



GLOBAL

## The new nationalism and internationalisation of HE

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To borrow a turn of phrase from Karl Marx, a spectre is haunting higher education internationalisation and it is the dramatic rise of often xenophobic nationalism now sweeping across many countries – from Trump’s ‘America First’ to Brexit in the United Kingdom to Orban’s proto-fascism in Hungary.

What is the nature of this phenomenon and how will it affect the efforts of universities to internationalise and the global patterns of student and faculty mobility that have emerged in the past several decades? What are the implications for universities and for societies more broadly?

All aspects of internationalisation will be affected by these broader social and political trends, but the exact nature of the impact is, as yet, unclear. Some patterns, however, are emerging.

### Why is this happening now?

It is impossible to provide a full explanation of current nationalist populist trends here. But several factors mentioned by analysts are clear. In many countries, segments of the population – generally those without postsecondary education – are affected by growing economic inequality; these groups blame their problems on globalisation and on cosmopolitan elites.

Elites have permitted inequality to grow. Educational attainment is increasingly necessary for economic success and social mobility and access to higher education, especially to elite universities, is more competitive than ever. Higher education systems are increasingly stratified and the traditional elite institutions have remained dominant.

While massification has opened opportunities for degree attainment to unprecedented numbers, significant populations do not have access, large numbers do not complete degrees and many others graduate with burdensome debts.

Neoliberalism – the marketisation of most aspects of society – has contributed to the malaise. Postsecondary education has become costly in much of the world, and, in general, those least able to afford to study and not qualified for top schools are often relegated to low-quality, frequently for-profit private institutions that are more interested in earning money than providing job-

producing qualifications to those who need them most.

At the same time, globalisation has come to be conflated by many with the marketisation of society.

Free trade is seen as eroding employment for many, especially those with limited skills. Even when not producing unemployment, globalisation is seen as opening up economies to competition from low-wage countries. This often results in wage reductions and job loss, when jobs can be done more cheaply overseas.

A final pressure on low-skilled workers has nothing to do with globalisation: it is the result of the rapidly increasing pace of automation of many processes, replacing workers with robots and information technology. On the other hand, unemployed, unskilled workers see graduates from elite universities, including a growing number of foreigners, succeed in the knowledge economy.

Elites, including the academic community, have paid only limited attention to these fundamental contradictions of the 21st-century global economy, feeling that, in the long run, globalisation will benefit most and that these painful adjustments are necessary and inevitable.

To the surprise of many (but quite understandably, in the light of history), many of those negatively affected have reacted and voted against these global trends – for Brexit, Donald Trump and various hard-right parties in Europe.

These contradictions have also contributed to an increased anti-global and more nationalist approach in emerging societies, partly in reaction to demands from the developed world to comply with ecological, social and economic changes the developed world, until recently, did not act on itself.

Almost exactly a century ago, the crisis of World War I and the political, economic and social disruption it created – combined with the inability of the elites of that period to deal constructively with the crises – resulted in the rise of extreme movements and parties of both left and right. The Bolsheviks took power in Russia and fascism and Nazism redrew the map of Europe.

Are we experiencing a return to those dark days? And what are the implications for higher education and its internationalisation?

### **Implications for higher education internationalisation**

It is difficult to predict the implications of the shift towards nationalism, including anti-globalisation, anti-Europe and anti-immigration ideas, for the internationalisation of higher education around the world.

Surveys in recent years have shown an ongoing, strong commitment by the higher education community to internationalisation. Close to two-thirds of the universities around the world have strategies for internationalisation and-or have

incorporated internationalisation as a key pillar in their overall mission and vision.

National governments in an increasing number of countries have in the past decade developed policies for internationalisation. Encouraging global-citizenship development, closer research cooperation as a stimulus for excellence and rankings performance and international student mobility as a source of institutional and national revenue is seen as the key rationale for many education policies.

Will all of this disappear and will internationalisation return from the current mainstream attention to the margins of institutional and national higher education policy?

Perhaps less threatened are those aspects of internationalisation that are associated with the world of Donald Trump and his business-minded associates: the industries of recruitment, pathway programmes, franchise operations and other for-profit enterprises connected to the commercial side of internationalisation.

It is highly likely that this commercialised part of what has become an 'internationalisation industry' will become more prominent and flourish in the current political climate. The more idealist elements of 'internationalisation at home' and global citizenship development, however, will suffer.

Ironically, Mexican students who can afford to will continue to be allowed to come to the United States – and will pay indirectly for the wall intended to stop their poorly educated fellow countrymen from entering the country. Of course, Muslims from Saudi Arabia and other strategic partners will be allowed to come and pay high tuition fees as well.

But will international students *want* to study at American and British universities? As far as the universities and colleges themselves are concerned, we can be optimistic in answering that question. The autonomy of the large majority of higher education institutions in Europe and North America, and their critical reaction to the current nationalist and xenophobic wave, still provide a solid foundation that allows for an open-minded global education.

The same is true for the large majority of the younger generation, already active in protests against nationalism, xenophobia and increased commercialisation. Opinion polls also confirm the generally open views of the younger generation.

Immigration restrictions, visa requirements, increases in international student fees and other challenges may be imposed as the result of government policies in the United States and United Kingdom, and perhaps in other countries as well. Trump's 2017 travel bans on seven (then six) Muslim-majority countries gives insight into how nationalist ideology can be translated into public policy.

It is also unclear how students from emerging economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where most international students come from, will react to the nationalism of some of the rich countries. If many no longer choose to come to the United Kingdom or the United States, this would cause massive disruptions in international student flows.

### **The EU and the future of higher education in Europe**

Much of the attention in the general debate, and in this article, has focused on the United Kingdom and the United States. But what will happen with higher education internationalisation on the European continent?

Will European countries be affected by the increasing development of nationalism and by anti-EU and anti-globalisation trends? Will the flagship programme Erasmus, which in 2017 is celebrating its 30th anniversary, survive this landmark year?

Will the other key European manifestation of internationalisation, the research programme Horizon 2020, get an extension beyond this year? And will the Bologna Process – perhaps the most radical higher education reform in modern times anywhere – survive?

Optimism is difficult. European integration and cooperation are not priority matters of the leading parties on the extreme right or left. At the same time, to survive, many centrist parties are also taking less pro-European stands. A drastic reduction in funding and support for the key pillars of European internationalisation in higher education is thinkable.

The impact of cuts would resonate beyond the European continent, as scholarship schemes and capacity-building projects for the developing world would likely be the first victims.

### **What to expect?**

Foreseeing the future is impossible, but some trends seem clear:

- The commercial side of internationalisation – for-profit higher education, outsourced pathway programmes, agents and other manifestations – will benefit from the current wave of nationalism and populism, even though anti-immigration sentiment points in the opposite direction.
- Internationalisation at home will encounter more opposition and will depend more on the autonomy of universities than on government support.
- Internationalisation in the United Kingdom and the United States, but also, and probably even more strongly, in the European Union, will be challenged as a result of reductions in funding and other forms of support.
- Other countries and regions in the world – for example, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and, in the longer-term, Asia, Africa and Latin America – will

become more active players. China, already seeking to boost its global economic role as the United States withdraws, will no doubt play a more active role in higher education internationalisation.

We are entering a profoundly difficult period for higher education internationalisation and for the vision of the university so painstakingly built up in North America and Europe over the past half-century.

The burden of maintaining this vision will likely fall to the academic community, while important segments of society, as well as many governments, push in nationalist directions. Pessimistic as we are, we still hope that the full logic of 'Weimar' – the emergence of authoritarian societies – will not come to dominate the heretofore 'democratic West'.

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