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Internationalization: Interpretations Among Dutch Practitioners

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Abstract

The concept of internationalization has been seen as a buzz word and container concept. The meaning of internationalization includes everything that relates to international, meanwhile internationalization is losing its meaning. This study takes a practical approach to searching for some clarification of this concept. During the period 2009-2011, 73 key actors in the field of internationalization at 16 Dutch higher education institutions (HEIs) were interviewed. Among the 14 elements identified by this study as constituting the concept of internationalization, many may be commonly known. However, the value of this study is that it ranks their significance and provides a sound base for further comparative studies in other countries. Moreover, this study compares and contrasts the differing interpretations of what the pursuit of internationalization means in research universities and universities of applied sciences and concludes that internationalization is pursued differently in the two sectors and clarifies the cause of these differences. These sectoral differences are important but have so far been rarely acknowledged in the internationalization literature. Finally, knowledge about practitioners' perceptions of internationalization is not widely available in the education literature on internationalization. This study provides this knowledge based on the Dutch situation and argues that the current trend of theoretical development and general conceptualization in this field needs to recognize the actual practices, if our aim is to produce meaningful and feasible models/guidelines/frameworks that are recognizable by the practitioners.

Keywords

internationalization, higher education, strategic institutional management, cooperation and competition, international cooperation, teaching, learning and research

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It has taken some years for the importance of internationalization in higher education and its strategic position in the mainstream of university development to be recognized (Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Teichler, 2004). In recent years, research on internationalization has claimed that it has either reached maturity (Knight, 2011; Sanderson, 2008) or nearly done so (De Wit, 2011). According to Knight (2011) some misconceptions about internationalization have emerged. Examples of these misconceptions are that the number of international students in a higher education institution (HEI) is an indicator of its degree of internationalization and that the number of international faculty, curricula, research, partnerships, and institution is an indicator of its reputation. Brandenburg and De Wit (2011) point out the danger of confusing the goal of pursuing internationalization with its means when international marketing campaigns and student recruitment have became the goal of internationalization. These developments of knowledge about internationalization have not provided more clarity, but have instead made the "portmanteau term" (Callan, 2000) of internationalization start to lose its meaning and direction (Knight, 2011). With this in mind, the research reported here deals with a simple but important, an old but not yet fully answered question: *How is internationalization interpreted in practice?*

The interpretations of internationalization do not develop in a vacuum, affected only by theoretical research, but are affected by the organization and consciousness of professional practice (Callan, 2000). Thus, this research takes an empirical approach by interviewing a large number of practitioners ($n = 73$) in the field of internationalization in Dutch public universities. In the following account, contextual factors of the Dutch public higher education sector in which this research has taken place, are first described, followed by a literature review on the evolution of definitions of internationalization and an account of the research methods adopted. The Dutch higher education system has a binary division of universities of applied sciences (UAs) and research universities (RUs); both are actively engaged in pursuing internationalization. The existing definitions of internationalization have not treated these two sectors separately, although such a binary division widely exists in European countries and their differences have remained (De Wit, 2002; Van der Wende, 2007). To close this knowledge gap, this article not only reports the interpretations of Dutch interviewees but also compares the differences between these two sectors and suggests possible reasons for the sectoral differences. Finally, the practitioners' perceptions are discussed in relation to the current literature on higher education internationalization.

The Dutch Context of Public Higher Education and Its Internationalization

The Netherlands has 14 RUs and 39 UAs, for which the government remains the principal financer. The UA sector enrolls almost two thirds of Dutch higher education students. The RUs and UAs are regarded as "equal but different" (De Boer, Kolster, & Vossensteyn, 2010; Goedegebuure, 1992). They are equal because both subsectors are indisputably part of the Dutch higher education system; they are different because some general features, such as their origins, distinguish them from each other

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(Theisens, 2004). Most RUs have a much longer history (the first Dutch RU was established in 1575), carry out fundamental research, and primarily offer academically oriented programs. The UAs in general were set up much later with a strong regional focus and an intention to offer study programs with a strong vocational orientation.

The Netherlands has been identified as one of the most active countries in the field of internationalization. For example, with more than 1,500 study programs taught in English, this small country has the highest number of such programs among European non-English-speaking countries (Nuffic, 2013). In some leading Dutch universities, the number of English language programs has exceeded the number of programs offered in Dutch (De Boer et al., 2010). Three important developments need to be addressed in terms of internationalization. First is the transformation of the Dutch higher education system to a BaMa (bachelor–master) structure that took place in 2002-2003. In the light of the Bologna process, traditional degree programs of RUs in the Netherlands have been transformed into 3-year bachelor's programs and 1- or 2-year master's programs. Second, tuition fees for non-EU students have been gradually increased since 2007. The Dutch tuition fee standards are on average higher than they are in most other European countries, with the exception of the United Kingdom (Becker & Kolster, 2012). However, the increase in tuition fees has not led to a decrease in the number of international students coming to the Netherlands. The number of incoming international students from 2006 onward has seen a steady annual growth rate of approximately 0.4% (UAs and RUs together; Nuffic, 2011a). Third, the core function of internationalization defined by national policy has changed from being actively involved with capacity building in developing countries to an increased emphasis on knowledge economy building and the international marketing of Dutch higher education (Nuffic, 2010). For example, the Dutch government has encouraged the development of internationally oriented master's programs, graduate schools, and "centers of excellence" at Dutch HEIs as instruments to recruit high-quality international students and to keep Dutch HEIs internationally competitive (Becker & Kolster, 2012).

Definitions of *Internationalization*

The term *internationalization* has appeared in the education literature only since the 1990s. By analyzing the existing definitions on *internationalization*, the following evolutions can be discerned (see Table 1).

a. A shift from an activity-focused to a strategy-focused perspective.

In the early stages, internationalization was defined in terms of a set of activities focused on a program of student and staff exchange with a short-term orientation, as defined by Arum and Van de Water (1992). Accompanied by a growth in the complexity and scale of international activities, internationalization started to take on a shape of its own and grew in size and scope, and introducing strategic management to the internationalization process is not a surprising development. Different suggestions for

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Table 1. Evolution of the Definitions of Internationalization.

Scholar	Year	Level of focus	Meaning of internationalization	Definition
Arum and van de Water	1992	Institutional	Activities	"the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation" (p. 202)
Knight	1994	Institutional	Process	"the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (p. 7)
Rudzki	1995	Institutional/ sectoral	Defined feature	"a defining feature of all universities, encompassing organisational change, curriculum innovation, staff development and student mobility, for the purposes of achieving excellence in teaching and research" (p. 421)
Van der Wende	1997	National	Systematic efforts	"any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalisation of society, economy and labour markets" (p. 18)
Ellingboe	1998	Institutional	Strategic management	"the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system" (p. 199)
Söderqvist	2002	Institutional	Changing process	"a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies" (p. 29)
Knight	2003	Sectoral/ national	Process	"the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2)
Teichler	2004	National	Changing process	"internationalization can best be defined as the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education relative to an increasing frequency of border-crossing activities amidst a persistence of national systems" (p. 22)

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strategic management of internationalization can be found in the definitions: Ellingboe's (1998) advice was leadership driven, Van der Wende (1997) tended to rely on the national policy guidance and monitoring, and Söderqvist (2002) suggested a holistic management approach.

b. A broadening from the individual institutional level to the sector/national/regional level.

The early definitions of internationalization focused on the institutional level, as defined by Knight (1994) and Rudzki (1995). Van der Wende (1997) studied the missing links between national policies for internationalization and those for higher education in general and pointed out that an institutional-based definition has limitations. It was claimed that this limitation needed to be overcome by viewing higher education from a broader perspective, to include the regulatory frameworks and policies for internationalization and to focus on the role of national agencies such as ministries in policy making and incentives. By agreeing with Van der Wende's proposal, Knight's (2003) later definition included all three levels: institutional, sector, and national. Söderqvist's (2002) and Teichler's (2004) definitions similarly placed emphasis on the totality of internationalization and its impact on the whole higher education system

c. A development from fragmented studies from diversified perspectives to a synthetic view of internationalization.

Table 1 illustrates the evolution of the definitions of internationalization in the education sector. There are more similarities and interlinkages than conflicts or divergences among the existing definitions. So far, the notions of "process" and "integration" defined by Knight and the drive to be responsive to the external environment introduced by Van der Wende remain the most important elements of the definitions of internationalization in education.

Research Method

To understand how internationalization is interpreted in practice, face-to-face interviews were chosen as the primary method to collect authentic statements and meaningful information of personal experiences and contextual factors. In all, 73 interviews were conducted between February 2009 and February 2011 at eight RUs and eight UAs. The selection of eight institutions in each sector enables representation of institutional diversity while remaining practically manageable. The 14 RUs together offer 432 bachelor's and 901 master's programs, whereas 39 UAs, having almost two thirds of Dutch higher education students, offer only 347 programs in all (Nuffic, 2011b). This is an indicator of greater homogeneity in the UA sector compared to the RUs, so choosing the same number of institutions from the UA sector has little impact on the comparative representativeness of the two samples.

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To provide a picture of Dutch HEIs' internationalization as comprehensively as possible, the institutions were selected from well-known and less-well-known geographical locations, comprehensive universities and specialized universities (business school, technical university, agriculture university, etc.), and universities that have experienced structural changes such as institutional mergers in the past few years and those that have not. The sample selection covers faculties that by their very nature are internationally oriented (e.g., economics, medicine, international business studies, international law) and faculties traditionally having limited international elements in their curricula (e.g., German language and literature).

Key actors were selected as interviewees, namely those who hold key positions in the pursuit of internationalization at central or faculty level and have a good overview and adequate knowledge of the internationalization process, activities, history, and so on, both in their own institution and more generally. This selection is based on two parameters. First of all, wherever possible, respondents were selected on the basis of the length of their working experience in HEIs, which suggests that they will have sufficient knowledge of the internationalization process pursued at their institutions. Second, they were also selected from a range of function levels directly related to internationalization working processes: for example, senior managers; the head and staff members of the international office, the marketing and communication department, and the recruitment office; internationalization project coordinators; internationalization policy advisors and coordinators; deans/vice deans in charge of internationalization; and faculty heads and academics. The selection of these key actors was often influenced by the identification of their significance by others in the institution and even from other institutions, particularly those key actors in a position to know what has occurred in relation to the internationalization process at each HEI in the study The interviews were based around a core question: "What is your interpretation of internationalization?" In total, more than 100 hours of interviews were recorded from 39 interviewees working in the UAs and 34 in the RUs.

With the help of the ATLAS.ti computer program, which is for general use in qualitative social research activities involving the interpretation of texts and discourse analysis (Muhr, 1991; Smit, 2002), a large group of codes was developed inductively from the material around the central term *internationalization*. Keywords and expressions used by the interviewees that were judged to be similar in meaning were brought together under one code and were then checked with three experts in discourse analysis. A frequency table was constructed by identifying all interviewees who made reference to each of the elements and recording them in the appropriate cell according to their function level and institution type. Any individual referring to one of these elements is recorded once only in the appropriate cell, no matter how many references she or he made to it in the interview. Through continual comparison with the raw data, core categories were distilled down into constructs, which enabled the links among categories to be established (Charmaz, 2000) and the data to be organized into a meaningful whole (McCann & Clark, 2003). This process led to the identification of 14 distinctive elements for the concept of internationalization (Table 2).

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Table 2. Differences Between the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAs) and Research Universities (RUs) in Understanding Internationalization.

Elements of internationalization	Total (%)	UA (%)	RU (%)	Difference (UA – RU; %)
1. Student recruitment	88	82	94	–12
2. Gaining international experience/ competences/knowledge	74	77	71	6
3. Internationalizing curricula/programs	67	79	53	27
4. International marketing	62	62	62	0
5. Globalization/government policy	58	54	62	–8
6. Network building	55	51	59	–8
7. Improving education/research quality	52	36	71	–35
8. A process changing universities	49	41	59	–18
9. Student and staff mobility	48	64	29	35
10. International positioning of the institution	44	26	65	–39
11. Creating an international environment	36	36	35	1
12. Integration into the whole institution	30	31	29	1
13. The defining features of higher education	27	10	47	–37
14. Peacemaking/solving global or societal problems	22	21	24	–3

The Key Elements of Internationalization

Element 1

Student recruitment covers any comment that refers to recruiting international students. The high frequency of such comments confirms that the interviewees support the statement made by Lunn (2008) that internationalization is primarily conceived as dealing with the recruitment of international students. Historical experience of the internationalization in the UA sector was often criticized by the interviewees for seeking quantity (student numbers) at the cost of quality (quality of students), as illustrated in this comment:

> Several years ago internationalization was driven by money. When universities are in a difficult financial position, they need students from abroad to pay tuition fees. As long as a student could pay the fee, they did not look at the quality of the student. Still many universities, especially those UAs, are doing this probably, but that is killing universities. (IP59, RU)

This recruitment-driven practice has given UAs something of a bad name in internationalization. The lower rate of reference to it among UA interviewees, compared to those from the RUs, may indicate a concern of UAs to distance themselves from quantity-driven recruitment and to correct their previous mistake. Meanwhile, the RU interviewees recognized their previous shortcomings in terms of paying inadequate attention to active recruiting and promotion, and therefore gave more value to this

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element. The 12% difference in the value given by the RUs and UAs is interpreted as a sign that both sectors have matured in their pursuit of internationalization.

Element 2

Gaining international experience/competences/knowledge covers the remarks made about the contribution that internationalization can make to the development of an international awareness or perspective among students and staff. On this element UAs and RUs rated similarly. Successful international student recruitment is more commonly and emphatically related to creating a large and diverse international student population, which can then provide opportunities for home students to improve their international awareness, increase their interest in studying abroad, and gain international experience and knowledge without going abroad. The second highest ranking of this element shows a weak link between student recruitment and economic gain for the institution.

> Internationalization for our Dutch students is basically to broaden their view of the world. It is not meant only for the pure education purpose. It is also for the life experience of students. (IP19, UA)

> It was written in the internationalization policy of the university that the students of this university have to be internationally competent after they have finished their studies. (IP48, RU)

Element 3

Internationalizing curricula/programs covers the understanding of the interviewees that internationalization helps their institution to develop international programs or add international dimensions to their existing study programs. Meanwhile, the large number of English-taught programs also helps their institution to attract more international students and enrich their students' international knowledge. The proportion of UA interviewees mentioning this issue exceeded that of the RU staff by 27%. One possible explanation for this lies in the Dutch RUs' longer tradition of internationalization. The curricula and programs in the UA sector, which have a central purpose of serving local development needs, are still in need of internationalization, whereas those at the RUs are already relatively more international or more suitable for internationalization based on RUs' longer international working experience. In other words, although the "old" international programs were first established in the RUs, the UAs are more active in developing "new" international programs by following the trend of internationalization.

> This university already has many English taught programs before internationalization became a fashion like it is today. (IP54, RU)

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> To get foreign students to the Netherlands, to join our programs, we have to develop programs taught in English . . . . When I started, we didn't have any international programs, we started slowly and expanded. At the moment we have over twenty international programs. (IP19, UA)

Element 4

International marketing covers remarks about marketing and branding activities outside the Netherlands. From the statements of interviewees, a link can be seen between international marketing and student recruitment. However, they are coded and studied separately because it becomes clear from the data that student recruitment means getting students into the study programs, while marketing activities can be undertaken for goals other than student recruitment: for instance, to help HEIs find suitable local partners/agents in a new target market, obtaining international research funds and membership of international associations/consortia.

> Internationalization is the way that you present yourself internationally . . . . You want to sell your product or service all over the world and you have some people functioning like ambassadors who go all over the world and present your products and your organisation. (IP64, RU)

Element 5

Globalization/government policy includes any remarks indicating internationalization as a response to government policies that are themselves a response to globalization. The high ranking of this element reflects the interviewees' strong awareness of external pressure caused by globalization and the direction of internationalization steered by EU/Dutch government policies. Internationalization is used to give HEIs a new élan, to bring more competition and new changes to public HEIs, and to boost their ambition and will to play on the global stage.

Element 6

Network building refers to comments about networks, partnerships, or other forms of collaboration with national and international bodies of any sort. Networking is an important tool for HEIs' internationalization (Söderqvist, 2002). The interviewees in general were concerned about extending (inter)national networks, but the focus on network building has shifted from the quantity to the quality of their networks. Particularly for the HEIs that already possess what they judge to be sufficient and extensive networks, the trends in network building are the centralization of international contacts established by individual lecturers/research groups/faculties, reduction of the number of partners/agencies, and intensification of a selected group of strategic partnerships. The interviewees from RUs and UAs gave similar values to Elements 4, 5, and 6.

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Element 7

Improving education/research quality includes the understanding among the interviewees that internationalization can help HEIs to safeguard and improve their education and research quality. The proportion of RU interviewees mentioning this issue exceeded that of the UA staff by 35%. The difference can be explained by interview data showing that the research quality in particular, referred to by several respondents as "the lifeline" of RU, really depends on the quality of PhD students and research staff they can recruit internationally. A considerable number of RU interviewees claimed that education and research quality are improved by having international students in the classroom, as they function as a role model for Dutch students because "they are the best out of the best" (IP44-RU) and "work extremely hard" (IP70-RU); their presence have many positive effects on the education quality and research output. This seems not to be echoed by the interviewees at the UAs, most of whom linked the presence of international students to the creation of an international environment for the home students to motivate them to go abroad or to give them international experience without leaving the Netherlands. Although English language skills and international experience have even been used for selecting new staff and their development is promoted among the current staff, the interviewees at the UAs relate internationalization more to enhancing the capacity to receive international students and meet their education demands, rather than to the improvement of their education quality. In fact many of the UA sector interviewees considered the international students as benefitting from rather than contributing to Dutch education, which they perceive to be more advanced than that in students' home countries.

> The reason why the Asian students come to us is because for many students the universities in their home countries do not have the same level of ours. Many of our education concepts such as project working, practical placement, are very much appreciated by them. The education they receive from us is much better than what they can get at their home countries. (IP38, UA)

Element 8

A process changing universities shows that internationalization is also understood as bringing changes to HEIs. These changes are not only developing programs taught in English, having an increasing number of international students, adding new requirements on job performance evaluation of teaching staff, and so on; the impact of these changes has gone deeper into changing the mind-set of students and staff. This element is more commonly expressed by RU respondents (59%) than by those at UAs (41%), which suggests that the RU respondents view internationalization as bringing more changes to their institutions than those from the UA sector. However, the majority of interviewees claim that the RUs were previously already more international than the UAs, so one might expect that the changes brought about by internationalization would be much more influential at the UAs that were historically not international at all. This contrast may be explained in that the form that internationalization is now

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taking is different from that in the history of RUs. The contemporary way of thinking about and implementing internationalization has a new dimension of marketing.

> The UAs are far more businesslike, far more pragmatic about dealing with everything. I don't want to generalize, but I think the UAs accept the idea of using business models more easily than a lot of RUs. The way our organization is set up is more according to the business model than traditional RUs where academic staff members are independent. (IP6, UA)

The changes caused by applying these "business models" such as an increased central direction of activities and an emphasis on business-like management are contrary to the traditional academic way of being international at RUs. When contemporary internationalization is led more by efficiency management and marketing activities that are seen as threats to their traditional academic rationale by the RUs, but as opportunities by the UAs, the resulting changes are likely to have a greater impact in the RUs than the UAs.

Element 9

Student and staff mobility refers to any activities that involve movements or exchanges of home students or staff with foreign institutions. They would seek international experience thought joint programs, exchange programs, study trips, and so on. Although mobility remains a core element of internationalization according to statistics (e.g., Eurodata, Erasmus Statistics), this study reports a relatively low ranking of mobility in the Dutch practice of internationalization. This difference can be caused by the Dutch context and different research focus. The proportion of UA interviewees mentioning this issue exceeded that of the RU staff by 35%. It is almost certainly an oversimplification to interpret this as suggesting there is more staff and student mobility in the UAs than the RUs. According to the interviewees, the practices of mobility such as having international contacts, taking part in international research cooperation, and attending international conferences are firmly established in the RU sector and are seen as a normal part of their job, so the interviewees paid much less attention to this element. The UAs, on the other hand, are still working intensively on this element to become more international.

> In the research universities, a lot of their staff have international contacts in their own disciplines. This is not the same for the university of applied science . . . . To make progress in internationalization, you also need more and more lecturers who are interested in international activities. That sometimes is a problem. It's not very common for our teaching staff to go abroad to teach at other universities. (IP9, UA)

Element 10

International positioning of the institution covers any statement that places the Dutch institution in relation to the international higher education community. This may be expressed explicitly in terms of ranking or in terms of less precise measures, such as

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"reputation." The proportion of RU interviewees mentioning this issue exceeded that of the UA staff by 39%. Given that the most popular international rankings include only the RUs, it may be concluded that the RUs see internationalization as a means to achieve and improve their ranking position, which marks their international status. Putting it the other way around, they intend to establish their international status through international cooperation and partnership, joint research, educational exchange, and so on to improve their ranking. Neither of these is commonly applicable for the UAs because they are not included in the international rankings and are only minimally involved in national rankings. This means that they have no independent means of measuring their relative international position, thereby reducing the significance of the concept for their institutions.

Element 11

Creating an international environment covers remarks about making the Dutch university environment more international through such means as having more nationalities on campus and promoting multicultural classrooms. According to 36% of the interviewees, creating an international environment increases the diversity of cultures on campus, but does not necessarily produce intercultural communication and exchange between these diverse cultural groups. This is especially true when international recruitment is successfully conducted in a few target countries and a large number of students from the same country form a subculture group within an otherwise international environment. The interviewees pointed out not only that the international students tend to do this, but also that the local Dutch do the same when they form the majority of the class or study group.

Element 12

Integration into the entire organization covers the integration of international aspects into the entire organization. Subcultural groups often reduce open communication and intercultural exchange because students tend to stay in the comfort zone of their own culture rather than actively dealing with the difficulties they encounter when they are exposed to a multicultural environment. Students who stick to their own subcultural groups may fail to grasp the importance of integrating with other cultures within the university, that is, by choosing groups members from their own culture and speaking their own language in after-class discussion rather than English (where this, by default or design, is the lingua franca of the international programs). This is counterproductive to achieving the intended learning outcomes in promoting a genuinely international environment. Therefore, about one third of the interviewees stressed the importance of integration among different cultural groups, which indicates a concern among the practitioners that creating an international environment is not the same as creating an internationalized community.

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> Our largest international student group is the Chinese students, the biggest non-Dutch group is the Germans. When the Chinese students celebrated their Spring Festival for the first time, there were only Chinese students, they wanted to have their own gathering and only talk Chinese. So I said, "If you don't invite other students to this party, then you won't see me next year again." Their celebration must be open for all international students. Although the main group remains the Chinese, but you see many other people celebrating together and doing games and having fun. This is what we mean by integration; it is important that all different nationalities involve with each other rather than forming subcultural groups within the university. (IP71, UA)

Element 13

A defining feature of higher education refers to the remarks that interviewees expressed that internationalization or any international activity is part of the defining features of HEIs and activities. RU interviewees (47%) are much more likely than those from UAs (10%) to express the opinion that higher education is international in its basic nature, which implies that the longer a HEI has been established, the stronger an international characteristic it possesses. The RU interviewees tend to reinforce their more prestigious position in terms of history and academic background and place much greater emphasis on this element. The interviewees from the UA sector in general stated that it is very difficult or even impossible to compare their institutions with the RUs. The interviewees from RUs commonly did not like to be compared with interviewees from UAs. Some of them even insisted on using the title of "college" rather than "university" when referring the UAs. So these RU interviewees have a different set of defining features of what constitutes a "university" in mind than their UA colleagues.

Element 14

Peacemaking/solving global or societal problems covers the ideological rationales of internationalization, on which the interviewees from both sectors placed similar emphasis. Moreover, this element adds a new dimension to the noneconomic rationales defined by the current literature (Knight & De Wit, 1999; Pandit, 2009; Van der Wende, 2007). The identification of an ideological rationale covers the threefold division of political, cultural, and academic rationales, but goes beyond it. As globalization progresses, while countries, institutions, and people are becoming inevitably more connected together, they also become more dependent on each other. Global problems such as climate change, environmental sustainability, and societal problems caused by immigration, demand a global solution in which HEIs can contribute.

> If you think subjects like climate change and sustainability. We are all connected and all together. We have to start with working together. The first step of working together to deal with these problems is internationalization. (IP35, UA)

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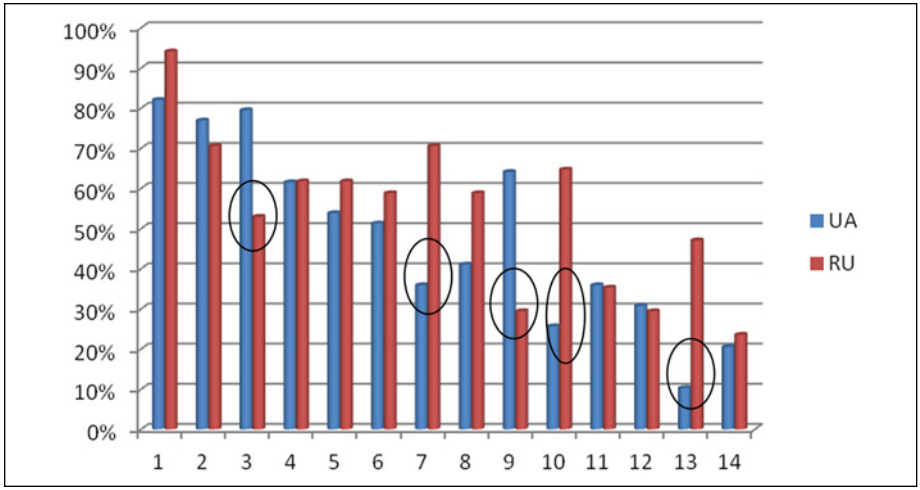

Figure 1. Sectoral differences between the universities of applied sciences (UAs) and research universities (RUs).

Further Synthetic Discussion

The research data show that the container concept of "internationalization" is full of pieces that interviewees have constructed according to their professional life. The newly emerging view of "misconceptions" (De Wit, 2011; Knight, 2011) implies that some "misinformed" pieces should be picked out and removed from the container to keep the container consistent. I argue, however, that these pieces are all valuable because they represent how people working in HE are making sense of the concept of internationalization. They are not misconceptions or misinterpretations, but perceptions that are significant for individuals' professional roles in the reality of internationalization. For the conceptualization of a term, it may be convenient to first formulate selection criteria, then use these to evaluate the existing varieties of practice, and finally to decide which are the right pieces of practice that can stay in the container and which ought to be thrown out. These selection criteria are often an abstract description of what actually happens in the practice of that term, however, and this purifying process can lead to unrealistic standardization.

This study draws attention to the sectoral differences when studying and evaluating internationalization. Interviewees at RUs and UAs differ in their understandings of the implications of internationalization (see Figure 1). RUs have a much longer history, carry out fundamental research, and primarily offer academically oriented programs. Most of the UAs were set up much later with a strong regional focus and the intention of offering study programs with a strong vocational orientation. Consequently, the UAs have been making efforts to internationalize their curricula and stimulate staff and student mobility, whereas the RUs place more emphasis on international market positioning of the university and academic positioning in the ranking lists. For the

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UAs, research is not their primary function, whereas for the RUs it is, so international student recruitment, particularly at the undergraduate level, is less important for the RUs, being only a small part of their internationalization. But for the UAs the main benefits of internationalization, such as generating extra income, giving international experience and knowledge to the local students, and creating an international environment, come from undergraduate recruitment.

The interview data also initiate discussions on HEIs' motivations/rationales pursuing internationalization that have been classically categorized as economic, politic, cultural, and academic rationales (Jiang, 2008; Knight & De Wit, 1999). However, a negative rationale is identified by this research, that is, the fear of falling behind competitively when the entire system or sector is moving in the direction of greater international involvement. So a "bandwagon effect" is created by HEIs all becoming international and by a general belief that an international orientation is a necessity. As a result, their active participation in internationalization might not be driven by a clearly defined rationale because not doing so places any individual HEI at a disadvantage when everyone else is doing it.

> If you don't want to be internationalized, you won't have a competitive advantage, you will miss a lot in competition. Who wants to be left behind? (IP46, RU)

Student recruitment and international marketing that are commonly presumed to represent an economic rationale were ranked high by the interviewees. However, the increase of student numbers was related to revenue growth by only 27% of the interviewees; many more Dutch interviewees related it to noneconomic rationales, such as creating an international environment for improving home students' cultural awareness, selecting the best master's/PhD candidates from a talent pool, providing chances for young people from all over the world to meet and learn from each other's culture, and ultimately contributing to world peace. Therefore, the economic and noneconomic rationales have, to some degree, become symbiotic.

Conclusion

The past decades have witnessed a progressive broadening of areas of attention spanning internationalization activities, strategic integration, and policy stimulation. In the midst of the increasing complexity and diversity of internationalization aims and activities, this article intends to go back to the basics, that is, the meaning of the concept itself.

Among the 14 elements identified by this study that constitute the term *internationalization* in the perceptions of the interviewed practitioners, the internationalization activities undertaken by the Dutch HEIs are similar to those of HEIs in many other countries, as mentioned by Van Damme (2001), De Wit (2011), and Knight (2011): student recruitment, internationalization of curricula, international marketing, staff and student mobility, joint research projects, the development of exchange programs, and (inter)national network building. HEIs experience similar demands such as dealing with international competition, students with a free choice of where to study

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abroad, and staff with easier access to sources, because of increasing connectedness between HEIs in the context of globalization (Burnett & Huisman, 2010). Although these commonalities can transcend the particular sites (the Dutch context) used in this research to a more broadly application in HEIs elsewhere, the context must be understood and taken into account when interpreting international practices and perceptions. For example, student recruitment cannot simply be assumed to be driven by an economic rationale and the ranking position of each element cannot be used as an absolute criterion to judge the importance of each element in practice in an individual institution.

Moreover, a composite picture is obtained by studying a large sample of institutions and practitioners (73 interviewees at 16 institutions in total), paying attention to institutional distinctions in terms of RUs and UAs. This comparison between the two institutional types is an important analytical approach. The aim here has been not only to clarify the elements within the container concept of internationalization, but also to explain the sectoral influences on the perceptions of and significance given to different interpretations and emphases of internationalization. Since the binary system in the Netherlands has remained relatively stable, the distinction is perceived by the government as an important form of differentiation that matches the prior education of students as well as labor market needs (Lepori & Kyvik, 2010), so understanding these sectoral differences can be helpful when designing an internationalization strategy and evaluating its outcomes.

A synthetic view of internationalization among the existing definitions has caused certain blind spots; for example, a greater concentration on policy making, but a neglect of the input side of policy formation; greater concern with the macro and meso levels of organizational adaptation, but a neglect of the micro dynamics and effects in the actual practices of academic work (Enders, 2004). Also, Stohl (2007) argues that the biggest challenge to developing and sustaining internationalization in this century will be how to increase the level of engagement of faculty staff. This study looked at the meso and micro dynamics and a rich diversity of interpretations of internationalization and suggests that this term can be better described as a loose collection of ideas rather than as a coherently structured definition. When we understand internationalization as a process, it is neither wrong nor helpful to accept the container of concepts and interpretations, into which various kinds of problems, solutions, misconceptions, and corrections are dumped by participants, as this is how internationalization moves forward in reality. An important conclusion here is that the current idea of purifying the concept can reflect a wish for theoretical development, but it does not match the "impurity" of daily institutional reality.

This research carried out an analysis of the interpretations of internationalization in the Dutch public HEIs' practice. During the literature review in preparation for the empirical work, I came across only a limited number of studies looking into the perceptions of the practitioners, for example, Trahar and Hyland (2011), Al-Youssef (2009), Söderqvist (2002), and Dixon (2006). The majority of studies still relate to the theorization and associated conceptualization of internationalization. The current theoretical developments and general conceptualization of internationalization are valuable because they provide common definitions, models, guidelines, and

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frameworks, but if they produce general definitions, models, guidelines, and frameworks that are abstract and remote from actual internationalization practices, they will not be seen as relevant by the practitioners. If we agree that general conceptualization of internationalization is meant to help practice, then we as researchers need to recognize the views of the practitioners and try to understand and respect them. We cannot stay at only an abstract level and produce decontextualized models, guidelines, and frameworks that are neither meaningful nor recognizable to the practitioners. Our perspective of developing concepts, models, theories, and frameworks tends to constantly correct the practitioners and tell them "what it *should be* about"; perhaps it is also time to correct our research view by understanding "what it *is* about" and develop something that is acceptable and workable in practice. In this way, the theoretical developments and practice can mutually enhance rather detract from each other.

Research Limitations and Further Research Suggestions

The major limitation of the study is its scope, which was restricted to the Dutch HEIs. The generalization of the results to different context becomes an issue. UAs and RUs represent two types of HEIs in the Dutch situation. This study shows that there are important differences between the perceptions of internationalization in the UAs and RUs, and these differences are clearly influenced by the sectoral differences. Therefore, a suggestion for future research is a comparison of this research with similar research carried out in other European countries investigating the commonalities and differences between the perceptions of internationalization in different political and social contexts. On one hand, this would allow the further validation of the results of this study, but more important, such broader comparative studies will help to develop a more robust theorization of the impact of such differences.

This study used just two parameters for the selection of individual respondents: their job function and the length of their working experience. This was primarily because the focus of the study is at the sectoral and institutional level. It was recognized throughout that differences between individuals—as private individuals and not just as institutional functionaries—might influence their perceptions, but such differences were not the study's concern. It was also anticipated that such individual influences (age, gender, social class, etc.) might to some extent at least be subservient to the professional contextual parameters of position and experience when their opinions were sought in relation to their professional practice. The research data did in fact reveal that individual personal history (e.g., experience of war, having a foreign parent, experience of studying or living abroad) and broad political perspective (e.g., nationalism vs. globalism) do have some impact on perceptions of internationalization. Further studies that adopt different selection parameters are, therefore, encouraged as offering the potential to further enrich our understanding of how individuals working in HEIs perceive internationalization and put it into practice. It is hoped that the findings from this research offer some guidance in developing a framework for such further studies.

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