

Double reunification through the European Union's Education Policy

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Cross-border Universities as a Field of Europeanization of Higher Education in the EU

1. Introduction

The European integration process is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon strongly influencing various aspects of both the everyday lives of Europeans, but also academic reflection on its nature, forms and manifestations. One of the fields that is worthy of deeper analysis is the creation of a common, European educational space, because it transcends the limits of the European Union and of European integration, offering a much wider platform for standardization on the continent and engaging states outside the Brussels-based integration. Academic integration has led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This initiative resulting from Bologna process was completed in 2010. The Bologna process aimed at a higher level of coherence of academic education in Europe, by creating the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) common framework and the three cycle educational model, containing the 3+2+3 mode. This, supported by the European Union's Erasmus mobility program, not only standardized the educational model in Europe, but also contributed to the large-scale mobility of young Europeans. A multilingual education, as well as the internationalization of faculty started to become standard in many universities (Beichelt, Jańczak, 2010, pp. 51–62).

At the same time, however, in several places in the Old Continent an even more ambitious attempt was undertaken. Many universities started to consider not only the above described participation in European education space, but additionally looked at more intensive academic integration across national borders. Consequently, several initiatives can be detected in contemporary Europe where the concept of the cross-border university was invented, conceived and (sometimes) successfully implemented.

The aim of this essay is to overview examples of cross-border universities in Europe. It tries to answer the question of how this concept was put into operation and implemented in practice. The aim is to outline the way in which such universities are organized. At the same time, it is assumed that this phenomenon is framed by two processes. First of all, debourgeoisization, being a part of the redefinition of national borders. Secondly, the Europeanization of higher education. Consequently, a situation has been created where, on the one hand, state boundaries no longer limit science and education, allowing universities to penetrate non-native systems. This is possible because of the high level of standardization, where the most crucial elements of the education system in European states are similarly structured and offer high levels of transferability, both for students and scholars. At the same time, it is due to the positive overlap of academic institutions and their eagerness to become involved in this new, challenging cross-border cooperation initiative, and the support from the political environment of the national centers.

The text, consequently, begins with a short debate on border changes in contemporary Europe, signalizes the phenomenon of Europeanization and finally tests several examples of cross-border university education in an attempt to categorize them.

2. Borders and overcoming borders

The debate on cross-border universities requires a short review how the border is conceptualized and defined in academic literature.

The most basic, but at the same time the most universal understanding of borders is as a method of distinguishing “us” from “non-us”. This makes borders the most common instruments of inclusion and exclusion.

A border can, however, be structured according to one of two models, namely the *frontier* or *boundary* (Kristof, 1959).

Frontiers dominated in pre-nation state Europe, being more areal than linear. They were characterized by overlapping influences, mixing of cultures and values. Following Walters (2004, pp. 687–688) and Browning, Joenniemi (2008, p. 529) it may be presented as “a zone of contact between two entities or social systems” (Evans, Newnham, 1998, p. 185) or “no man’s land” (Alkan, 2002, p. 34). Populations that inhabit frontiers are

usually open and represent complex identities, representing elements of both neighboring structures (O'Dowd, Wilson, 2002, p. 8).

Boundaries are products of the Peace of Westphalia and started to dominate in Europe together with the creation of the modern nation-state. They were lines, precisely defined and demarcated. National centers aimed to establish "more or less strict territorial limits" (Evans, Newnham, 1998, p. 185), separating the exclusive sovereignties of neighboring states (O'Dowd, Wilson, 2002, p. 8). Boundaries "indicate certain well established limits (the bounds) of a given political unit, and all that which is within the boundary is bound together, that is, it is fastened by an internal bond" (Kristof, 1959, pp. 269–270). Borderlands are inhabited by homogeneous and alien communities on the respective sides of the border.

With regard to the academic environment, borders reveal two contradictory processes.

On the one hand, they are about the national educational system, separated from other educational systems by a clear boundary. The role of universities, especially in the field of social sciences and humanities, is consequently closely linked to the state's functions and makes possible the domestic consolidation of nation-states. States that regain independence usually re-establish their own universities to produce national elites. The process of autonomization often leads to the same. The case of Belgium shows how the emancipation of the Flemish and Walloon communities resulted in the division of Belgian universities into independent (and entirely unconnected) French and Dutch language-based institutions.

On the other hand, however, science is recognized as universal and independent from politics, states, religions and so on. Borders, in this perception, are set between the academic and non-academic environment, not between national academic systems. One could conclude consequently, that, together with boundarization processes, universities are trapped within national borders, and political constraints separate them from foreign schools. At the same time, however, they naturally attract each other across borders, tending to overcome the existing barriers in mutual contacts, especially related to research or teaching, but also to the mission of international communication, mutual understanding and openness. They then frontierize existing boundaries.

A situation that is especially interesting is the one when this eagerness to cooperate based on scientific universalism (and revealing a bottom-up pressure) meets a political window of opportunity. Such a window, due to

centrally motivated reasons (revealing top-down processes), makes it possible to weaken national control of academic organization and break with pure standardization within a national academic system. Universities operating within them are allowed, or even encouraged to collaborate across borders, or – which is of special interest to this investigation – create structures that transcend state borders and result in cross-border universities.

Before testing examples and manifestations of this process, it is still relevant to understand the logics of the change in policies of central authorities. It is claimed that the European integration process is the key factor here, and cross-border universities represent the most advanced forms of Europeanization of higher education and research. Consequently, a brief look at the concept of Europeanization seems to be helpful for further argumentation.

3. Europeanization

The concept of Europeanization is still a matter of ongoing debate. Due to the limitations of this text, it outlines only the key arguments identified in it. First of all, the concept has at least five aspects: “changes in external territorial boundaries; governance institutions developed at the supranational level; influencing and imposing supranational at the sub-national and national levels; exporting governance procedure and policy specific for EU beyond EU borders; and a project of a political nature aimed at intensifying the unification of the EU” (Howell, 2004, p. 8). In the case of all of them, the process of European integration that led to the creation of the European Union seems to be the main context of the process. Roberta Ladrech even labels it as a process where “EC political and economic dynamics [become a] part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech, 1994, pp. 69–88). This top-down perspective is confronted with a bottom up explanation offered by Johan Olsen. He claims that Europeanization “[...] implies adapting national and sub-national systems of governance to a European political center and European-wide norms” (Olsen, 2002, p. 3).

Applying the presented understanding of Europeanization to the border debate, first of all the principle of cooperation and integration should be stressed. Neo-functionally understood, integration should lead to coop-

eration of universities in order to better serve educational needs and research efficiency. Additionally, one could expect cross-border contacts spilling over and creating a lively and dynamic cross-border academic environment within the European Union. An intergovernmental explanation would stress national interests and the role of national centers in creating cross-border academic initiatives for their own purposes, for example, the improvement of bilateral relations with neighbors.

The very nature of Europeanization in academic cooperation can be explained consequently as a national response to the EU's demand and implementation of new European principles (especially those based on cooperation, openness, and so on, but also formal and procedural mechanisms, like the European Credit Transfer System – ECTS). This top-down process reflects the imposition of European solutions. On the other hand, the bottom-up mechanism can be identified in universities being interested in overcoming the separating nature of boundaries in Europe and, using the new chances resulting from the integration process, eagerly employing EU provisions and getting involved in various forms of international activities and contacts. In both cases, one of the most advanced steps is to create elements of one's own academic system that crosses national boundaries.

As so far the debate presented has referred generally to academic cross-border cooperation in Europe, a more specific case seems to be worth further exploration. Cross-border universities were chosen as the most complicated, advanced but also rarest forms of cross-border academic contacts in the European Union, illustrating at the same time the main challenges of the Europeanization of higher education. The limited number of cases make it possible to explore the entire area, and to map the process within the European Union, revealing its limited character.

4. Cross-border universities

The concept of the cross-border university is still not well categorized, either in academic literature, or in practice. Literally, it refers to a higher education institution located across a border. This is, however, the case of very few cross-border education structures. More frequently, the name is applied to common initiatives of universities located on two (or more) bor-

der sides, often to university networks, common study programs or shared buildings.

Considering a university as a separate legal entity, fulfilling specific legal and functional criteria (with regard to research and didactics), cross-border universities are hardly detectable in Europe. Most of them do not have this legal and organizational form. Both networks and shared buildings are in practice only platforms of very close collaboration of universities that are settled in their respective national systems. On the other hand, some of the universities have parts located across the border, which is possible only because of the presence of a partner institution there, such as the European University Viadrina with its parts located in Collegium Polonicum (CP) and Angel Kanchev University with Bulgarian-Romanian Interuniversity Europe Center (BRIE). The University of Białystok has one of its faculties located across a state border. Finally, Selye János University was entirely exported abroad to serve a local Hungarian minority politically and culturally as a part of the Hungarian educational system. Both subcategories literally form cross-border universities, however with limited cross-border effect as they are in fact nationally oriented.

Further investigations will concentrate on the three proposed models.

4.1. Cross-border university networks

The first category of schools that very loudly announce themselves as cross-border universities are networks of institutions from neighboring states, cooperating across a common border, offering joint programs (usually implemented in one of them) and often focusing on a specific region.

The first of these examples is the Cross-Border University, a consortium created by two Finnish and five Russian universities: University of Eastern Finland, University of Tampere, St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University, Petrozavodsk State University, St. Petersburg State Forest Technical University and Moscow State Forest University. The list reveals, however, that not only schools from the border area are involved in cooperation here. They offer together master's degree programs in forestry, international relations and public health. Students obtain a master's degree from their home university and, addition-

ally, a certificate of the CBU or, if they participate in a double degree program they receive a degree from two universities. These are in line with the European Higher Education System. As the official website of the initiative states, one of its aims is “to implement the Bologna process and to promote the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) process in Finland and in Russia” (Cross, 2015). This can be considered to be an element of Europeanization of higher education in Russia.

Barents Cross-Border University is another example of cooperation organized on the Finnish-Russian borderland, initiated in 2005, this time in the northern part of their joint border. The group of partner universities includes the Russian International Institute of Business Education, Karelian State Pedagogical Academy, Murmansk State Humanities University, Murmansk State Technical University, M. V. Lomonosov Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Northern State Medical University, Petrozavodsk State University as well as the Finnish University of Lapland and University of Oulu. The Northern Dimension initiative framed the collaboration initially, and led to its territorial extension. Teaching in English was to lead to joint master’s degree programs and result in the wide scale implementation of the Bologna process in this part of Europe. Study programs concentrated on the fields of comparative social work, environmental engineering, information systems, circumpolar health and well-being, and law. The BCBU+ project was financially supported by the Kolarctic ENPI CBC program for years 2011–2013 aiming at the development of the Barents Sea region using academic resources (Barents, 2015).

A similar initiative is the University of the Greater Region – UniGR, a consortium of six schools: University of Luxembourg, Saarland University, University of Liège, University of Lorraine, University of Kaiserslautern and Trier University. They come from Luxembourg, Germany, France, and Belgium. This offers the possibility for the mutual use of the partners’ resources, among others, attending seminars there or participating in double degree programs, as well as collaboration in research. Additionally, travel costs between the schools can be reimbursed from the UniGR mobility fund. UNIGR itself was established in 2012 and financed by the INTERREG Iva Greater Region program. The key areas are biomedicine, border studies and material science (University, 2015).

Finally, the Franco-German University was established in 1999, based on the international Weimar agreement. It is a platform of schools from

both sides of the border (located in various parts of Germany and France and managed from Saarbrücken) with over 6,000 students enrolled in programs under this umbrella and attending over 160 courses. The project is focused on promoting Franco-German cooperation and bi-national activities using the academic environment. Its special focus is on increasing mobility of students and teachers. The university does not award its own degrees (which is however planned for the future) but allows double degree acquisition issued by partner universities from both states (Franco, 2015).

4.2. Cross-border common academic institutions

Two cases illustrate the situation where two partner institutions from both border sides aim at creating a new, common structure, existing on the border and equipped with its own resources. Despite the fact that neither of them resulted in a cross-border university in the narrow sense, they have strongly contributed to cross-border academic integration, merging elements of neighboring academic systems in one entity, functioning together spatially and on an everyday basis. They are usually located in border twin towns (Lundén, Zalamans, 2002) – towns located directly on a border and neighboring each other (Schultz, Stokłosa, Jajeśniak-Quast, 2002) and are often considered “laboratories of integration” (Gasparini, 2008).

The first of these cases is the European University Viadrina, which was re-established in 1991 after a break of 180 years in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany. One of its aims was to provide an intellectual and economic impetus to the post-communist and peripheral areas of the former Eastern Germany, located directly on the Polish border. At the same time, 30% of the students were to be from Poland (Kurcz, 2001, p. 168), becoming the first (and for several years the only) western university publicly available to them. One of the principles was to contribute to German-Polish reconciliation and Poland’s entry to the European Union by creating a platform for contacts between young Poles and Germans. The new bilingual elites were also supposed to contribute to local collaboration, supporting the local authorities, and so on.

In 1997 the next step was made: Viadrina, in collaboration with Adam Mickiewicz University from Poznań, Poland established Collegium

Polonicum in Słubice (on the Polish border side). It was planned to be a platform where both universities could locate their own resources in order to conduct research and didactics on an everyday basis and facilitate direct contact. Very soon both Viadrina and Polonicum became very successful in attracting students and scholars from Germany, Poland, but also from other states in the region. They also contributed to the creation of a non-commercial, cross-border environment (especially cultural), *frontierizing* and *deboundarizing* this part of the German-Polish border (Musiał-Karg, 2009). It is important to note that the central authorities in Berlin and Warsaw were deeply involved in creating the institutions there, making it a flagship project of German-Polish post-cold war relations and a forerunner of European integration in a micro-scale in the region (following the mayors of Słubice declaration from 2001: “we are already in Europe, despite having not entered the European Union yet” (Vinkel, Matzat, 2001, p. 83). Political support resulted in financial subsidies that were well used by both collaborating institutions.

But Poland’s entry into the European Union led to difficulties in collaboration. The political aims of both national centers were achieved, so academic collaboration on the border lost its primary importance. The eastern enlargement also opened up other western European universities to Poles. *Frontierization and border normality* (Jańczak, 2013) led to difficulties. The university had to look for a new profile, orienting itself finally on border studies, but also to re-attract the centers’ attention. Since 2015, the idea of creating a common German-Polish faculty in Collegium Polonicum has been debated.

Another example is represented by the cooperation on the Romanian-Bulgarian border which was highly inspired by the German-Polish case, as well as supported by it. In the border twin towns of Giurgiu and Ruse, similar developments are observable. Angel Kanchev University was established in Ruse in 1995 on the Bulgarian side of the border. Seven years later the Bulgarian-Romanian Interuniversity Europe Centre (BRIE) was established on the Romanian side (Bulgarian-Romanian, 2015). It was a joint initiative of Angel Kanchev University and Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania. It attracted support from numerous German universities, and also politicians (e.g. former German Bundestag Chairman Rita Suessmuth). Both universities offered joint programs (they started with European Studies and Economic IT) (Assenmacher, 2005, p. 102) addressed to both Romanian and Bulgarian students, however at-

tracting attention from other candidates, mainly from the Balkans (Kornazheva, 2007, p. 82). Bilingual education and an international academic spirit framed the cooperation here.

Similarly to the German-Polish case, the entry of both states to the European Union lowered the political and practical assistance of the national centers and external partners which resulted in lower levels of collaboration. This was exacerbated by the fact that local spatial conditions were still undermining it. Despite their territorial proximity, the free movement of students was limited by a bridge tax and the lack of public cross-border transportation (which was partly solved by a university shuttle for students and professors (Kornazheva, 2005, p. 114; Kornazheva 2004). Reports from 2005, named BRIE “still a pilot project” (Assenmacher, 2005, pp. 106–107). Eventually, the Giurgiu campus was closed. Common programs had to be redesigned.

4.3. Universities (partly) across a border

Two cases illustrate the situation where there is only one partner, but which operates partly or entirely behind the national boundary. Both are oriented towards their own national minorities located in the neighboring state, aiming at de-bordering their own nation, separated by a state boundary, and then to frontierize it.

Selye János University was established in 2003 in Slovak Komárno – a town neighboring Komárom in Hungary (Selye, 2015). As this part of the Slovak-Hungarian border is inhabited on both sides mainly by Hungarians, it was to be a center of higher education for the Hungarian minority there. Consequently, Hungarian is the main language of instruction, and 30% of students are additionally Hungarians from Hungary. Slovak approval of this school was a part of the normalization of relations between both states, as well as the new organization of the minority problem in the context of expected EU enlargement. Three faculties of the university were soon filled with 2,500 students. It is important to note, however, that the university is relatively unknown in the Slovak academic environment. It serves as a bridge between the Hungarian communities on both border sides, but it does not integrate Hungarian and Slovak system.

The University of Białystok, Poland decided to open a faculty in Vilnius, Lithuania. Since 2007, the Faculty of Economics-IT has been op-

erating, offering education in Polish to the Polish minority living in this city. Acting according to the Polish and Lithuanian law, it was a result of the entry of both states to the European Union. Its establishment was additionally an outcome of the efforts of Polish scholars from Lithuania, as well as the central authorities' negotiations on this issue. The historical, ethnic context seems important here, with Vilnius and its university being one of the main academic centers of pre-war Poland, with the exodus of Poles, especially those linked to the university, after 1945, and the city's final transfer to the Lithuanian Republic as a part of the Soviet Union. Establishment of the faculty was justified with the argument of the Polish minority's much lower education level compared to the Lithuanian average. Today, there are almost 500 students studying at bachelor and master level in the Faculty. Most of the alumni, following the school's declaration, work in the Vilnius region (Wydział, 2015).

5. Conclusions

The considerations presented here reveal three main schemes of how academic institutions collaborate with a foreign partner in creating cross-border universities. This process, in most cases, results from (but also contributes to) the border transformation, where state boundaries are gradually being replaced by frontiers. It is also a result of the Europeanization process, where top-down logic has led to the European Higher Education Area in European national education systems, and other instruments enhance cross-border collaboration. The bottom-up impulse is created by the universities themselves, who aim at collaboration in research and didactics, which reflects the very nature of academia. This materializes always where national authorities support that sort of initiative, or at least create an environment where they can be implemented.

Cross-border universities operating as networks usually involve bigger territorial units and the de-bordering effect is related to regional or national policies. They seem to be practically oriented. Those working as common institutions are usually flagships of symbolic relations between neighboring states, with a more local and regional impact. Finally, those operating as single institutions (with no partners) across a national boundary implement policies related to reconnecting the nation.

Figure 1. Models of cross-border universities

	Universities(')		
	network	common institution	behind border
examples	Cross-Border University, Barents Cross-Border University, University of the Greater Region, Franco-German University	Collegium Polonicum, Bulgarian-Romanian Interuniversity Europe Centre	Selye János University, Faculty of Economics-Informatics, University of Białystok
de-bordering	on macro-level	on micro-level	of the nation

Source: The author.

The considerations presented above should be treated more as an introduction to further studies on cross-border universities than a completed investigation. The complex nature, variety of forms and dynamic character (with new initiatives still appearing) create a niche for further reflection.

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