

“The big challenges facing society can only be solved through international cooperation”



DAAD/Thilo Vogel

Dr. Dorothea Rüland, General Secretary DAAD

The keyword “Third Mission” is doing the rounds. The argument is that, in addition to research and teaching, universities have a social responsibility for society. The German Academic Exchange Service or DAAD is currently investigating how universities can take this responsibility into account in their internationalisation initiatives. General Secretary Dr. Dorothea Rüland and Director of Studies Uwe Brandenburg, PhD., talk about the contents and aims of the study.

Mr Brandenburg, you are currently conducting a study for the DAAD together with Hans de Witt, Betty Leask and Elspet Johnes. What’s it all about?

Uwe Brandenburg: Our goal is to find out how internationalisation can contribute to solving the big issues in society, such as climate change, radicalisation, populism, the preservation of democracy and wider issues such as policies towards the admittance and integration of refugees in society. In concrete terms, the aim is to systemise the concept of International

Higher Education for Society (IHES), in order to accomplish internationalisation within society. It is particularly important to us to deliver a kind of typification based on practical examples, which will help universities to systematically integrate IHES as part of their internationalisation initiatives

Mrs Rüländ, why has the DAAD commissioned this study?

Dorothea Rüländ: Universities today are thoroughly internationalised. This leads to the question of what effect internationalisation has on society. There are not many studies on this topic to date

To what extent do universities have a social responsibility?

UB: It is absolutely out of the question that universities don't have any social responsibility. Research and teaching are never an end in themselves. Currently, we are also seeing a strong trend towards universities taking on increasing responsibility. For example, 2,000 universities worldwide say that the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations are only achievable with the help of universities.

DR: I completely agree. The big issues of today can only be addressed through international cooperation. Climate change is one of the best examples, but there are many more. At the same time, the issues are so complex that they can only be solved by science.

UB: But, when it comes to internationalisation, we are giving very little thought to what could happen with these initiatives. Take climate change, for example. All the universities say: We need to develop a green campus. So far, however, there is no clear position on the role of internationalisation in this, for example within the context of the many mobility programmes.

Is internationalisation a driving force for social engagement?

UB: Right now, it is definitely not. In 2019, an intermediate report was published about a large EU project that aims to develop a framework for the social and societal engagement of universities. According to this report, it is regrettable that social engagement is not prioritised in comparison to research excellency and internationalisation. That tells us everything we need to know right now: Internationalisation and social engagement are currently seen as competing issues. If we discover that social engagement is becoming an ever more important issue in teaching and research, then internationalisation should also address this issue. However, we are seeing that those who are working towards social engagement are hardly communicating with those who are working towards internationalisation. In actual fact, there are interfaces that could be used by both fields.

How can this be encouraged?

UB: As universities, we should be asking ourselves the following question about every activity we conduct: What societal problem do we want to help solve with it? And how will our internationalisation skills help us?

What can the DAAD do to help?

DR: We are currently working on building up a theoretical framework on the topic – together with Mr Brandenburg and his group – so that we can then feed it into the discourse. We are also considering whether we will build it into our programmes. When we set up internationalisation programmes today, we first have to ask ourselves what we want to achieve. Then the societal aspect comes into play almost automatically. For example, we have just set up a large programme for the internationalisation of teacher training.

Are there any more examples?

DR: In one programme, universities in Germany and in the Global South are working together with local business partners to align the curricula more closely with local needs. In Jordan, we are promoting a degree in social work to educate young people who will later work in this field when the war in Syria is over. A great many projects have been started, especially to do with the integration of refugees. For example, we have set up a large-scale blended learning project with the University of Konstanz and are supporting numerous projects related to trauma.



Uwe Brandenburg, PhD., Managing Director of the Global Impact Institute in Prague

Mr Brandenburg, would you like to add any examples from your study?

UB: The first example is the Welcome Centre for the region in Göttingen. At the university, there was already a centre like this to help international researchers settle in. Then someone had the idea to create the same thing for the local economy. Other examples: In Chile, there is a university that sent female entrepreneurs to Spain or to other Latin American countries to learn how they can better market their products. Peacemakers is an EU project, led by Koç University in Turkey, with the aim of bringing migrants and local people together to identify and solve conflicts. Another significant project is Social Erasmus. What's more, Leeds Beckett University in the United Kingdom is running a programme in which students apply physiotherapy methods in Nepal. La Trobe University in Melbourne is pursuing a similar concept through therapeutic interventions in Cambodia and Indonesia.

When and how will you present the results?

DR: The theoretical part is complete. By autumn, the practical examples will follow. In April next year, there will be a large conference in Prague, organised by Mr Brandenburg's institute, that will focus on the issue. We have taken note that the topic is currently trending.

Interview: Peter Niderstigt (29th August 2019)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Uwe Brandenburg, PhD., is the Managing Director of the [Global Impact Institute](http://www.globalimpactinstitute.eu%20) [\[http://www.globalimpactinstitute.eu%20\]](http://www.globalimpactinstitute.eu%20) in Prague. On 23rd and 24th April 2020, the conference "Making a Difference: Internationalisation in Higher Education for Society" will take place there (further information available in early September at www.ihs-conference.com), during which the results of the current study "Internationalisation in Higher Education for Society" that Brandenburg is currently conducting with three international colleagues on behalf of the DAAD will be presented.