

## EDITORIAL

# Internationalisation of universities in the network society

**Josep M. Duart**

Lecturer in Psychology and Education Sciences at the UOC and Director  
of the *Revista de Universidad y Sociedad del Conocimiento*

Why must we internationalise our university? This is, in our opinion, the question that any university management team must ask itself when faced with the challenge of internationalisation. In other words, the internationalisation of an institution must form part of its strategic planning and be based on its mission and vision. It cannot (and must not) be the result of improvisation. The reason for making internationalisation part of strategy at an institution is none other than the need to understand and underline the importance of defining the position, as an institution, that we want to take in our global society, what we want to contribute, and who we want our partners to be. It is, then, a positioning of the institution and, thus, strategically important.

The Monograph in this issue of RUSC looks at the internationalisation of universities. It has been coordinated by Hans de Wit, Professor of Internationalisation of Higher Education at the School of Economics and Management, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, University of Applied Sciences. It includes important contributions based on observation of specific experiences and analysis of the processes already in existence and the extensive literature on the subject. In line with RUSC's editorial line, the articles analyse and assess internationalisation of universities in the context of the information and knowledge society, a global environment, where the web is particularly important, bringing with it new challenges, opportunities and scenarios for internationalisation. There is no doubt that the articles in the monograph will be of great use to readers in terms of strategic internationalisation processes at universities.

In the network society, which is made up of nodes of influence, universities, (following a process of strategic reflection), have to assess which node or nodes they can inhabit, why and, above all, what they can provide them to ensure full acceptance. To form part of a node, universities need to contribute knowledge, experience, reflection, analysis, etc. This is why, for example, it is important that the institution work on the definition of its areas and spheres of excellence and the challenges to ensure sufficient credentials to form part of a node and a commitment, alongside other institutions, to its development and growth. We believe, then, that a university's internationalisation strategy has

to take into consideration the reality of our global network society with its agile internet-enabled communication processes and knowledge sharing based on the social knowledge networks that make it up.

In our opinion, reflection on internationalisation today cannot be based on what are now obsolete parameters such as the number of international students or faculty from abroad, the languages used in academic programmes, or the number of research projects involving universities from other countries. These elements may be clear indicators of success in our institutional strategy, but under no circumstances can they define it. In order to achieve good results in terms of these or other indicators, we need to set certain priorities and actions. Examples of these can be seen in the monograph's articles. An interesting strategy developed by some universities, thanks to the possibilities offered by the web, is the creation of hybrid programmes with global contents and objectives (i.e. a blended educational design that combines the on-site and off-site indistinctly and provides a learning continuum for faculty and students). These programmes incorporate, as part of their design, faculty from other institutions and countries or institutions with links to the subject under study. They have to be global in their design, in terms of their contents and objectives, and have to be aimed at a global and international audience. The programme's language, for example, will be defined as part of the course design and not pre-established for internationalisation. Another simpler, but equally interesting, example is the need to create programmes with useful international content not to attract foreign students, but to offer students in our own country or the University's immediate environs access to international content. University research and its dynamics based on projects and teams is, without doubt, another fundamental element in the design of internationalisation strategies. Once again, they will not be based on language or the number of foreigners forming part of the teams, but on the subject matter being researched, and on the quality and visibility of their contributions to the scientific community.

The internationalisation of a university is a strategic institutional concern and as such needs to be understood and organised. The network society offers new possibilities for universities, their programmes and academic communities to take their place in a global forum where they can contribute their knowledge and assess that which already exists. The institution has to define and position itself in this global forum so as to offer its excellence and knowledge.

Josep M. Duart  
Director of RUSC