

# **Attracting International Students to Semi-Peripheral Countries.**

## **A Comparative Study of Norway, Poland and Portugal**

### **Introduction**

This paper investigates the strategies employed to attract full-degree international students to three countries from the periphery of the European Economic Area: Norway, Poland and Portugal. It aims to examine under which circumstances, why and how national governments in these countries have prioritised international student recruitment as an explicit goal in higher education policy. The concept of centre and periphery is inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of 'world system' (Wallerstein, 1974) which defines core countries, semi-periphery countries and periphery countries based on the structure of the economy. We transpose this taxonomy to the economy of international education as evidenced by the inflow/outflow of students. Thus, for the sake of this analysis, we consider countries to be in the centre (core-countries) if they are major 'importers' of international students, thus popular (global) destinations (e.g. the US, UK, Australia, but also France, Germany, the Netherlands or Switzerland). Semi-peripheral countries are those which have a more balanced inflow/outflow of students (they can be regarded as 'exporters' and 'importers' of international students). They are not major players on the market of international students, lying farther away from the centre, however they still demonstrate capacity to attract international students, albeit to a lesser extent than the former. Norway, Poland and Portugal fall into this category. Finally, in our analysis the periphery countries are those which fail to attract international students and are mainly 'exporters', supplying the global market with students who choose to study abroad, due to limited institutional capacity, underdeveloped higher education systems, low quality of education or economic/political reasons.

This study is based on the assumption that semi-peripheral countries have to develop different strategies to attract international students because of their disadvantaged starting positions on the global market and because they often lack tradition of international education. According to Urbanovič et al (2014), small countries face different challenges compared to the major recruiting countries. First, they are late-comers on the international student market, implying a lack of the ‘first-mover advantage’ of countries like the UK, the US, Australia or Canada. Second, for many countries, limited financial resources and a lack of economies of scale may mean an inability to invest in infrastructure (e.g., accommodation and library facilities), marketing/branding and human resources (as may be the case of Portugal and Poland, but not Norway). International student recruitment in countries not traditionally at the forefront of the international student market has been under-researched (França et al, 2018). This study – comparative in nature – aims to find commonalities as well as national particularities and distinctive advantages that each country exploits in order to enrol more international students. Since recruitment to the peripheries of the global education market (Cantwell, 2017) has been little studied in these contexts, this paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the strategies developed by semi-peripheral countries to attract international students.

The paper conducts a comparative analysis of recruitment policies and strategies and operationalises this through the following research themes: (a) the time and circumstances under which international student recruitment became a policy goal with high priority; (b) the rationales behind the policies of the three analysed countries and, finally, (c) the instruments that the governments have deployed in order to foster the recruitment of international students. The paper also offers a final reflection around the specific measures that semi-peripheral countries undertake

in this respect and also examines push and pull factors that each country exploits and promotes as comparative advantages. This analysis is confined to governmental policy, although it is acknowledged that this activity involves a variety of different actors. Notwithstanding this, the government plays a dominant role by setting the rules and facilitating public resources accordingly. The paper also identifies the major policy actors involved in the implementation of national strategies (such as agencies for the promotion of the country as a study destination, university associations, foreign office etc.) and the dynamics in actors' operational environments, e.g. external events and emerging (market) demands to which they have to respond (Salerno, 2007). From a methodological point of view, the paper utilises document analysis and evaluates national strategies, policy documents and national legislations which have (direct or indirect) impact on the recruitment of international students.

### **International student recruitment: conceptual backdrop**

Worldwide, the number of students enrolled in higher education (HE) abroad (full-degree students) grew from 3 million in 2005 to 4.6 million in 2015 (OECD, 2017). Aware of the economic potential of HE, many governments have developed policies and incentives for institutions to attract international students (Cremonini and Antonowicz, 2009; Stier, 2004). English-speaking countries are the main destinations of students who pursue education abroad (Barnett *et al.* 2016; OECD, 2017). According to OECD, the country that attracts the highest number of international students is the United States. In Europe, the United Kingdom, France and Germany are the most popular destinations (OECD, 2017). However, smaller European countries have lately become aware of the opportunity presented by increasing flows of international students (Cox, 2013; Kondakci, 2011; Mosneaga and Agergaard, 2012) as a means of compensating for a declining demography and

dwindling public funding. Student mobility is, indeed, the most frequent international activity of European HEIs, with interest shifting from the national to the European or the worldwide community (Sursock, 2015). Similarly, a survey in 38 European countries (European University Association, 2013) revealed that attracting international students is the utmost priority in terms of internationalisation. A European Parliament report on internationalisation of higher education (de Wit et al., 2015) argues that countries share several common goals such as: increased importance of reputation (seen through rankings), visibility and competitiveness; the competition for talented students and scholars; short-term and/or long-term economic gains and demographic considerations. Therefore, in a context of a global higher education (HE) and decreasing numbers of traditional home students across Europe (de Wit et al., 2015), recruitment of international students could, in the medium-long term, ensure the sustainability and survival of many HEIs.

In order to systemize our analysis of rationales for recruiting international students, we use an analytical framework that has been applied in several studies and which identifies four types of rationales for internationalisation policies (Blumenthal et al., 1996; van der Wende, 1997; Knight and de Wit, 1995). *Cultural rationales* reflect a concern with cultural diversity and improving students' intercultural understanding and communication, but can also be related to the use of a common language. *Political rationales* are centred on the status and role of a country in the world, therefore emerging highly relevant from a national perspective. *Academic rationales* are present when the objective is to reach international teaching and research standards, assuming that internationalisation will add value to the quality of education and contribute in this respect. Finally, *economic rationales* are present when internationalisation becomes market-oriented and is seen as a way of generating revenue or attracting future highly-skilled workers.

Policy rationales only reveal governments' motivations and intentions. For this reason, the tools that governments employ with a view to implementation, i.e. the policy instruments used to increase the number of international students, are also important to consider, as they complement the picture of international student recruitment policies with actual concrete initiatives. Therefore, the paper addresses two issues: (a) rationales, or why national governments have given political priority to international student recruitment; (b) instruments, or how this political area has been translated into policy action. In order to address the latter question, we use Evert Vedung's (1998) taxonomy of policy instruments according to the degree of 'authoritative force': regulations (sticks), economic means (carrots) and information (sermons). Regulations (sticks) are 'measures undertaken by governmental units to influence people by means of formulated rules and directives which mandate receivers to act in accordance to what is ordered in these rules and directives' (Vedung, 1998, 31). Laws and decrees which steer institutional activity towards international recruitment could fall under this category. Economic means (carrots) leave policy recipients to decide on the course of action. However, financial or in-kind incentives encourage them to choose the option preferred by the authoritative body, as 'economic means make it cheaper or more expensive in terms of money, time, effort, and other valuables to pursue certain actions' (Vedung, 1998, 32). Economic benefits derived from enrolling international students is an example in this sense. Information (sermons), the third category, is defined as 'moral suasion' and covers 'attempts at influencing people through the transfer of knowledge, the communication of reasoned argument, and persuasion'. Vedung stresses that information should not be understood exclusively as objective knowledge and facts; it also covers 'recommendations about how citizens should act and behave' (Vedung, 1998, 33). National strategies which recommend a desired course of action and country branding and marketing campaigns are examples in this respect. Importantly, Vedung also

discusses the choice of ‘doing nothing’, non-interference or the policy-of-non-policy (Antonowicz, 2012), in which case international recruitment is simply fashionable political rhetoric.

How international students make choices of study destinations and what determines the direction of student flows becomes essential for the formulation and operationalisation of government policies. Therefore, a brief overview of determinants of student choices can put policy developments in a broader context and help to understand their direction. Given the intense market competition (Varghese, 2008), marketing and academic branding have become important to influence choice and decision-making by potential candidates (Drori, 2013; Nicolescu, 2009). In the decision to study abroad, the choice of country usually precedes the choice of institution (Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). According to OECD (2016), there are four underlying premises for students’ choice of host country: language of instruction, quality of programmes, tuition fees and immigration policy. Empirical studies addressing underlying dimensions for mobility patterns (Caruso and de Wit, 2015; Beine et al., 2014) have identified other factors as well: expenditure per student, perceptions of safety, openness of the economy, economic conditions of the host country and migrant network in the host country. Perkins and Neumayer (2014) claim that income in destination countries, together with relational ties created by colonial linkages, common language and pre-existing migrant stocks are far more influential than quality. In relation to peripheral countries, Kondakci (2011) suggests that the nature of cultural, political, and historical proximity between home and host countries determines the size and direction of in-flowing student mobility. Thus, despite the general mobility flows from economically less developed toward economically developed countries, regional hubs in the periphery are capable of attracting students largely originating from other countries of the periphery (Kondakci, 2011). In turn, Börjesson (2017) identifies three distinct mobility patterns and poles of

recruitment: the Pacific pole, describing student flows from Asia to North America, Oceania and the UK; the central European pole, comprising intra-European mobility; and the French/Iberian pole, describing recruitment from former colonies to South Western Europe. These reflect different recruitment logics: a market logic, a proximity logic and a colonial logic, respectively.

### Data and methods

The study relied on desk-based research. A search was conducted of policy documents, legislation, reports, statements or position papers, issued by governmental bodies or other relevant organisations, which addressed internationalisation in general and student recruitment in particular (see Table 1). The selected documents were subjected to a thematic analysis regarding the strategies, the rationales and the instruments employed to increase the attractiveness of these countries for international students. This analysis also allowed the identification of the major actors involved in international student recruitment.

Country	Policy documents
Norway	<p>Om høyere utdanning [On higher education] (1985). White paper no 19. Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Grenseløs læring [Borderless knowledge] (1989). Green paper 1989:13</p> <p>Gjør din plikt, krev din rett. Kvalitetsreform av høyere utdanning [Do your duty, demand your rights. Quality reform in higher education] (2001). White paper no 27.</p> <p>Internasjonalisering av utdanning [Internationalisation of Education] (2009) White paper no 14.</p> <p>Kultur for kvalitet i høyere utdanning [Culture for quality in higher education] (2017) White paper no 16.</p>

<p>Poland</p>	<p>Partnerstwo dla Wiedzy. Reforma szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce [Partnership for Knowledge. Reform of Higher Education] (2009) Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MNiSW)</p> <p>Założenia do nowelizacji ustawy – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym oraz ustawy o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki [White paper – The law on higher education and the law on academic degrees and titles] (2009) MNiSW.</p> <p>Program umiędzynarodowienia szkolnictwa wyższego [The programme of internationalisation of higher education] (2015) MniSW..</p> <p>Rozporządzenie MNiSW w sprawie statutu Narodowej Agencji Wymiany Akademickiej [Ordinance of Ministry of Science and Higher Education about National Agency for Academic Exchange] (2017) MniSW.</p>
<p>Portugal</p>	<p>Uma estratégia para a internacionalização do ensino superior português [A strategy for the internationalisation of Portuguese Higher Education] (2014). Ministry of Regional Development and Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Decree-Law 36/2014: Statute of the International Student (2014). Ministry of Education and Science.</p> <p>Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 47/2015. [Resolution of the Council of Ministers].</p> <p>Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 78/2016. [Resolution of the Council of Ministers].</p> <p>PortugalGlobal: A crescente internacionalização do ensino superior português. (2017). AICEP (Portuguese Agency for Foreign Investment and Trade).</p>

Table 1. Analysed documents related to the internationalisation of higher education.

No unique international database for the three countries was deemed sufficiently accurate to compare the trends in student flows to Norway, Poland and Portugal. Even when data was apparently available (UNESCO-UIS), a mismatch between the numbers contained therein and national statistics was observed. For this reason, the numbers presented in this paper are obtained



from databases, sometimes national and sometimes international, which the authors trusted to be reliable based on their knowledge of the national higher education system. These numbers represent reference points for policy-makers, an aspect which legitimizes them in policy developments. In Norway, information about student numbers was retrieved from Statistics Norway, Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU) and the doctoral register of the Nordic Institute for studies in Innovation, Research and Education (Sarpebakken, 2016). In Poland, the data come from the Central Statistical Office (GUS). In Portugal, the source of information is the General Directorate for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC). Although national statistics which discriminate degree-mobile students have only been available since 2013, the increase in international students is evident even in this short time period (see Appendix 1 for an overview of international students in the three countries). In this paper, ‘international students’ are understood as full-degree students on diploma mobility, both undergraduate and postgraduate, and the numbers presented reflect this understanding. If data refers to only a specific student group, this will be made clear.

In Norway, international students represent around 10% of total enrolments at the bachelor and master level (SIU, 2016).<sup>i</sup> The proportion is higher at the doctorate level, foreign citizens constituting 39% of all PhD graduates in 2017 (<https://www.nifu.no/fou-statistiske/fou-statistikk/doktorgrader/>). The number of international students rose sharply at the beginning of this century (Wiers-Jenssen, 2018) but growth has slowed down in recent years. As the table in Appendix (A1) shows, international students in Norway come from a wide range of countries. Many come from neighbouring countries with a similar language (Sweden and Denmark), and increasing numbers come from Germany. Students from China, Russia and Poland are also highly represented.

In Poland, international students constitute approximately 4.9 % of the total student population, but only most recently the number jumped to the highest level in history (GUS, 2016). For years, the number of international students demonstrated modest but stable growth, but this changed in 2005 triggering a dynamic and sustainable increase. The driving force of internationalisation are Ukrainian students who are dominant (54%) (see Appendix). International students are almost equally distributed between bachelor programmes (and medicine) 5.1%, then MA programmes 4.4%, and the least proportion of 3.3% international students is registered in doctoral programmes (GUS, 2016). The latter is most probably the side-effect of critically low level of public spending on research.

In Portugal, in 2014, international students represented 4.1% of total tertiary enrolments (OECD, 2016). Doctoral programmes registered the largest percentage (15.8%), followed by master programmes (4.9%) and by bachelor degrees (2.6%). The same year, among OECD countries, Portugal's share of international students was 1% compared to 0.51% in 2011 (MADR/MEC, 2014), suggesting a twofold increase in three years. Around two thirds of international students come from Portuguese-speaking countries (former Portuguese colonies). Chinese students in particular have registered a threefold increase between 2014 and 2017 (see Appendix), because universities individually and through their representative body have stepped up efforts to advertise themselves to this public, as China is perceived as an appealing target with large potential.

The following sections present the main findings about the time and circumstances under which international student recruitment became a policy goal with high priority; the rationales behind the

policies of the three analysed countries; and the instruments that the governments have deployed to foster the recruitment of international students.

### **Emergence of international student recruitment as a political priority**

International student recruitment, as a dimension of internationalisation, has become a political priority in Poland and Portugal only recently, while in Norway it has been a priority since the late 1980s, but especially over the past two decades. At this time, the major international student recruiters had already managed to develop their national strategies and also built recruitment channels. The analysed semi-peripheral countries entered the global international student market later than core countries. In Poland and Norway, the policy shifts toward internationalisation came as part of a bigger reform agenda aimed at the modernisation of higher education, the ‘Quality Reform’ in Norway (2003) and the ‘Partnership for Knowledge’ (MNiSW, 2009a) in Poland, while in Portugal the shift was marked by the publication of a national strategy for the internationalisation of higher education (MADR/MEC, 2014). Politically, the shift was initiated by the central governments which also took initiatives to transform it into action.

Norway started discussing internationalisation and recruitment of students from abroad in the 1980s. Student mobility was seen as a deliberate strategy for internationalisation of higher education, and increasing the number of international students became a goal (Ministry of Education, 1985). A committee was established by the government to consider priorities regarding recruiting international students to Norway, and the recommendations were published in a report (Norges offentlige utredninger, 1989, 13). Central recommendations were to create more programmes in English and to establish a centre for internationalisation of education. The fact that

Norway joined the ERASMUS programme as early as 1989 (despite not being a member of the European Union) is a sign of its commitment to internationalisation in higher education. This was confirmed with the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999, followed by a higher education reform called the ‘Quality Reform’ from 2003, implementing a new degree structure in line with the Bologna principles (Ministry of Education and Research, 2001). The positive effects of attracting students from abroad, such as including a wider range of perspectives in HE, are underscored in a white paper on internationalisation of higher education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009) and repeated in a white paper on quality in higher education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

In Poland the real policy shift dates from 2009. Before, internationalisation remained marginal in HE policy, which was mainly focused on addressing the unintended consequences of rapid expansion (Pinheiro and Antonowicz, 2014). The lack of international students stemmed from a historical legacy of Polish higher education – namely, close links with the nation-state – which prioritized a focus on domestic students. The first syndromes of change appeared in 2004, when the first moves to implement the Bologna process were made, drawing attention to international education and triggering (initially slowly) the process of internationalisation at home. However, the governmental attitude changed mostly due to external normative pressure (Altbach, 2013), associated with the growing popularity of the global rankings that shed light on deficits in Polish universities. One of the major shortcomings revealed by the rankings was the lack of international students, which the government saw as proxy for backwardness and fixed attitudes that led to failure in adapting to a dynamically changing environment (Pacholski, 2005; Thieme, 2009). This largely stood at odds with the country’s great aspiration to become a rising star in Central and

Eastern Europe, matching its economic and political success, which prompted the government at least to consider it as a policy issue.

In Portugal, although the Bologna reforms (2006 onwards) turned internationalisation more visible, the turning point as far as recruitment of international students is concerned came only in 2014 with the launch of a national strategy for the internationalisation of higher education and a piece of legislation facilitating the recruitment of international students (Decree-Law 36/2014). The strategy was elaborated by the Ministries of Regional Development and of Education and Science (MADR/MEC, 2014), intending to align Portuguese higher education with the globalisation trends in science and education. As the new strategy recognised, the internationalisation of Portuguese HE has been ‘diffuse, misarticulated and with modest results, when compared to the invested resources’ since ‘many institutions carry out their activities in isolation, without taking full advantage of the skills and competences that can be mobilized’ (MADR/MEC, 2014, 11-12). For this reason, it appeared ‘essential to develop a national strategy for the internationalisation of Portuguese higher education that, without undermining institutional autonomy, provides coherence to the fragmented efforts that are being promoted by several institutions on their own’ (pp. 17-18). The strategy also aims to tackle ‘the great disarticulation among the diverse public administration sectors and the involved organisations’ (p. 10). The recruitment of international students stands out as a main action plan. The objective is to double their number by 2020, claiming there is ample room to improve performance in this area. Traditionally, international students in Portugal came from the former colonies, but their enrolment was motivated by political and cultural proximity, rather than integrated in a strategic higher education area of activity. Summing up, the strategy appears to have recognised the need for concerted and coherent national action to achieve better internationalisation.

The analysis shows that international student recruitment came on the political agenda of the three countries as part of wider reform packages that aimed to modernize and/or internationalise national systems of higher education. Before, this activity area was left to individual HEIs, with hardly any supporting actions or mobilisation of resources from the central government. The policy shift took place mostly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (in Norway, although the process started in the 1980s, it accelerated from 2000) and timing here is not accidental. Although the process was spread in time, circumstances under which it occurred show some similarities. The governments re-considered their higher education policy priorities in response to globalisation (Kwiek and Dobbins, 2017) and driven by comprehensive European reforms. Thus, although more than a decade later than in the leading recruiting countries, higher education in semi-peripheries countries also got caught up in the webs of globalisation. Moreover, the ability to attract international students turned into a proxy for global attractiveness and prestige not only of HEIs, but of countries.

### **The hierarchy of policy rationales**

The rationales behind international student recruitment vary depending on context. Since the vast majority of previous research is naturally focused on the pioneers (França et al, 2018), it is worthwhile exploring what has driven internationalisation in semi-peripheral countries. In order to do so, we use the four different types of rationales for internationalisation (Blumenthal et al., 1996; Knight and de Wit, 1995; van der Wende, 1997). As mentioned above, the interest in attracting international students is generally multi-faceted and, therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint a particular rationale in each of the analysed countries. It is rather a combination of all four rationales, albeit the weight of each rationale varies between countries.

*Political rationales* play a very important role in the three countries, but with totally different nuances and different regions in which they wish to affirm themselves. For Norway, the EU policy on HE and student mobility has been of vital importance to the shaping of Norwegian policy on internationalisation (Gornitzka and Langfeldt, 2008). However, the cooperation with the EU is more strongly reflected in credit mobility than in full-degree mobility. Norway has substantial cooperation with a wide range of countries, in addition to the EU. The Nordic region is considered important (Elken, Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen ., 2015) but so is cooperation with USA and BRICs countries, Russia in particular (Wiers-Jenssen and Sandersen, 2017). Traditionally, there has been a focus on international solidarity and capacity building in developing countries, including public funding programmes and grants for students from developing countries. Such programmes at the intersection of education policy and foreign aid policy still exist, but have been reformed in recent years, resulting in falling number of students from developing countries. The broad range of regions that Norway cooperates with illustrate that political rationales are definitely present.

Poland aims to increase its status and role in the region, as a newly established member of the European Union, aspiring to perform a much bigger role in Europe (Kołodko, 2009). It enjoys the image of a dynamically developing country on the way of full integration with the western world. However, Polish higher education seems not to use its full potential (in particular as reflected in global university rankings). This is explicitly demonstrated in various policy documents, for example: ‘Membership in the EU, the geopolitical location of our country and the development of knowledge economy are circumstances that shall foster internationalisation of higher education. Success in this field becomes a window of opportunity to develop higher education and strengthen Poland’s role in Europe and beyond’ (MNiSW, 2015).

Portugal, in contrast, aims to maintain its outstanding position as a student destination among Portuguese-speaking countries and to act as a bridge between these countries and the European Union, as stated in the above mentioned strategy (see also França et al, 2018). It therefore puts emphasis on the privileged relationship with Portuguese-speaking countries. Interested in preserving cultural and political relationships with the community of Portuguese-speaking countries (*Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa - CPLP*), the Portuguese government has been subsidising places for students from former Portuguese territories (Sin et al., 2016). The Portuguese language is portrayed as an asset for international recruitment. However, the 2014 strategy expresses a clear interest in diversifying the sources of international students, since the low number of enrolments from other countries represents a considerable growth opportunity.

Equally important in Poland and Portugal seem to be the economic rationales, while in Norway (which is more affluent compared to the other two countries), this appears to be less of an issue in policy documents. The latter is partly due to the fact that most HEIs are public, and that these do not charge tuition fees. Hence, there is an absence of direct economic incentives for recruiting international students. But Poland and Portugal – more representative for the semi-peripheral category, as they have struggled with an economic crisis, austerity measures and less expenditure on higher education (Fonseca et al., 2015, Kwiek, 2014) – tend more easily to see international students as ‘cash cows’ (Choudaha, 2017) and as a window of opportunity for generating financial revenue. In Portugal, the Decree-Law 36/2014 (also known as the Statute of the International Student) states that the ‘recruitment of international students allows...increasing own revenue, which can be used to strengthen quality and diversification of teaching, and has a positive impact in the economy’. In Poland, the draft amendment (MNiSW, 2009b, 14) underlined that in several



countries tuition fees are an important source of revenue for HEIs. This statement was illustrated by a rough estimation of revenues that leading countries of foreign recruitment can generate from tuition fees paid by international students. The government sent strong messages to HEIs that international students can bring in substantial money. Invoking financial arguments in policies by the governments is rather inconvenient, as the latter would have to admit their failure to provide adequate resources. Thus, the policy narratives put greater emphasis on emerging ‘financial opportunities’ that international student recruitment brings for HEIs.

Much lesser focus is put on *academic rationales*, whose objective is to reach international teaching and research standards, assuming that internationalisation will add value to the quality of education and contribute in this respect. Only in Norway does this emerge as a major driving force for international student recruitment, where policy is based on an assumption that internationalisation improves the quality in HE (Ministry of Education and Research, 2009; 2017). For Poland and Portugal, international student recruitment is instrumentalised in order to achieve politically more significant needs/goals, namely increase/maintain the countries’ position and status in their areas of interest (Central and Eastern Europe and, respectively, the CPLP countries) and also increase financial revenues for HEIs. Both issues are not really policy issues in Norway, so the bigger focus is on academic rationales. It could be assumed that when both the political and economic ambitions of a country are satisfied, then academic rationales come to the fore.

Clearly the least important in the policy discourse are the *cultural rationales*, reflecting a concern with cultural diversity and improving (national as well as international) students’ intercultural understanding and communication. Both the policy rhetoric as well as key documents tend to downplay *cultural rationales*. In each of the three countries this is used as an additional and

supportive argument, rarely as a priority. It is rather seen as general policy goal that shall be considered, but not a specific cause for policy actions.

Therefore, the interest in international student recruitment in Norway, Poland and Portugal, although occurring under similar circumstances, displays commonalities as far as political rationales are concerned, but differences in the fact that economic rationales stand out in Portugal and Poland, compared to academic rationales in Norway.

Based on whether HE is considered as a means for a broader national purpose or as an end in itself, the above four types of rationale for international recruitment were aggregated into two major categories: *instrumental* ones – political and economic rationales – related to added value, positioning and status; and *normative* ones – cultural and academic rationales – related to academic values and improvement. A hierarchy emerges in the policy discourse which appears to prioritize instrumental rationales over normative ones. Except for Norway, which represents an outlier with its exceptional economic wealth and political reputation as a stable and highly developed country, the analysis reveals that rationales are not focused on improving the core missions of higher education. The governments in Poland and Portugal see international student recruitment as an instrument to address internal challenges (e.g. underfunding of higher education or demographic decline) and to improve or maintain the countries' reputation or standing in a particular geographic area (see, for example, França et al, 2018). What traditionally lied at the heart of internationalisation – namely enrich cultural diversity on the campus for academic purposes (Opper et al, 1990; Altbach and Teichler, 2001) – could be expected only as a side-effect. The analysis therefore reveals two views of internationalisation: a normative view which emphasizes inherent value and an instrumental view which is concerned about gaining concrete benefits. Normative rationales have

hardly been flagship motives for diverting HE policy onto international rails, except in the case of Norway.

### **Policy instruments**

Unlike many other higher education reforms, the policy instruments targeted at international recruitment have been of a rather soft nature, mostly in the form of persuasive information and economic incentives (Vedung, 1998). A first step that opened the window of opportunity for international recruitment in Norway, Portugal and Poland was the acknowledgement that this is not solely the responsibility of institutions. There are numerous factors beyond the remit of individual institutions that condition the capacity to enrol international students, e.g. migration, consular or other political issues which are run independently and have their own distinct goals which do not necessarily support international recruitment; therefore, a variety of public actors have to share responsibility for it and this should be addressed by public policy. This represented a fundamental change that called for a wide range of actors to engage in the internationalisation of the student body. This was achieved through national strategies (*information or 'sermons'* with persuasive power) and the establishment of infrastructures meant to support this new policy area, especially needed since the countries in question had little history of proactive international student recruitment.

In Norway, The Ministry of Education and Research has been the driving force of HE internationalisation policy as illustrated by a number of policy documents produced since the 1980s. A public agency is playing an importantly increasing role in the recruitment of international

students. The Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU)<sup>1</sup> was established in 2004, and promotes international cooperation and mobility at all levels of education. SIU runs the *Study in Norway* campaign (see [www.studyinnorway.no](http://www.studyinnorway.no)), promoting Norway as a study destination combining high quality education with the safety and the ‘exoticness’ of Norway, such as scenery and nature. This is a clear example of resorting to country branding and marketing to increase attractiveness for international students. SIU has also taken over the administration of several national cooperation agreements and programmes targeting students from developing countries, previously administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Portugal, the Ministries of Regional Development and of Education and Science jointly launched the long overdue national strategy for the internationalisation of higher education (MADR/MEC, 2014), filling a political vacuum in nation-wide orientation and coordination of institutions’ policies and activities in this field. The strategy makes a number of recommendations, of which the most relevant are: the promotion of the country and its institutions, cooperation strategies with specific world regions (beyond the *Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries*), better and comprehensive information provision to potential candidates, streamlining bureaucratic processes for obtaining visas, accommodation, fiscal numbers etc. through cooperation with public entities (e.g. Immigration and Border Service, consular units, High Commissariat for Migrations and local authorities), creating a ‘green channel’ for the admission of international students in order to smooth their entry and residence in Portugal, increasing the provision of education in English, and so on. Additionally, CRUP (the representative body of the fourteen public universities) has created the initiative *Universities Portugal* and, summoning the help of other actors (Government, Camões

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<sup>1</sup> SIU merged into a new directorate called DIKU in the fall of 2018.

Institute, Portuguese Agency for Foreign Investment and Trade [AICEP], Tourism of Portugal, embassies, etc.), defined priority target markets (Angola, Brazil, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Luxembourg, Macau, Mozambique and Peru), secured EU funding, created a brand and a website (<http://www.universitiesportugal.com>) and set a timetable for marketing and promotion in the target countries (Assunção, 2017). The newly created website presents affordable living, inclusive healthcare and safety as the advantages of choosing Portugal over other destinations. Polytechnic institutions also plan a similar strategy for joint promotion abroad (Mourato, 2016). Again, country branding is obvious in the case of Portugal.

Until 2016, the Polish government had no clear strategy for internationalisation of higher education, and not even a single policy document existed in relation to internationalisation of higher education. Instead, the government undertook various spontaneous, largely uncoordinated and even *ad hoc* measures to manifest its commitment to increasing the enrolment of international students. For example, in 2011 President Bronisław Komorowski underlined the paramount importance of internationalisation in a speech to academics: “in the time of demographic crises we need to find capacity to attract international students. This is a big challenge and test for us, whether Poland is able to compete on the educational market”. This strong statement was fully shared by Barbara Kudrycka - at the time the Minister of Science and Higher Education - but she left no doubts that the government would not finance an agency for international academic exchange. It exemplifies empty gestures and often meaningless political declarations which amounted to nothing more than a façade. However, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP) (2005), together with support from the Ministry of Education and Foreign Affairs, established the programme *Study in Poland*, operated by the private foundation *Perspektywy* and, for almost ten years, it was *Perspektywy* that provided support and facilitated individual HEIs in

their pioneering attempts to develop international recruitment<sup>2</sup>. Of course, the program *Study in Poland* was officially ‘blessed’, but at the time it was a peripheral issue on the political agenda. It was given a more central role by the draft amendment to the law on HE (MNiSW, 2009a), but only in 2015, did the Ministry of Science and Higher Education publish a separate document (MNiSW, 2015) called *The programme of internationalisation of higher education* which recognized internationalisation (in particular enrolling international students) as a window opportunity for Polish HEIs. It triggered greater policy interest in various aspects of internationalisation of HE and consequently the next minister convened a group of experts who provided policy recommendations and guidelines for higher education institutions (Sułkowski, 2016).

Confining only to information as a policy instrument would perhaps raise awareness, but it may not necessarily lead to any real changes. In order to facilitate the political statements expressed in strategic documents (MADR/MEC, 2014; Ministry of Education and Research, 2009; MNiSW, 2015; Sułkowski, 2016) governments resorted to more ‘*authoritative*’ means in the form of *legislation*. This covers a broad range of issues related or not to higher education institutions. For example, the Polish government introduced new special regulations for foreign students, such as a special kind of visas for students (student visa) and softened regulations for students living in bordering regions. Similar legal amenities were introduced in Portugal. Already before 2014, immigration-related legislation enhanced foreign students’ circumstances by introducing an ‘EU blue card’ for highly qualified foreign nationals, following an EU recommendation. In 2012, agreements between universities and the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) led to the simplification entry and authorisation procedures for foreign students (Fonseca et al., 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> The short history of the program is briefly described here:  
[http://studyinpoland.pl/konsorcjum/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=6&Itemid=9](http://studyinpoland.pl/konsorcjum/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=6&Itemid=9)

However, the piece of legislation which made a difference was the *Statute of the International Student* in 2014, defining a parallel entry regime for these students, independent of the admission requirements applicable to Portuguese students. It also created the possibility for public institutions to charge higher tuition fees for international students (non-EU), considering the real cost of education. Nonetheless, the *Statute* maintains a special scholarship programme for students coming from the Portuguese-speaking African countries and East-Timor in order to preserve the privileged relationship with these countries. This programme has not been implemented yet (França et al, 2018). Although in the form of legislation, carrying authoritative force, this *Statute* may equally act as an economic instrument. The Resolution of the Council of Ministers 78/2016 charged the General Directorate for Higher Education, in close articulation with HEIs and AICEP, with the dissemination of Portuguese HEIs' education provision through the *Study in Portugal* (<http://www.studyinportugal.edu.pt>) online portal.

The last but not the least important were *economic instruments (carrots)*. For universities, financial gains became one of the major driving forces for international recruitment. In Poland, since 2017, systematic changes in the financial algorithm of public universities favour international students and represent a strong incentive for these to change their enrolling strategies. This is important because, for decades, Polish universities had been deeply embedded in the national context and inbound-oriented while recruiting students. The process of internationalisation stood at odds with a long-established Polish academic tradition and, for such autonomous and loosely-coupled organizations (Weick, 1976) as universities, only attractive financial resources could effectively divert them into international recruitment. Beyond the change in the financial algorithm, the government very recently established a new national agency (NAWA) to take over responsibility for academic exchange, inspired by DAAD in Germany, Nuffic in the Netherlands or Campus

France. NAWA is expected to play a pivotal role in stimulating the exchange of students and academics. In the first year (2018), NAWA had a relatively modest budget of 35 million euro, but this was the very first time the government allocated targeted funding for internationalisation (including bilateral programmes of student exchange and scholarships programmes for foreign students) and also promised to increase the budget as more programmes for students (and academics) were announced. In Portugal, the *Statute of the International Student*, opening the possibility of higher tuition fees, has been acting as a powerful policy instrument which is resulting in more concerted recruitment strategies by institutions, including a diversification of targeted regions beyond the traditional ones. In contrast, Norway serves as an example of an affluent country in which financial instruments have limited impact on public actors' behaviour. The direct economic incentives for recruiting international students are small. Tuition fees are not charged in public HEIs, but HEIs receive a small economic premium for each international student. However, a performance-based funding system serves as an important indirect incentive. This system includes government funding for credit points awarded, independent of whether the student is Norwegian or international. Institutions have generally been responsive to the government's internationalisation policy, although the direct economic incentives have been limited. The absence of tuition fees also increases attractiveness for international students.

Summing up, for the three countries making international recruitment a goal in public policy and designing policy instruments to steer institutions towards proactive recruitment accordingly represented a breaking point with the past, though more so for Poland and Portugal than Norway. It automatically integrated the (previously fragmented) activity of various actors, many from outside the higher education realm, which pursued different policy agendas. Governments also set the expectation that institutions should expand their horizon and think globally about recruitment.



However, sermons could be both sound and convincing policy tools, but they are more effective when complemented by the more authoritative influence coming from the legal framework. In Poland and Portugal, new regulations were targeted at actors and their policies within and beyond higher education (mainly concerning migration issues and visa policies). These allowed bringing down internal barriers that prevented foreign students from coming to these countries. Finally, funding algorithms, financial incentives derived from fee-paying students or special stream funding were meant to motivate higher education institutions to re-orientate their strategies and increase the enrolment of international students.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The paper has investigated the approaches employed for attracting and recruiting international students in three different countries: Norway, Poland and Portugal, thus shedding light on the national strategies semi-peripheral countries resort to and on the comparative advantages they exploit.

National policy-makers' prioritisation of internationalisation and the emphasis on international student recruitment are a phenomenon of the past few years, except for Norway where this has existed for a longer time. As a result, actions have been taken and resources have been mobilised in the three countries. Ministries responsible for HE have been the key promoters of international student recruitment, often enlisting the help of other institutions, e.g. national agencies or organisations trusted with the task of branding the country and the HE system. Strategies have relied on information as a policy instrument (Vedung, 1998), using rhetoric to influence institutions' behaviour towards proactivity in international student recruitment, but also on legislation. However, economic means in the form of financial incentives have also contributed to

raise the number of international students, but curiously with totally opposite strategies: Norway's resistance to introduce fees for international students has boosted attractiveness, whereas in Portugal recent legislation created different admission rules for international students, who are now charged higher fees, thus making them more appealing for institutions. Academic and political rationales (Knight and de Wit, 1995) have guided the Norwegian national strategy, whereas political and economic rationales have emerged in Poland and Portugal. We observe, therefore, that there is often a mix of rationales, but instrumental ones (political or economic) tend to prevail over normative ones (academic and cultural).

Country branding (Nicolescu, 2009), through websites presenting the educational provision and the appealing conditions of the host country, is probably the only approach common to the three countries. However, the country assets that are promoted as pull factors for international students are different from those employed by the major international student recruiters. This differences are likely due to reputational factors related to the fact that these countries are recent players on the international student market (see Urbanovič et al, 2014). Semi-peripheral countries cannot rely on the prestige or the perceived quality of their higher education system to entice students. Lagging behind in this respect, these countries use other resources (cultural, linguistic, geographical, economic, etc.), mostly independent of HE, while seeking comparative advantage on the global educational market. Norway promotes unspoilt nature, benefits from the attractions of a safe and prosperous welfare state and has maintained tuition-free education, contrary to the tendency in Europe and in the region. Poland relies on its central role in the Central Eastern European region, as a pivot of economic stability. Portugal relies primarily on the Portuguese language as a pull factor to attract students from Portuguese-speaking countries and also advertises affordable living, safety and a widely-spoken language in an attempt to widen the pool of international students

beyond those coming from its former colonies. One could therefore infer from these findings that on the global educational market semi-peripheral countries are competitive primarily in specific regions from which they attract candidates. The emergence of regional hubs (Kondakci, 2011) is obvious in the case of Poland, while Portugal has been a hub for students from Portuguese-speaking countries. Peripheral countries thus exploit political, cultural or geographical advantages rather than educational assets.

The three countries have witnessed increases in the number of international students, albeit from distinct recruitment regions. Recruitment patterns reflect not only deliberate strategies, but opportunity structures and historical bonds. Portugal relies mostly on the ties with former colonies to recruit international students, while Poland recruits primarily from neighbouring countries, taking advantage of cultural and linguistic proximity. These illustrate the colonial and, respectively, the proximity logic (Börjesson, 2017), which could be seen as tied in to political rationales. However, these two logics are tinged by the market logic, related to the economic rationale, since the intensification of proactivity is also driven by the need to generate revenue. Norway partly follows the proximity logic, but also recruits students from further afield, probably thanks to its unique assets, such as absence of tuition fees and economic prosperity, that make it more attractive than other peripheral countries. Arguably, the increase in the number of international students has not resulted from concerted national strategies, especially in Poland and Portugal, since these strategies have either been recent, uncoordinated and largely ad-hoc. Yet, for these countries the increase has been facilitated by other circumstances related to cultural and linguistic links, geographical proximity and welfare, combined with growing aspirations for education in countries with less developed HE or in countries with volatile situations (e.g. Ukraine). The intensification of political and institutional activity in this area may in the longer term result in the recruitment of

students from countries other than their traditional recruitment regions. Due to a lack of universities considered world-class and/or with high visibility in international rankings, attracting large numbers of students from leading sender countries in Asia is not yet within reach, although the aspiration is there.

The major result of this study is that semi-peripheral countries appear to apply different strategies and resort to other comparative advantages than the largest student recruiters on the global stage. This has implications for the policies and strategies employed to attract students at the margins of the global student market, highlighting the need for these countries to identify their distinctive attraction capacities and assets, as well as to be purposeful in choosing the targeted recruitment regions. Such an approach appears to yield better returns than an indiscriminate broad approach. Another insight is the need for combined and coherent national and institutional efforts to promote the higher education system as a whole, since few individual institutions, if any, are sufficiently prestigious to attract large numbers of international students. An area deserving further investigation is the strategies employed by institutions in semi-peripheral countries, as research looking specifically at institutional measures intended to boost attractiveness and recruitment is also scarce.

#### **Conflict of interest**

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix 1

Table A1. Total inbound internationally mobile students in Norway. Mobile students are defined as full degree students who have secondary education from abroad and moved to Norway less than 5 years before entering higher education. Source: Statistics Norway

<https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/attachment/335552?ts=160b65dba20>

Country of origin	2013/2014		2016/2017	
	N	%	N	%
<b>TOTAL</b>	9240	100	9385	100
<b>Sweden</b>	758	8.2	692	7.3
<b>China</b>	745	8.1	494	5.2
<b>Germany</b>	440	4.8	441	4.7
<b>Russia</b>	608	6.6	397	4.2
<b>Nepal</b>	429	4.6	395	4.2
<b>Denmark</b>	245	2.7	312	3.3
<b>India</b>			301	3.2
<b>Iran</b>	453	4.9	279	3.0
<b>Poland</b>	232	2.5	251	2.7
<b>USA</b>	204	2.2	247	2.6
<b>Ethiopia</b>	251	2.7	228	2.4
<b>Ukraine</b>	221	2.4	225	2.4
<b>Pakistan</b>			209	2.2
<b>Other</b>	4654	51.4	4914	52.4

Table A2. Total inbound internationally mobile students in Poland, 2013/2014 and 2016/2017

Source: Own calculations based on GUS statistics from 2014 and 2017.

Country of origin	2013/2014		2016/2017	
	N	%	N	%
<b>TOTAL</b>	35983	100	65793	100%
<b>Ukraine</b>	15123	42	35584	54.08
<b>Belarus</b>	3743	10.4	5119	7.78

<b>Norway</b>	1580	4.33	1531	2.32
<b>Spain</b>	1361	3.78	1607	2.44
<b>Sweden</b>	1251	3.47	1242	1.88
<b>Lithuania</b>	965	2.68	802	1.21
<b>Turkey</b>	882	2.45	1471	2.23
<b>USA</b>	814	2.26	769	1.16
<b>Russia</b>	810	2.25	1055	1.6
<b>Germany</b>	743	2.06	1173	1,78
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	688	1.91	871	1.32
<b>China</b>	670	1.86	953	1.44
<b>Czech Republic</b>	626	1.7	1061	1.61
<b>Other</b>	6727	18	12555	19.08

Table A3. Total inbound internationally mobile students in Portugal, 2013/2014 and 2016/2017

Source: General Directorate for Education and Science Statistics.

<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>		<b>2016/2017</b>	
	N	%	N	%
<b>TOTAL</b>	14 883	100,0	22 194	100,0
<b>Brazil</b>	5218	35	7 764	35,0
<b>Angola</b>	2121	14	2 916	13,1
<b>Cape Verde</b>	1832	12	2 267	10,2
<b>Spain</b>	647	4	965	4,3
<b>Mozambique</b>	483	3	751	3,4
<b>France</b>	279	2	674	3,0
<b>São Tomé and Príncipe</b>	317	2	661	3,0
<b>Italy</b>	315	2	543	2,4
<b>China</b>	148	1	488	2,2
<b>Guinee-Bissau</b>	199	1	384	1,7
<b>Germany</b>	205	1	327	1,5
<b>East Timor</b>	257	2	326	1,5
<b>Other</b>	2862	19	4 128	18,6

<sup>i</sup> This figure includes three categories of students; Students who have moved to Norway to undertake a full degree, foreign citizens who have lived in Norway more than 5 years before entering higher education in Norway and exchange students