

Chapter 4. Internationalisation of higher education in Italy

This chapter expands on the findings of Chapter 2 related to the internationalisation of the Italian higher education system. It provides a more in-depth discussion of the challenges faced with regard to the need to embed internationalisation into systemic and institutional strategies and providing a conceptual framework to analyse this phenomenon under a multidimensional perspective. It explores which rationales drive internationalisation in Italy and in which areas, and what actors are critical in these respects. The chapter also presents various national models and good practice examples.

Introduction

The international dimension of higher education (HE) has become increasingly important for governments and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe and worldwide. The European Association for International Education (EAIE) Barometer (EAIE, 2018) and the International Association of Universities (IAU) Global Survey (Egroun-Polak and Hudson, 2014)¹ highlight the growing importance of internationalisation for HEIs. In these reports, it has been pointed out that the majority of the institutions already have (or are developing) policies to promote internationalisation and have been developing a supportive infrastructure to monitor and foster progress in this area. However, there is not a single and universally applicable model, but rather different approaches to internationalisation across countries, regions and institutions (De Wit, Hunter and Howard, 2015).

Italy has been developing efforts to internationalise its HE system, which have been significantly encouraged by both external (European) and internal (systemic and institutional) drivers for change. External drivers such as the European Higher Education and Research programmes and, in particular, by the adoption of the so-called Bologna Process, have not only fostered initiatives for internationalisation and successfully paved the way for new and more diverse forms of internationalisation, but have also been the driving force behind recent legislation to reform Italian higher education. European initiatives have then been combined with a set of internal initiatives and efforts, at a systemic but also at an institutional level, which have been boosting internationalisation. However, such efforts and initiatives for internationalisation often face a context of economic and political instability and strong internal resistance (from the academic community), which have been hindering and slowing a more successful development and implementation (De Wit, Hunter and Howard, 2015).

Although internationalisation has traditionally developed in the areas of education and research, there has been a growing debate about how it can be embedded in a more transversal way in universities. This would include taking advantage of internationalisation in another range of activities, namely in what can be broadly considered the university's engagement with society. Through this, the university could magnify its societal relevance by becoming a platform connecting the local and the global in a way that is enhanced by its capacity to create and disseminate knowledge to the various areas of economic and social life.

In this chapter, we discuss internationalisation policies and practices in Italian HE, reflecting on their main features, opportunities, strengths, challenges and weaknesses, both at a systemic and at an institutional level. We will explore the multiple dimensions, the complexity and the diversity we expect to face when dealing with this matter. Despite the possible limitations of this approach, we will follow the analysis with a set of recommendations and suggestions for further reflection aimed at Italian decision-makers at the national and institutional HE levels.

Defining internationalisation

HE, by its very nature, has always been international. Nevertheless, the international "nature" or dimension of HE has profoundly changed over the centuries. Internationalisation of HE, as it is understood today, is a recent phenomenon that has emerged over the last 30 years driven by academic, economic, political, and socio-cultural rationales (De Wit and Hunter, 2018).

The concept of internationalisation is neither simple nor static. It is a complex concept that has been reflecting the changes in the approaches to the international dimension of HE. Nowadays, internationalisation means not only “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2008, p. 21), but has also become an instrument (rather than an end in itself) to enhance the quality of teaching, research and the service role of HE to society (Hunter and De Wit, 2016; De Wit et al., 2015).

Broadly considered, the notion of internationalisation incorporates two components: internationalisation abroad, translating all forms of education across borders: mobility of people, projects, programmes and providers; and internationalisation at home, which is more curriculum-oriented and focuses on activities that develop international or global understanding and intercultural skills (Hudzik, 2011).

Nonetheless, the recognition of these two components of internationalisation does not necessarily reflect a fragmented understanding of the concept. On the contrary, the need for a holistic and comprehensive approach to internationalisation by HEIs has been increasingly emphasised in the literature. Indeed, the concept of comprehensive internationalisation defines “a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research and service missions of HE. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire HE enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students and all academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility” (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6).

Rationales for internationalisation

The rationales for internationalisation in HE are diverse, though they are interconnected and may overlap in terms of characterising particular goals (De Wit and Hunter, 2015; Helms et al., 2015; Seeber et al., 2016).

The first rationale to be considered is the academic one. This involves issues such as the expansion of HE’s capacity, the improvement of HE’s quality, the expansion of knowledge creation’s capacity of HEIs, the enhancement of prestige (especially as reflected by rankings and league tables) and the opportunity to benchmark institutional performance.

The second rationale is the economic one. This integrates aspects ranging from short-term economic gains to long-term effects in national economic development, and the development and qualification of the workforce. In the short term, international students bring additional revenue through general living expenses. In the long term, international students can add to the domestic pool of highly-skilled workers and thereby help to strengthen the domestic knowledge economy. This is especially important for countries, such as Italy, that experience demographic change, negative population developments and growing skills shortages.

The third rationale is the political one, which is based on issues of public diplomacy, national security and international development.

Finally, there are social and cultural rationales, that include topics such as international awareness of and deeper engagement with global problems (such as those outlined in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals), global citizenship and mutual understanding. In addition, one may argue that there are also national and organisational-institutional levels rationales influencing how academic, political, economic and social-

cultural rationales come into play in shaping internationalisation strategies and how these strategies are actually developed and implemented (Seeber, 2016).

The role of national policies

Given the growing visibility of internationalisation in HE policy, several governments have introduced policies to promote the internationalisation of their HE sectors (Davies and Hunter, 2018; Rumbley and Helms, 2018). In addition to having different rationales, these interventions vary in scope and complexity: the role of governments can range from an active, dynamic and greatly influential role to a very distant and almost absent one.

National governments can greatly facilitate or hinder internationalisation strategies and their actions need to be carefully assessed and contextualised within the broader HE framework. However, the experience of some national policies can be also useful in suggesting possible ways of effectively promoting the internationalisation in the Italian context.

Like many European governments, the Finnish government is committed to enhancing internationalisation policies and practices in HE. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) has prepared a set of “policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research 2017-25”, based on seven main packages of actions: international attraction through renewal of science and leading-edge research; strengthening the quality and pioneer spirit in HE as well as reinforcing internationally attractive clusters of competency; momentum for the export of Finnish competency; simplification of the processes of seeking education and employment in Finland to facilitate entry into Finland; making Finnish messages heard in international discussion; establishment of a Team Finland Knowledge network to represent Finnish higher education and research in selected countries; calling on expat experts and alumni. The aim is that, by 2025, Finland has a genuinely international community for and an international appeal based on scientific quality.

One of the key issues when it comes to internationalisation policies is that of co-ordination between the different actors, as the proliferation of actors and initiatives may hinder their effectiveness and lead to an incoherent policy framework. Internationalisation has become a very relevant topic in HE in Germany. Being a federal country poses particular issues in terms of co-ordination. In the case of Germany, the promotion of HE’s internationalisation is co-ordinated by five entities: the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the German Council of Science and Humanities (DFG), the German Rectors Conference (HRK), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Alexander von Humboldt German Academic Exchange Service (AvH). The agenda-setting by these federal-level players defines overarching goals, which are then carried out at state and local levels by agencies, research institutes, foundations and academic institutions (De Wit, Hunter and Howard, 2015). In addition, Germany has moved from fragmented national internationalisation policies towards a more coherent and common agenda on internationalisation, especially since 2008 when the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has carved out its first comprehensive internationalisation strategy, updated in 2017 with the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Education, Science and Research (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The Federal and Länder Ministers of Science (2013) have also launched the Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Higher Education Institution. This strategy outlined nine fields of action to be implemented by the federal and individual *Länder* governments and covered themes related to student mobility,

internationalisation at home, staff, research, services, strategic frameworks and transnational education (De Wit, Hunter and Howard, 2015; Helms et al., 2015).

The effectiveness of national policies needs to take into consideration the fact that HEIs are key actors in the successful development and implementation of internationalisation strategies. Thus, one area of intervention of national policies has been the certification and assessment of internationalisation. The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO) has developed a “distinctive (quality) feature” for internationalisation and, in addition, an “internationalisation certificate”, which was adopted by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2011). This has handed the institutions substantial tools for profiling themselves nationally and internationally on the issue of internationalisation. The aim of the Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation (CeQuInt) is to assess, enhance and reward internationalisation. This certificate confirms that a programme or an institution has successfully incorporated an international and intercultural dimension into the purpose, function and delivery of its education (ECA, 2018).

International examples illustrate the multidimensionality and complexity of internationalisation and the potential of government intervention in supporting the HE system in this respect. They also highlight the need to develop consistent approaches in collaboration with HEIs and in a way that addresses the needs and specificities of the HE system and its various actors. In the following sections, we will analyse more systematically the various tools and forms of internationalisation.

Multidimensionality of internationalisation – An analytical framework

Given the complexity described so far, in order to analyse and understand internationalisation, either at the national/systemic or institutional level, one should consider different dimensions of analysis, namely:

1. **Motivations, drivers and rationales:** which motivations, drivers (European, national and/or institutional) and rationales (academic, economic, political and social) for internationalisation are there when developing institutionalisation strategies?
2. **Goals:** which are the main goals internationalisation strategies aim to achieve?
3. **Actors:** which are the leading actors promoting and implementing internationalisation strategies (at the national level or in the institutions)? In the definition and implementation of internationalisation strategies, which role does the leadership play? Which other external stakeholders impact the operationalisation and outcomes of the internationalisation strategies?
4. **Areas and instruments:** how can internationalisation strategies integrate the different HEIs’ missions and activities? And which instruments in each “mission” are being developed, considering internationalisation abroad and internationalisation at home (Table 4.1)?
5. **Strategy and management:** how HEIs (or the national government) generally approach internationalisation and define internationalisation strategies? Do they embrace a comprehensive and systematic approach to internationalisation – based on a clear strategic plan, integrated into the broader management and governance context of the institution – or a more fragmented approach – based on looser internationalisation activities and initiatives?

Table 4.1. Instruments of “internationalisation abroad”

Teaching and learning	Research	Engagement	Other services/activities
Recruitment of international students	Research co-operations and partnerships	Partnerships with business	Establishment of branch centres abroad
Staff and student exchange programmes	Participation in EU research projects	Development of international companies	Establishment of branch campuses abroad
Joint programmes	Publications with international partners	Overseas consultancy and development	Establishment of new institutions in collaboration with local providers
Joint faculty appointments		Strategic alliances and partnerships with overseas institutions	Development of regional offices (for market intelligence and permanent presence of the university abroad)
Development of alumni networks			
Opportunities for international volunteering, work or study placements			
Exchange of curriculum resources and learning materials			
Distance and e-learning programmes			

Source: Adapted from Middlehurst, R. (2008), “Developing institutional internationalization policies and strategies: An overview of key issues”, in M. Gaebel et al. (eds.), *Internationalization of European Higher Education: An EUA/ACA Handbook*, RAABE, Berlin, pp.1-24.

These various dimensions try also to encompass the diversity of possible paths when approaching this topic. This is particularly relevant when we are analysing a diverse landscape of HEIs, whose internal and contextual diversity is likely to be reflected in the way each HEI approaches internationalisation and the general and specific challenges faced by each and all of them.

In the subsequent sections, we will use as much as possible this set of dimensions to analyse the internationalisation of the Italian HE system. This will be based on the documentary evidence collected in the review and the views and perceptions expressed in the meetings during the two site visits.

Table 4.2. Instruments of “internationalisation at home”

Teaching and learning	Research	Engagement	Other services/activities
Internationalisation of the curriculum (integration of international perspectives, international relevance)	International recruitment of researchers	Support for the engagement of international students in the community/society	Encouraging the acquisition of language skills
Study abroad opportunities and study visits	Organisation of international research events/conferences	Collaboration in international partnerships/networks	Provision of specialist or tailored support for international students
Development of courses attractive to international students	Collaboration of international researchers in the research activities/projects developed in the institution		Improvement of current provision of international student facilities

Teaching and learning	Research	Engagement	Other services/activities
English-language teaching			Encouragement of international students to participate fully in the social and cultural life of the university
International foundation programmes			Compliance with national and European legislation
Exchange of curriculum resources and learning materials			Commitment to equality and diversity
Distance and e-learning programmes			Implementation of the Lisbon convention for the recognition of foreign qualifications
International recruitment of staff (teaching and research) and of students			Study skills for international students
Embracing different pedagogical cultures to ensure that teaching is sensitive to students' educational contexts			
Staff development on intercultural understanding			

Source: Adapted from Middlehurst, R. (2008), "Developing institutional internationalization policies and strategies: An overview of key issues", in M. Gaebel et al. (eds.), *Internationalization of European Higher Education: An EUA/ACA Handbook*, RAABE, Berlin, pp.1-24.

The Italian case

Like several other OECD countries, Italy has been developing efforts to internationalise its HE system, which have been driven by external and internal factors. According to the most recent data (for the academic year 2016/17), the number of foreign students is 92 655 (corresponding to 5.1% of total enrolments in HE) and the number of foreign academic staff in HE is 3 240 (corresponding to 3.7% of total academic staff). The figures for student mobility in the first 3 years of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014/15-2016/17) indicate that the number of students enrolled in that mobility programme has stayed above 30 000 each year with a tendency to grow every year and in all types of mobility considered in that programme. Among the main destination countries of those students involved in mobility are the following: France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. The figures for incoming mobility students also present a tendency to grow since 2012, though less than that observed with outgoing students. Moreover, the number of incoming students is clearly below that of outgoing students (56% in 2016), which suggests issues linked to the attractiveness of Italian universities in European Union (EU) mobility flows. Hence, whereas the total number of outgoing students corresponded to 2.8% of total enrolments (in 2016), incoming students were less than 1.6% of total enrolments (in 2016).

Other figures regarding the internationalisation of Italian HE indicate that there is clearly room for expansion. In the academic year 2018/19, there are 466 first- and second-cycle programmes that are considered international. The definition of international study programmes includes joint and double degrees and programmes taught in English with at least 10% of students coming from abroad. A key instrument for internationalisation, the teaching offer in English, is growing, though it is particularly concentrated in the areas of engineering, informatics, technologies, economics and business and in second-cycle degrees and doctorates. Currently, almost one-third of the doctorates are in English and

more than half of them accredited as Innovative Doctorate for internationalisation. The supply of summer or winter schools and first/second level of master's programmes in English is also growing.

These figures, however, do not compare well with leading EU countries with much more consolidated strategies in the internationalisation of HE. For instance, in the case of Sweden, whose government has been developing great efforts to improve internationalisation of Swedish HE through the recent Strategic Agenda for Internationalisation, the figures on internationalisation of education and research indicate that 14% of graduates in Swedish HE studied abroad for more than 3 months (2016/17 academic year). Moreover, the number of incoming students was about 50% higher than that of outgoing students (35 900 and 24 100 in 2016/17). On the other hand, one-third of the teaching and research staff was internationally mobile for at least 1 week in 2015 and the proportion of internationally recruited teaching and research staff was slightly below 20% in 2014. There was also intense collaboration in research with 65% of the publications written by 2 or more authors and based on international co-operation (Swedish Government Official Reports, 2018).

Another interesting example is that of Germany, which is one of the most popular host countries worldwide in HE. Over the past 30 years, there has been a strong increase in the number of German students engaged in degree-related mobility, from 34 000 in 1991 to 133 800 by 2011 and there is the goal to increase the number of foreign students in Germany to 350 000 and the number of German students going abroad to 50% until 2020 (De Wit et al., 2015). Moreover, according to data of the German Rectors Conference, 6.9% of the programmes were registered as “international” in terms of the content of the curriculum, the language of instruction or the fact of offering a double degree. English was the language of instruction in around 20% of all international programmes and 40% of all international programmes led to a double degree. In total, more than half of Germany's HEIs offered international programmes (De Wit and Hunter, 2015; DAAD, 2018).

In the following sections, we will analyse in a more systematic way the current situation regarding internationalisation in Italian HE by looking at the main issues at the system and institutional levels.

System policies and initiatives

As stated above, national governments can have a greatly influential role, fostering or hindering internationalisation strategies. National policies for the strategic development of universities steer institutions towards including internationalisation as one of the five main strategic targets for institutional development plans, together with teaching, research, students' services and recruitment. As the implementation of institutional plans is co-funded by the ministry on the basis of an evaluation process, for the period 2016-18, 33 plans have been positively evaluated and co-funded for a total of EUR 23.5 million. Actions eligible for funding were aimed at the increase of:

- the number of internationalised study programmes, including the third cycle
- the proportion of international students
- the number of European Credit Transfer Scale (ECTS) credits earned abroad after a mobility period.

Mid-term results of institutions are quite positive. Hence, in the academic year of 2018/19, 466 first- and second-cycle programmes are considered international.

There are two kinds of additional incentives provided for the increase in international programmes. On the one hand, professors from partner universities in foreign countries contribute to the calculation of the minimum requirements for initial accreditation. On the other hand, financial incentives are provided by the fund for the strategic planning of the university system.

Recruitment procedures have been also progressively adapted to facilitate international recruitment and a new legislative provision has been introduced as from 2018 in order to allow the double-appointment of professors and researchers.

The Italian government is also financially supporting international credit mobility by investing EUR 60 million per year to foster it.

The government has been developing special policies encouraging the internationalisation of HE. In order to support and implement actions to strengthen the internationalisation of HE, the Italian parliament established a fund of EUR 150 million for the period 2017-20 with Law No. 232/2016 for the cultural promotion of Italy abroad, including Italian HE.

The law promulgated, the Presidency of the Council specifically dedicated EUR 18 million for the internationalisation of HE, funds aimed at supporting the new Strategy for the Promotion Abroad of Italian HE 2017-20. The document approved jointly by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) is the first policy document giving an overview of the future of Italian HE in the international scenario. The choice of having such a strategic document was also driven by the candidature of Italy as Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area, approved in May 2018. The aforementioned strategy, following an analysis of the current academic incoming and outgoing mobility flows, proposed a new set of rules to simplify the visa procedure for incoming students. These regulations have also been enforced with new Legislative Decree No. 71 of 11 May 2018, implementing in Italy EU Directive 2016/804 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing.

The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) is presently working, in line with the provisions of both the aforementioned national strategy and Legislative Decree 71/2018, in the development of a web portal, new platform “Universitaly”, which will manage all procedures for incoming students and academics. Thus, by the end of 2019, it will become the unique entry point for such types of international mobility.

The Italian NARIC Centre (CIMEA) launched the *Diplome* initiative in order to develop a portfolio into which individuals can upload their qualifications. This aims to create a decentralised, transparent, certified and stable system, with the goal of simplifying the procedure for students, graduates and professionals to enrol in university or to apply for a job in another country. The *Diplome* initiative and Blockchain technology are also being used in a targeted action to assess refugees’ qualifications, following the Council of Europe’s Guidelines for the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees.

At the bilateral level, MIUR is presently enforcing a new approach to academic recognition agreements, elaborated on the basis of a simple format in co-operation with CIMEA. The investment made for internships at the national level is matching the one made within Erasmus+ and by the ministry. The Erasmus+ EU programme is providing funding for

traineeship mobility of students and graduates. MIUR is further supporting European traineeships mobility.

The national government is addressing the need for an institutional subject that co-ordinates and supports promotional actions, such as DAAD or the British Council. The organisation Uni-Italia, promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in co-operation with MIUR, has been the first step in this direction.

Box 4.1. National organisations supporting internationalisation (governmental, quasi-governmental and independent organisations)

In several countries, one finds organisations responsible for co-ordinating and supporting the internationalisation of HE (or internationalisation beyond the HE field). These organisations range from governmental agencies overseen by a certain ministry (or the articulation of several ministries), to quasi-governmental or even independent organisations.

In Finland, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) provides expertise and services on international mobility and co-operation as an independent agency under the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, promoting the internationalisation of Finnish society in education, training, working life and culture. CIMO has a particular focus on the internationalisation of education and promotes Finland abroad through supporting the teaching of the Finnish language and literature in universities outside Finland, as well as through promoting Finland as a study destination for students and international affairs professionals in HEIs (CIMO, 2014).

Under the oversight of the French Ministries of Foreign and European Affairs and Higher Education and Research, Campus France is a public institution in charge of promoting French HE abroad and welcoming foreign students and researchers to France. It encourages international mobility and manages scholarship programmes and the alumni network. Campus France provides foreign students and researchers with the tools to learn more about the French institutes of HE and also assists French institutes of HE and research bodies in their international development strategy (Campus France, 2018).

Sources: CIMO (2014), *Centre for International Mobility, Finland: Finnish National Agency for Education*, http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/; Campus France (2018), *Campus France's Mission, France: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and Ministry of Higher Education and Research*, <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/Campus%20France-missions>.

Finally, the government acknowledges that a significant factor to attract international students is the presence, in the country of destination, of robust communities coming from foreign countries. Thus, one possible instrument to increase the number of international students could be the promotion and support (at a national level) of associations of graduates who have studied in Italy (such as alumni associations) in foreign countries.

Governmental internationalisation policies and initiatives explored above seem to translate a global commitment to internationalisation, essentially (though not exclusively) focused on student mobility, mostly driven by the will to expand HE capacity and to reinforce international reputation. Indeed, at a systemic level, academic rationales, combined with economic rationales for internationalisation seem to prevail, as internationalisation in Italy seems to be getting a more revenue-generating character (EAIE, 2018). Attracting more

international students and improving international institutional reputation and prestige are amongst the main reasons to internationalise. Simultaneously, the national strategy for internationalisation seems to be indisputably focused on teaching and learning and (though to a significantly lesser extent) on research, whereas instruments of internationalisation at home and internationalisation abroad interact.

Incoming and outgoing student mobility seems to top the list of most common instruments included in the national internationalisation strategy in Italy. Moreover, joint and double degrees are being expanded, as a consequence of governmental funding for joint programmes. Italian institutions are actively trying to recruit more international students both in the form of degree-seeking students and ones pursuing part of their studies in Italy through such joint programmes. Naturally, intensified efforts to recruit international students and develop joint programmes led to an increased international population on campus with distinct service needs. Consequently, for internationalisation to reach its true potential, adequate funding and coherent policies are needed, accompanied by qualified staff equipped to deal with the ever-changing field of internationalisation.

Despite increasing national policies promoting internationalisation in HE and despite the commitment to reforms that open up Italian HE, there is still a lack of an integrative and holistic strategy dedicated specifically to international HE. Namely, this should include the different HEIs' missions and activities: teaching and learning, research, engagement and other support services. Moreover, it should take into consideration different dimensions and instruments (e.g. covering internationalisation of the curriculum, student and staff mobility, research collaboration, development goals, partnerships with regional and local businesses, development of regional offices). Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated body promoting the internationalisation of HE and the low level of co-ordination between the different ministers can significantly hinder the necessary policy synergies for the development and implementation of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. It is, for example, worth stressing that the Ministry of Economic Development (which is promoting Industry 4.0) does not play any role in the internationalisation strategy of the HE system.

Work still remains to be done in order to raise the profile and quality of Italian HE, yet these challenges are familiar to many other European countries as well and there are signs of progress and potential for improvement.

Institutional strategies and activities

Internationalisation is generating change within the system and Italian universities are taking active steps to internationalise, albeit to different degrees. Overall, “internationalisation” is part of the strategic goals, mission, vision and management of universities, though the depth and consistency of the institutional approaches vary across the system.

Motivations and rationales

We have seen that the motivations and rationales for internationalisation (and the ways they are combined) differ substantially not only across countries but within the countries, their regions and their HEIs. Italy is not an exception and one can find significant differences between regions and between institutions. There are however some major trends in the rationales for the development and implementation of internationalisation strategies:

1. Academic rationales are the most frequently highlighted, namely aspects such as the expansion of international students' numbers, improving HE's quality, enhance

institutional prestige and position in rankings (particularly visible in the most prestigious HEIs) and, to a lesser extent, knowledge creation and advancement.

2. Economic rationales are less visible, though recognised by HEIs (especially regarding regional development), namely issues such as the contribution of students and potential economic and growth and development, at a national and regional/local level.
3. Political rationales are not often mentioned and are mainly related to public diplomacy, soft power and international development.
4. Social and cultural rationales are present in several HEIs through initiatives of internationalisation at home and abroad with some references to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030. This last “type” of rationale is, for example, widely translated into the initiatives developed by a large majority of Italian universities and aimed at refugee’s students, which have been integrated successfully through different support programmes in Italian universities.

Italian universities have tended to emphasise the academic rationales in their quest for internationalisation. However, in a context of declining financial governmental contributions, international students (particularly from outside the European Union) have become an additional funding opportunity. Moreover, internationalisation can improve universities’ reputation and its attractiveness in an increasingly competitive international market for students and academics. In addition, attracting international students has become very important for many Italian universities, due to adverse demographical trends (decline of youth population) and social-economic factors (namely in some regions struggling with very difficult economic and social conditions). Demographic and social-economic factors, as well as the lack of embeddedness of HEIs in regional development strategies, have depressed student enrolment in many regions and that has become a very important issue for many Italian universities. Though international students’ recruitment itself cannot solve the problem of declining national enrolments, it is well known that international attractiveness is a way to promote not only the HEIs located in a region but also the region as a whole, ultimately attracting more national students.

Areas of internationalisation

The most prominent area of internationalisation is education and training, followed by research and finally by engagement. Despite some variety across the system, the most consolidated internationalisation strategies developed by Italian HEIs are mainly related to teaching and learning activities, with student mobility arguably the most prominent and frequent focus. In general, universities invest both in activating collaborative international study courses (double, multiple and joint degrees) and in making existing degree programmes more international through intensive programmes and summer schools. At the same time, Italian universities invest in internationalisation at home, creating study programmes where the international dimension is represented by a more internationally oriented content of programmes and by the language of instruction (often English).

The institutional figures regarding the internationalisation of the student body confirm a picture of significant diversity, though the general situation is that of low shares of foreign students. Some universities visited indicated figures of foreign students close or even above 10% (the two HEIs in Pisa and the Universities of Bologna, Siena and Rome Tor Vergata, and the Polytechnics of Torino and Milano). However, several others indicated much lower shares of 1%-2% of total enrolments, which seems to be the general rule of those

universities located in the southern part of the country. The situation seems to be particularly weak in first-cycle enrolments. None of the universities discriminated figures of students involved in mobility periods or those enrolled in a degree programme, though the impressions collected during the site visit indicated that the former corresponded to the largest share, despite a few exceptions.

Initiatives on the internationalisation of research are also present in Italian universities. Academic mobility and research collaboration are increasingly present, though much less significant than initiatives developed on education. The figures provided by the universities visited during the review indicate a significant diversity in the degree of internationalisation of academic staff and research. The weakest point is the proportion of foreign staff, which in general is very low (below 5%), with several institutions presenting figures around 1% of the total academic staff. More significant international activity is taking place in the collaboration of their academic staff with other researchers, as shown by the figures about publications with foreign co-authors. The best examples presented percentages of 30%, 40% or even 50% of total scientific publications with foreign co-authors, namely the Universities of Bologna, Rome Tor Vergata, Bari, Cagliari and the two HEIs in Pisa. However, a few universities visited presented values below 10% (such as Palermo) or did not offer relevant data. The diversity among disciplines may also be very significant within each university, as often happens, with some fields much more engaged in international research than others.

Still, one can observe some pockets of greater internationalisation and good examples of participation in European and international research networks, of international mobility of doctoral students and of institutional structures supporting internationalisation policies. Moreover, the international mobility of doctoral students is often a cornerstone of universities' strategy to strengthen the efficiency and quality of doctoral courses, namely by increasing scholarships dedicated to foreign doctoral students and by promoting promotion new agreements with universities and foreign research centres. Thus, some universities visited indicated significant shares of foreign students enrolled in their master's and doctoral programmes (e.g. Polytechnic of Milan or the two HEIs in Pisa), though these did not correspond to the general landscape.

Offices supporting participation in competitive research funding are also increasingly present in the majority of Italian universities. Therefore, to efficiently engage with European funding programmes, universities have created structures (offices, working groups) supporting the design and development of applications to European and international funding, frequently in co-operation with other international HEI and research centres (as is the case, for example, in the University of Cagliari, Rome Tor Vergata, the University of Siena or the University of Bologna).

Internationalisation activities related to engagement are less visible. When presenting their internationalisation strategy, universities tend to highlight their aim for excellence both in education and in research, and rarely link their internationalisation strategies to their engagement activities. Still, there are interesting practices promoted by some universities (for example, the University of Cagliari or the Polytechnic of Milan, which promote the collaboration between international students and local companies, or foster partnerships with international corporate partners). Although there is significant potential for attractiveness, brand-recognition and opportunities to transfer knowledge internationally, this area is largely overlooked by most Italian universities.

Approaches to internationalisation

Considering the two approaches to internationalisation – abroad and at home – the most disseminated in Italian HE seems to be that of “internationalisation abroad”. Regarding the instruments adopted in this approach, the most widely used are the following: recruitment of international students; staff and student exchange programmes; joint programmes; distance, e-learning programmes and massive open online courses (MOOCs); opportunities for international volunteering, work or study placements; research co-operations and partnerships; participation in European research projects; publications with international partners; establishment of branch centres abroad; and establishment of branch campuses abroad.

As regards the approach of internationalisation at home, this is more visible in the most consolidated cases of internationalisation. In this approach, the following instruments stand out: internationalisation of the curriculum (integration of international perspectives and international relevance in the curriculum); study abroad opportunities; English-language teaching; international recruitment of staff (teaching and research) and of students; collaboration of international researchers in the research projects developed in the institution; encouraged acquisition of language skills; improvement of current provision of international student facilities; encouragement of international students to participate fully in the social and cultural life of the university; integration of refugees.

Overall, “internationalisation” is part of universities’ strategic goals, mission and vision. This strategic “vision” of internationalisation is frequently highlighted not only by the institutional actors during the visits but also in several institutional documents. The leadership of HEIs, particularly rectors and their teams, seem to be the main actors promoting the development and the implementation of internationalisation strategies, which indicates a “commitment” with internationalisation. Nonetheless, there are also several bottom-up activities, facilitated and supported by the institutional top level, without an apparent consolidated strategy. These bottom-up activities seem to be particularly prominent within the context of the development of partnerships for international research projects, which are often stimulated through personal contacts and collaborations.

Despite the overall “commitment” to internationalisation, most universities have an insufficiently developed structure in this area. On the one hand, most HEIs struggle with the lack of financial resources and of qualified and trained human resources which hinders the implementation of internationalisation strategies. On the other hand, the existence of different institutional actors and bodies responsible for internationalisation, though, in some cases, facilitates the dissemination of internationalisation activities, in most cases results in fragmentation and insufficient co-ordination of responsibilities, hampering the development and implementation of an integrated and effective internationalisation strategy. To a large extent, one could say that these two aspects (insufficient resources and loosely connected institutional structure) are two sides of the same coin and reinforce each other.

Institutional good practices

Overall, all the institutions have “internationalisation” as part of their strategic goals, their mission, vision and their management and are strongly willing to engage at the European and global levels. The system has seen the emergence of some good examples that have developed significant internationalisation efforts and activities.

Unlike the general perception that there is mostly a bottom-up trend in internationalisation initiatives in Italy, which are facilitated by the institutional top level, the most “successful” internationalisation strategies in southern universities in Italy are top-down, particularly promoted by their rectors. The cases of the University of Cagliari (UniCa) and the University of Bari (UniBa) are interesting examples of a change of strategy due to a change of rector and his/her team. It is also interesting to notice that one of the most important challenges faced by these universities in the near future is giving continuity to this proactive and dynamic “culture” built by the current rectors and embedding it into their institutional “culture” and “mission”, not only with regard to the internationalisation strategy but to a much broader entrepreneur and innovative institutional strategy.

UniCa is a university with committed governance supported by a very well-articulated team operating on internationalisation, third mission and innovation. Though operating in an adverse economic and social context, UniCa has been developing a sustainable internationalisation strategy, supported by a well-structured “team” and by the regional ecosystem.

As most of the universities in Italy (and indeed in most countries), the internationalisation policies in UniCa focus mostly on education, namely on: attracting international doctoral students (a three-year scholarship for each doctoral programme for a foreign candidate holding a degree awarded abroad), double master’s degrees, mobility of teaching staff and researchers (visiting professor and visiting scientist programmes), promotion of international co-operation among institutions of HE in southern Mediterranean countries and Sardinia; but also on research, where it is interesting to observe, amongst other initiatives, the constitution of a working group for promoting the participation of UniCa in European research programmes; and on engagement, particularly by promoting professional experiences in regional companies by international students.

In UniBa, the current governance and its team have developed a strategy that can be characterised as comprehensive. It is based on the internationalisation of teaching and learning, promoting the international mobility of doctoral students (through programmes such as: Global Thesis Grants, SEMINARE and Global Doc Grants), attracting international students (despite the limitations in broadening the courses taught in English), attracting international researchers and professors (visiting professors), developing international degree courses; research and engagement, with the active participation of all departments in international research partnerships and networks, also involving local enterprises.

Notwithstanding, the social rationale behind UniBa’s internationalisation strategy and, particularly, the awareness of and deeper engagement with the refugees’ situation is particularly noteworthy. The Centre for Lifelong Learning (CAP) is determinant in supporting European and non-European citizen’s and refugees, namely by certificating the competencies (soft skills) in formal, informal and non-formal contexts and by supporting the integration of the refugees in the community.

Another encouraging example is the Polytechnic of Milan (often called PoliMi), which has been developing a consistent and careful strategy for internationalisation. In the case of this institution, the focus has been on privileging the postgraduate level of education and English as the dominant language of instruction at that level. This was pursued through a gradual strategy increasing the enrolment of international students and the proportion of international staff teaching at that level as well as targeting its master’s programmes increasingly at the international market, both regarding enrolments and curriculum orientation.

The experience of PoliMi, though certainly benefitting from the specific characteristics and context of this institution, is very relevant because it proves the feasibility of the development of a mature strategy of internationalisation, despite limited national support. Capitalising on the advantages offered by its ecosystem, the experience of PoliMi highlights the relevance of focus and prioritisation, since it was the result of an institutional path pursued persistently and consistently over two decades. Moreover, the institutional strategy has been selective in its choices, being able to discriminate not only what it wanted to achieve, but also clarifying what was not feasible or a priority for PoliMi. PoliMi reflects well the industrial specialisation of its territory and this creates a virtuous cycle that other local universities cannot fully exploit.

A very good experience is also that of the University of Bologna (UniBo). Being one of the oldest and more reputable universities in Europe has not prevented this institution from engaging in a proactive way with other universities and different stakeholders in its region when it came to internationalisation. This collaborative approach has led to several relevant initiatives. This includes the development of joint master's programmes with other universities of Emilia-Romagna that focus on some of the region's most important economic clusters, namely the automobile sector and the agrarian sector. These programmes are taught in English and have a strong international vocation, namely to attract students from abroad.

On the other hand, by developing these programmes in partnership with major economic partners in the region, UniBo generates the possibility of exploring new linkages between different institutional missions – education, research, services to society – through internationalisation. This takes advantage of the local economic strengths to promote certain areas of expertise abroad and enhance the attractiveness of those programmes by having them interact with worldwide recognisable Italian brands and sectors. This also creates opportunities for further collaboration in which universities enhance their regional relevance as a platform for the internationalisation of important sectors of economic activity.

Overall, these different examples of Italian universities located in very different parts of the country illustrate the potential of the system regarding internationalisation. They also point out the multidimensional nature of international projects and the need for each university to assess carefully its strengths and limitations in order to devise feasible and potentially successful strategies of internationalisation. The results also show that, despite significant constraints, several Italian universities are able to make important inroads into the highly competitive international HE market.

Challenges

The internationalisation of Italian HE has made important progress in recent years, both due to national and institutional efforts. However, this has been more limited than its potential due to some challenges and constraints to which we now turn our attention. We will start by looking at those challenges at the system level and then will analyse those more relevant at the institutional one.

The system level

One of the most important systemic challenges to the internationalisation of the Italian HE system refers to its large number of universities. The Italian system, like many other European HE systems, has expanded visibly in the last decades, not only in its size

measured by the enrolments, but also in the number of institutions, departments and programmes. Moreover, several universities have become complex units of multiple branches and campuses, which has created a dense network of institutions, dispersed around the country that make it quite complex to manage the system as a whole.

To this large network of institutions should be added the large diversity in the system. This diversity has many dimensions, some of which are internal to the institutions and others contextual to them. Thus, the system includes very different HEIs in their disciplinary coverage, size, age, prestige, research intensity and degree of interaction with their communities. The system comprises several of the oldest universities in Europe but also many recently established institutions. It also comprises several comprehensive universities and a few specialised ones. The relevance of postgraduate education and research is also uneven across the system.

On the other hand, they also face very different contexts, especially economically, with several located in some of the wealthiest regions in Europe and others in some of the poorest ones. Some universities are located in areas with significant industrial activities and others in largely de-industrialised areas. Some are located in areas dominated by a few large and highly internationalised companies, where others are embedded in a territory of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and, even in that case, the reality regarding their competitiveness and internationalisation can be rather contrasting.

Another characteristic of the Italian HE system that poses a relevant challenge is the limited degree of co-operation. Like many other HE systems, the Italian system has seen the development of intense competition, visible in aspects such as student attraction (due to demographic declines) or funding (due to the retrenchment of public sources, which were the cornerstone in the funding of the system). This exacerbated the competitive nature of many aspects of the academic sector and has also been reflected in a tendency of Italian universities to develop individual strategies regarding internationalisation. However, many activities related to internationalisation require a scale and co-ordination that imply co-operation between universities. There are some examples, but these do not seem to be either systematic or the rule for institutional behaviour. Thus, one aspect requiring attention at the policy level would be how to encourage Italian universities to co-operate more in this respect.

There is a lack of a detailed international HE strategy covering the major aspects to be considered. These should include aspects related to HEI missions – teaching and learning, research and engagement – and, in particular, aspects such as student mobility, research collaboration, business partnerships, regional engagement and development goals. In the documents available, the policy vision regarding the internationalisation of the Italian HE system was not fully clear. There are some statements about its importance, though they tend to be rather limited and generic, and many aspects are still to be addressed.

The potential role at the system level is somewhat constrained by the fact that HEIs enjoy significant autonomy and this leads to the perception that internationalisation is only a responsibility for the institutional level. However, and despite the respect for that autonomy and for the specificities of each university, one must not neglect the central role to be played by national and regional authorities in the promotion and implementation of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. This can provide incentives and stimuli for HEIs to develop more elaborate and consistent strategies in this dimension.

In fact, during the institutional visits, the government was hardly mentioned as playing a key role in this area and this omission was rather striking, especially when compared to

other European countries where the government is usually regarded as a key actor in this respect. Moreover, the few references to the government tended to be associated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is usually regarded as being very helpful and willing to contribute to institutional initiatives in this area. By contrast, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the Ministry of Economic Development were hardly mentioned, which was rather striking and warrant some reflection. Given that HEIs can play a very important role as intermediaries between the local and global networks, the Ministry of Economic Development could play a role by encouraging universities to include that international dimension in their engagement with the regions in which they are located. This can enhance the attractiveness of both the university and the region and be potentially translated in the attraction of qualified workforce, international projects or new partners for training and research and development (R&D).

The strategic weaknesses are also reflected in the lack of a dedicated body for the promotion of the internationalisation of Italian HE. This should have major responsibilities in areas including overseas representative offices or participation in conferences, trade fairs and marketing events. One of the effects of the lack of a dedicated body is that several initiatives do not have continuity after initial support and funding.² The lack of this body has also an impact on relevant indicators monitoring the consolidation of the degree of internationalisation of the Italian HE system. For instance, in the information available, it was unclear what national/systemic efforts have been made to sustain or increase the number of bilateral agreements/memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed between Italy and foreign education ministries on the topic of collaboration in HE. This has certainly expanded but through the multiple and largely uncoordinated efforts of each individual HEI (or groups of them) and not clearly the result of a national push or co-ordinated activity. The existence of greater national co-ordination would also be supported by more systemic efforts to monitor and inform the internationalisation of its HE system, e.g. by reinforcing and spreading data on international student and faculty mobility, programme and provider mobility and research collaboration.

The limitations regarding co-ordination are also amplified by the insufficient integration between the national and regional levels. During the visits, there were several references to the limited or even non-existent co-ordination between the national and regional levels. In some cases, there were initiatives at the latter, though they seemed to operate regardless of what was being defined at the national level. Despite internationalisation being ultimately a responsibility of the institutions, the state and the regions have a crucial role in promoting internationalisation, at a central and regional/local level, and in fostering innovation ecosystems. Moreover, this regional difference in the engagement with HE and its internationalisation tend to amplify the diversity and inequality across the system that will be discussed in more detail below.

These challenges do not contribute to making the Italian system an important player in the growing international HE market. Although there is a widespread welcoming attitude regarding internationalisation, especially at the European level, the levels of mobility and attractiveness are generally low compared to peers in OECD countries. The Italian HE system needs to work harder to assess its comparative advantages and explore more effectively its untapped potential in this area.

The institutional level

At the institutional level, there is also a limited identification of a systematic approach to internationalisation. Internationalisation was regarded by HEIs as a very important

dimension of institutional development in most cases and there was a clear willingness to make it an important aspect in the institutional strategy. However, the perception formed through the interviews and the data collected indicated that there was a limited formulation of a strategic approach to this area. The predominant tone tends to be of generic statements stating the importance of internationalisation but with a lack of maturity that tends to characterise the earlier stages of internationalisation.

This limited maturation of institutional internationalisation strategies is reflected in the type of data they collect about internationalisation. Although all universities collect data about this, the data available tends to be concerned mainly with areas such as the mobility of students and staff. In several cases, there is also data about international students and staff. However, there is far more limited data available regarding more consolidated aspects of institutional internationalisation such as joint initiatives in teaching (e.g. joint programmes, dual degrees), in research (data on joint projects, co-authorship of publications), and even less about engagement activities developed in the framework of institutional international activities.

The priorities in internationalisation are still largely focused on teaching and learning, with more limited reference to research and even less so to engagement and services to society. In the interviews and documentation collected during the review, the references to the first mission were very frequent, less so to research (though still common in most universities) and very limited in the case of engagement. A few exceptions to the latter were the cases of international programmes (either because the language of instruction was not Italian or the recruitment of students aimed at the international market) developed in collaboration with the business sector. In fact, several Italian universities have a significant potential in this respect given the existence of world-class companies or business clusters with international visibility and reputation and that could be explored in the development of educational and research-related activities aimed at the international market.

Internationalisation activities and initiatives seem to be more fragmented than integrated. Though internationalisation in Italian HE ranges from looser and fragmented activities to better integrated and comprehensive initiatives, the former seems to be the rule. One would argue that a central-systematic strategy, in which a large volume of co-ordinated international activities is undertaken to support the international mission of a university, is less frequent in Italian universities. According to Davies (1992), universities can adopt four different approaches to achieve their internationalisation goals: a central-systematic strategy, a spontaneous-central strategy, a systematic-marginal strategy and a spontaneous-marginal strategy. Despite the variety across the system and the co-existence of the four approaches within the system, the spontaneous-central strategy, in which a large volume of international activities is undertaken but with no clearly defined plans and goals, seems to be predominant. Thus, we could say that there is more a “reactive mode” of internationalisation, which is based more on spontaneous activities than a “proactive mode” based on more organised strategies, which are integrated into the principles of general strategic management (Rudzki, 1995).

Regarding the development of initiatives in internationalisation, the perception of the team is mixed and the evidence collected was rather limited. The leadership of several of the universities visited seemed to be convinced of its role, though the evidence was less clear. The fact that the team could not have extensive meetings with other levels of the institution suggests that this should be considered with caution, especially since the evidence from many institutional internationalisation strategies is that it tends to be often initiated and supported, in its initial stages, by individual initiatives. The fact that most of the universities

presented a limited development of their internationalisation strategies suggests that a lot of the activities in this area tend to be developed more through a bottom-up approach, started by individual academics or groups of them and then facilitated by the institutional top level.

In the area of internationalisation, there is a certain degree of fragmentation of activities and decision-making. Internationalisation, like other activities of universities, seems to be associated with multiple bottom-up initiatives that do not coalesce around an overall institutional and systemic strategy. Furthermore, many actors and institutions still think that more is better regardless of the value it adds and the additional strain it places on the institution. Although the existence of a dynamic rank and file is a very important aspect in any successful university, the following step is the need to co-ordinate and establish greater coherence at the institutional level, screening and integrating them into a consolidated strategy. This is a step that seems yet to be taken by most Italian universities.

Universities seem to privilege quantity over depth and impact in their partnerships. They seem to be especially concerned with the number of partnerships rather than with the establishment of deeper interactions enabling major benefits of international collaboration.

The difficulties are common to many universities, though they are particularly relevant in the Italian case due to the tradition of weaker institutional autonomy and the more recent strengthening of power at the centre of the university. Internationalisation is one of the areas where it is difficult and most necessary to have a cogent strategy, since the relevance, meaning and forms of internationalisation may mean very different things to different stakeholders, disciplines or levels of decision-making. On the other hand, certain important initiatives in some of the universities the team visited seem to be too dependent on specific people (including at the top level) without being fully integrated into institutional policies/strategy and there is the risk that a change in the key individuals may seriously weaken these initiatives.

Recommendations

The system level

Self-critical attitude

There are many aspects that need to be addressed more effectively; internationalisation should receive more attention from HE leaders. Nonetheless, the perception of the national stakeholders is that the current situation is more positive than it is, especially when compared to other countries in Europe. Thus, an important change is to adopt a more self-critical attitude about the current positioning of Italian HE in the European and global scenario and this can be done through systematic benchmarking.

Vision and strategy

At the moment, the views put forward at the national level regarding internationalisation tend to express generic and favourable purposes regarding this matter. It would be important to develop more focused and articulate views about why and how is internationalisation relevant for the specific case of Italian HE. The way internationalisation fits into the wider views and priorities about the HE system and its development is also very important. In particular, it will be relevant to devise an overall strategy that can effectively accommodate the diversity of the system and integrate the multiple initiatives of the various actors.

Incentives and tools

A national vision and strategy about the internationalisation of Italian HE will have to be supported by tools that encourage the different institutional and individual stakeholders to align their strategies and behaviour with what has been defined nationally. Thus, the system needs to have incentives for institutions, academics, students, local authorities and the business sector to internalise this priority and make it part of their priorities. Many systems are dealing with similar challenges in this respect and Italian decision-makers could benefit from identifying good practices among other countries to enhance the attractiveness of Italian HE and support the participation of Italian HEIs in international networks.

Comprehensiveness

Our analysis has highlighted the variety of activities and multidimensionality of internationalisation. Although national policies have traditionally privileged internationalisation in the areas of education and research, it would be important that they aim to embed it in a more transversal way in universities' strategy. This would include taking advantage of internationalisation in another range of activities, namely in what can be broadly considered the university's engagement with society. Through this, Italian universities could explore their societal relevance, connecting the local and the global in a way that is enhanced by its capacity to create and disseminate knowledge.

*The institutional level**Vision and strategy*

Most Italian universities value internationalisation as an important dimension of their mission. However, universities need to develop a clearer vision that is embedded in their development and to revise their existing internationalisation strategies, elaborating more comprehensive strategies that articulate and contextualise this dimension within their other institutional priorities. Developing a more mature institutional strategy to internationalisation requires, on the one hand, exploring the broad scope of internationalisation (not only teaching or research but also engagement) and, on the other hand, adopting a more selective approach in the definition of priorities and instruments according to their feasibility and desirability to each institutional context.

Institutional dynamics and co-ordination

Although the bottom-up dynamics is very important in institutional internationalisation, Italian universities would need to develop greater effectiveness in dealing with the multiple opportunities and initiatives in this area. Thus, greater capacity to co-ordinate the various activities across the different missions, disciplines, levels of decision-making, ministries and national agencies would be important. This needs to be negotiated and communicated internally and externally, to avoid frustration and waste of energies in less relevant initiatives.

Scope and density of partnerships

Most Italian universities still seem to adopt an approach that privileges quantity rather than depth in their partnerships. Thus, along with a reflection about potential synergies in the development of international activities that cut across different missions and different parts of the university, Italian universities should also privilege deeper interactions that may

allow greater internalisation of the benefits of international collaboration and that may promote spillovers to other areas.

Concluding remarks

The Italian HE system includes some of the oldest universities in the Western world and thus presents a historical university tradition of international mobility and co-operation. This has also been stimulated by the process of European integration, of which Italy has been one of the founding countries and one of the most engaged for several decades. Nonetheless, the acceleration of internationalisation in HE in recent years has had more limited effects on Italian HE than in most European systems and there is a general perception that the system is not taking full advantage of the opportunities created with the development of the European HE and research areas, alongside the densification of global networks in HE and science.

Italian universities are becoming more international, especially as they choose to align with international practices by enhancing their international education and research profile in order to position themselves more successfully and contribute to enhance the level of attractiveness of Italy as a study destination and knowledge nation (De Wit, Hunter and Howard, 2015). However, there is a lack of maturity in the institutional thinking about internationalisation and its various dimensions, which is reflected in an insufficiently systematic and comprehensive approach to internationalisation. There is certainly diversity across the system, though the rule seems to be fragmented and multiple initiatives, rationalised *ex post*.

Notes

¹ The last available IAU Survey is the 4th Survey from 2014. According to the International Association of Universities, the results of 5th Global Survey are expected to be available in early 2019.

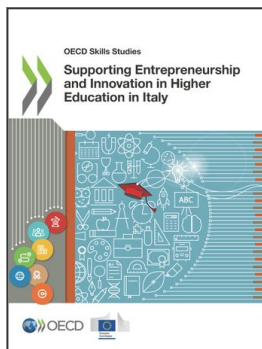
² During the site visit were mentioned several examples of national and international funding that did not have continuity, leading to the end of the initiatives that they were aimed to support.

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From:
**Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in
Higher Education in Italy**

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/43e88f48-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/European Union (2019), “Internationalisation of higher education in Italy”, in *Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Italy*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b2718f34-en>

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