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INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

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Internationalisation in challenging times: practices and rationales of internal and external stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

This is the introduction to a Special Issue which addresses the rationales for and practices of the internationalisation of higher education and research in Europe and Eurasia. The contributors look at a variety of activities within internationalisation, such as collaborative degree/joint programmes, student and staff mobility, and research collaborations. In particular, the articles examine how and why rationales, or motivations and goals for internationalisation, vary or coincide at different levels, for example at the supranational (e.g. regional), national, institutional, programme and individual level. This Special Issue pays a special attention to the political environment in which the internationalisation takes place, and how the given environment – e.g. formal political institutions, or policies – encourages, enables or prevents the internationalisation of higher education and research. The contributors focus on internal university stakeholders relevant to the internationalisation, relations between different internal stakeholders and/or their interplay with key external stakeholders.

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Many recent global, regional and national developments, such as rising nationalism, the Covid-19 pandemic and different conflicts or wars, most recently Russia's war against Ukraine, have complicated, if not totally halted, the internationalisation of higher education. This Special Issue addresses the rationales for and practices of the internationalisation of higher education and research in Europe and Eurasia in these challenging times. The contributors look at a variety of activities within internationalisation, such as collaborative degree/joint programmes, student and staff mobility, and research collaborations. In particular, the articles in this issue examine how and why rationales, or motivations and goals for internationalisation, vary or coincide at different levels, for example at the supranational (e.g. regional), national, institutional, programme and individual level. The authors critically analyse the mutual influence of what they term the 'politics' and 'practices' of internationalisation at different levels.

Politics is broadly understood here as any action or outcome containing a political dimension, which has to do with negotiations and struggles over different interests and values, and is thus not necessarily tied to formal political institutions. Therefore,

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actors involved in politics should be understood as not only those connected with formal political institutions and possessing formal decision-making power, but also those participating in any action or outcome with a political dimension. In this sense, universities, researchers, teachers and other staff may be potentially regarded as political actors that can be relevant both for domestic and international politics.

In previous studies, the international political dimension in (international) higher education has often been assessed through a state-centric lens: how governments (aspire to) instrumentalise international higher education for the purposes of foreign policy, nation-building or modernisation projects (e.g. Moscovitz and Zahavi 2019; Sidhu and Dall'Alba 2012). This has been particularly true in studies on international relations, studying (higher) education or science as a resource or tool of soft power (see also Mäkinen 2016, 2022), addressing questions of how international higher education may contribute to national soft power, how it is used for diplomatic purposes (Knight 2023; Scott-Smith 2020; Snow 2020), or what the impact of university soft power is on national soft power or vice versa (Bertelsen 2012). This corresponds to the discussions on the political rationale for the internationalisation of HE.

In this Special Issue, the contributors do not challenge previous state-centric studies per se, but rather expand this view to better take into account perceptions of internal university stakeholders (see below for the definition) regarding the relationship with governments at different levels, namely with institutionalised power, and the kind of context it creates for activities regarding the internationalisation of education. Most often, the authors refer to national and supranational governments, their relations (e.g. EU-Russia relations), and institutional, national and supranational policies connected with internationalisation (such as the EHEA, HE region-building in different organisations in Eurasia, Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, NORIA, Nordic Master, and institutional internationalisation strategies) when examining the connection between practices and politics. Thus, the authors emphasise the perceptions and experiences of internal university stakeholders in international higher education, particularly the interconnection with formal political external stakeholders. The writers also ask whether internal university stakeholders perceive their activity – international HE collaboration – as being linked to the international political environment (such as supranational policies and interstate relations).

The authors have examined all of these questions through qualitative case studies, an approach that is particularly relevant for studying internal university stakeholders' views, perceptions and experiences. To this end, they use both primary qualitative data, such as interviews with internal stakeholders, and document reviews of different strategies and other policy papers, as well as statistics. The authors are also internal stakeholders in international higher education themselves, having participated in the planning, development and/or implementation of international higher education initiatives, such as joint programmes, and drawing on their own experiences accordingly in their articles.

There have been claims of a 'theory deficit' in higher education research, and one of the reasons for this state of affairs has been 'the multidisciplinary nature of the field' (Teichler 2015 in Krücken, Mishra, and Seidenschnur 2021). Indeed, the contributors also come from different fields of study, particularly higher education/international education studies and political/international studies, broadly understood. We see it as an advantage when scholars cross the borders between different disciplines, theories and

methodologies used in these fields. This was also the idea behind the seminar entitled *Higher Education and International Cooperation: Role of Collaborative Degree Programmes*, organised at Tampere University, Finland in 2019, at which most of the contributors to this issue met and earlier versions of some of the papers were presented.

We contend that both of the research orientations recognised in studies on the internationalisation of higher education – 'the applied aspects of managing and steering internationalization at the institutional level' and 'the perspectives and experiences of the actors involved' (Bedenlier, Kondakci, and Zawacki-Richer 2018, 127) –need more attention. They also need combining and comparing with regard to how the institutional- level management is experienced by the actors involved, internal stakeholders, or how those involved influence the institutional level (or beyond). These two levels – institutional and individual – should also be studied by taking into account the national and supranational actors and contexts.

Below, I will first address the need to contextualise the internationalisation of higher education, with one of these contexts comprising the international political environment of the twenty-first century, which poses challenging times for internationalisation. I will then look at the classification of rationales for internationalisation, followed by a short discussion on stakeholders in international HE. After that, I will introduce the contributions in more detail. This introduction concludes with a few findings from/reflections on the articles in this Special Issue.

Challenging times and the internationalisation of higher education

The internationalisation of teaching and research does not take place in a vacuum but within local, national, regional and global contexts, one of which may be termed 'an international political environment'. The given context may encourage and support, or discourage or even hinder international cooperation in HE and research (see Scott-Smith 2020, 46; Fischer and Green 2018, 244; on the international environment and student mobility, see Choudaha 2017). When planning this Special Issue (as well as the seminar that preceded it in 2019, and the project (2017–2022) that gave rise to the seminar), the international political environment was not short of challenges in Europe and worldwide. The problems that the EU had faced, such as Britain's decision to leave the Union (Brexit), the shift away from liberal values by some member states, the migration crisis, and the growing authoritarianism and aggressiveness of Russia's domestic and foreign policy that was apparent even then, including the annexation of Ukrainian Crimea, together with unrest linked with the pro-democracy movements in Belarus, Hong Kong and Thailand, and the continuing conflict in Syria, were just a few examples of such challenges. It was therefore apposite to ask whether and how such an international political environment frames and influences the internationalisation of higher education and international academic collaboration in Europe and Eurasia.

When submitting the manuscripts for peer review in December 2021–January 2022, very few of us could anticipate what would happen on 24 February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Europe was duly faced with the first war on its continent since the wars connected with the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. At the time of writing this Introduction, the number of casualties, including civilians, in Ukraine had been increasing every day. In 2022, in contrast to the period

following the annexation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine since 2014, European powers and the US acted more decisively and imposed severe sanctions on Russia. Counter-measures against Russia were extended to higher education and research as well. Most institutional collaboration between HEIs in the EU member states and the US and Russia was frozen in accordance with the decisions and recommendations taken by the EU (EU Commissioner 2022), as well as national governments and the White House (2022). The influence of the international political environment on the internationalisation of HE, together with international collaboration in HE and research, became increasingly tangible in Europe.[1] The discontinuation of academic cooperation between EU member states and Russia will have a long-lasting effect not only on Russian academia and students, but also on the directions taken by the internationalisation of HE in Europe as a whole.

Rationales for internationalisation

The contributions in this Special Issue examine the rationales for internationalisation, and the interplay between the rationales of different stakeholders in international higher education. Rationales in this context are 'motivations for integrating an international dimension into higher education', and 'imply different means and ends to internationalisation' (de Wit 2002, 84). The rationale approach is one of the four approaches to studying internationalisation together with the activity, competency and process approaches (De Wit 2002, 116–118). Here, the rationale approach has been combined either with the activity approach (the most common when studying internationalisation), looking at the content of activities related to internationalisation, or the process approach, studying/comparing certain organisational policy or strategies and examining regionalism at different levels.

Following his own and Knight and de Wit's (1995) , Knight (1997) classifications, de Wit (2002) divides rationales into four categories: political, economic, social and cultural, and academic. Maringe, Foskett and Woodfield (2012) subsequently elaborated on this classification and identified six rationales: economic, political, educational, sociocultural, technological and pedagogical. In this Special Issue, contributors refer to the classification by de Wit (2002), or Knight (1997, 2004). For de Wit (2002, 85–89), political rationales are linked with foreign policy, national security, technical assistance, peace and mutual understanding, national identity and regional identity, which may overlap with each other. Economic rationales address economic growth and competitiveness, labour market needs, and/or financial incentives for institutions and governments (de Wit 2002, 89–92). Cultural rationales have to do, for example, with the export of national, cultural and moral values, and are closely related to the political rationales of foreign policy and national identity (de Wit 2002, 92–93). Social rationales are linked with the level of the individual, and students are usually examined in this regard (de Wit 2002, 94–95). Academic rationales include adding an international dimension to research and teaching, extending the academic horizon, institution-building, profile and status, and enhancing quality and international academic standards (de Wit 2002, 95–99).

It has been argued that little attention has been paid to differences between rationales at different 'geopolitical layers'; there are differences between international, regional, national, institutional and disciplinary rationales (Fischer and Green 2018, 245).

Moreover, institutional motivations for internationalisation have been prioritised in previous studies, which concluded that there was a discrepancy between the institutional level and faculty (individual) motivations: faculty had personal, cultural and academic motivations, whereas institutional strategies had to do with global competition and revenue generation, and hence were mainly economy-related motivations (Calikoglu, Lee, and Arslan 2022, 63). One of the main goals of this Special Issue is to address the assumed differences between various levels, acknowledging mutual influences between individual, institutional, national, and supranational levels. In addition, greater attention is paid to three sub-groups of internal university stakeholders: academics, administrators and students, addressing both their personal rationales and their interpretation of programme-, unit-, institution-level, national and supranational rationales. For example, contributors look at how motivations and rationales for internationalisation differ between internal stakeholders in collaborative/joint programmes and/or between internal and external stakeholders in joint programmes in different countries, and how internal stakeholders see the impact of external stakeholders and the broader international environment on their practices (see Vellamo, Kivistö and Pausits; Shenderova; and Mäkinen in this Special Issue).

Revisiting the international political environment and the political rationale for internationalisation

The contributions to this Special Issue reflect the international political environment, and particularly the political rationale for internationalisation to varying degrees, depending on the disciplinary background of our multidisciplinary team of authors, as well as the exact topic and approach applied. For those articles taking the international political environment into account more closely (Deriglazova; Mäkinen; Pogorelskaya), the connection between international education and foreign policy, and discussions on soft power and education diplomacy have been relevant. In previous studies, particularly from the US perspective, the role of international exchanges in democratic learning, the dissemination of liberal values, and the way in which participants on exchanges may bring about democratic change in their authoritarian home countries have all been addressed (see e.g. Snow 2020; cf. Deriglazova in this Special Issue as to the EU). However, learning in international collaboration may also have to do with authoritarian learning, and the dissemination of non-liberal or illiberal values and practices (see Hall and Ambrosio 2017) when the provider of education (or the recipient) represents an authoritarian state. However, Deriglazova did not find evidence of this sort of learning. Moreover, it is questionable whether mobility (Scott-Smith 2020, 42) has helped to create 'global homogenisation' or strengthened 'awareness of the divide between cultures'. This is one of the questions also raised in Anastasia Pogorelskaya's contribution – the second article in this Special Issue – in which she discusses the interconnection between international student mobility and the construction of supranational identities (cf. Van Mol 2013). Larisa Deriglazova also addresses the soft power component of student mobility, but focuses more intently on how motivations and expected outcomes of mobility diverge from each other for students, universities and governments. As for Mäkinen's article, the notion of education diplomacy is employed, investigating whether internal university stakeholders engaged in Finnish-Russian double degree collaboration perceive

and represent any political rationale for their collaboration (*higher education for diplomacy)*, and whether they see that interstate relations would have had any impact on their collaboration (*diplomacy for higher education*).

When we imagine different ways of conceptualising the link between international higher education or international academic collaboration and politics at the national and regional levels, higher education regionalism is one way of looking at this relationship, as expounded by Dang and Pogorelskaya. Dang's article explores the rationales of Nordic countries which aim to reposition themselves and strengthen their identity as a collective powerhouse of knowledge production through internationalisation.

As argued by Lo and Chan (2022, 588), regionalism is a response to globalism,[2] and regionalisation could be understood as 'a defensive strategy against the marginalising pressures brought about by globalisation'. It is a truly political project. As for HE regionalism, according to Chou and Ravinet (2017 in Cabanda, Tan, and Chou 2019, 90), it is a 'political project of region creation'. The political dimension is defined as the need to have 'some state authority (national, supra-national, international)' engaged in its creation and decision-making regarding the definition of the given geographical region. HE regionalism has 'three broad dimensions' regarding the key actors in regional cooperation, the institutional arrangements and the ideas and principles driving the given regional initiative (Chou and Ravinet 2015, 369 in Cabanda, Tan, and Chou 2019, 90).

Previous studies have addressed HE regionalism in Europe and Asia (Chou and Ravinet 2017 on the Bologna Process and European Higher Education Area and ASEAN; Lorenzo 2022 on ASEAN regionalism; Cabanda, Tan, and Chou 2019 on HE regionalism in Asia; Abbasov 2022 on HE regionalism in the territory of the former Soviet Union; Leskina and Sabzalieva 2021 on Eurasia). In this Special Issue, Dang and Pogorelskaya examine the three dimensions of HE regionalism mentioned above: actors, institutional arrangements and ideas. Dang highlights parallel processes of Nordic HE regionalism and European/EU HE regionalism, in comparison with HE regionalisms in Asia, that is, not necessarily copying the EU-led process as such, but having indigenous developments. Pogorelskaya's contribution addresses the triangle of HE collaboration, regional identity and region-building in HE. What is important is that both contributions approach HE regionalism not only at the national level, and with the focus on the rationales of a state actor, but also study those who are supposed to interact and collaborate within this region: experts, teachers and students. They must also be seen as actors in the building of the region. Our authors ask, among other things, whether they have an interest in contributing to region-building, or feel that there are prerequisites for region-building.

Agency: internal university stakeholders and their interplay with external stakeholders

For our contributors, the agency or actorhood of universities, and its sub-units or internal university stakeholders, is one of the key foci; either actorhood drawing on neoinstitutionalism, namely 'organisational actorhood', which is 'an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own actions and … held responsible for what it does' (Krücken and Meier 2006 in Bloch 2021, 494), or political agency,

exemplified by universities contributing to the socialisation of elites, state-building, and national image construction (see e.g. 12; Chou, Kamola, and Pietsch 2016, 19; Kamola and Noori 2014). What is shared by both strands of research is that universities, their programmes and their teachers, researchers and students are not treated as passive recipients of different policies but potentially as (organisational, political) actors themselves. They do not just respond to environmental expectations, but also have their own agenda (interests), (self-)recognition as an actor, and capability to act (Bloch 2021, 490–491).

One way to examine actorhood and relations between different actors in the internationalisation of higher education is to apply the stakeholder approach (cf. Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008). The authors in this Special Issue critically examine the connection between internal and external stakeholders in international higher education and research, and focus on their rationales as presented above. Following Jongbloed et al.'s definition (2008), stakeholders in *international* higher education are the people to whom a given activity in international higher education is expected to respond (see also Farrugia and Lane 2012). In particular, the contributors analyse how practices and the connection with the external community are perceived, experienced and represented by international HE's internal community. Internal stakeholders comprise teachers and researchers, administrators and managers, who plan and implement different activities in international higher education, and international students or students who participate in internationalisation at home.

Looking at internal and external stakeholders in international HE also allows us to focus on different levels of actorhood significant for the internationalisation of higher education, and their relations: the supranational level, regional or multi-state level, national level, institutional level, intra-institutional level such as the programme level, and the individual level. In our study, 'external' refers to 'outside the university', and thus external stakeholders are represented by national governments, and regional organisations such as the EU and Eurasian Economic Union, due to our interest in the (international) political dimension in international higher education. As for the relationship between internal and external university stakeholders, we investigate, for example, how these actors view the influence of (supra)national policies, such as the Erasmus Mundus joint programme, or international relations such as those between the EU and Russia, on internationalisation activities, such as joint programmes or international research collaboration (Dang; Vellamo, Kivistö and Pausits; and Mäkinen in this Issue). Furthermore, the authors inquire into the way in which international higher education has, in their view, affected the construction of individual and supranational identity and images of 'others' (Deriglazova; Pogorelskaya).

Introduction to the articles in this special issue

The first two articles address higher education regionalism, and activities pertaining to mobility and collaborative degrees. Dang opens the debate with HE regionalism in the Nordics and highlights the complexity of regional space – 'a sub-region within a larger region', and double identity (Nordic and European). Pogorelskaya, for her part, discusses HE regionalism in Eurasia, continuing the debate started by Leskina and Sabzalieva (2021), but focusing on the role of supranational identity construction (or the lack thereof) for building a region.

Dang draws on the literature on regionalism, particularly on HE regionalism. She focuses on the Nordic countries and parallel processes of intra-Nordic and European HE and research collaboration, defining Nordic collaboration as a sub-regionalism of European or EU-level regionalism. Dang is interested in what drives regionalism, and applies two main theoretical models to explain this: spatial logics (economic logic, scale and identity) and ideas of the region, or the concept of Nordic added value. She looks into the links and outcomes of parallel regionalising processes involved in EU-Nordic and intra-Nordic cooperation in HE and research, as well as the way in which 'Nordic added value' has been utilised to strengthen Nordic HE regionalism. In order to address these issues, Dang examines three Nordic flagship programmes: the Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA), the Nordic Master programme, and Nordplus, a Nordic mobility programme. Dang finds that NORIA and Nordic Master are clearly more related to the logic of economic competitiveness, whereas in Nordplus it is a question of the logic of community and building a regional identity. NORIA and Nordic Master are tools, for example, for attracting talent to the Nordics, but also for encouraging intra-Nordic collaboration. NORIA in particular is seen as strengthening the Nordics by virtue of it being a regional actor with recognisable actorhood, and its participation in EU programmes. For Dang, Nordic added value (NAV) is a floating signifier, and functions as a mechanism of Nordic HE regionalism. Dang emphasises that it is different from the EU's soft governance tool – the open method of coordination (OMC) – because NAV focuses on synergies between countries and does not work on benchmarks or indicators. As a whole, Dang argues that the Nordic regional governance approach is pragmatic and focuses on 'technical and functional projects with defined sectors without challenging national sovereignty or the existing power within each country (Söderbaumn 2016)'. Furthermore, Dang has found that the governance of HE has become less national, and is more a question of voluntary 're-scaling of governance'. She concludes by suggesting that 'Nordic HE regionalism may present an opportunity for other comparative sub-regional integration studies'.

While one of the rationales or tools for Nordic HE regionalism in Dang's research was regional identity-building, Pogorelskaya's research concentrates on regional identity as an outcome of the interrelation between academic mobility, the process of forming a regional identity in Eurasia and perspectives for Eurasian HE regionalism. Pogorelskaya ponders whether academic mobility may contribute to supranational identity and region-building by studying the case of a double degree programme in Eurasian integration, run by Russian, Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani universities. As primary data, she utilises interviews with key internal stakeholders – alumni and staff involved in the given programme, asking how the opportunity for common identity-building is perceived by academic mobility participants. Pogorelskaya starts her article by looking at academic mobility in post-Soviet Eurasia, in which Russia was a regional hub of academic mobility and also called for educational integration, manifested within the framework of the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union. However, what she finds is that regional integration is highly selective and declarative, as well as asymmetrical, duly characterised by one-way flows to Russia, but not from Russia to other parts of the CIS or Eurasian Economic Union. For this reason, for example, integration in HE in post-Soviet Eurasia is unlikely. When looking at her case, and the perceptions of the alumni and staff, we can first notice that the rationales of students for entering the given programme do not differ from those

identified in previous studies (cf. Deriglazova's article in this Special Issue): students are interested in acquiring education of higher quality, and in cultural exchange and employment opportunities. In this study, conducted before Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its potential implications for the image of Russia and the Russian language, both the alumni and staff argued that the Russian language can function as the basis for the common identity creation that would be needed for HE region-building. They also referred to shared values, but held ambivalent views on the significance of the Soviet past. Opportunities for student mobility were also mentioned as a positive factor. According to the internal stakeholders, religious and cultural differences, diverging state policies, the lack of a humanitarian dimension in cooperation projects, as well as the lack of information regarding cooperation projects could all be taken as factors preventing region-building.

The subsequent three articles focus on collaborative degree programmes, but with slightly different foci and approaches. In their article, Tea Vellamo, Jussi Kivistö and Attila Pausits study the stakeholder approach to highlight and contrast the differing internationalisation rationales. In particular, the authors examine the impact of external stakeholders on HE (the EU, national governments) and their policies regarding internal stakeholders, namely at the programme and institutional levels. In addition to the stakeholder approach, they draw on literature on the Europeanisation of HE and the classification of different modes of influence that external stakeholders may adopt, that is, formal, economic and political. Following this classification, the authors argue that the EU has no formal power in HE, but can exert direct economic and indirect political influence, whereas national governments possess all three modes of influence. Therefore, one of the questions is whether universities lobby governments to pass legislation to conform to the EU's policy priorities if it is in line with their interests. The article focuses on one particular EU policy, the Erasmus Mundus joint degree, for which the EU has both EU internal rationales – to make European HE systems compatible and to strengthen collaboration between European HEIs – and external rationales to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of European HEIs in the global market. In order to study this particular policy, the article zooms in on the Finnish HE system and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programme, entitled 'Master in Research and Innovation in Higher Education' (MARIHE). What Vellamo, Kivistö and Pausits find is that the EU influences the programme level (economic influence) more directly than the institutional level. In addition, they argue that joint degrees in Finland are not important enough for the institutional level, and hence the host university would not lobby/negotiate for any policy change at the national level to accommodate programme-level wishes. They even claim that the institutional level lends 'little strategic interest or direct support to the individual programme'. They conclude by arguing that even though Erasmus Mundus has not brought about legislative changes to the national level, it has encouraged institutions and their programmes to find innovative solutions for collaboration 'within the boundaries of existing legislative frameworks'.

Svetlana Shenderova continues the theme of collaborative degree programmes, exploring the different roles of university stakeholders in these programmes. In particular, she studies the salience of internal university stakeholders in Finnish-Russian collaborative degrees from the perspective of the sustainability of such programmes. She has used national- and institutional-level documents, university websites, and semi-

structured interviews with internal stakeholders in Finnish-Russian double degrees (DDs) as her data. She investigates how internal stakeholders perceive their roles, particularly with regard to salience, in the provision of DDs, and how this perception influences the programme's sustainability. In order to understand the role of perception in relation to salience, she addresses two main questions: What are the factors that contribute to the salience of internal stakeholders for those in partner universities? How do the attributes of stakeholder salience correspond with programme sustainability? With the help of this study, Shenderova seeks to reveal more about the implementation of internationalisation policy at the individual, partnership, programme and university levels. In the context of salience, Shenderova studies the academic, economic and political rationales of internal university stakeholders for implementing a double degree. Her article provides a fascinating description of the differences between university governance cultures in Finland and Russia, and what this actually implies for the roles of and relationship between different university internal stakeholders in international HE. The roles and responsibilities of Finnish stakeholders in DD collaboration were very clearly delineated, whereas Russian stakeholders claimed to have responsibility for many issues in the DD regulatory arrangements. It was also evident that Russia's top-down administrative traditions had a strong influence on DD regulatory arrangements in all partnerships. As for rationales, the partners shared many of the academic and economic rationales, such as wishes for a sustainable DD and research cooperation, and international development. They valued the partner's reputation in research, and the good quality of students. They were also interested in international student recruitment and financial support from Finnish/Russian government programmes. Differences emerged in terms of supra-national and national policy demands and how they were met, such as those concerning the priority and quality of international student recruitment (Finnish universities), or requirements to report on the achievement of KPIs with no attention paid to qualitative issues (Russian universities). One of the major differences in rationales was manifested in what were termed personal rationales, namely motivations not connected to the programme or the institution, but to personal development benefits, connected either with social and/or economic interests unrelated to the DD, or related to academic professional development, which were found among internal university stakeholders in Russian universities, but not in Finnish universities.

In her article, Sirke Mäkinen is interested in Finnish-Russian relations after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, approaching the topic from the perspective of HE collaboration. The studied case concerns Finnish-Russian double degree collaboration, similarly to Shenderova's article.[3] Semi-structured interviews with internal stakeholders such as administrative and academic heads/coordinators of these programmes serve as the main source of primary materials. The key concepts used in the study are education diplomacy and two aspects of politics: politicking and politicisation. The article studies how, in a situation of deep political crisis, internal stakeholders in collaborative degree programmes perceived the role of their cooperation, whether they considered that their cooperation was linked to interstate relations and, if so, in what ways. In particular, the focus is on the political rationale for collaboration, namely whether internal stakeholders acknowledged and presented any political dimension to or rationale for their cooperation (e.g. cooperation as education diplomacy), or whether HE cooperation was disconnected from politics and depoliticised. The study reveals that even

though internal stakeholders explicitly wanted to depoliticise HE cooperation and denied that interstate (or EU-Russia) relations would have had any impact on their collaboration, many of them still hoped that HE cooperation would help in improving the given relations. Accordingly, they argued for education diplomacy in the sense of 'higher education for diplomacy', but argued against it in the sense of 'diplomacy for higher education'.

Larisa Deriglazova, for her part, addresses student mobility between the EU and Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Both events are important for academic collaboration between the EU and Russia. After the first, collaboration continued and mobility even increased, even if Russian HEIs no longer had the right to lead any EU-funded projects. After the second, collaboration was completely frozen. Deriglazova focuses on the rationales of external stakeholders in EU-Russia academic collaboration – the EU and the Russian government, the sponsors of student mobility at the supranational and national levels – as well as those of internal university stakeholders, namely students, at the individual level. She asks whether the rationales of the given stakeholders in international academic mobility coincide or clash. In addition to her analysis of previous studies and supranational and national-level documents, Deriglazova conducted semi-structured interviews between 2015 and 2021 in order to study the cross-cultural experiences of European and Russian students. Even though there are a number of studies regarding students' motivation for mobility, starting from Altbach, Kelly, and Lulat (1985), Deriglazova adds a new perspective by comparing them with national and subnational rationales, as well as by drawing on an under-researched case and original data from EU-Russia mobility (on internal EU student mobility, see e.g. Souto-Otero 2013; Van Mol and Timmerman 2014). Drawing on previous studies, Deriglazova argues that in addition to the economic rationale of increasing the competitiveness of European HE in the global market (Zahavi and Friedman 2019), the EU has a political rationale for the Erasmus+ programme, namely strengthening the European identity or, in the case of Russia, to Europeanise and democratise Russia/Russians. In line with previous studies regarding students' motivation for mobility, here too European and Russian students alike expressed academic, socio-cultural and economic rationales for mobility, such as boosting their professional and personal development, improving their communication skills in foreign languages, gaining knowledge about the culture, traditions and customs of the host society, and the potential positive impact on their careers and employability. Thus, their rationales coincide with the rationales of the EU and Russian government stakeholders, such as the enhancement of national cadres for globalised economies, the internationalisation of HE, social and cultural development, and intercultural understanding. As for Russian students' accounts, Deriglazova found some evidence for what could be described as 'European values transfer'. They appreciated their 'European experience' and described Europe in positive terms. In contrast, European students were more critical of their experiences in Russia, for example regarding the academic culture and hierarchies. Deriglazova duly argues that mobility 'strengthened the positive image of the EU among both European and Russian students', thereby justifying the soft power rationale of the EU. The European identity of European students was reinforced while they were away from home, whereas Russian students seemed to idealise the EU and Europe to some extent. In both groups, mobility made the differences between EU member

states and Russia visible to students. Deriglazova ends with a regrettable but important observation: 'Recent interviews conducted indicated less optimism about the European experience being transferred to Russia, although interviewees expressed a wish for contacts with Europeans to be expanded, and interest in European cultural heritage to be generated'.

Reflections and conclusions

The novel contributions of this Special Issue to the field of higher education research concern the rationales for internationalisation and international collaboration. The authors highlight not only the clashes between the national level and the institutional level and/or academics, but differences in motivations and goals between the institutional and the programme level, between academics and administrators at the programme level, and between academics and administrators of partners in international collaboration in HE.

Drawing some generalisations from the findings of the contributors, it is notable that economic, political and academic rationales were most significant at the supranational and national levels, whereas economic and academic rationales were prominent at the institutional and programme levels. As for students and staff, the most important rationales were social, academic and economic. For example, in the case of HE regionalism studied by Dang and Pogorelskaya with regard to the Nordic countries and Eurasia respectively, there was certainly a political rationale of regional identity- building at the supranational or national level, and to a certain extent also among students but not particularly among staff (Pogorelskaya). An economic and academic rationale was also clearly in play in Nordic HE regionalism (Dang). According to the study by Vellamo, Kivistö and Pausits regarding rationales and their interplay within the Erasmus Mundus joint degree, both economic (tuition fees) and academic rationales (enhancement of quality, institution-building) were significant at the programme level. As for the differences, it was important to note that institutional and programme-level rationales did not necessarily coincide, and the programme level might have more in common with the EU-level rationales than with the institutional (or national) level. The EU's soft governance did not succeed as a consequence of this discrepancy between institutional and programme-level interests and goals. In Deriglazova's research focusing on the supranational/national and individual-level rationales, students harboured social, academic and economic rationales, whereas at the EU and national (Russian government) level, both the political and economic rationale were most evident. Pogorelskaya's study also confirms the clash of rationales between faculty members/universities vis-à-vis the state-level policy in HE: the faculty and university were interested in academic mobility, while the state prevented it in order to keep the students in their home country.

In addition to confirming that discrepancies exist between different levels and between different stakeholders (external vs. internal university stakeholders or between different groups of internal university stakeholders), the contributions also show that these differences likewise exist within the same level if we look at actors in different countries collaborating with each other, for example in Finland and Russia (Shenderova; Mäkinen in part). Probably due to some extent to one of the contexts in which she was studying the rationales, namely Russian higher education, Shenderova emphasised 'a personal

rationale' manifested by internal stakeholders, defined as 'the gains that make a DD beneficial for a stakeholder, but are not oriented towards the programme and its sustainability in and of themselves'. So the motivation was not about academic rationales at the institutional, programme or personal level – research interests, or benefits for the educational process, or the ranking of the university, or even career development – but had to do instead with personal benefits such as an opportunity to travel abroad. Moreover, Shenderova's study partly confirms and partly refutes the findings of previous studies regarding the significance of interpersonal relationships for sustainable partnerships (see Ma and Montgomery 2021). This was considered far more important in Russian universities than in Finnish ones. In Mäkinen's article on the perceptions of internal university stakeholders in Finnish-Russian double degrees regarding the political rationale for their collaboration, administrators and teachers in Russian universities more willingly accepted the claim about the potential impact of international education collaboration on interstate relations. In other words, they accepted the idea of education diplomacy (in that international HE collaboration may contribute to interstate relations; cf. Mäkinen 2016, 2022) more than their Finnish partners, but both of them denied that there was any political dimension to their activities, or that the interstate relations or wider international political environment had an impact on their collaboration.

The uniqueness of this Special Issue is exemplified through the focus of the articles on international HE and relations between neighbouring countries, with different political settings and academic traditions. For us, higher education and research should first and foremost contribute to solving complex problems today and in the future. We hope that the internationalisation of higher education and research, and international academic collaboration, can also decrease the likelihood of any potential conflicts and wars in the future, even if our experience of the past has not necessarily provided enough compelling evidence to this end.

Notes

1. As to the developments in 2022, it should be noted that the research was conducted and articles submitted for peer review before 24 February 2022, and it was possible (or necessary) for some contributors to address the implications of Russia's war for the findings of their research only during the revision stage in March–June that year.
2. Globalism is understood as a discourse constituting globalisation as an object (Papastephanou 2005 in Lo and Chan 2022, 588).
3. Both are part of the same EDUneighbours research project, funded by the Kone Foundation (2017–2022).

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