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## EDUCATION

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### **ON THE PATH TO POLISH HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION: WHAT AND HOW INFLUENCED THE ITINERARY?**

**Alla Krasulia**

*PhD in Education, Associate Professor  
Sumy State University, Sumy, Ukraine*

*<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2048-1879>; e-mail: [krasalla77@gmail.com](mailto:krasalla77@gmail.com)*

**Yevhen Plotnikov**

*PhD in Education, Associate Professor  
Nizhyn Gogol State University, Nizhyn, Ukraine*

*<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6010-247X>; e-mail: [plotnikov@ndu.edu.ua](mailto:plotnikov@ndu.edu.ua)*

**Liudmyla Zagoruiko**

*PhD in Education, Associate Professor  
National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine*

*<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4250-3688>; e-mail: [zagoruiko@npp.nau.edu.ua](mailto:zagoruiko@npp.nau.edu.ua)*

*Poland's membership in the EU, geopolitical location of the country and the development of the knowledge economy are the main contributing factors increasing the level of internationalization of Polish higher education. Due to the pandemic, HEIs had to change the ways to promote themselves in the international arena. Considering the literature review and studies of Polish researchers, the authors studied the dynamics of internationalization and approaches to assessing higher education systems' internationalization. The article presents the analysis of the state of higher education internationalization in Poland within the world context. The authors revealed the methodology and indicators that have been used in Poland for the internationalization assessment to find some positive practices. Some steps taken by Polish higher education institutions to promote internationalization and take higher positions in the international rankings have been highlighted in the article. They are as follows: establishing service departments or offices for international students within the university structures specializing in serving students from outside*



*the EU, creating support structures for the implementation of international projects, providing support for international accreditation processes for individual programs and faculties, caring for communication, its form, language and content, especially concerning recruiting students from abroad, transparency of the processes of recognizing previous education, creating possibilities to exchange students who will be mainly in need of foreign experiences on the labour market, creating motivation systems, including payroll systems, encouraging teachers to conduct classes in foreign languages. It is stated that investing in internationalization can provide a positive image of the country abroad and help to improve the quality of education. The authors conclude that the benefits of higher education internationalization in Poland are not limited to finance, economic growth and increased competitiveness as it deepens mutual understanding, multilingualism, personal and professional development of the young generation.*

*Key words: internationalization, Polish higher education, world context, internationalization assessment, international students, multilingualism, personal and professional development of the young generation.*

*Членство Польщі в ЄС, геополітичне розташування країни та розвиток економіки знань є основними факторами, що сприяють підвищенню рівня інтернаціоналізації польської вищої освіти. Через пандемію закладам вищої освіти довелося змінити способи представлення себе на міжнародній арені. Проаналізувавши дослідження та праці провідних польських науковців, автори статті висвітлили динаміку інтернаціоналізації та підходи, які застосовуються для опису інтернаціоналізації систем вищої освіти. У статті представлено аналіз стану інтернаціоналізації вищої освіти у Польщі у світовому контексті. Автори висвітлили методологію та показники, які були використані в Польщі для оцінки інтернаціоналізації, щоб знайти певні позитивні практики. У статті висвітлені деякі кроки, зроблені польськими закладами вищої освіти, для сприяння інтернаціоналізації та зайняття вищих позицій у міжнародних рейтингах. Серед основних можна виокремити створення відділів обслуговування або офісів для іноземних студентів у структурах університетів, що спеціалізуються на обслуговуванні студентів за межами ЄС, а також механізмів підтримки для реалізації міжнародних проєктів, забезпечення успішної міжнародної акредитації окремих програм та факультетів, звернення уваги на залучення студентів з-за кордону на навчання, прозорість процесів визнання попередньої освіти, створення можливостей для обміну студентами, які в подальшому потребуватимуть досвіду на ринку праці за кордоном, створення систем мотивації, включаючи фонди оплати праці, заохочення викладачів проводити заняття іноземними мовами тощо. Зазначається, що інвестиції в інтернаціоналізацію можуть створити позитивний імідж країни за кордоном та сприяти покращенню якості освіти, хоча автори роблять висновок, що переваги інтернаціоналізації вищої освіти не обмежуються фінансами, економічним зростанням та підвищенням конкурентоспроможності, оскільки насамперед вони поглиблюють взаєморозуміння, багатомовність, особистісний та професійний розвиток молодого покоління.*



*Ключові слова: інтернаціоналізація, польська вища освіта, світовий контекст, оцінювання рівня інтернаціоналізації, іноземні студенти, багатомовність, особистісний та професійний розвиток молодого покоління.*

**Introduction.** The development of higher education is therefore linked to pro-innovation activities in all areas of social activity. Higher education innovation refers to teaching and research, technological support of university services, organization systems, and teaching and research projects management. A comprehensive approach to high school innovation was presented in the framework of the European Commission's "HEInnovate" initiative (HEInnovate, 2021a). HEInnovate is a self-assessment tool for universities in terms of potential innovation, by identifying, prioritizing and planning actions in the seven key areas for entrepreneurship and innovation of higher education environment, i.e., leadership and governance, organizational capacity, financing, people and motivation, teaching and learning in entrepreneurship, training and support of entrepreneurs, knowledge exchange and cooperation, internationalization and impact measurement (HEInnovate, 2021b).

In many countries, internationalization is an important political project of a state policy; it fosters a better understanding of different cultures, serves purposes of foreign policy and national security, and stimulates economic development. It can also be an important new source of revenue for the country and its universities. It drives university development, raising the quality of education and starting innovations (Knight, 2007).

Internationalization is a widely discussed phenomenon in higher education, covering several activities implemented at the central and ministerial level and at individual universities, where this process is reflected in the strategies. However, the internationalization of education is not a new phenomenon. In the Middle Ages, the greatest scientists, seeking knowledge, contacted other outstanding minds and migrated all over Europe. The concept takes on many different meanings related to the activities that become possible thanks to technological development, mainly in distance communication.

Knight (2008, p. 21) proposed the most universal and commonly used definition of internationalization in higher education. According to the researcher, "internationalization in higher education, state, sectoral and institutional level, is the process of integrating the international dimension, intercultural and global in the goals, functions and the way education works". The scientist also distinguishes two key elements (forms) of internationalization. The first one is internationalization "abroad" as all forms of education across borders, including mobility, projects, programs, and education service providers. The second is internationalization "at home", which focuses on the curriculum and activities that develop international and intercultural skills.

Knight (2009) points out that internationalization can be understood as:

- a range of international activities, including student mobility and lecturers, organization of networks, partnerships and international projects, academic programs and research initiatives on an international basis;



- establishing a branch, franchising in another country, integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the curriculum and teaching/learning process;

- a way to improve the national and world ranking position, recruiting the best and brightest international students and scientists.

Student mobility has become of paramount importance since the Green Paper on the Mobility of Young People for Their Education by the European Commission in 2009 (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). It has become one of the most visible forms of internationalization of higher education in the world. The Bologna process was also significantly inspired by the need to promote mobility within Europe and outside the region, increasing its competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Global competition for highly qualified labour has become a new significant factor, and European countries are developing new strategies in internationalization.

Kwiek (2010) notes that a group of international experts prepares the analyzes of national education systems, i.e. supranational organizations (OECD, World Bank, IMF) and the European Commission (corresponding to higher education and research, building the European Research Area and the Bologna Process). The first step towards developing the internationalization of higher education in Poland was taken in 2005 at the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland. One of the goals set by the Conference was to draft legal acts concerning higher education, science and culture, and promote Polish science abroad (KRASP, 2005).

Walczak (2017) mentioned that in the Polish perspective, the internationalization of higher education is defined as undertaking studies at foreign universities and participation in international research projects as a primary indicator of the development of science and higher education.

**Methodology.** The logic of the article presupposes the analysis of the state of the higher education internationalization in Poland within the world context. The study used the methodology and indicators analysis used in Poland for the internationalization assessment and revealing some positive practices that could be applied in the HEIs' internationalization in different countries. Polish higher education institutions had taken steps to promote internationalization and take higher positions in the international rankings. The research findings were used to demonstrate the importance of a complex approach for raising higher education internationalization in the world education arena.

**Results and discussion.** The dynamics of internationalization vary significantly between regions and countries, depending on their higher education systems (Halangescu, 2015). Wu & Zha (2018) proposed to study the dynamics of internationalization using their typology based on the diffusion of innovation covering knowledge, culture, higher education models and standards. Knowledge of the dynamic nature of higher education internationalization can make it easier for the universities authorities to decide to implement the strategic goal, increasing the level of internationalization.

Kwiek (2015), two approaches to assessing higher education systems' internationalization can be indicated: external and internal. "The external approach to the system is based on national statistics on higher education and macro-level research. In



contrast, the internal approach to the system is based on the data on the subject behaviours and academic attitudes” (Kwiek, 2015, p. 366). The author also proposed thirteen parameters to analyze the level of higher education internationalization relating to various activities of academic staff. They include, among others (Kwiek, 2015, p. 333): research results publishing and conducting classes in a foreign language, attention to the international aspect of the content conveyed during classes and promoting international cooperation and research.

Erkol (2017) proposed a list of 200 based on literature review indicators used to measure higher education internationalization. Later, as a result of the research, he narrowed it down to six, to which he passed (in order of importance). They are the following:

- ✓ International research projects (number).
- ✓ Student mobility (%).
- ✓ Share of international students (%).
- ✓ International curricula (number).
- ✓ Research and teaching staff from abroad (%).
- ✓ Campuses abroad (number).

Methodology for measuring university internationalization was developed by the experts of the Polish foundation “Perspektywy” (“Perspektywy”, 2019). It includes seven groups (Fig. 1).

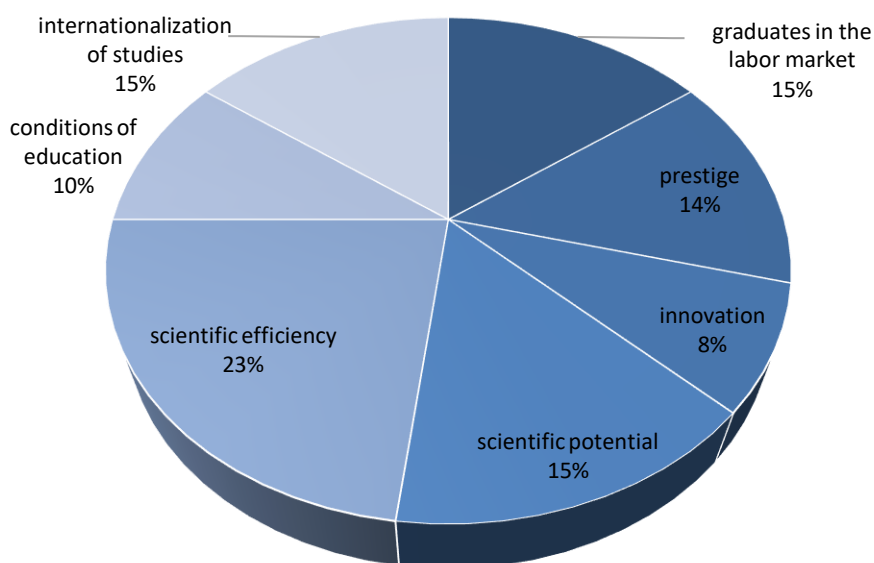


Figure 1. Methodology of the Polish university ranking

Internationalization takes 15% in the ranking measurement. It consists of eight specific criteria. They are the following:

- *Programmes in foreign languages (3%)* – measured by the number of programmes in foreign languages.
- *Students studying in a foreign language (3%)* – measured by the ratio of students studying in a foreign language to the total number of students. Foundation.
- *International students (3%)* – measured by the ratio of foreign students to the total number of students.



- *ICI (Collaboration Impact) (2%)* – measured by the number of citations in publications with a foreign co-author in 2014-2018. Source: SciVal.
- *Foreign teaching staff (1%)* – measured by the international staff ratio to the total number of full-time teaching staff.
- *Students exchange (outbound) 1%* – measured by the ratio of students going abroad on an exchange programme for at least one semester in 2018/2019 to the total number of students.
- *Students exchange (inbound) 1%* – measured by the ratio of students coming to the academic institutions as part of a foreign exchange programme for at least one semester in the 2018/2019 academic year to the total number of students.
- *Multicultural composition of student body 1%* – measured by the number of countries represented by at least ten international students.

The Polish scientists Krzysztof Leja and Karolina Wysocka (2018) defined the most important, in their opinion, factors influencing the level of internationalization and called them the decalogue of internationalization (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Decalogue of internationalization (Leja & Wysocka, 2018)

The researchers divided internationalization into two groups. The first group, called the culture of internationalization, included the awareness of the importance of internationalization among the university community, motivating it to develop internationalization and commitment. The remaining components of the decalogue are significant at the operational level. The strategy of internationalization is the element that connects both groups. Individual elements of the internationalization decalogue may have different weights and forms depending on the internal and external conditions of the universities. The authors stated that it is essential seeing the interrelationships of each component.

Popowska (2015) stated that higher education and business internationalisation could take various forms, whereby most often, it is of a phased nature. It proceeds from the involvement of the safest, requiring the minor use of human capital; and financial, after foreign direct investment (Fig. 3).

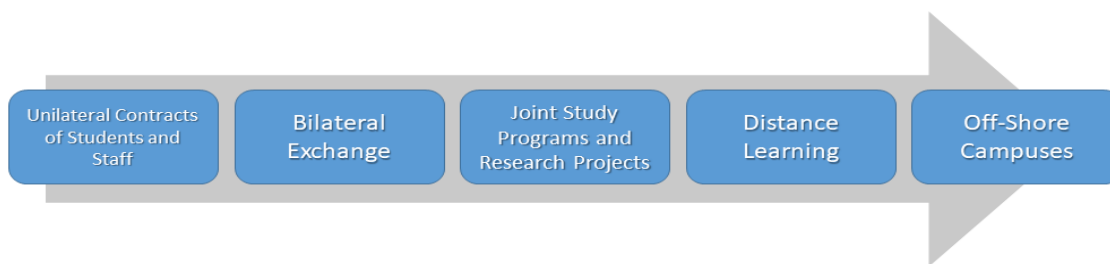


Figure 3. Phases of HEIs internationalization in Poland (Popowska, 2015)

In education, that safest engagement area is mobility (exchange) of students, teaching staff and researchers. However, establishment a foreign (off-shore) campus requires a considerable investment. Moreover, all the presented forms of internationalization require the creation of programs in English. However, some countries, especially German-speaking, French-speaking, Russian-speaking or Spanish-speaking, pay less attention to this requirement due to the popularity of their languages.

The first phases of internationalization include student and staff exchange within established networks, often with financial support from external institutions. The following stages require more own expenditure and are the most common (Szomnik, 2014).

Mobility is a fundamental feature of higher education internationalization, which can be considered from the subject's perspective (mobility of students, academic and administrative staff or the institution itself) and the object (mobility educational programmes). In this context, mobility is linked to cross-border traffic for the limit of individual education and training courses, in direct form, at a distance or a combination (Knight, 2006). Cross-border education covers a wide range of forms, starting with those related to direct the impact and presence of students up to all forms of distance learning (OECD, 2005).

Antonowicz (2020) stated that the last decade is characterized by a significant increase in international students (Fig. 4) at Polish universities. The scientist explained it by several factors.

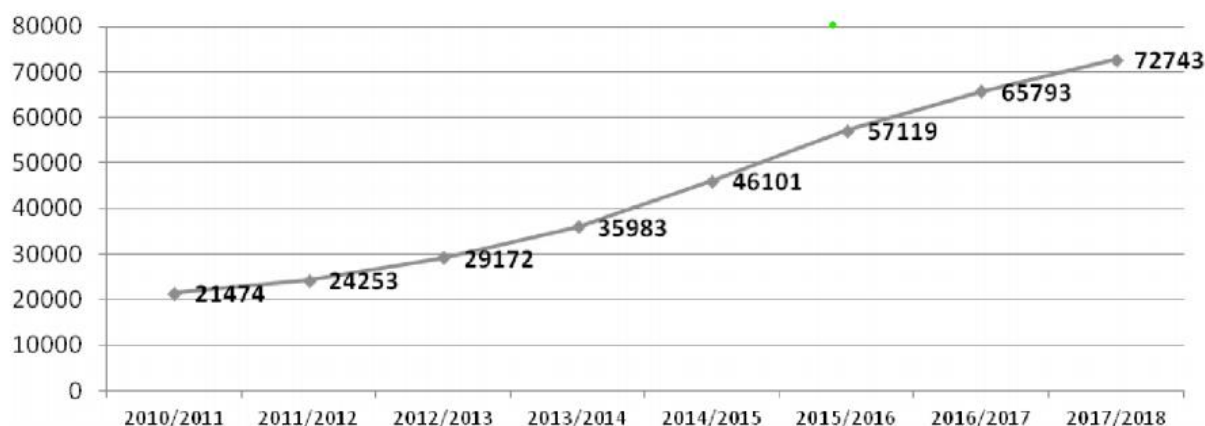


Figure 4. The number of international students in Poland (2010–2019) (Antonowicz, 2020)



First, the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine and the accompanying economic crises caused waves of emigration of Ukrainians to Poland. Many young people decided to bind their future, including education, precisely with Poland; hence the number of Ukrainian students increased eight times in 2009–2018, becoming the main reason for the increase indicators of most internationalization (but not all) Polish universities. Second, the demographic decline combined with the depletion of some people making up for the shortcomings in formal education resulted in a shortage of candidates for studies. The third factor is the awareness of the need to search for the most talented students worldwide as one of the elements building the university's brand.

The visits of Polish academic staff to European countries support the implementation of the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area, supporting the improvement of the quality of education and developing new study programs at Polish universities. Furthermore, the mentioned factors (quality and new study programmes) significantly influence university internationalization. Thus, the academic staff have the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus mobility program. In partnership projects, teachers choose to conduct classes abroad, participate in a short training course or take an intensive course for students (Euridyce, 2020).

The program co-funded from other EU funds the project “Masters of didactics” (Ministerstwo edukacji i nauki, 2017). The project (2017-2023) provides, among other things, preparation and implementation of the tutoring model and foreign study visits and training for Polish teachers in cooperation with foreign universities that are in the top 100 Shanghai ranking.

Poland proposes various national programs/initiatives to support the academic staff in conducting their research abroad. For example, the Mobility Plus Program (Ministerstwo edukacji i nauki, 2012), launched by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education in 2012, enables young researchers, including PhD students, to participate in foreign research centres. Another opportunity is the programs implemented by the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA, 2021). The Agency proposes several programs addressed mainly to foreign staff, including learning mobility.

Higher education internationalization in Poland presupposes the internationalization of scientific research and, as a result, citation of the Polish researchers. It was indirectly contributed by establishing two government agencies financing the research, namely the National Science Center (NCN) and the National Center for Research and Development (NCBiR). These Centers brought a lot of new research practices, starting with submission applications in English due to the global criteria of the scientific achievements of leaders and ending with gradual but successive inclusion in the review process by scientists from outside Polish science (Antonowicz, 2020). As a measure of their impact on science in Poland, there is a steady increase in the number of publications with Polish affiliations, published in journals indexed in the Scopus database (Fig. 5), especially in social sciences and humanities.



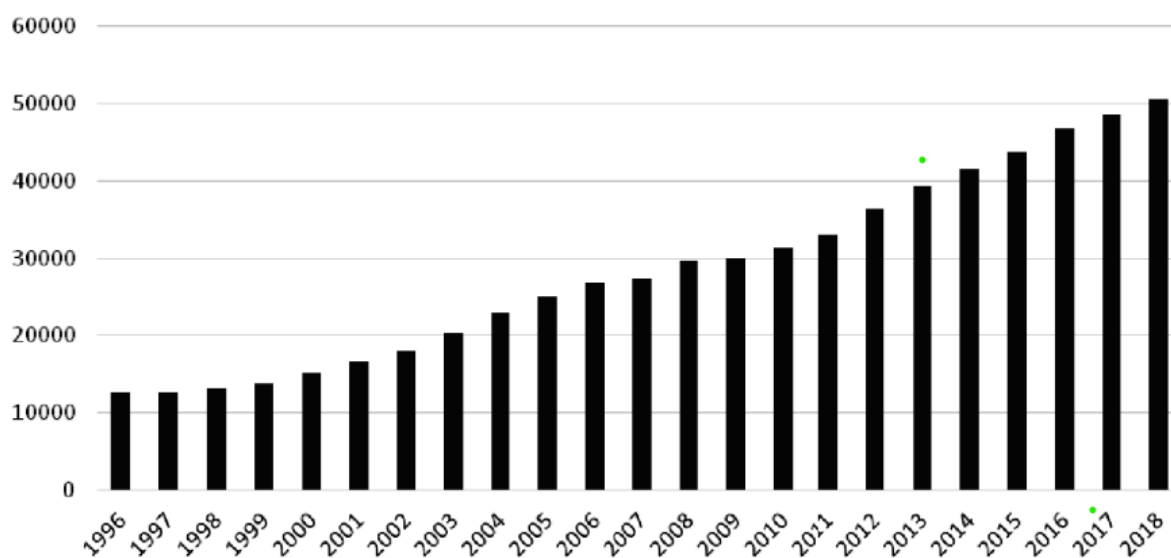
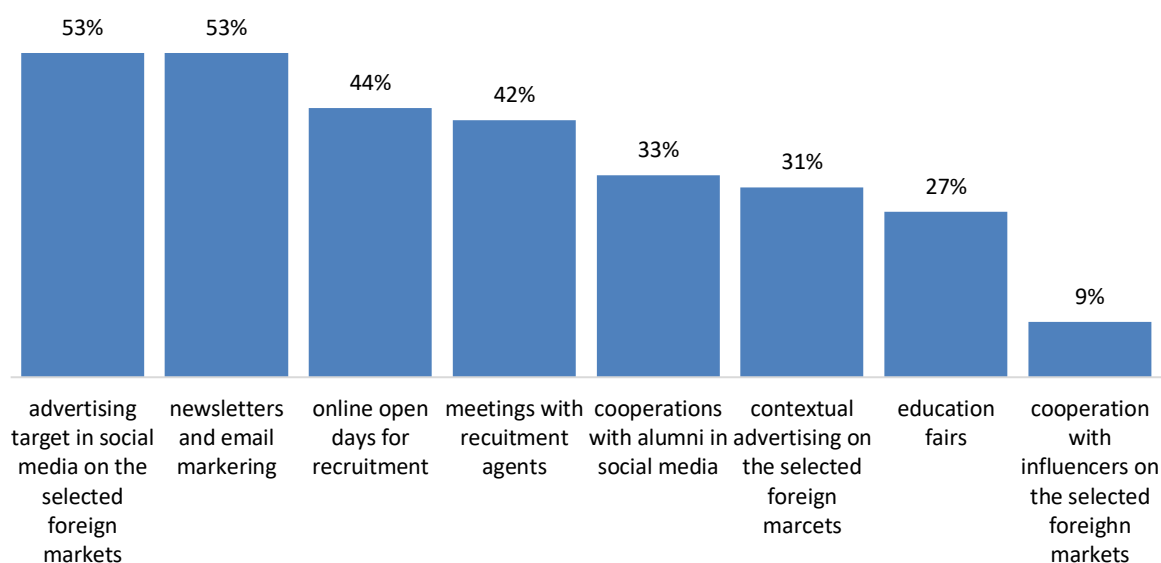


Figure 5. The number of publications in Scopus (Antonowicz, 2020)

In the opinion of Knight and McNamara (2017), one of the global trends in higher education is the diversity and complexity of operational models of distance learning, which include such forms as programmes implemented entirely within the framework of distance education (taking into account that students from a particular country, participate in self-education programs offered by a foreign university), MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) programs, in the framework of which students implement programs aimed at the mass market, distance education with an international business partner and distance education with a foreign university (academic partnership in the field of joint design curriculum, quality assurance procedures for the validation of learning outcomes and administrative coordination)

The level of internationalization of Polish higher education came under the microscope of the Supreme Audit Office. It is estimated that this indicator in Poland deviates in minus from the OECD average (in 2019: 8.9% in the OECD versus 6.4% in Poland). Nik notes a high risk of not reaching the level of 100 thousand rubles adopted in the "multi-year plan of cooperation with foreign countries of the Ministry of science and higher education" of 2018. international students at Polish universities in 2021 (the increase in 2019-2020 amounted to only 2.9 thousand. persons). It is partly due to the pandemic-significant restrictions on mobility that are not conducive to internationalization.

Due to the pandemic, HEIs had to change the ways to promote themselves in the international arena. As the number of international students is one of the internationalization criteria, universities switched to online promotional events (Fig. 6) (KRASP, 2020).



*Figure 6. Promotional and marketing tools for international recruitment*

Among the promotional and marketing tools available in the pandemic times, the most effective total advertising targeted in social media is widespread and cooperation with alumni on these platforms – 53% and 33% respectively, giving 86% responses. In addition, they gained relative popularity through newsletters and email marketing (53%). Open days for recruitment are also of significant popularity (44% of respondents). They replaced traditional events of this type in recruiting international students, which became more popular. Foreign fairs or meetings with agents also moved to the virtual world – 27% and 42% of respondents took advantage of the virtual fair option and meetings with online agencies. About 1/3 of the respondents also use contextual advertising on the selected foreign markets to increase their chances of upcoming recruitment.

Popowska (2015) proposed different steps for the Polish universities to create internal international culture. They include many small activities, often not very expensive but requiring increased organizational effort. These activities are the following:

- ✓ To include local governments in the internationalization process and at the university level – student organizations. It is, therefore, often necessary to find other "student" partners to support internationalization.

- ✓ Establishing service departments or offices for international students within the university structures specializing in serving students from outside the EU, i.e. groups requiring many formal and legal actions to regulate their stay in Poland.

- ✓ Creating support structures for the implementation of international projects in the field of didactics or science.

- ✓ Support for international accreditation processes for individual programs, faculties or the entire institution, and attention to participation in the international rankings.



✓ Caring for communication, its form, language and content, especially concerning recruiting students from abroad. Any procedural or linguistic complexities may be counterproductive.

✓ Transparency of the processes of recognizing previous education. Information about procedures should be listed as one of the basics in recruiting candidates for subsequent degree studies.

✓ Transparency of the tuition fee system, showing fairness in calculating fees and allocating for the development of universities.

✓ Creating possibilities to exchange students who will be mainly in need of foreign experiences on the labour market. It is recommended to use more flexible forms of recognition of education obtained abroad and reference qualifications framework rather than specific subjects.

✓ Considering the academic staff mobility and participation in the international projects in academic recruitment, evaluation, and promotion systems.

✓ Creating motivation systems, including payroll systems, encouraging teachers to conduct classes in foreign languages as part of developed educational programs for Polish and international students.

**Conclusion.** The benefits of internationalization of higher education are not limited to finance, economic growth and increased competitiveness. It deepens mutual understanding, multilingualism, personal and professional development of the young generation. It is also essential to build a positive image of the country abroad.

It is worth investing in internationalization, not only because of the tangible economic benefits but also to improve the quality of education. The multicultural environment mobilizes lecturers to improve teaching and gives students unique opportunities to connect internationally and learn from each other.

Poland's membership in the EU, geopolitical location of the country and the development of the knowledge economy are the main contributing factors increasing the level of internationalization of Polish higher education. Successes in this field are opportunities to develop science and higher education and Poland's more influential position in Europe and the world. Therefore, an effective state policy requires an indication of activities and tools necessary for their implementation.

While studying the methodology taken by Polish researchers and organizations to assess the level of internationalization, the authors became interested in international students' influence on the process in terms of international academic mobility. In addition, the academic staff mobility caused significant interest in increasing the internal international culture of a university and taking it at a higher level in the international rankings. So, the authors see the prospects of their further research in a detailed analysis of the mentioned factors.

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