Exploring the Impact of Influencing Factors on Internationalization, Using Quantitative Methods

After exploring existing theories on internationalization of universities in general, and of German universities in particular, this chapter aims to quantitatively capture supporting and inhibiting factors, and is followed by the views of leaders in the next chapter.

3.1 Research Goal

This part aims at capturing the key drivers of internationalization of German universities with regard to the internationalization of the student body and international scientific staff. In order to do so, hypotheses are derived from literature of different fields, including theories on the internationalization of universities as well as on management theory. Ideally, a quantitative model emerges that delivers quantitatively measurable correlations between factors of impact and the defined outcome. The results serve as a starting point for the qualitative part of this research, which aims at refining findings from the quantitative part, especially encapsulating the impact of leadership. For triangulation purposes, this research starts with a quantitative analysis of the internationalization behaviour and strategy of German universities, then proceeds with a qualitative analysis of interviews with leaders of universities.

Given that the internationalization behaviour of German universities can largely be described and measured quantitatively, this research starts by positing hypotheses, then measures internationalization outcomes. To bolster the official statistics, a survey was conducted among all public German research universities. Consequently, this research design produces objective, generalizable results. First, hypotheses are derived from literature, in the next step methodology is described, then hypotheses are tested against data; findings as well as limitations of the approach are presented.

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3.2 Definition of Key Factors of Influence and Derivation of Hypotheses

This section derives key factors of influence from literature on strategic management, internationalization and higher education. The factors are divided into the categories of strategy, leadership, environment, external validation, institutionalization and self-reinforcement.

3.2.1 Strategy impact

This section covers aspects in control of the university’s leadership and encompasses typical tools of strategic management, such as the choice to craft a formal internationalization strategy, the choice to publish a mission statement – and which particular relevance internationalization is given in this statement, the organizational structure and international partnerships at all levels. The underlying assumption is that senior management has a significant impact on the internationalization trajectory of its organization.

3.2.1.1 Formal internationalization strategy

As discussed in the previous chapter, theory affirms that universities can craft strategies and should do so. It appears to be an implicit assumption of nearly all papers that strategy is to be codified in order to have an impact on the organization; Nag, Hambrick, and Chen (2007) assess a ‘general implicit consensus’ on the essence of strategic management (p. 936). A few authors, like Mintzberg et al. (2005), and Inkpen and Choudhury (1995), discuss the option of non-codified strategy. Rudzki (1995) differentiates between normative and descriptive approaches to strategic management, the first using tools of strategic management in order to craft strategy, the latter being defined as patterns of decisions (p. 422). This section aims at capturing the impacts of formalized, normative internationalization strategies. Twelve years back, literature assessed that strategy was not common in German universities (Hahn, 2005, p. 26).

Strategies deliver a number of benefits, such as the inclusion of relevant information, assessing strengths and weaknesses, preparing for opportunities and threats, and crafting an organizational plan to align resources (Martinez & Wolverton, 2009, pp. 3-9). Additionally, strategies balance out universities’ obligations towards different stakeholders (Foskett, 2010, pp. 36-37). Under the assumption that strategies deliver the intended results, the question emerges as to when these results can be observed and measured. Theories on the time lags describe the fact that a chosen