

BUILDING A NORDIC-LATIN AMERICAN COOPERATION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN FINLAND, DENMARK, AND BRAZIL

CONSTRUINDO COOPERAÇÃO LATINO-NÓRDICA-AMERICANA
EM INSTITUIÇÕES DE ENSINO SUPERIOR NA
FINLÂNDIA, DINAMARCA E BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

Globalization puts pressure on the internationalization process of higher education. In this article, we describe the Beyond Alliance for Knowledge (BAK) strategic partnership process of three higher education institutions. The topic of the article is to analyse the creation process of the partnership from the viewpoints of the national higher education policies and institutional strategies. The promoting, prohibitive and crucial factors, as well as difficulties of the partnership process are reflected on theories. The data consists of the memos and reports of the partnership process in 2010-2017 and is analysed by qualitative content analysis. In BAK Alliance Feevale (Brazil), HAMK (Finland), and VIA (Denmark) are committed to increase collaboration in education, science, technology, and innovation to promote knowledge and regional, national, and international development. This is a great challenge considering multiple contexts, languages and cultures, but common interests and the conviction that innovative knowledge contribute towards transforming society, guide the goals and strengthens the partnership offering benefits for students, faculty and for the community of all three countries.

Keywords: Higher education. Internationalization. Cooperation.

RESUMO

A globalização acelera o processo de internacionalização do ensino superior. Neste artigo, descrevemos o processo de parceria estratégica do Beyond Alliance for Knowledge (BAK) de três instituições de ensino superior. O propósito do artigo é analisar o processo de criação da parceria a partir dos pontos de vista das políticas nacionais de ensino superior e estratégias institucionais. Os fatores promotores, proibitivos e cruciais, bem como as dificuldades do processo de parceria, refletem-se na prática de construção da proposta. Os dados consistem dos memorandos e relatórios do processo de parceria em 2010-2017 e são analisados por meio de pesquisa qualitativa. No BAK Alliance, a Feevale (Brasil), a HAMK (Finlândia) e a VIA (Dinamarca) estão empenhadas em ampliar a colaboração em educação, ciência, tecnologia e inovação, para promover o conhecimento e o desenvolvimento regional, nacional e internacional. Este é um grande desafio considerando múltiplos contextos, idiomas e culturas; interesses comuns e a convicção de que o conhecimento inovador contribui para transformar a sociedade; orientar os objetivos e fortalecer a parceria, oferecendo benefícios para alunos, professores e para a comunidade dos três países.

Palavras-chave: Educação superior. Internacionalização. Cooperação.

1 INTRODUCTION

Globalization puts pressure on the internationalization process of higher education. Throughout the past years, the political pressure for collaboration between higher education institutions has strengthened. The justifications have been based on the demands of deeper, wider and more long-term joint development and the increasing understanding of the duties of higher education in the modern world. Fruitful co-operation in research and education will grow when there is dialogue between institutions and not only individuals or projects. There should be institutional-level research carried out on the process. Staff and student mobility have been an essential part of international activities in the field of education. However, international co-operation in the institutional level has been in the shadow. (RANTA-MEYER *et al.*, 2017). In this article, we describe and analyse one case of a strategic partnership, in which the parties are three higher education institutions from Brazil, Denmark and Finland.

In the first chapter, we introduce all three institutions: education and research volumes and regional attributes. The theoretical background is presented in the second chapter concentrating in the context of higher education institutes. In the third chapter, we present the research questions, data, and methodology of the research. In the fourth chapter, we introduce an overview to higher education policy of the three countries: Brazil, Denmark and Finland, emphasising the internationalisation aspects. In the fifth chapter, we analyse, as the starting point of the partnership, the internationalization policies and targets of the three institutions. The sixth chapter draws out the partnership process and reflects it against the theoretical background. As the conclusions, we discuss the crucial factors of success and state the keystones for successful strategic partnership of higher education institutions.

1.1 THE THREE PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

The three institutions which strategic partnership process is described in this paper are Feevale University from Brazil (Feevale), Häme University of Applied Science (HAMK) from Finland and VIA University College (VIA) from Denmark. A short introduction of each partner university opens important background data, both quantitative and qualitative, for the institutions and the partnership process.

Established in 1969, Feevale University is strategically located in the city of Novo Hamburgo, about 40 kilometers from Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Novo Hamburgo is part of the Rio dos Sinos Valley, a region with a population of approximately 1.4 million inhabitants, considered one of the most important footwear clusters in the world. Technology parks have been established to house educational, research and innovation initiatives. In order to meet the demands of this population, Feevale University offers education at all levels, from early childhood education to higher education, including

graduate programs such as MBAs, master's and doctorate degrees. The university has two campuses and Feevale TechPark, with facilities located in the cities of Campo Bom and Novo Hamburgo. As a university committed to regional development, Feevale University promotes the integration between education, research, extension, and administrative management in order to fulfill its social commitment considering production, development and diffusion of knowledge. Approximately 19.000 students are currently enrolled at all levels of education. The university has 1.600 employees, and offers 53 undergraduate programs in the fields of Technology and Science, Applied Social Sciences, Humanities, Languages and Arts, and Health Sciences. Graduate education is available through three doctoral programs, six master's degree programs, and 35 specialization and MBA programs. There are currently 27 research groups with 62 research projects under development. In addition, the university also offers a regular school where students are able to enroll from early childhood education to secondary education. There are currently 41 active extension projects, and the university also offers a Student Support Center (SSC), a Language School, and Feevale Theater. This prestigious theater is the largest in Southern Brazil, and offers state of the art facilities for international and national performers. In addition, Feevale University fosters a technology park called Feevale TechPark, where 43 companies are presently working.

VIA University College (2008) is the result of a merger between the Alpha Centre for Higher Education, Mid-West Centre for Higher Education, Vita Centre for Higher Education, University College Jutland and Vitus Bering Denmark. Today, VIA is the largest of the seven Danish university colleges with 2,100 employees and 18,500 students across eight campus locations in the Central Denmark Region. As one of Denmark's largest institutions of higher education, VIA offers a wide range of degree programmes, primarily professional bachelor degree programmes, in areas including education and social studies, health sciences, design, animation, media, technology, engineering and business, which qualify students for jobs both in the private and the public sector – locally as well as globally. VIA University College is headquartered in Aarhus and has four faculties: VIA Faculty of Education & Social Studies, VIA Faculty of Health Sciences, VIA School of Business, Technology & Creative Industries and VIA Faculty of Continuing Education. The Danish university colleges are universities of applied science that in 2013 gained official status as research institutions. As such, VIA follows the same scientific standards as traditional universities but focus on applied research with a total of 18 research and development centres and programmes. As a university college, VIA must ensure that the degree programmes are developed with a strong relation to practice to ensure that all programmes meet the general interest of the students as well as the regional need for a qualified workforce in both the private and the public sector. As a university college, VIA is expected to contribute to the regional growth and the development of sectors and professions.

Therefore, VIA University College is working on several initiatives with the Central Denmark Region and is represented in the regional Growth Forum.

Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) is a multidisciplinary higher education institution situated centrally in the most populated area of the country, southern Finland. The student is the centre of all the operations and the workplace is the immediate beneficiary. HAMK works for the benefit of the region and is a solid part of the national and international higher education community. Finland's system of higher education is based on a dual model, where more academically oriented traditional universities and more practically oriented universities of applied sciences complement each other. Both award legally equivalent academic Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Universities of applied sciences – with their combination of theory and practice – provide an interesting alternative to traditional scientific universities. HAMK offers an applied, multidisciplinary academic learning environment for its 7000 students (23 bachelor's degree programmes, of which 4 delivered in English, 7 master's degree programmes of which 1 delivered in English and 4 professional teacher education of which 1 is delivered in English). The School of Bioeconomy functions in an area of natural resources and rural development; the School of Entrepreneurship and Business coordinates entrepreneurial development and organizes entrepreneurial studies; the School of Technology provides engineering studies and also research and product development services; the School of Wellbeing provides studies in the area of social services and health and the School of Professional Teacher Education provides professional teacher education, professional special needs teacher education and professional student counsellor education. The graduate employment rate is one of the highest in Finland as is also the rate of graduates who start their own business. The success of education is based on strong cooperation with the labour market. HAMK offers also continuing and further education, open university studies and exchange studies. As Finland is undeniably well known for its strengths in the field of education, HAMK offers educational products for the global market. HAMK's activities are present throughout the entire region. HAMK has four customer-oriented applied research units for collaboration with business and industry in the region: Bioeconomy, Professional Expertise, Sheet Metal Centre and Smart Services. Research is strongly integrated into studies and projects are available to all students.

1.2 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AS A THEORETICAL PHENOMENON

The theories of strategic partnership between organizations emphasise the possibilities of stronger development and better results by sharing information, knowledge and competencies. Compared to networks, and even value-added networks, the partnership means more focused institutions and more

focused aims of collaboration. In the case of higher education institutions, the capabilities of anticipating future needs are often in the focus. Especially, so-called wicked problems need both global understanding and common multidisciplinary capacity to become tackled. One definition of a strategic partnership was introduced by Matthias Kuder and Clare Banks in an international survey and report on strategic partnerships (KURDER *et al.*, 2016):

A strategic partnership is a formal alliance between two or more higher education institutions developed through an intentional process whereby the partners share resources and leverage complementary strengths to achieve defined common objectives. Strategic cooperation is tied to the strategic goals and objectives of an academic unit, college, or the university as a whole. It indicates a multi-dimensional engagement between the involved institutions and implies the joint undertaking of a diverse range of activities with the aim of the parties' mutual benefit.

This definition fits well to BAK (Beyond Alliance for Knowledge) in which the target-oriented working method is in the focus. As well the pressure to implement the co-operation in all levels: faculties and degree programmes as well as research activities and administration is emphasized. Among the universities also co-operating in managing research, development and innovation activities, sharing data and information as well as building joint research projects for international funding, are underlined (EPSRC 2018).

Liski (LISKI 2017) cites to the report of the European Association for International Education (EAIE 2014) reminding the human factor in strategic partnership. The significance of staff members in the partnership is high. The individuals in higher education institutes generate the concrete processes on internationalization by research projects, mobility and joined education activities by human interaction. The motivation or the lack of motivation of teachers and researchers affects the strength and continuance of real partnership. At BAK, the human factor has been the starting point of the strategic partnership process, as written in the sixth chapter. Throughout the process, in the management level, there has been simultaneously activities among teachers and researchers. Therefore, the partnership has been built in many basis, among different actors in the partner institutes.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA AND METHOD

The aim of the study is to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the starting points of the successful strategic partnerships?
- b) What are the stages of the strategic partnership process?
- c) How to develop and maintain the strategic partnerships?

The research data consists of the memos and reports written during the partnership process. The top management of the partner institutions have met yearly 2010-2016 at the Partnership Seminar. The discussions and decisions are documented in memos and the actions between the seminars are documented in reports.

The research method, qualitative content analysis, is used in interpreting the strategic partnership process as a continuing and target-based dialogue between the institutes. The framework of the analysis has been the question of the progress of the partnership as a process. Therefore, the focus has been on the bases of the partnership, the process and actions, as diffusion of the partnership in the institutions. (DENZIN *et al.*, 1994).

Trust is one of the key elements in the partnership. Is trust something visible in the memos and reports or is it something that have to be read between the lines? Is there some other mental changes that are invisible in the written data but remarkable to the process? These questions about the researchers' interpretation are important because the authors of this article have been personally involved in the partnership process. The ethical challenge is to recognize personal knowledge and experiences from the official documents. (CRESWELL 1994, 6, 147).

1.4 OVERVIEWS OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES

The national higher education policy of each partner country steers the overall and international strategies of the participating institutions. Therefore, below there is a short description of these policies to find the key points of the national situations. It can be clearly seen the strong pressure of internationalization in each country.

According to UNESCO (2004), the process of internationalisation in Brazil is currently the subject of many debates between the Brazilian government and higher education institutions. As in most Latin American countries, the Brazilian coordination model is complex and centralized. However, much remains to be discussed, including, for example, what can be considered ideal conditions for cooperation. The government still plays a key role in this matter (UNESCO, 2004). An important aspect to consider it is the clear and objective definition of quality standards in internationalization processes. In Brazil, however, such standards are presented according to a normative framework. While such framework attempts at regulating processes, it still has no adequate control over the relationship between expansion, demand, and quality (UNESCO, 2004).

In an attempt to accomplish expansion objectives while still respecting demand and quality, a new planning process was required from Brazilian HEIs based on an Institutional Development Plan (IDP)

prepared for a period of five years. The IDP characterizes Higher Education Institutions with respect to their work philosophy, their mission, and the pedagogical guidelines that guide their initiatives towards intended organizational and academic activities. By implementing an IDP, it is possible for the institution to project itself into a dynamic and strategic future (UNESCO, 2004). Policies for the internationalization of higher education are particularly found in the field of International Cooperation between different government human resources, development of institutions and scientific and technological development (KRAWCZYK, 2008). The processes of internationalization can be included in the agenda of institutions as strategic planning, and be planned with the support of specific agencies. In Brazil, the main agencies related to internationalization are the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (*CNPq*), which is directly connected to the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*CAPES*), both within the Ministry of Education.

CNPq and *CAPES* promote policies to foster international cooperation of Brazilian HEIs since they aim at scientific and technological development, as well as promoting the presence of international universities in Brazil. In general terms, within the organization of international cooperation programs, the following trends can be identified in the Brazilian scenario of internationalization of higher education:

Table 1 - Trends in Internationalization of Brazilian Higher Education

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Training Programs | Undergraduate student exchange; master's, doctoral and postdoctoral researcher training; human resources training with medium-term or long-term faculty visits; student, faculty or researcher academic exchanges to improve undergraduate programs in Brazilian institutions. |
| Joint Research Programs | Inter-university scientific cooperation through research and/or joint publications between countries. |

Source: the authors

According to Krawczyk (2008), policies for international scientific and technological cooperation started to take on a role of greater relevance in Brazil starting in 2001, with a policy that aimed at opening new markets and building regional leadership. According to the author, France and Germany were countries that initially promoted greater international cooperation with Brazil. In regard to projects, the ones that receive the most support are institutional rather than individual projects, and do not cover

only academic research, but also applied research. Brazil has been encouraging mainly bilateral projects that promote the strengthening of institutional ties between countries of the region, either through bilateral programs that fund joint research projects, university partnerships and/or training of local human resources. The purpose is to assist in training of human resources - faculty and students - and to improve the productivity of graduate programs in Brazil (KRAWCZYK, 2008, p. 47).

Morosini (2011) points out that the policies for the development, expansion and consolidation of the national system of Science, Technology and Innovation guide the internationalization of Brazilian higher education, and determine which fields of study are the priority for internationalization.

Support programs with scholarships, such as those offered by *CNPq* and/or *CAPES*, are an attempt to increase academic mobility, and encourage the internationalization of institutions. Thus, it is possible to identify an increase in the numbers of scholarships offered for doctoral and postdoctoral programs. It is possible to notice the predominance of the peripheral model of internationalization of higher education, focusing on graduate programs and not on the university as a whole.

Within the Brazilian international education scenario, it is important to highlight Science Without Borders, a program that was very active from 2011 to 2015. The main goal of the program was to promote the consolidation and expansion of science, technology and innovation in Brazil by means of international exchange and mobility. The program granted 100 thousand scholarships to undergraduate and graduate Brazilian students, as well as other programs for international professional training. However, in the Brazilian demand to internationalize, there is no clear definition of strategies to be followed, since "the country itself does not provide the path that HEIs should follow to develop the national interest to internationalize its institutions". (FOSSATTI; MIRANDA; MOEHLECKE, 2015, p. 5). According to the authors, a reform in Brazilian higher education requires cultural and educational changes that pose significant challenges to internationalization practices. From a governmental perspective, internationalization of higher education must be strategic for the country, promoting modernization, innovation and, consequently, national development. (FOSSATTI; MIRANDA; MOEHLECKE, 2015).

In order to meet the need of a public policy for the internationalization of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions, the authors suggested measures such as: (1) defining a public policy to help build a country development project; (2) efficiently articulating enterprises and strategies from different players, and increasing commitment to internationalization of higher education; (3) improving the country's image abroad, emphasizing what is best with regards to Brazilian education, guaranteeing quality education; (4) following successful education practices from other countries and higher education institutions as a tool to review internal mechanisms and evaluate improvements to be made in the country's internationalization

processes; and (5) expanding internationalization programs and initiatives in higher education (FOSSATTI; MIRANDA; MOEHLECKE, 2015, p. 7).

Denmark is a knowledge-based society being frontrunners in areas such as renewable energy, biotech and design. Therefore, higher education is of great importance, and Denmark is one of the countries with the highest expenditure on higher education (% of GDP) in the OECD. Public higher educational institutions in Denmark are regulated by national legislation, where university colleges are regulated by the Act for University Colleges of Higher Education (Act no. 562 of 6 June 2007 with later amendments). The act concerns degree structures, teacher qualifications and examinations. The Danish Accreditation Council accredits all programmes. Recently, the accreditation system changed from programme accreditation to institution accreditation. On 1 December 2016, the Accreditation Council granted VIA University College (VIA) a positive institutional accreditation.

Internationalization was on the political agenda in 2004 when the Danish government introduced a strategy intended to strengthen internationalisation in the Danish education system as a whole. The aim was to ensure that the Danish educational system was able to support the outgoing mobilization to study, research and work abroad. Furthermore, it highlighted the need to attract qualified international students, scientists, teachers and workers to Denmark. In addition, it aimed at improving the possibility of Danish educational institutions to participate in cooperation and competitions on a global scale and to secure the quality through participation in transnational cooperation and international comparisons.

In 2008, a new law on AP-degrees (Academy Profession) and PB-degrees (Professional Bachelor) established a new framework for strengthening internationalisation. Specifically, it made it possible for AP or PB degree students to study abroad as a part of their education, while also having the opportunity to achieve a joint degree from an acknowledged higher education institution in another country. This sparked a series of studies with a focus on motivation, benefit from and barriers to outgoing mobility resulting in a national strategy for increasing the outgoing mobility for the AP and PB-degrees.

Since 2013, the Danish government has focused on improving the quality and relevance of higher education. In 2013 and again in 2014, the Danish government at that time published action plans that were a part of the government's effort to increase the internationalisation of higher education. Two overall action plans focused on strengthening the international outlook of Danish students as well as attracting and retaining international students to achieve continuous growth and employment. The current Danish government has continued the focus on quality and relevance in higher education with the ambition of decreasing the unemployment rate for graduates. Degree programmes should match societal needs, and students must graduate immediately with 60% of the graduates finding employment in the private

sector. International students continue to be an important factor and therefore retaining and attracting international talent and is still a high priority.

In Finland the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the planning and implementation of the higher education and science policy, including policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research. The Ministry of Education and Culture helps promote the Government's higher education and science policy targets, and develops the higher education and science system in cooperation with stakeholders in the field. Higher education institutions are autonomous actors that are responsible for the content of their education and research as well as the development of their own activities. The objective of Finland's higher education policy is to develop higher education institutions as an internationally competitive entity where each institution also flexibly responds to regional needs. The higher education system consists of universities and universities of applied sciences of high standards, each profiled in their core areas. Profiled higher education institutions create clearer and deeper cooperation and division of responsibilities among themselves and with research institutes in the areas of education, research, support services, structures and infrastructures.

The activities of universities and universities of applied sciences promote Finnish competitiveness, well-being, education and learning as well as sustainable development. The objective is to establish a higher education system that is of a higher standard and more international as well as more influential and effective than at present. The higher education institutions exercise foresight, help regenerate society, culture and the world of work, and make sure the required highly educate workforce is available. Being international and attractive learning and research environments, the higher education institutions work to develop their activities. In June 2017, the ministry published a new policy paper "Better Together for a Better World. Policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research 2017–2025". The goal for 2025 is that Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences will be strong and competitive actors, particularly in the European higher education and research area. As higher education institutions become profiled, international strategic partnerships are one way of raising the selected profiles. In addition to developing their staff competence and networking activities, higher education institutions improve their expertise by increasingly recruiting international staff members and by utilising the competence of international students. Cultural diversity is used as a resource, while the higher education institution assumes an important role in building up the cultural diversity of its operating area. More inputs need to be made in cooperation between higher education institutions and companies in international activities; for example, higher education institutions are encouraged to participate actively in the Team Finland networks of their areas. The following goals and actions will promote the internationalisation process:

(1) Greater international attraction through focusing on the latest science and leading-edge research, (2) Finland is the home of high-quality education, (3) momentum for the export of Finnish competence, (4) a warm welcome to Finland, (5) the Finnish message is heard internationally, (6) bridgeheads in the world, and (7) greater involvement of Finnish experts living abroad and alumni.

1.5 INSTITUTIONAL INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES

We now focus on the international strategies of the three partners. As the previous chapter pointed, the steering of the national policy varies in each of the three countries. The assessment and evaluation are typical in Nordic countries while in Brazil the higher education institutes make their own choices in the internationalization activities. In compliance with the social responsibilities of higher education established by UNESCO (2009), internationalization must be actively present in the training principles of students, faculty, and staff. In order to effectively meet this demand, the International Affairs Office at Feevale University was created in 2003, in an attempt to expand its international network with the prospection of worldwide partners. Since then, the international mission of Feevale is to contribute towards integral education and academic excellence by promoting and disseminating internationalization in education, research, community extension programs, and continuing education.

Internationalization is a strategic theme for the university, and represents an open statement made to the academic community that this is a value that must be followed by all programs and initiatives at Feevale University. Everyone must thrive for internationalization to become a reality in academic and administrative practices (PDI, 2016).

Thus, the strategies for internationalization are found within the following modalities: defining an internationalization policy that is carried out through academic cooperation; promoting student, faculty, and staff exchange; becoming part of international cooperation networks with clear objectives; participating in joint global research; applying for domestic and international funding; coordinating and participating in international events and meetings; managing cooperation contracts for scientific and academic collaboration to create different programs; managing joint degree programs; offering support to create ties with worldwide centers of excellence; offering support for training of high qualified staff, as well as human resources for university education; promoting special information regarding international education; and, finally, promoting communication between external partners, and participating in different modalities of international academic cooperation (PDI, 2016).

In 2012, VIA University College established the following vision for 2020: We educate for professional practice in cooperation with practice / We develop knowledge, challenge and inspire professional

practice/We create opportunities for students / We commit globally from a local perspective / We act with courage, passion and curiosity. The current strategic direction for 2015-2017 has been named “Co-creating better societies” and reflects the changing world around us. It is VIA’s hope to offer students and employees increased opportunities to help co-create better societies – together with public and private partners nationally and internationally. VIA has identified four strategic challenges and directions, which affect our international strategy new learning styles, an increased focus on private businesses, a strong social commitment and a flexible organisation. A strong social commitment along with a development of new learning styles and environments also requires continued international cooperation. VIA School of Business, Technology & Creative Industries is home to the majority of VIA’s English degree programmes. The faculty prepares graduates for careers in global companies and organisations, and the international perspective is therefore an integral part of all activities.

Based on the overall vision and strategic directions, VIA School of Business, Technology & Creative Industries especially strives to qualify all research material internationally in cooperation with its international partners to produce knowledge that can help solve real challenges for public and private organisations both in Denmark and internationally.

HAMK Strategy 2020 is the central document guiding the international activities at HAMK. According to this strategy, HAMK performs the statutory duties of a university of applied sciences in a novel and unique way. Strong international strategic cooperation plays a key part in our new policy, and we draw on global collaboration to advance our competence in education and research. Activities support the development of the students’ international competence. Student, teacher and researcher mobility in degree programmes is systematic and directly supports our operations. Degree programmes taught in English are linked to the internationalisation of the region. The global education business has become a central part of the operations, it has also expanded into the digital sector, and it is profitable. The success factors include strong cooperation with our partners, which makes us an integral part of the international higher education community. HAMK has four customer-oriented research units to support education. The research units cooperate with a diverse network, also at the international level. The strategic partners (Feevale University and VIA University College) play an essential role in promoting internationalisation. The Global Education Business Strategy 2020 sets out the targets, development measures and evaluation system of export activities (including risk management). In HAMK’s Development Plan for Internationalisation 2020 the objectives, measures and indicators has been described. In the international setting of HAMK, the students and staff work actively in networks with the aim of promoting competence in the areas of both education and research. Strategic international partnerships have evolved into an

alliance that carries out international research, has a shared pool of experts, and engages in joint online teaching and global education business activities. The main aim in the internationalisation of education is development of students' international competence. The objectives are: after graduation, the students possess international competence and cultural literacy. Possibilities for developing their competence are systematically guaranteed for all students as part of their studies. In the student mobility the objective is that at minimum 20% of the students in Bachelor's programmes study and/or participate in work placements abroad in 2020. HAMK offers several degree programmes in English. The objectives are: Education is of a high quality, appropriate learning environments and infrastructures have been provided, services for receiving international students and helping them to settle are efficient, integration into the higher education community, world of work and society in general goes smoothly. The impacts of tuition fees on student numbers will be anticipated, ensuring that the degree programmes in English remain attractive. In the immigrant education, the objective is that immigrants with a refugee background are facilitated in studying, and the practices for recognising qualifications are streamlined. The main aim in the internationalization of research, development and innovation (RDI) is that research conducted with strategic partners is systematic and relevant to all research units. Researcher exchange programme will be in operation in 2016 – 2017 and international spearhead research projects in operation in 2019. Internationalization of the region is one of HAMK's responsibilities. Objectives in this field are: together with other stakeholders in the region, HAMK develops the international competence of the region's communities, enterprises and individuals. HAMK has agreed on joint international operating areas with business and industry in the region. Areas determined in Team Finland Häme cooperation: Russia (St Petersburg), Poland, Sweden, Germany. HAMK's international networks (especially the strategic partnership network) serve the region's internationalisation. Good partnerships are essential in international activities. The main objectives at HAMK are: In the international strategic partnership with VIA and Feevale, a synergistic overall reform will be carried out, resulting in a strong international alliance. In this alliance, strategic development is based on jointly defined objectives and an action plan drafted on their basis. Each degree programme should also have a well-functioning key partner network (nonstrategic partners, some three partners/programme), with whom the programme engages in active and mutual activities, especially in the sphere of mobility. That is why each degree programme continuously evaluates its partnership network and acquaints itself carefully with the key partners (including education offered by them). HAMK's other wide partner network efficiently serves activities in line with the strategy. Expansion of the other partner network is based on accurate needs assessments. One of the main objectives is that the personnel have sufficient competence to internationalize the education process

and also the research and development process. HAMK participates actively in national and international networks that develop and support the internationalisation of higher education institutions. In part, this is also realised through mobility. A joint pool of experts with the strategic partners.

In the face of so many challenges, Jacques Delors, in the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, points out some problems to be faced in the field of education in the 21st century. For the author, the barriers between the global and local should be worked so that the citizen becomes a citizen of the world without losing the roots of his country of origin and grassroots communities. In this sense, it is necessary that educational institutions reorganize within the new global scenario and cultural renewal (LIMA, 1984), modernizing and reinventing itself deeply (GADOTTI, 2000) both in its forms and in its methodologies and relations, since knowledge ceases to be local, to become global, to network, to interact, to collaborate.

Within this perspective, it is up to the universities to adapt themselves so that they can start offering diversification of their programs' offers, contributing to the development of education. For this, according to Delors (2010), HEIs should be presented in the following ways:

- a) as a space for science, the source of knowledge, for establishing the conditions for theoretical or applied research, or for teacher training;
- b) as a means of acquiring professional qualifications supported by courses and content constantly adapted to the needs of the economy;
- c) as a privileged platform for lifelong education, by opening the doors to adults who wish to resume their studies, or adapt and enrich their knowledge, or satisfy their taste of learning in any field of cultural life;
- d) as a privileged partner in international cooperation, by enabling the exchange of teachers and students - as well as facilitating the dissemination of the best teaching contents through lectures with a global vocation.

Having made these proposals, the Committee points out that this problem is of particular importance in the least developed countries. However, Higher Education Institutions in developing countries should focus on research that contributes to the solution of serious problems, as well as encouraging the effective construction of a better future for all citizens. Thus, in the context of educational reform, Delors (2010) suggests some of the main actors responsible for bringing about effective changes; among them, the local community, the constituted authorities, and the international community. The university should occupy the center of the educational system, even if, as in other countries, there are other higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2010). For this, Delors (2010) states that it is the university's duty to

perform four essential functions, among them: (1) preparation for research and teaching; (2) provision of training in different areas, highly specialized and adapted to the needs of economic and social life; (3) openness to all to respond to the multiple aspects of what is termed permanent education in the broad sense; and (4) investing in international cooperation.

2 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROCESSES

2.1 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, we describe the partner activities before the beginning of the strategic partnership process in 2010. The core actor in the partnership has been HAMK which had collaboration both with Feevale and VIA many years before the ideas about the deeper partnership. So, in the following, we explain the separate co-operations and how it became a trilateral international strategic partnership. The liaison between VIA and HAMK goes back almost 20 years. The initial agreement was made with the Architectural Technology and Construction Management programme at VIA starting out with regular student and staff exchange. In 2000, the first Double Degree agreement was established within Architectural Technology and Construction Management. The strong cooperation has resulted in several joint activities, such as short-term workshops, a yearly language and networking course, and joint participation in projects such as the Nordic-Russian UNICO project (Higher education and university-business cooperation in international construction). Throughout the years, there has been a consistent flow of students and staff between the institutions. Staff exchange has especially been a vital part of the cooperation. The many joint academic and research activities has engaged many staff members including management across the departments at VIA. After 2011, the collaboration with HAMK has continued to develop, and activities now include several Double Degree agreements, Erasmus+ and Nordplus projects, R&D cooperation such as SNOWMAN consortium etc.

The first contact between Feevale and HAMK took place in 2005, when Feevale representatives met with HAMK directors in Hämeenlinna, Finland. Finland was chosen due to the international prestige in education held by this Nordic country, which is a leader in international rankings such as PISA, among others. Furthermore, the country also presents high levels of excellence, innovation, technology and other values that are important for society. After the first introductory meeting, a cooperation relationship between the institutions began, and in January 2006 the first agreement of cooperation was signed. With the agreement, faculty and student mobility, and other activities became a reality. The history before the strategic partnership process points out the bottom-up nature of the partnership. The initiatives of co-operation have grown up from the shared projects of teachers and students.

2.2 TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

A strategic partnership process started at HAMK in 2010 when a need for a deeper collaboration with some key partners was identified. The demand for strategic partnerships was also emphasised by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The first step was to identify partners whose profile was in line with the HAMK Strategy and the HAMK International Strategy at that time. In the partner evaluation, there was bottom-up approach rather than top-down decision; it was recognised that the actual involvement of staff members will create a solid foundation for strategic cooperation. After the evaluation process, the joint criteria for the strategic partnership was discussed with some of the identified key partners.

It was rewarding to experience the easiness of finding criteria in spite of differences in the educational cultures. Commitment to collaboration, mutual trust and respect at the personal and the university level and willingness to deepen and widen the partnership were recognized as the core elements to the strategic partnership. Also, those strategic areas where the potential partner universities have particular strengths were defined. The partners should benefit from each other's strengths to make the universities stronger in the long run; the partnership should create synergy in the common education and research areas. Extension of cooperation to include more fields of education is also essential when developing joint development projects in education (programmes, pedagogical development). One aim is to increase mobility (students, teaching and administrative staff). Joint research and development activities in shared focus areas and shared expertise in regional development is also important and will lead to joint development projects in regional development. The quality assurance system was one part of the whole process from the very beginning. Evidence of quality will be important in operations of interest.

In the following, we describe the strategic partnership process according to the memos of the yearly partnership seminars. The participants of the seminars have been the management of the institutions and depending of the theme persons responsible of the thematic activities. The first strategic partner seminar was held at HAMK in 2011. In this seminar, there were further discussions on the structure, aims, and schedule of the strategic partnership. HAMK signed separate bilateral strategic partnership agreements with Feevale, VIA, and a Chinese university. It was agreed that partners are committed to increasing collaboration in science, technology, and innovation to promoting knowledge and regional, national, and international development. The agreement was seen as a great challenge considering multiple contexts, languages and cultures, but common interests and the conviction that innovative knowledge contribute towards transforming society, guide the goals and strengthens the partnership offering benefits for students, faculty and for the community of all four countries. After this first seminar,

it was obvious that the universities have many shared interests in higher education. Research is demand-driven and contributes to the innovations in the professional practice. Also strong connections with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), business, local and regional governments, and the public sector were typical. Entrepreneurship, social responsibility, sustainability and internationalisation are important themes in education, research and institutional policy. There was a strong willingness to get forward.

In the second strategic partnership seminar at a Chinese University in 2012 the topics were focused in two directions; both inside and outside the universities. In the agenda were modes between applied universities and enterprises under the international environment and teachers' sources, quality and characteristics in applied universities. Also the partnership *an sich* was in the discussions: University plan or vision for international education cooperation; the ways and bottlenecks of further deepening the cooperation between the strategic partners.

The third strategic partner seminar took place at Feevale 2013. The theme was International Education Cooperation: Quality Management and Regional Impact. The topics were quality and quality assurance in higher education policy (examples from each country); quality management in the strategies for of higher education institutions (examples from each partner institution). The theme of regional impact included examples of programmes offered to the community and their impacts. Regional networks of every institute were currency also from the viewpoint of sharing, utilizing, and optimising them among all three partners. The Chinese University did not participate in the seminar. As decided at Feevale in 2013, the partners started to deepen cooperation, especially in research activities. Joint research processes especially in digitalisation and bioprocess were discussed. The research teams were formed and started their work. One of the ideas was that in the teams, more experienced researchers would guide less experienced staff members and students. The first research seminar took place at HAMK on 27 – 29 October 2014. The themes were: Successful ageing; Water & energy; Big data analysis and digitalisation; The change of leadership in organisations. The fourth strategic partner seminar closed the circle of visiting each partner. It took place at VIA in 2014. The topics were The Innovative Learning Environment – how to make it a part of the daily teaching and how to include the local business sector in the process; Entrepreneurship – why is it an important part of our student's education; and How do we make it a part of our teaching. One of the concrete ideas discussed in this seminar was to create a joint "Working around the sun" module of entrepreneurship for the students. Typical for this seminar was the clear step to concrete joint activities in education. The fifth seminar was organised at HAMK in 2015. The topics were eLearning, sustainable development meets business, and joint research activities. In the Presidents' meeting held during the seminar, the strategic development of the universities was

discussed and the decision concerning the main goals and activities was made. In the summary of the meeting, it was stated that all partners are committed and willing to develop the cooperation further. It was noted that there is a clear need to integrate the cooperation with the universities' processes so that it enhances the common strategy. Also the roles of the partners needs more discussion and sharpening. The number of partners noted adequate and that it is important to make this partnership work before widening the network. The Chinese partner was involved to the project in 2012-2015 but due to many changes in their organization, it withdrew from the partnership process in 2015. The decision of the seminar was that more applications with enterprises are needed, and that research has a very strong impact in this process. It was also noted that in the partnership the first stage, mobility etc. exists are reached. But now it is time to take the next step. In order to enhance the activities, more concrete aims, action, responsibilities and timetable was decided. The agreed aims and actions were the following:

1-Promoting the research groups

Discussions concerning research focus areas led to a decision of four joint research areas, each including two or three research ideas. The team members responsible for the process was decided. In the next seminar in FEEVALE May 2016 status of joint research activities will be evaluated. It will be a long term process to gain results (research funding, publications etc.)

Timing: during next a couple of months discussions concerning research focus areas.

2-Joint eLearning activities

The first steps are agreement on curricula, implementation plan and competence base. It was agreed to design a pilot project of 15 hours module for undergraduate students (5+5+5) and the team responsible for the process was decided.

Timing: Agreement on curricula as a first step, implementation plan and competence base 12/2015.

3-Enterprises involved in the cooperation

Ideas were discussed, piloting should start in the coming year.

4-Assessment

Annual follow-up and reporting will take place in strategic partnership seminars, report will be given by the actors.

The sixth strategic partnership seminar took place in 2016 at FEEVALE. Before the seminar, a new agreement was drafted in a joint process between the partners. The agreement was signed in May

2016 seminar at Feevale, the agreement Beyond Alliance for Knowledge (BAK). The Beyond Alliance for Knowledge is a leading actor in Nordic – Latin America collaboration. Universities and business partners are the main components of this research ecosystem. The cooperative areas include a joint international expertise pool, strengthening research activities, developing a common virtual campus, export of education, and enterprise networks. The alliance supports student and staff mobility. In addition, the aim is to create international network-based research units.

2.3 RESULTS

One of the main goals of the alliance is to create a pool of qualified and competent experts in their respective fields of study. Through international research, the partners aim at jointly building an international network of research units to work as research teams. The research teams are meant to be created based on a combination of multiple competences that are uniquely brought by each partner. The main strategies and research topics of the alliance are highly connected to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Goals are also known as World Goals, and they are unique because they call all countries to act towards prosperity and protecting our planet. Sustainable development plays a crucial role in this context, and three elements must be harmonized in order for it to be achieved: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are of utmost importance for the well-being of societies, and that is why water has been chosen as the main research topic that brings the three partners together in order to contribute towards sustainable development. Results about the SD education in Feevale and HAMK has been published (FRIMAN *et al.*, 2018). With that in mind, a joint platform and working model for reporting the activities and results of each research group is currently in use. The groups presently working under the BAK are as follows:

a) international research team with a focus on water

The first focus area is Water Research. Studies currently focus on microbiological evaluation of dry toilets installed in the rural and urban environment in the Rio dos Sinos river hydrographic basin, located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Southern Brazil.

b) international research team with a focus on materials

The objective of this research group is to evaluate and compare the durability of different materials. They conduct studies on atmospheric corrosion of metals and degradation in polymers and composites.

c) international research team with a focus on entrepreneurship

The current project within this group is called "Contribution of the University to the Entrepreneurial Formation". Its main objective is to evaluate the entrepreneurial profile of students, and to identify how university extension actions can contribute to their behavior.

d) other initiatives in education

Partners are presently developing and offering courses in *Strategic Management and Successful Aging*. Successful Aging is currently offered to Brazilian students, and Finnish students will join the group in the upcoming weeks. Brazilian and Finnish professors are leading this course, which is divided into chapters covering different topics in Gerontology and the process of successful aging. In addition, an international module on *3D technologies* is also being planned, and will cover topics in additive manufacturing/3D printing from the designer's point of view, reverse engineering (in mechanical design), and virtual technologies (augmented reality in mechanical design). An important goal of this program is to execute real international product development projects between students from participating universities. An upcoming project will offer online Portuguese and Finnish classes to students, faculty and staff from the partner universities, as well as the international community at large. The objective of the course is to offer basic language knowledge, and will consist of 10 chapters that will include texts, grammar clues, videos and exercises. Another successful ongoing initiative is *IP Smart Systems*, which is an intensive program focused on smart devices. Regarding joint collaborations involving local businesses, a survey instrument was built in the first semester of 2017 by HAMK and Feevale in order to compare the use of agile methodologies in Finnish and Brazilian companies.

e) initiatives in healthcare

In the field of healthcare, the universities are currently working on a collaboration *in simulation education for health science programs*.

f) publications and international scientific events

Scientific publications are also important for the partnership. An e-book on Environmental Education is about to be released, and will feature chapters by scholars from the partner institutions. In addition, Feevale publishes research journal Conhecimento Online, and the editorial board includes representatives from HAMK and VIA.

The partners have already participated in scientific events presenting joint collaborations in events such as the FAUBAI Conference and Intercom in 2017. Both events took place in Brazil and partners had the chance to present the process of building their Nordic-Latin American cooperation, as well as a

proposal for educational audiovisual collaboration between the universities Feevale and HAMK. Students from HAMK have three times had the opportunity to present their research work during a virtual scientific fair Inovamundi promoted by Feevale.

3 CONCLUSIONS

In recent decades, discussions on the internationalization policies of Higher Education Institutions have been more intensively expended. The first major decisions on the direction of an international education came from European institutions. As landmarks, we can mention: Lisbon Convention (1997) - revision of the European model for the recognition of diplomas; Sorbonne Declaration (1998) - signed by France, England, Germany and Italy, reaffirming the need to create mutual recognition of European higher education diplomas for professional purposes; Bologna Declaration (1999) - definition of a central core of objectives, consisting of the unification of academic degrees, introduction of the concept of employability and the enhancement of lifelong learning; The World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in 2009, says that

(...) Given The Complexity Of Global Future Challenges, Higher Education Has The Social Responsibility To Advance Our Multifaceted Knowledge On Various Issues, Involving Cultural, Scientific, Economic And Social Dimensions And Our Ability To Respond To Such Questions. Higher Education Leads Society To Generate Global Knowledge To Meet Global Challenges In Relation To Food Security, Climate Change, And Conscious Use Of Water, Intercultural Dialogue, Renewable Energy Sources And Public Health (UNESCO, Paris, 2009)

Souza (2008) emphasizes that the process of internationalization promotes the adoption of transnational education practices by new providers of higher education, as well as establishing new forms of relationship between higher education, the State, the market and the community in general resulting in qualified workforce. Allied to this scenario Feevale-HAMK-VIA maintain a Strategic Nordic-Latin Cooperation with Nordic countries, highlighting the Beyond Alliance for Knowledge (BAK) -, for trilateral exchange and joint research projects in relevant areas such as: Water Resources and Management; Bio economics; Sustainability; Corrosion, Durability and Recycling of Materials; IT, Health and Welfare and International Education, as described in the last chapter. It seems to be important that the partnership process moves on not only in the administrative but also practical level. The best method to implement the partnership in the institute is to give opportunity and engage the teachers and researchers in the joint activities. Remarkable is also that the partnership is in dialogue with each partners local stakeholders as

well as the global challenges of higher education. The future of the partnership seems successful because of the high commitment of every institute and the concrete goals.

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