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SUPPORT SERVICES LANDSCAPE AS A KEY STRATEGIC DRIVER IN THE ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY OF SPANISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

EL PANORAMA DE LOS SERVICIOS DE APOYO COMO UN AGENTE ESTRATÉGICO EN LA ACTUAL ECONOMÍA DEL CONOCIMIENTO DE LAS INSTITUCIONES DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR ESPAÑOLAS

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Abstract: Globalization and internationalization have a complex relationship, but, for universities foreign student mobility is clearly related to both concepts. This student flows generates a large cross-border market, as well as a set of transformations in host and home universities. In this paper, we reflect on support services landscape in a Spanish Higher education context. Credit mobility flows are predominant in Spain, even though Spanish Higher education market continues to be welcoming and attractive to different type of mobile students from different countries worldwide.

Keywords: Globalization, economy, credit mobility, support services.

Resumen: La globalización y la internacionalización tienen una compleja relación, pero cuando se trata de estudiantes internacionales, ambos conceptos están claramente interrelacionados. El flujo de estudiantes genera un amplio mercado que atraviesa numerosas fronteras, y a su vez transforma las universidades de origen y de destino. En este artículo reflexionamos sobre el panorama de los servicios de apoyo en el contexto de las instituciones de educación superior españolas. La movilidad por reconocimiento de créditos es la predominante en España, a pesar de ello, el mercado de la educación superior española sigue siendo acogedor y atractivo para diferentes tipos de estudiantes de movilidad de diferentes nacionalidades a nivel mundial.

Palabras-clave: Globalización, economía, movilidad de crédito, servicios de apoyo.

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Introduction

In the globalized knowledge economy the traditional role of the university is changing, due –among other factors- to the neoliberal pressures (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Thornton, 2009). As a consequence, the university looks for new legitimization (Rodriguez-Pomeda & Casani, 2016) that allows its adaptation to the new knowledge economy (Trowler, 2001; Williams, 2007). Altbach (2013) considers that the word 'globalization' gathers the main forces that are shaping the higher education within the knowledge economy in this century. The changes that globalization is eliciting on higher education are described by Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley (2009: ii) as follows:

> We define globalization as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions. Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization. These typically include sending students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas, or engaging in some type of inter-institutional partnership.

The relationship between globalization and internationalization is more complex, and more contested, that it would at first appears (Dodds, 2008), but some effects of globalization on higher education has been widely accepted, mainly related to the current status of information in the knowledge society. The main effects of globalization on the use of information within universities are increasing access to information, commodifying information, and questioning that information previously considered as privileged (Dodds, 2008).

The result is, that considering global knowledge economies (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007: 3)…[h]igher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums for a wide range of cross-border relationships and continuous global flows of people, information, knowledge, technologies, products and financial capital.

Within the "continuous flows of people" university student mobility has paramount relevance, because they are shaping a set of large cross-border student markets; in 2003 there were about 2.2 million of foreign students in the OCDE area (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007: 39). These huge flows represent a relevant source of revenue for the host universities (id.: 40), and also a transformative force for universities worldwide.

In this article, we focus on international students mobility and on the support services provided in Spain, because this country is very attractive to international students, mainly from the Erasmus + programme and Latin America.

Flows of mobile students are changing the knowledge economy of higher education Institutions in many countries. The approach to international and traditional mobility is shifting to mass and comprehensive mobility. Mass mobility is used as an indicator factor in internationalization of higher education due to the fact that since the last 50 years, many institutions of higher education around the world have seen record-high enrollments of international students on their respective campuses. Comprehensive mobility because international students seek for an inclusive support service to help them during the whole mobile process. According to the OECD (2013), the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside of their country of citizenship increased more than three times, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.3 million in 2011. In this paper, we focus on the Spanish context where Spain attracts 2.5% of foreign students worldwide to give an overview of the support services landscape as a strategic driver in the actual knowledge economy of Spanish higher education Institutions.

Spanish figures and facts on mobile students

Spain attracts 2.5% of foreign students in comparison with USA (16.5%), United Kingdom (13.0%), Germany (6,3%) and France (6.2%) (OECD 2013).

According to the previous information provided, we must identify between different types of mobility involved. Degree-seeking mobility and credit mobility, there is an overall increasing interest in students going to study abroad. Data represented before (2.5% foreign students) apply to all types of mobility in a whole. While in Spain for instance, credit mobility, which is described as temporary mobility in the framework of ongoing studies at a "home institution" for the purpose of gaining credit, is the most common type of mobility for international students (Kelo, Teichler, & Wächter, 2006). On the other hand, in other contexts and countries, have more international students participating in degree mobility programs, which is described as learning mobility for a degree purpose, even if only a part of the program is studied abroad (Maunimo Project, 2013).

One of the reasons for the big success of credit mobility in the Spanish context is the Erasmus + programme since its beginning. Some of the outstanding trends in the Spanish higher education landscape are the increasing number of incoming and outgoing students through credit mobility programmes (according to the European Commission report *Erasmus facts, figures and trends 2012-2013*, the student mobility has grown from 3.244 international students in the academic year 1987-88 to 268.143 in the academic year 2012-13), the importance of the Erasmus + programme as flagship, the enrollment increase of international and local students in Master programmes, the development of internationalization strategies at home and the participation of institutions in e-learning activities.

Independently of their mobility type, the presence of international students on university campuses can be seen as a major benefit in providing campuses with diversity, pluralism and opportunities for cross-cultural learning and engagement (Willer, 1992) but this continued growth in enrollment is calling for a closer look at the needs of this population and its level of satisfaction with university services.

Governments, institutions set policies and strategies to welcoming different types of students from all over the world. A recent report launched by the Spanish government about the first national *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Spanish Universities* (Internationalisation of Universities Working Group 2014) points out that Spanish higher education institutions need to be internationalized. Spanish institutions aim to develop their attractiveness and competitiveness in a global context. Therefore, some new internationalization policies and strategies might be developed not only at the national level but also at regional and local levels. One key strategy to promote Spanish higher education is through enhancing support services for international and local students. As part of the service provision, Spanish institutions could compete in the global market by providing Spanish language services integrated in the student´s curricula. Others could be by internationalizing the university at home.

Support services can be a key factor in attracting and retaining international students. In any case, in an internationalized campus not only mobility numbers are important, there are other factors playing an important role in the whole internationalization framework. The awareness of internationalization strategies done at home need to be increased and understood by all stakeholders at university. Proving support services and integration activities by and for staff, faculty and students will increase the internationalization of the campus and moreover enhance their attractiveness within other institutions. Provision and adaptation of support student services is becoming a main topic in the internationalization policies for higher education institutions due to the growing numbers of mobile students and the new coming types of mobility. According to the Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al. 2014, 164), the increasing number of incoming (and outgoing) students through Erasmus led to a rising awareness of the necessity of support services and the streamlining of administrative procedures. Kelo et

al. (2010) recognize that the "student support" and "student services" are considered to be highly equivalent, and refer to a wide variety of services that may be on offer to students. Student services can thus range from practical amenities such as accommodation and dining halls, to information provision and welcome activities, and even to academic or language support. Spanish universities have great interest in the development of language services for foreign students. Furthermore, they are interested in internationalization at home strategies and in the provision of quality educational programmes (Internationalisation of Universities Working Group 2014). Support Student Services should be provided for local and international students as it is not only requested by international students. In fact, some domestic students that are already on the campus can be interculturally deficient. Betty Leask (2009) suggested that international educators "move away from deficit models of engagement, which position international students as interculturally deficient and home students as interculturally efficient, when both need support". In this sense, cultural shock programmes, intercultural courses and activities as well as language and culture training courses could be promoted by the institutions for all students to activate their intercultural efficiency.

Enhancement of Support Services in Spanish higher education Institutions in a competitive market

The international student support in European higher education written by Kelo, Roberts, & Rumbley (2010) suggest that student services have a potentially important role to play in terms of attracting and retaining international students, as well as building momentum for future recruitment of high-quality students. Support services can be a key factor and an internationalization driver to attract and retain international and domestic students. Furthermore, Kelo et al. (2010) identify that international student support in European higher education stands out as the 'right thing to do'.

Support Services needed by international students might diverse from their period abroad. The higher education Academy report on International Student Lifecycle and the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) report have gathered together different phases that international students go through when they go abroad. In this sense, we might identify different needs of international students whether they are in one phase or another. International Student Lifecyle presents issues before arrival or pre- arrival information, arrival support, induction and welcome, learning in the classroom (academics) and learning in a new environment or life outside the classroom and the completion and return (cultural reverse shock).

On the other hand, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) report states that the most important support service areas identified by students included information and orientation, integration activities with local students, the institution, and/or surrounding community, language support, other practical considerations, including assistance with visas and other administrative procedures; housing; support for families; and career and internship guidance (Kelo et al., 2010). Therefore, the increasing number of mobile students have changed higher education institutions strategies and points of view to focus not only on the academic aspects of the student experience but also on the needs that international students might have concerning services and matters related to their stay and comfort. A good provision of support services can increase the reputation of a university and be a powerful tool for enhancing the quality and sustainability of the internationalization strategies and policies, not to mention the overall competitiveness of the university sector (Kelo et al, 2010) worldwide to attract and retain credit and degree seeking students on campus.

Results and discussion

In the Spanish context, credit mobility under the Erasmus + programme is predominant at Spanish institutions. The Erasmus program keeps the

mobility record and their flagship position as exchange program. This type of mobility has grown significantly in the last years. According to the European Commission report Erasmus Figures and Facts (2013), more than 3 million students went abroad for a part of their studies in the 2012-13 academic year. Spain still occupies the first position to receive and send international students under the Erasmus program, according to EC data from 2012-13. Student experience abroad has been researched by Studyportals ´report (2014) entitled Key Influencers of International Student Satisfaction in Europe. The report does not show any Spanish institutions in the Top 20 European universities rated for the level of their international student satisfaction. This is a key factor for institutions to consider as they set their strategic priorities for attracting and retaining international students on their campuses.

In October 2014, the Spanish government launched a Strategy for Internationalization of Spanish universities 2015-2020, which includes the following objectives: gather together staff with international experience, raise the number of mobile students (incoming and outgoing), provide internationalization at home for those students who do not study abroad, increase the attractiveness of the universities and therefore the attractiveness of the campuses, create welcome services (support service for arrival, stay and departure) and identify the potential demand sources for university products and services as well as intensify the Spanish´s presence as a supplier of university services in other parts of the world. Beyond the directive to formalize the internationalization process at Spanish institutions, these objectives also point to the importance of identifying the needs of international students that can in turn provide them with a satisfactory stay during their program. Presented data are based on a pilot study carried out in 2015, where 20 Spanish higher Institutions where assessed on   several components. Relevant for this research are: type of support system for international students and type of services provided in the institution.

In general terms, most Spanish universities are set up to have an international relations office with admission, enrollment, and general administrative responsibilities. Support services at Spanish institutions mainly use a decentralized system where information is not centralized in one office at universities. There is an important role of volunteer-based student organizations that help in the organization of extra-curricular activities together with some institutional offices on campus. Therefore, we state from the gathered data that there is a strong sense of collaboration and co-ownership at Spanish universities in how support services are provided. The mostly used and provided support services at Spanish institutions are: admission, academic issues, language support, practical information and community information. In the next table, we gather briefly support services landscape at Spanish higher education institutions.

Table 1: Support Services landscape in Spanish higher education institutions

Predominant mobility type	Credit mobility
Premier destinations	First country in Europe in receiving international students
Definition of International Student (adapted from Project Atlas, 2001)	Students from countries other than Spain studying at Spanish Universities. This includes short-term, transfer students who participate in programs such as Erasmus Mundus.
Global mobility numbers	2,5%
Type of University Support Services (in ranking order)	1. Admission (acceptance letters) 2. Academic issues 3. Language support 4. Practical information 5. Community resources
Management of services	Decentralized Collaborative and co-ownership approach
National Strategies	Strategy for Internationalization of Spanish universities 2015-2020 (launched in 2014) but not focused on support services.

Conclusions

Spanish higher education institutions attract and send abroad mainly credit seeking students. We assert that Spain occupies a competitive position within the higher education market in Europe, mainly by the implication and mobile numbers under the Erasmus + programme. Additionally, Spanish universities have a decentralized structure, which does not help to enhance the provision of a good service for international students. According to Rumbley, L and Howard, L (2014) we can state that there have not been developed national guidelines for support student services in the Spanish context. Many cases institutions are adapting their current services to new demands with monetary constraints and without guidance; consequently more efforts should be done by national policies and institutions themselves in order to internationalized Spanish higher education institutions in the knowledge economy to act in a competitive market of higher education worldwide.

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