ARC8 Expert Group on Inclusive International Mobility of People and Knowledge

Session 1 | Friday, 18 December 2020

Memo

Presentation of Dr Miki SUGIMURA, Vice President for Global Academic Affairs, Sophia University; Member of the Japanese National Commission to UNESCO

Miki was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are higher education internationalisation policies and practices currently, what is the status quo?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?

Miki started her presentation with introducing Sophia University, and point out some possibilities and challenges for internationalisation in case of her university. The COVID19 pandemic has created many institutional challenges, however, even before, it was time for universities to rethink or reshape their internationalisation vision and governance. Global mobility has been ongoing, but the cultural diversity, conflicts and quality of outcomes were not properly addressed.
One main element of rethinking internationalisation should be finding new ways for evaluating learning outcomes. For example, OECD has been developing a comprehensive project focusing on the evaluation of critical thinking and creativity. Sophia University has joined this project to create a system for evaluating student learning outcomes. Another element should be the introduction of blended/hybrid internationalisation activities. Sophia University is moving towards a more flexible and diversified system of learning in higher education. It has joined the ASEAN International mobility for student program (AIMS) program, which has been started by three countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand) and now moved on to a more regional based approach. The exchange programme has led to more comprehensive cooperation among partner universities, e.g., joint development of a transdisciplinary programme.

In Japan, many institutions pursue collaborative online international learning (COIL) programmes already for example. COIL is a quite new concept in the internationalization of higher education but a great possibility to include more stakeholders, diverse student, and faculty members. Sophia University has already started using this tool in 2018 in collaboration with another two Japanese universities. Below are some examples of their programmes:
Comments of Expert Group members on the Status Quo:

- Regarding the status quo, we need to establish a baseline, and develop a quite comprehensive understanding of what is happening in internationalisation in Asia and Europe, where are the points of intersections, how we utilize communities, etc.

- Virtual online mobility is a reality, it is happening already all over the world. For example, Indian universities are connected with British universities, running joint research laboratories on different topics. However, there should be more focus on qualitative learning.

- When we think about comprehensive internationalisation maybe internationalisation at home (I@H) is another very important point, especially in this complicated situation.

Comments of Expert Group members on the Risks and Challenges:

- Something striking is while the world has closed down it has actually become larger. We had more opportunities to attend more meetings, because they were not any longer closed, no longer in person only. There is an opportunity to keep our world larger, but there is also a risk that we snap back into that kind of closed mentality.

- In our day-to-day work we tend to look at things through a particular lens, through the lens of our work, which leads to a silo way of thinking. A community of practice, like this ARC8 Expert group, gives an opportunity to step out of that silo and have a wider focus on what is going on in Europe, in Asia.

- Let’s walk the talk when it comes to inclusion in our decision-making processes as well. At times, we have been guilty of having closed meetings in hotel conference rooms and not necessarily including people who should have been there.

- Another risk is that we are internationalising for the sake of internationalisation, and it is not tied enough to the context. We need to go back to the first principle and ask why we are doing this.

- As a student I am in love with the concept of connecting with different people online via different platforms. While being a part of these virtual opportunities, the risk is to lose the idea of personal networking and practicing social skills.

- There is an opportunity in redefining the relationship between quality and inclusion in internationalisation. In Europe we are finally evolving to a broader understanding of excellence for example in international collaboration and moving away from this very narrow way of conceptualizing excellence through research excellence. We are also looking at excellence in learning, education, and how diversity, how inclusion related matters can boost excellence in a cooperation.

- During the COVID19 pandemic, we have learned certain lessons faster, than we would have probably otherwise. Some of the myths related to inclusion have been deconstructed, e.g., the automatic assumption that digitally enhanced modes of internationalisation are more inclusive by default. We have seen examples where that assumption should not be made.

- In the European context we see more focus on strategic forms of collaboration that are quite often regionally defined. Quite a number of these networks e.g., European University Alliances actually have inclusion related mattress at their core, which is a great opportunity to promote inclusion. These networks will become pioneers, and “labs” for solutions on further enhancing the inclusion agenda, peer learning, etc.
▪ One of the risks in inclusion in internationalisation has to do with cultural ignorance. E.g., when we see that there are 46 Laotian students going abroad to study with the SHARE programme, but 0 exchange students are interested in going to study in Laos for a semester, makes us think about the reasons. It has to do with students’ expectations and prejudices in terms excellence, university systems, quality of teaching, recognition of credits, etc. This systemic prejudice towards certain HE systems creates a missed opportunity, because these countries have a lot to offer in terms of cultural exchanges and soft skill development.

▪ In the German approach there is the idea of the “distributed excellence”, which means that not only the absolute top 10 institutions can be excellent, but each institution can be excellent in some aspect.

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