

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT  
SEMMELWEIS UNIVERSITY'S FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES**

PhD thesis

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## **Introduction**

Semmelweis University's Faculty of Health Sciences (SE-ETK) has belonged to the group of elite universities training health care professionals in Hungary since its foundation in 1975. Closely following national and international tendencies and standards - and sometimes even foregoing those – the Faculty has continuously expanded and shaped its training offer based on the changes generated by the needs of society.

In my thesis, I introduce the process with which the Faculty seeks to meet the expectations of society and health professions induced by economical and social globalization. A vital element of the process is participation in the international relations of health sciences and higher education, and its active shaping: the creation of the personal, organizational and material conditions for participation in international cooperation – that is, “internationalization”.

I give an overview of the process of internationalization at Semmelweis University's Faculty of Health Sciences from the beginning to the present day, and I examine the effect of the internationalization process on the functional and educational system of the institution with the help of a case study: an assessment of the Atlantis program.

The Atlantis program is an outstanding, innovative international project in the frame of which the nursing students of SE-ETK can obtain a dual degree; that is, besides the degree of their home institution, they are awarded the Nursing BSc degree of a partner institution on the other side of the Atlantic. The project analyzed in detail in my work – in which I also played an active role as a program coordinator and teacher – integrates every element of internationalization; therefore it is a successful example realized in practice in the process of internationalization.

## **Introduction of the research**

It is internationalization through which institutions can reach the point where they are able to train professionals who can meet the expectations of society and different professions, and who can identify, interpret and manage linguistic, communicational and social differences.

The aim of my research is to explore the background motivations, give an overview of the history of the initiatives and activities directed towards internationalization, and examine the effect of the internationalization process on the functional and educational system of the institution with the help of a case study.

## **Methods of the study**

- LITERATURE ANALYSIS: analysis of the documents found in the library of the institution.
- QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY: survey about the intercultural necessities in the health care system.
- INTRODUCTION: analytical introduction of the Atlantis program.

## **Hypotheses**

I assumed that:

- SE-ETK shows a continuous development in regard to their international relations, and they play an exemplary, leading role in particular areas of international activities in Europe.
- The background motivations of the Faculty are in coherence with those listed and analyzed in the international technical literature.
- The Atlantis program is the most coherent, comprehensive project of SE-ETK in terms of internationalization, which means a specific innovation both regarding the professionals trained within the program and in the institutional and educational system of the Faculty.

In my **conclusions** I am expected to be able to:

- Give a prognosis about the future direction of the internationalization process.
- Spread the model of Atlantis we developed and ran as a good practice.
- Offer guidelines to the internationalization process of the dual degree.

**The first part of the research deals with an historical overview of Semmelweis University's Faculty of Health Sciences.**

Method, aim:

- **Literature analysis:** with the analysis of the documents found in the library of the Faculty I explore the elements regarded as milestones of internationalization from the foundation of SE-ETK until the present day (e.g. the shaping of the charter of the Faculty, foreign language teaching, mobility programs, training in a foreign language, its personal and material conditions, the advancement of infrastructural conditions).

**The second part of the research focuses on a survey of the intercultural necessities among the professionals working in the health care system.**

Method, aim:

- To assess the presence of intercultural competences in the training programs, and their realization in everyday practice (situation analysis) in particular professional circles with the help of a **questionnaire**.

**The third part of the research is the analytical introduction of the Atlantis program.**

Method, aim:

- To judge the effectiveness and role of the Atlantis program in the process of internationalization of SE-ETK with the help of **document analysis**. For the sake of this, I have analyzed the following documents:
  - the American and European (Hungarian and Finnish) project reports (2008, 2009, 2010);
  - documents and mobility data related to the management of the program as well as program's the student and teacher mobility.
- **Survey with a questionnaire** (TSET) how possible is it to gain intercultural proficiency during foreign studies organized in the frame of Atlantis.

## **Results, discussion**

The internationalization of societies and the processes of globalization raise new challenges towards health provision systems, including professional, ethical, social, cultural and communicational references of nursing and nursing education. The changes in demography and the system of provision, the development of technology, and the mobility of clients have largely modified the expectations towards health sciences higher education.

Globality, which can be interpreted as the common taking of responsibility of societies to solve common problems, has driven also the Faculty of Health Sciences to react to the needs of the society with timely, adequate and responsible answers and actions.

In my work, I tried to find the answer to how Semmelweis University's Faculty of Health Sciences can renew itself time after time, and what tools they can line up so that they can keep traditional values and make new types of competences learned as added values.

In my first hypothesis, I claim that SE-ETK shows a continuous development regarding their international relations, and in particular elements of activities they have an exemplary, leading role in Europe.

In my thesis I give an overview of the international relations of SE-ETK and its legal predecessor.

The technical literature clearly defines the most characteristic elements of internationalization: student mobility, teacher mobility, training in a foreign language, teaching foreign languages, international program and institutionalization.

During the study of the international development of the Faculty I was able to identify every indicator. Therefore, it can be guaranteed that SE-ETK can adequately react to the needs and expectations of society. Moreover, in order to maintain and even strengthen their marketability, they can offer the possibility of training professionals who are able to exhibit global thinking and culturally competent patient care in different situations during the practice of their professions.

The utilization of international experiences in the training process had already had a long tradition in the life of the legal predecessor of SE-ETK. And from around 2005 on, they have put a large emphasis on the quick development of international relations, including:

- the development of the quality and quantity of international relations,
- widespread application of various forms of cooperation,
- institutionalization of international relations.

Based on the study of the international relations of SE-ETK, it can be claimed that a clear line of development can be drawn up in the internationalization process of the Faculty.

As a result of conscious, purposeful development the personal, material and infrastructural conditions are at their disposal to create new, and maintain and develop existing international relations.

- **Training in a foreign language:** 9.8% of students come from abroad which ratio exceeds the Hungarian average of 6.6%, and meets the average of the developed European countries, and also meets the directives of the EU.
- **Teaching foreign languages:** the Department of Foreign Technical Languages was set up at the foundation of the Faculty in 1975, which organizes the training and examination of both students and staff. The number of students passing a language test at the Faculty is decreasing year by year due to the fact that more and more students possess a language examination already at the time of their admission to the Faculty.
- **Good indicators of student and staff mobility:** the number of outgoing students is stagnant, while the number of incoming students and teachers is increasing. This is due to the Faculty operating foreign language trainings, and also to the growing international popularity of SE-ETK, and the outstanding quality of their trainings.
- In order to realize internationalization **the Faculty has lined up various methods**, the variety of which proves the complex, conscious approach to the problem:
  - off campus training in Switzerland,
  - hosting an off-campus training program in Traditional Chinese Medicine
  - setting up tailor-made intensive programs, which are in line with the current international requirements and professional trends,
  - the Faculty's ambitions in the **Far East** are in coherence with the indicators showing that Hungarian health sciences trainings have great potential in that region, and also in Africa and the Middle East,
  - the international program aiming at the **dual degree** which, based on my study, integrates every element of internationalization.

**In my second hypothesis**, I tried to verify that the background motivations of the Faculty are similar to those listed in the international technical literature. The theories of globalization describe globalization and the related political, economical, social and cultural questions, civilization interactions and multiculturalism, in deep detail.

Among the factors of motivation are the following: meeting the changing needs of the society, maintaining the marketability of the Faculty, meeting challenges of the higher education reform and cultural changes, shaping the European Higher Education Area, requirements of international reform processes, changes in the domestic legal background, and the consideration of international trends and the application of these among domestic circumstances and peculiarities.

The advancement of the above processes of globalization gives a larger surface and intensity to the interaction of different cultures, religions and civilizations. The changes have certainly affected the system of health provision by generating new needs, expectations and requirements on the levels of both the individual and the society. In my work, I tried to assess the needs of the professionals working in the Hungarian system of health provision in the above aspect.

The survey performed among health professionals working in practice proved that there is a **real demand** for intercultural skills and knowledge related to the expectations of the society. However, they only partially possess these skills: there are only limited personal and material conditions.

Based on the results of the survey there is a large number of those who do not possess, or cannot judge their intercultural skills related to the expectations and phenomena of society. There is a large difference between those who speak a foreign language and know different systems of provision, and those who do not speak any language but Hungarian, and are not familiar with any system of provision other than the Hungarian one.

More than 90% of the respondents regard these skills as important in their work, and judge the necessity of linguistic and cultural elements in the nursing protocols as significant. In the meantime only 10% think that they are fully capable of meeting the cultural, linguistic and social demands in the system of provision.

I also studied the coherence between qualification and intercultural capabilities, and made a comparison of answers given by BSc nurses and nurses holding a secondary qualification related to **knowledge/skills and attitude**. I sought answers to the question of what the difference between the two groups of professionals is.

Based on my findings, it can be stated that more professionals holding a BSc degree speak a foreign language, and they also have a higher level of knowledge and more practical experience. This result is due to the fact that from 1993 on a mass of health professionals holding a BSc degree have evolved who have more than 15 years of professional experience. A contributing factor is that a lot of them completed their studies while working.

Regarding the attitude component, the BSc qualification holders think that non-verbal communication and the socio-cultural peculiarities of patients are more important when considering the well-being of patients. Again, a majority of them regard the practical protocols in nursing adequate, while those with a secondary qualification do not.

To sum up: although I got better results in the components of skills and attitude from the BSc nurses, there is still room for improvement for the above reasons.

Through the analysis of the results, the question arose whether it made sense to make further examinations and attempt to find an explanation for the above difference: does insufficient knowledge resulting from the qualification, the date of graduation, and the years of experience or the field of work makes the difference?

In my opinion, the reason for the results related to both the intercultural knowledge and skills, and the attitude component is the **deficiency in practical training**. This is a multi-sectorial problem affecting both the system of provision and health sciences training.

Another possible solution to the problem has been tried in the frame of the Atlantis program. It was not the notion of health sciences higher education but that of the European Higher Education Area.

Data in technical literature prove that institutions are aware of the significance of intercultural competences, but they have insufficient number and quality of tools necessary to reach these.

Certain curricula contain elements of theoretical preparation but again, data show that because health sciences higher education is so practice-oriented, theoretical knowledge can only be interiorized with practical training.

**In my third hypothesis** I claim that the Atlantis program is the most comprehensive and broad one in the history of the Faculty, which means a specific innovation regarding the professionals we train, and also in the institutional and teaching system of the Faculty. I assumed that the mobility realized in the frame of the program can complement the deficiency in the practical preparation of students.

**The results support my hypothesis.**

In order to examine the coherences between the Atlantis program and the internationalization process of the Faculty I used the **cycle model** described by Jane Knight.



The results of the analysis show that the Program integrates every component of the internationalization process summed up in technical literature.

The mobility data of the Program show the success and functionality of Atlantis. Every participating Hungarian student (15 persons) successfully completed the requirements of Atlantis and those of the Faculty, and 10 of them also passed every examination of the US partner, and therefore earned the American diploma as well. Though two more Hungarian students successfully passed their American exams, they have not passed the Hungarian exams yet, and therefore have not obtained either diploma. (Obtaining the home institution's degree is a prerequisite of being awarded the host institution's degree.)

The Finnish students were similarly successful to their Hungarian colleagues. Six of the American students obtained their home diplomas and four of these earned the Hungarian diploma as well. One US student has met every requirement of SE-ETK but has not passed all her American exams; therefore she has not obtained either degree, yet.

The dual degrees we issued prove that the training program we developed successfully integrates the elements of both the European and the American curricula.

Based on the feedbacks of teachers who participated in the program there are a few very important added values of Atlantis:

1. getting a deep insight into all three countries' health systems;
2. getting to know new teaching cultures;
3. having the opportunity to learn and integrate new methods of pedagogy;
4. practicing professional language in a multicultural environment;
5. individual professional and cultural development of teachers.

According to the professional literature, international relations must have the **skill of intercultural communication** in a particular foreign language. It is important for professionals to be able to use that foreign language properly, in addition to properly carrying out practical tasks.

Both the expectations of the project and the feedback received from the teachers support the assertion that Atlantis offers an excellent opportunity to practice professional language in an intercultural environment, which contributes to the development of teachers' intercultural communication competence.

A vital element of internationalization is **intercultural proficiency** gained in international programs.

One of the aims of Atlantis was to contribute to the training of professionals with intercultural competence. We regard it important to consider the extent to which the program has reached this goal.

During the analysis of Atlantis, we assessed with the help of a questionnaire (Transcultural Self Efficacy Test - TSET), to what extent it is possible to gain intercultural proficiency in the frame of the mobility organized in the program. TSET contains components of knowledge, attitude, behavior and competence, and is based on the cultural competence and self-assessment model of Jeffrey's (Cultural Competence and Confidence – CCC). I made a comparison of the results of this questionnaire with those of the US and Finnish partners.

The independent surveys performed by all three partners show that the students participating in the program:

- report a high level of intercultural proficiency; the majority of the respondents marked the upper one-third of the scale, which shows a remarkably higher level than in the survey performed among practicing professionals;
- are open to cultural diversities and
- possess the skill of thinking globally.

Our results **confirm** the data in the professional literature, that the process of intercultural learning does not only mean the study of theoretical material, but also the acquisition of skills and abilities via experiences and, in some cases, even by experimentation.

During the four years of the program, the teaching methodology, and also the **institutional and administrative background** of Atlantis were developed; including the credit transfer process, division of semesters, TCN certificate, language tutorial system, and the system of thesis tutoring. A new study model was created, that is a standardized way for students which, by following the institutional practice of credit transfer, lead to the diplomas of both the home and host institutions in a standardized, automatic way. Therefore, it can truly be claimed that the **process of institutionalization of Atlantis** has been realized.

The training model processed in the frame of the Atlantis program can be regarded as a new tool, the functionality and effectiveness of which have been proved. Since its foundation, the Faculty has always been able to respond continuously to the new challenges of globalization. To be able to do so, the Faculty has always strived to renew and create new personal, material and infrastructural conditions, and the result of this process is the current, extensive system of international relations, and the world's first and entirely successful dual degree program in nursing.

## **Recommendations**

- Continuous revision and development of the internationalization strategy of the Faculty, and its adjustment to the ever changing economical, social and professional needs. The final aim is unchanged, though: the development of international relations and the integration of international program in the training structure and everyday life of the Faculty.
- The development of profit-oriented international relations and the related international marketing according to the needs and demands of the particular market.
- Application, extension and testing the mobility program processed in the frame of Atlantis in other professional trainings.
- Due to the high costs of the program, it can serve as the basis of a talent support program instead of its application in mass education. In order for the Faculty to be able to sustain the program, I propose the introduction of a scholarship system, which could support talented Hungarian and foreign students to participate in dual or multilateral international mobility programs.
- Spreading and publication of results.

### **Publications related to the topic of thesis**

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