



NICOLAUS COPERNICUS
UNIVERSITY
IN TORUŃ

Faculty of Philosophy
and Social Sciences



Fundacja Rozwoju Systemu Edukacji

Marta Jaworska

Dominik Antonowicz

Polish universities in European Alliances – methodology & lessons learned

19.11.2024

NCU and FRSE joint research project: EUI at Polish universities

Who we are:

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (PL),
Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences,
Institute of Sociology.

Department of Science and Higher Education Research:

Prof. Dominik Antonowicz,
dr Jarosław Domalewski,
dr Anna Pokorska,
dr Marta Jaworska,
dr Krzysztof Wasielewski.





Context

- ⦿ Flagship European Commission programme, yet a result of a political impulse (President E. Macron in 2017);
- ⦿ Built upon the Bologna Process (1999) and the Erasmus+ (1987),
- ⦿ Goal:
*creating **networks of universities** across the EU which will enable students **to obtain a degree** by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the **international competitiveness** of European universities*
- ⦿ Originally oriented around education and collaboration with the surrounding community;
- ⦿ By now (after 5 calls) there are 64 alliances (goal: 60), encompassing ca. 560 HEIs of 35 European countries.

A revolutionary programme:

- not oriented around competition over resources or areas of interest (Gunn 2020),
- based on pre-existing conditions (ties, change in management, autonomy, accountability, stratification) (Gunn 2020),
- balance between inclusiveness and excellence (Lambrechts et al. 2023),
- based on consensus; preservation as the highest priority (Pinheiro et al. 2023),
- organised not in a project-like manner, with strong commitment (Maassen et al. 2022).



Our approach:

- ⊙ Perception of the EUI among university management,
- ⊙ Circumstances and reasons behind joining EUI,
- ⊙ Finding partners and most suitable alliances,
- ⊙ Impact on universities and their institutional policies,
- ⊙ Biggest beneficiaries,
- ⊙ Probable outcomes,
- ⊙ Closer look at institutions in Central and Eastern Europe.

What is the impact of the EUI on Polish universities?



Project timeline:

- ⦿ October 2021 to September 2023 (24 months).

1st stage:

- ⦿ Organisation and management of the alliance: the university and network itself (governance of the alliance; alliance in the university structure; role of rectors).

2nd stage:

- ⦿ Educational initiatives taken by universities under the EUI (initially: joint programmes, students in joint programmes; eventually: analysis of other programmes, i.e. soft skills, language courses, microcredentials).



3rd stage:

- ⊙ Circumstances and reasons for joining the alliances;
- ⊙ Logic behind choosing partners;
- ⊙ Institutional policies and the impact of EUI upon it;
- ⊙ Biggest winners.

4th stage (additional):

- ⊙ Focus on university staff – identified as the least expected and biggest beneficiaries of the European Alliances at Polish universities during the 3rd phase of the project .



Sample:

- 14 universities in Poland (6 - 2019 call, 5 - 2020 call, 3 – joined later on);
- 13 partners and 1 leader.



Politechnika
Śląska



AGH



Politechnika Łódzka

SGH

Szkoła Główna
Handlowa
w Warszawie

Methodology:

Preliminary remarks:

1. Political importance,
2. Requirements of the funding institution,
3. Risk of narrative traps,
4. Denzin's data triangulation (1978): application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon,
5. Diverse sources of information,
6. Team of 8 researchers of different academic background.

Methodology:

1. First round of preliminary interviews (IDIs) with university management team members - rectors or PMs (n=14) at the initial stage of the project (on-line and in-person) in 2021.

Q: Governance and management of the alliance,

Q: Perception of the EUI among university management (1 or 2 years into project),

Q: Finding the alliance (general),

Q: Probable outcomes and expected benefits.

R: Description of the initial integration process; actions taken so far; hopes and expectations; thoughts on the prospects of the Initiative and the particular alliance; initial thoughts on other partners.

Methodology:

2. Second round of interviews (IDI) with university management team members - rectors or PMs, heads of units (n=14) at the further stage of the project (on-line and in-person) in 2023.

Q: Perception of the EUI among university management (3-4 years into project) - **update**,

Q: Circumstances and reasons behind joining EUI - **in detail**,

Q: Logic behind choosing partners and particular alliances,

Q: Difficulties met while running the EUI project,

Q: Changes within the university, benefits of the project so far, and future prospects.

R: A revised, updated and complete description of the integration process; changes within the university; critical revision and thoughts on the project and the particular alliance; remarks on other alliance members (those absent and new ones); afterthoughts on universities and the future of the Initiative; anticipated formula.

Methodology:

3. Analysis of rectors' inaugural speeches from 2020 and 2021.

Q: Official narrative;

Q: Context and place in structure;

Q: Perception of the initiative;

R: Presentation and importance of the EUI (present or not, when mentioned); narrative, especially in comparison to other endeavours (i.e. IDUB – Excellence Initiative), or when no other initiatives were present.

Methodology:

4. One round of interviews (IDIs) with students (n=11),

Q: perception of EUI and of opportunities it creates,

Q: involvement in the initiative (board: time, resources; courses),

Q: perception of the involvement of students from partner universities.

R: students' narrative, especially in comparison to other mobility programmes (i.e. Erasmus Plus); willingness among students to obtain a double-degree diploma; silhouette of an EUI student.



Methodology:

5. Ethnographic studies during on-campus visits at each participating university (n=11) – observation and a casual conversation with staff (CROSS-CHECK)

Q: comparison of the reality to the narrative,

Q: location and visual identification of the EUI offices on campus,

Q: proximity of staff to rector's / vicerector's office,

Q: frequency and intensity of meetings with rectors / PMs for EUI.

R: importance of the EUI to university rectors; their involvement on a daily basis; meaning (pride, prestige) of the initiative; in-direct communication with university community.

Methodology:

6. Analysis of the university websites content

Q: comparison of the reality to the narrative,

Q: location and visual identification of alliances online.

R: importance of the EUI to university; meaning (pride, prestige) of the initiative, also compared to other achievements; communication on the initiative to the university community and to visitors from outside the university (i.e. other universities).

Methodology:

7. FGIs with non-academic staff (NAS) (n=7)

Q: involvement of the NAS in the alliance implementation,

Q: involvement of the NAS in the provided programmes,

R: time and resources involved; anticipated and actual professional benefits (participation in short courses, study visits, international networking); getting rid of various complexes; clash with a different organisational and working culture; comparison and afterthoughts on their position within particular institutions.



Research:

1. All interviews transcribed.
2. All IDIs and FGIs anonymised (identity protection – key), coded names of universities.
3. Long discussions on observations and results.

Limitations:

Time of study:

1. initial stage of the initiative (a long-term programme),
2. changing engagement within the alliances,
3. COVID-19 restrictions on international mobility and in-person meetings.



Some Results

Europeanisation – strategic institutional agency

⊙ values

(...) this European idea was important to show that these are pro-European, pro-EU universities, with a mission to root this idea of Europeanness deeper in all kinds of social space (U-11).

⊙ pragmatic reasons

One of our arguments (...) was to enter a close collaboration with the strongest universities, in order to improve our capacity to attract good research grants to the university, also to become members of very good research teams, which are formed at those universities, so of course to increase the chance for a number of grants, for more prestigious grants; for progress in research (U-11).

⊙ ambitions

This idea of some kind of shaping of our international position has been accompanying us for years (...); this initiative of European universities is really heaven-sent. After many years of various attempts suddenly we got the framework we could fit into (U-3).



Impact on Polish universities

- ⊙ moderate impact on structure,
- ⊙ revisiting internationalisation (more-inclusive, horizontal *diffussion of internationalisation*),
- ⊙ a long-term institutional strategy with impact on various policies (language, institutional culture),

It was not like these matter were completely unknown to us, but it was easier to find an answer on how to transform it into a document. Because it was not any revelation to us that the matters of gender equality have to be regulated. It is different when we speak of it fully aware as the team of rectors, and different when we have to somehow prepare a document (U-4).

- ⊙ perceived as an opportunity to catch-up with Europe.

It is catching a train called “higher education in Europe” (U-2)

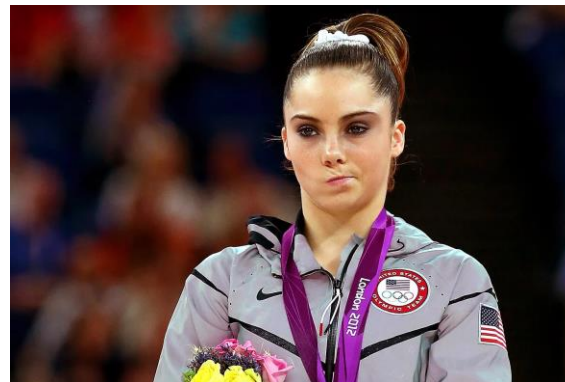


⦿ Enthusiasm and reservations



Fot. Thinkstock

VS.



Fot. Getty Images



Lessons learnt:

- ⦿ Having great ideas is not enough.
- ⦿ Having a nice budget is also not enough.
- ⦿ Be ready for surprises.
- ⦿ Adjust to changes.
- ⦿ New ideas come along the way.