An eco-system perspective on the recognition culture in higher education

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External factors that shape universities

Some examples

- Global movement of people
- Socio-economic factors
- Regional developments

Most recent

- Covid-19
- Geopolitical situations

Effects of external factors

- Universities have become more open to non-traditional backgrounds
- But universities are part of a larger eco-system that intertwines with internal decisions at universities

Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU)

- A public research university

- Located in the capital city of Rīga in Latvia

- Established as a medical school in 1950, but currently has a full-university status

- Levels of study: college, bachelor's, master's and doctoral

- Number of students: ~10K

- Number of full-time international students from 70+ countries: ~2.8K (28%)

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RSU examples: Recognising non-traditional backgrounds

- Expanding admissions criteria
- Additional certificates, volunteer work, etc.
- Language skill testing
- Digital educational documents
- Opportunities for credit-transfer
- Role of Open University

Becoming more open: Covid-19

- Transitioning to an online application process in a week

Becoming more open: War in Ukraine

- Recognising prior educational experience
- Transfer opportunities for Ukrainian students
- Open University courses

- Institutional culture of recognition is important, but not sufficient.
- Working with other actors in the higher education eco-system.
- Recognition must be approached from an eco-system perspective that involves multiple actors who play a decisive role in the creation of recognition culture

Requirement for external recognition

- National recognition agency
  - Evaluation of previous academic credentials
  - Additional fee
  - Waiting times

Authentication of documents

- Legalisation
- Additional assessment countries and double-legalisation

Access to embassies and consular departments

- Staff shortages and administrative processes
- Lack of representations
- Foreign policy priorities

Different HE entry requirements in different countries

- Mandatory subjects

Lengthy administrative processes

- Repetitive paperwork
- Multi-step procedures

Health requirements

- Recognition of non-Western Covid-19 vaccines
- Lack of European vaccination passports (European electronic registry)
- Language problem

Conflict zones and lost documents

- National regulations on who qualifies for university studies
- One exception, but other situations

Inter-operable cross-border systems

- Electronic signatures

Consequences for students

- Lost time
- High costs
- Stress
- Uncertainty
- Lack of flexibility
- Sense of inequal treatment

Recommendations

- University collaborations with governmental institutions to shape national policies in ways that are friendly to international students;
- Shifting the formal responsibility of recognition of prior education and experience to universities;
- Creating opportunities for automatic recognition within the EU and other regions or, at least, inter-operable databases;
- Engaging international professional organisations and accrediting bodies;
- Facilitating collaborations among EU embassies in various parts of the world;
- Cross-border inter-operable systems and services.

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