper, we argue why spatial theories provide a novel approach to tease out implicit

understandings of the geographies of internationalisation; i.e. what come to be seen as 'the right knowledge' when teaching in English, who becomes the 'good student' in a classroom with students from all over the world, and how pedagogy is affected by international staff. After discussing arguments for a spatial approach to HE internationalisation, we present the empirical study and its first results, thereby showing how the theoretical framework can be used in practice.

## **A spatial approach to internationalisation of HE**

Internationalisation can potentially open the world of education by including a diversity of perspectives; yet, it can also close the world through 'Westernisation' or 'anglicisation' of education and curriculum (Leask, 2015). Hence, there are inevitable geographical dimensions to internationalisation of HE. Spatial and mobility theories highlight such geographical dimensions. In the 1990s, a spatial turn emerged in the social sciences and the humanities, whereby scholars from these fields became interested in spatial dimensions of different phenomena (Warf & Arias, 2008). This was followed by the mobility turn (Sheller & Urry, 2006), which added perspectives on mobility to spatial theories. A number of education researchers have used spatial and mobility perspectives in their studies of education: from the micro level in the classroom (Fenwick et al. 2011), to a macro level on internationalisation (Larsen, 2016). In a parallel development, human geographers have become increasingly interested in the field of education (Holloway & Jöns, 2012). Thus, spatial studies of education are found both amongst educationalists and geographers.

In this study, we combine a number of approaches and concepts from these fields. 'Geographies of science' (Livingstone; 2010) can help us understand the localness of scientific knowledge, which is important for understanding what relevance means in different parts of HE. This spatial approach examines local aspects of global knowledge and education. It does not reify the local or imply a static notion of knowledge. On the contrary, 'geographies of science' explores the world as interconnected through flows and networks instead of binaries. While some has challenged academics to put an end to Western/Eurocentric domination in international HE curricula (Haigh, 2002), we use 'geographies of science' to question what an international HE curriculum looks like. A central method for studying this is 'mapping the curriculum' that provides a picture of knowledge geographies and identifies geographies of power in the production and reproduction of academic knowledge (Tange & Millar, 2016).

Following the mobility turn, geographers, historians, and anthropologists have studied 'mobility of knowledge', especially concerning HE (Jöns et al. 2017). We use this approach to study how knowledge, pedagogies, and notions of what it means to be a good student travel, for instance through and with international students and staff. Simandan (2002) has captured specificities of what it means to be 'a good student' in different programs at different HE institutions and in different countries. We combine Simanda's work with the concept 'the cultural production of an academic' (Adriansen et al. 2016) to examine what happens when students move across settings and countries and encounter new notions of how to be 'a good student'. 'Geographical imaginaries' (Thompson, 2017) is an important concept that can capture the historical and political influences on students' motives for choosing a certain part of the world to travel to. This historical perspective is important for understanding how students and staff perceive their own history, the world, and the (educational) history of the places they travel (Koh, 2017). In continuation of mobility of knowledge, there has been a focus on the 'mobility of policy' (Geddie, 2014). This approach can be used for examining how

notions of quality and relevance move, based on the idea that both concepts are discursive constructs that receive their meaning in the discursive construction of actions linked to them (Saarinen, 2007).

## The empirical study of geographies of internationalisation

Using a spatial framework, we use Denmark as an empirical case for exploring how internationalisation policies and instruments affect perceptions of quality, relevance, and learning in higher education, and how these perceptions travel with internationally mobile students and academics. We focus on six common instruments of internationalisation in Danish HE: outgoing student mobility, incoming student mobility, English as a medium of instruction (EMI), international specialisation, international staff, and internationalisation at home. We do so through the following research questions: Which notions of quality and relevance are produced through the various instruments of internationalisation in different Danish HE institutions and educational programs? How do different instruments of internationalisation create global hierarchies through the promotion of certain types of knowledge, students, and pedagogies?

While this is work in progress, our preliminary research shows that geographical imaginaries are shaping not only Danish students' choice of destination for outgoing mobility, but also what they find possible to learn during their stay abroad. The spatial approach thus allows us to uncover the (uneven) geographies of internationalization.

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