

Exploring the peculiar relationship between higher education quality and internationalization: a discourse analytical and spatial reading of four European university strategies

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen, Lene Møller Madsen, Taina Saarinen & Johanna Waters

To cite this article: Hanne Kirstine Adriansen, Lene Møller Madsen, Taina Saarinen & Johanna Waters (04 Feb 2025): Exploring the peculiar relationship between higher education quality and internationalization: a discourse analytical and spatial reading of four European university strategies, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, DOI: [10.1080/20020317.2025.2462061](https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2025.2462061)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2025.2462061>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 04 Feb 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Exploring the peculiar relationship between higher education quality and internationalization: a discourse analytical and spatial reading of four European university strategies

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen ^a, Lene Møller Madsen ^b, Taina Saarinen ^c and Johanna Waters ^d

^aDanish School of Education, Aarhus University, Copenhagen, Denmark; ^bDepartment of Science Education, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark; ^cFinnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland; ^dDepartment of Geography, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

Internationalization is often regarded as a tool for enhancing the quality of education and research, but the question is how are they related? This paper aims to address this by analysing the way quality and internationalization are represented in strategy documents of four universities, looking into how quality and internationalization are discussed together, what kinds of premises are present about their relationship, and how quality relates to universities' geographical positioning. We do so by analysing strategies in four European universities; two 'capital' universities and two 'town' universities. First, we analyse what quality means in relation to internationalization within the strategies and show that the meaning is often empty; then, we unfold the implicit meanings of this 'self-evident quality'. With a spatial perspective we analyse how the universities position themselves in the world and how this is intertwined with notions of quality. The discussion compares and contrasts the four strategies and shows more similarities between universities of town or capital origin rather than universities with the same nationality.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 May 2024
Accepted 30 January 2025

KEYWORDS

Higher education; university strategies; quality; internationalization; spatial perspectives

Introduction

At first glance, university strategy documents can appear empty and shallow, mainly consisting of catchwords and platitudes. However, on closer reading, they are an embodiment of the institutions' essence, representing the ways in which they present themselves to others. In this paper, we present one such reading with a view to exposing the peculiar relationship between quality and internationalization of higher education.

According to some of the most frequently used definitions, internationalization of higher education will enhance the 'quality' of education and research. This understanding goes back to De Wit et al. (2015) extension of Knight's (2003) definition of internationalization as: '*the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society*' (De Wit et al., 2015, p. 281, highlighted in original). Hence, internationalization is not an end in itself, but rather a means to enhancing the quality of education, research, and service to society (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Yet, the meanings and implications of

quality are mostly assumed and unproblematised in these widely used definitions and fail to acknowledge the many complexities involved.

This calls for a more critical approach to investigating what quality means in the context of higher education internationalization and how these different understandings (re)produce certain (geographical) hierarchies. Lee Harvey (2022), founding editor of the journal *Quality in Higher Education* and long-time policy actor and researcher in the field of higher education quality, criticizes earlier research for focussing too much on describing and legitimizing quality assurance systems, and too little on critically scrutinizing the concept and its foundations. He calls for a '*more critical examination of the notion of quality in higher education*' (Harvey, 2022, p. 145). Following this, we critically consider quality in relation to the internationalization of higher education, providing us with a platform for critique.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyse the intertwined relationship between internationalization and quality, by looking into how they are discussed together and what is construed as a problem and a solution (Bacchi, 2012) in the interface of

CONTACT Taina Saarinen  taina.m.saarinen@ju.fi  Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, PO Box 35, FI-40014, Jyväskylä, Finland

The authors are placed in alphabetical order, with equal contributions.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

quality and internationalization. We will do so by exploring how quality is linked to internationalization within different institutional strategy documents and by analysing strategies from four universities. We have chosen a Finnish, a British, and two Danish universities. This allows us to see differences and similarities between Anglophone and non-Anglophone universities, which is important given the prominence of English as *lingua franca* in academia (Adriansen et al., 2023). By choosing two universities from the same country, we can see if there are *national* similarities or if this is not important for the content of the strategy document. Finally, the selection of two ‘capital universities’ and two ‘town universities’ allows us to explore the role of ‘centre-periphery’ location for internationalization. We use the terms ‘capital university’ and ‘town university’ pointing to the spatial location of the university rather than as normative or hierarchical categories. In the analysis, we return to the importance of the location of the four universities and how (if) they each relate to their geographical position and how this is linked to discursive quality constructs in the documents. Moreover, the four strategies are from the universities where we, the four co-authors, are employed. This means we can add an ‘insider’ perspective in our analysis of the strategies, but also question and challenge each others’ interpretations. We critically analyse the ways in which quality is discussed and operationalized in these strategies. As we investigate what meanings the term ‘quality’ is assigned, we are able to identify the values and ideologies embedded in internationalization of higher education, and how discourses on quality of internationalization reproduce and create existing geopolitical power relations and spatial inequalities.

By doing so, we are extending and advancing extant debates in the *Nordic Journal of Studies in Education policy* (NordSTEP). This journal has already seen a number of papers researching and discussing quality and internationalization of higher education. Ringarp and Waldow (2016) outline how international arguments linked to quality are used to legitimize education policy in Sweden; whereas Bergh (2015), also in Sweden, studies how local autonomy meets international and national quality policy rhetoric. He shows how some interpretations are taken further in the local context than the quality policy implies. Other papers focus on student course evaluation and quality assurance systems in Norwegian higher education (Borch, 2020), and Swedish administrative professionals’ role in transforming universities into strategic actors (Karlsson & Rytberg, 2016). Most interesting for our paper is Musiał (2023), who analyses internationalization and its strategies in what he calls the semiperipheral positionality of the Nordic

states. We add to this by focusing not only on Nordic states but also including a British university to show how internationalization not only relates to a nation’s position, but also to a university’s position within the nation as a metropolitan or city university.

The remaining paper is structured as follows: we first present a historical overview of the literature on quality in/and higher education and then we show the unusual relationship between quality and internationalization. The next section outlines our analytical framework. After this follows the methodology. The analysis is subsequently divided into two parts: first, we analyse what quality means in relation to internationalization in the four university strategies; then we use a spatial perspective to show how the universities position themselves in the world and how this is related to quality. In the discussion, we compare and contrast the four strategies in relation to the findings of the former two analyses.

Contextualisation of quality and internationalization in higher education

Quality and internationalization tend to be talked about as if they were interchangeable, or feeding directly and unproblematically into each other (De Wit et al., 2015). However, their relationship is much more complex than it appears at first sight. In the following, we critically engage with academic scholarship on the historical development of quality policies in higher education and then continue by discussing the apparently peculiar relationship between quality and internationalization. This sets the scene for the rest of the paper.

Quality policies in/and higher education

Policies relating to quality within higher education gradually became systematized following the economic recession of the 1970s, as public accountability demands started to create need for quality assessment, audit and accreditation, particularly in European higher education systems (Neave & van Vught, 1991). Simultaneously, higher education institutions in the United States had systematized student evaluations and programme evaluations (El-Khawas, 1998), showcasing another aspect of quality policies as ‘customer feedback’ (Harvey & Green, 1993). Increased and increasingly systematic staff and student mobility lead to calls for greater transparency which in turn required quality assurance procedures. Systematic quality policies of higher education (Vidovich, 2001) thus emerged as a consequence of different kinds of developments such as efficiency demands and convergence of the degree systems, sparked by more systematic cooperation between countries (Ala-Vähälä, 2020).

The massification of higher education (see Trow, 1973, for a theorization) has led to concerns around potentially declining quality. As new socioeconomic groups entered higher education in large numbers, both the organization of studies as well as university structures were changed to accommodate larger and societally differentiated student groups (Scott, 1995). Globalisation and Europeanisation, operationalized often as increased mobility of students and staff, but also the labour force in general, increased the need for transparency and a closer description of degrees, as the validity and relevance of degrees and education needed to be shown when transferred across borders. Concepts like Audit Society (Power, 2000) and Evaluative State (see papers in Neave & Vught Van, 1991) depict the evaluative ethos that has guided higher education policies since.

Quality assurance can be conceptualized as audit (securing processes that are believed to be needed to guarantee quality), accreditation (evaluating the criteria for permission to operate as a higher education institute) and assessment (of specific functions such as teaching or research) (Dill et al., 1996), but the concepts continue to be fuzzy and have different national realizations (Saarinen & Ala-Vähälä, 2007). National quality assurance systems appear to be a mix of accreditations, audits and quality management measures developed for various societal contexts and with their national and local historical roots (Ala-Vähälä, 2020).

According to Barnett (1992), developments in promoting, reporting and accountability have, in fact, reflected a fundamental change in the relationship between the society and higher education institutions, fronting externally demonstrated accountability over the more traditional and trust based relationship between universities and societies.

The relationship between quality and internationalisation

Quality and internationalization are often treated as if they feed into each other, quality promoting internationalization and internationalization increasing quality. In the Nordic contexts, Musiał (2023) refers to internationalization having been developed gradually and internalized as a knowledge society activity that allows the smaller Nordic systems to activate all their 'cognitive power resources and thus have a chance to reduce dependence on the hegemonic centres of the world economy and knowledge empires' (ibid p. 25), while improving the quality of academic research and teaching. As a consequence, *internationalisation* has become a self-evident activity linked with quality enhancement (Musiał, 2023). For instance, Swedish pro-tuition fee arguments emerged from the market

expectation that collecting fees from international students and the ensuing competition would enhance quality (Lundin & Geschwind, 2023).

While internationalization may be framed as increasing quality in higher education, Ozer (2022) points out that there is not enough evidence to suggest that internationalization would, indeed, increase quality. Perceived quality differences between domestic and international study is often thought to drive international student mobility: for example, Chinese students appear to participate in overseas study due to perceived lack of quality at home (Mok & Han, 2016), and mainland Chinese higher education is commonly perceived as not being able to meet societal needs; hence internationalization has been implemented as a political remedy for this (Wang, 2015).

In other contexts, internationalization can also raise concerns about declining quality. As internationalization is often operationalized as English Medium Instruction programmes (Galloway et al., 2020), a typical concern has been that a situation where both teachers and students are second language speakers of English may have a detrimental effect on learning (see literature review in Lin & Lei, 2021). Another issue relates to study fees, where the concern for quality stems from the assumption that education providers might lower the quality in order to collect more revenue (Nielsen, 2011). Whether we think of quality and internationalization feeding into each other or not, it is at the very least fair to say that their relationship is intertwined (Komotar, 2018).

Emerging literature critiques Western understandings of quality and internationalization; this literature somewhat answers the call of Harvey (2022) as well as de Wit and Altbach for more critical scrutiny of the field of quality and internationalization. Guzmán-Valenzuela (2023) critiques Western views of internationalization in higher education and finds three core narratives: the normative (emphasizing economic growth and quality education), the critical (challenging internationalization as a hegemonic market-based force), and the narrative of colonial legacies. Internationalization can also be analysed as an uneven playfield, where increased accountability, excellence demands, and requirements to deliver high-quality teaching create pressures on academics, not all of whom come to the field with the same resources (Ruan, 2021).

While internationalization of higher education is conceptualized as having a quality boosting effect on education, this does not happen equally everywhere. Sahin and Brooks (2023) call for decentralized internationalization strategies to push progressive (as opposed to neo-liberal or competitive) internationalization of higher education forward. Kim (2016) has, in turn, questioned the assumed quality hierarchies in Korean higher education, where the preference to

attract Western faculty in Korea is challenged by *'the systematic disempowerment of Western faculty'*, leaving them vulnerable and exploitable for the benefit of the Korean university, while the *'institution maintains the façade of internationalisation via the large-scale recruitment of Western faculty members by perpetually replacing those who leave with new recruits'*. (Kim, 2016, p. 87). These national complexities make the intertwined relationship between quality and internationalization even more difficult to grasp.

On a global scale, interest in quality, operationalized as assurance, audit, and accreditation measures remains strong. Staub (2019) attributes this to developments in internationalization, accountability demands, rankings, and job market requirements. Quality and internationalization thus remain intertwined in complex ways that require more scrutiny.

Analytical framework

The majority of research that has studied university strategies use some type of textual analysis, often discourse analysis. We do so too. The following section outlines the discourse analytical framework deployed in the paper. Next, we discuss strategies as data. The section ends with a brief discussion of the spatial turn in (higher) education as a way of exploring internationalization critically, thereby adding a novel approach to the analysis of university strategies.

Discourse analysis as frame and method

We are relying theoretically on a discourse analytical frame, where discourses can be seen both as mediating societal meanings as well as construing them. *Discourse analysis*, in this sense, is an eclectic body of theoretical and methodological approaches that, in a broad sense, combine an analysis of language use and its socially constructive nature (Fairclough, 2003).

In the study of documents such as strategy texts (see the next subsection on Strategies as data), this duality of texts has to be taken into account: the documents both interpret policies and are affected by them (Saarinen, 2008). In Stephen Ball's words, policies are *'textual interventions into practice'* (Ball, 1993, p. 12). Discourse analysis as a larger frame helps to understand, construe and make visible policy processes and the values and power relations behind them (Bacchi, 2012; Ball, 1993). In the discussion of the roles of strategies in understanding critically the intertwinedness of quality and internationalization, Carol Bacchi's (2012) question *What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR)* facilitates a critical interrogation of public policies. It builds on the idea that what the document states about solutions implicitly

tells something about how the problems are perceived.

Discourse analysis both as a methodological tool and theoretical approach is not only about the textual analysis of what the documents say, but also about what they do in their social and discursive contexts (Fairclough, 2003). Moving from the theoretical towards the methodological view of discourse, we find Critical Discourse Analysis useful (CDA). CDA is often attributed to Norman Fairclough (2003) and his view on language use and/in social structures. Fairclough's CDA is a three-dimensional approach, moving iteratively between the textual, discursive, and social spheres of the documents and the phenomenon they mediate and construe (Fairclough, 2003). We have employed these three elements in a two step analysis, which first includes textual analysis of the documents using the WPR approach, then examines the geographical positioning of the universities and their use of spatial metaphors. In the latter part, we use our insider-outsider positionalities in our analysis of spatial elements in the strategies, which will be detailed later.

Strategy documents as data

In this article, we have used general strategies of the four universities as data to grasp how they construe their position in the internationalization and quality policy nexus. Strategy texts are, in general, expected to provide a description of the organization and the values and missions guiding its activities. In addition, they should include things like future visions, goals, and activities and resources to achieve those goals. Strategies can be defined as the *'long-term direction of an organisation'* (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 4) and as realizations of organizational ideologies (Sison, 2018). For our paper, this means that we do not study how internationalization and quality policies materialize in the four universities, but rather the ways in which our four universities have chosen to *represent* their internationalization and quality ethos.

Strategies have been introduced to public institutions and organizations with a move from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic management and strengthened the role of managerialism. In higher education, this has taken place in the frame of New Public Management (Lane, 2002). This development has often been linked with the introduction of business practises into public strategy processes (Vaara et al., 2010); in fact, the strategy development of higher education historically coincides with the internationalization and quality policy developments since the 1980s and 1990s (see above sections 2.1 and 2.2). Universities, as other organizations, adapt and evolve in relation to their strategic goals (Vabø et al., 2016).

Cornut et al. (2012) have studied strategic plans with a linguistic genre analysis, using large corpora of different types of texts for comparison. Their results suggest that strategic plans appear more emotionally expressive, and more optimistic than other types of written business texts such as annual reports or project plans. Strategy texts also appear to include more expressions of inspiration and positive effects, and less negative emotions such as blame or hardship. Strategies are ideological (Sison, 2018), and our discourse analytical approach acknowledges the constitutive (and not only descriptive) nature of strategy texts (Pieczka, 2018). Typically, according to Cornut et al. (2012), strategy texts also appear more communal, with a lot of plural stance taking. For our paper, the communal aspect of strategic texts appears particularly interesting, giving us an insight into the differences between our town and capital universities.

Spatial turn and internationalisation

Through the strategies, the universities discursively locate themselves locally, nationally, and internationally. To understand how this global positioning is intertwined with notions of quality and internationalization, we will draw on spatial theory that has become widespread since the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences in the early 2000s. With this, an interest in the spatialities of (higher) education emerged (e.g. Fenwick et al., 2011; Gulson & Symes, 2007) and following this, we see universities and their production of strategies as a spatial practice. University strategies show how these institutions position themselves in the world and how they interact both nationally and globally through flows of students, staff, and knowledge. Internationalization of higher education, in particular, is a practice that is inherently spatial, involving mobility between countries, and has spatial consequences due to global hierarchisation and the (re)production of geographical inequalities. Hence, internationalization of higher education and how it is framed in university strategies is not a neutral practice (Adriansen et al., 2023). Moreover, internationalization of higher education not only takes place in space, it is also full of spatial metaphors and spatial ordering often used in strategies. Moreover, the discourses in which these spatial metaphors are embedded show how internationalization of higher education processes are seen as linked to quality, thereby we can tease out the spatialities of quality.

While the link between quality and internationalization has been explored by a number of scholars as outlined above, we offer a novel contribution by showing how strategies have (implicit) spatial notion of quality – often expressed in spatial metaphors. We are inspired by Paechter's (2004) categories of spatial

metaphors found in educational theory and practice. Paechter (2004, p. 451) found five overall, but also slightly overlapping categories: 1. area space, 2. movement through space, 3. structural space, 4. hierarchical space, 5. teacher/student or distance space. We use these categories as inspiration for analysing spatial metaphors in the university strategies. By adding a spatial perspective to the analysis, we are able to shed light on the global hierarchisation and geographical positioning thereby adding to critical internationalization studies that, according to Stein (2019, p. 1773), 'problematize the overwhelmingly positive and depoliticized approaches to internationalization that tend to dominate in universities'.

With these words in mind, we will now turn to the strategy documents and how we have analysed them.

Data and methodology

In this section, we present the data, explain our methods, and finally reflect on positionality. By analysing the relationship between quality and internationalization in four university strategies, we use 'small stories' to tell 'big stories'. Rather than conducting a comparative study *per se*, we compare and contrast the four university strategies to understand the spatialities of quality and internationalization.

The data

Most universities develop strategic plans that act as frameworks for their priorities for a certain time period, often 5–6 years. While some universities may have separate internationalization strategies, the majority include international aspects in their main strategic plan. We analyse university strategy documents from four universities located in three countries. They are University of Copenhagen (Denmark), Aarhus University (Denmark), University College London (Great Britain), and University of Jyväskylä (Finland). Each of these universities is situated differently in national and international hierarchies of institutions. University of Copenhagen (UoC, est. 1479) is Denmark's oldest and largest university, located in the capital, Copenhagen. Aarhus University (AU, est. 1928), is the second largest university in Denmark, located in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark. University College London (UCL) was established in 1826 as the University of London and thus was the first university in London. It was established as a secular alternative to the religious Oxford and Cambridge universities and is today the second largest university in the UK by total student enrolment. University of Jyväskylä (JYU) was founded in 1966 with roots in the former Teacher Training Seminary in Jyväskylä (established 1863) and is the sixth largest university in Finland.

While UCL and the two Danish universities take pride in announcing their participation in professional networks and alliances, Jyväskylä does not mention this, but instead that it has been granted the European Heritage Label due to its campus area and ‘equal education’. It is noteworthy that while Nordic universities tend to internationalize in English by establishing English Medium programmes (see Adriansen et al., 2023), none of the three non-Anglophone universities in our study mentioned the role of the English language in internationalization. All four universities are public research universities and multidisciplinary institutions.

Table 1 presents an overview of the four strategies. It should be noted that in a Danish and Finnish context, the term ‘university strategy’ is used, whereas in the UK, the term ‘strategic plan’ is used. We use the two terms interchangeably throughout the paper.

Data analysis

The analysis was performed in two steps. First, we conducted a thematic analysis of the use of *quality* in the four different university strategies. The first part

of the thematic analysis was theory driven, as we used the definitions of quality in relation to higher education originally proposed by Harvey and Green (1993) and a discourse approach inspired by Bacchi (2012), questioning ‘what is the problem presented to be’. Specifically, we combined Harvey and Green’s (1993) classic and much used categorization of six different notions of quality, combining it with Harvey and Newton (2007) as well as our own categories emerging from the data (see Table 2). We continued by extending the thematic analysis of quality by exploring linkages between quality and internationalization using a WPR approach (Bacchi, 2012), by asking ourselves iteratively in our discussions what problems the strategies seemed to respond to. At this stage, particularly the category ‘quality as empty’ became relevant as an empty signifier, receiving its meaning not from the way that *quality* was talked about, but from the context and the actions *quality* was operationalized with.

While doing this, it became clear that by being four different people, reading each other’s strategies, we have challenged each other in the reading and understanding of the strategies. This resonates with

Table 1. Presentation of the strategy documents.

University, title, and duration of the strategy	Pages	Cover image	Images in the strategy
University of Copenhagen <i>Talent and Collaboration</i> (2017-2023)	32	Graphic design with four pictogram designs illustrating the focus of the strategy and repeated through the strategy	5 photos, the first one very pompous with the rector speaking from the pulpit to the queen seated across the room and the audience on either side of them. The 4 other photos showing the new buildings of the university
Aarhus University <i>Strategy 2025</i> (2022-2025)	29	A graphic design called ‘core’ that is repeated in different ways throughout the strategy	9 photos from the university showing the campus and buildings from the outside and the inside, thereby also showing everyday life such as working in the lab, discussing in a study group, supervising/teaching a groups of students, a conference.
University College London <i>Strategic Plan</i> (2022-2027)	36	A graphic design called ‘Birds of a feather’	None; the design from the cover is repeated on the back cover.
University of Jyväskylä <i>Wisdom and wellbeing for us all</i> (2018-2024)	Unknown*	The opening web page has two photographs: on the top, a title image of a person (student?) sitting in the main building of the university, recognizable from the Alvar Aalto architecture. The second picture presents what appears to be a picnic on the summer lawn by the lake next to one of the newer buildings.	On all the sub pages of the web strategy, there are pictures of people at work or chatting informally in the campus environment. The feeling in the pictures is informal, together with images of the green campus. The subtle hints of Alvar Aalto architecture take the form of recognizable architectural features such as red brick buildings and ceramic pillars.

*The JYU strategy was the only one not available as a downloadable document, but instead presented on a website. This made it textually more fluid than the others, as one could follow the links on individual pages but not necessarily know whether those pages were meant as part of strategy or extended outside of it.

Table 2. An overview of analytical categories (modified from Harvey & Green, 1993.)

Different notions of quality
1. Quality as excellence (either tradition or perfection)
2. Quality as achieving standards
3. Quality as fitness for purpose (either internal/institutional goals or external customer/society needs)
4. Quality as value for money
5. Quality as transformative
6. Quality as development (potential or process)
7. Quality as competition
8. Quality as cooperation
9. Quality as zero defects
10. Quality as empty

Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's CDA three-dimensional approach, moving iteratively between the textual, discursive, and social spheres of the documents and the phenomenon they mediate and construe (Fairclough, 2003). We used our insider-outsider positionalities deliberately in the second part of the analysis, where it added a contextual layer to help us understand the social spheres of the documents and how they construe internationalization.

The second stage of the analysis was predominantly data driven, as we used a spatial perspective to tease out how universities position themselves geographically at different scales from the global to the national to the regional. We also explored the use of spatial metaphors in the strategies to see how these are linked to different notions of qualities. In this stage of the analysis, we have chosen a combined insider-outsider approach to provide a more contextual reading and analysis of the strategies that the thematic discourse analysis could provide. We have included vignettes from visits to each other's universities to allow the reader to see how strategies are part of the culture and institution, when experienced from the outside.

Positionality

Addressing researcher positionality is common and necessary in qualitative research. It is less usual in relation to discourse analysis. Nonetheless, we do so in this paper based on the idea that as with any texts, strategy documents also need to be read in their social context (Coffey, 2014; Fairclough, 2003). Reflecting on positionality comes from an understanding of knowledge as situated: '*where we are located in the social structure as a whole and which institutions we are in [...] have an effect on how we understand the world*' (Hartsock, 1987, p. 188). In this paper, we analyse strategies from the four universities where we have our academic practice (NN from AU, NN from UoC, NN from JYU, and NN from UCL). The strategies represent a culture and at the same time they are producing a culture. As insiders (see Adriansen & Madsen, 2009) to these four different cultures, we have been able to interpret the strategies in their wider context. As insiders, for instance, we added information about if and how the strategies are part of the lived culture of each university. During the analysis of each strategy, we have also exposed ourselves to the questions and problematizations from each other as outsiders to those strategies. This outsider perspective has allowed us to spot the peculiarities that the insider takes for granted. Importantly, we all have experiences not only of our own universities but also as occasional visitors to each other's universities. Hence, our positionalities turned out to be more

complex during the iterative analysis process. We will use these insights during the analysis and present outsider vignettes from different sites to illustrate these complexities. In qualitative research, vignettes can be used as stimuli that research participants are invited to respond to (Hughes & Huby, 2004). While we do not use vignettes as a fully fledged analytical *vignette framework* (such as explicated by Skilling & Stylianides, 2020), our vignettes have served to stimulate our analytical sessions and given us each both a sense of the locations that we may not have visited and a chance to reflect on the spaces we have visited.

Ethical considerations

It is perhaps more usual to anonymize the names of institutions when undertaking higher education research than not. Anonymisation is frequently tied to ethics – it is deemed unethical to 'expose' the names and identities of institutions that are being the subject of critique. However, it is both impossible to do so in this case and, we argue, undesirable from an ethical standpoint. Our paper hinges on the personal and lived experiences of us as academics and our interactions with our own institutions, which appear at the top of this paper next to our names as both labels and symbols of some sort. The documents we are critiquing are (or were) all publicly available. This was an important part of our strategy as the documents are both for internal and external consumption. Our desire to link our discourse analysis to our positionality is done, in part, from an ethical standpoint – it is about transparency, honesty, and openness. Our methods and our ethics are inextricably linked and therefore any attempt to anonymize the universities in this instance would render the research (and paper) nonsensical.

Analysis

This study investigates the intertwined relationship of quality and internationalization as seen (at the time of writing) in the most up-to-date strategies published by four universities. Strategies represent institutions' ideologies (Pieczka, 2018), and by focussing on aspects of *quality* and *internationalisation*, we challenge the underlying assumptions of quality and its relation to internationalization as somehow self-evidently conjoined. In the first part of our analysis, we use thematization of the textual data based on Harvey and Green's (1993), Harvey and Newton's (2007), and our own data derived categories (Table 2). Then, we analyse the strategies from a spatial perspective.

Table 3. Categorization of 10 different notions of quality in four university strategies.

University	No mentions (white), 1–3 mentions (light grey), 4–7 mentions (middle grey), 9–11 mentions (dark grey)			
	UoC	AU	UCL	JYU
Excellence				
Standard				
Fitness for purpose				
Value for money				
Transformative				
Development				
Competition				
Cooperation				
Zero defects				
Empty				

Thematic analysis of quality

Table 3 shows the ways in which *quality* was conceptualized in the four analysed strategy documents. Seven of the categories were found in connection with quality, but three stand out in terms of mentions: quality as *excellence*, *development* and *empty*. It needs to be pointed out that the analysis was conducted on instances of *quality* and what happened around that concept. For instance *excellence* is mentioned 16 times in the UCL strategy, but never in the context of *quality*.

The empty category is the most frequent category found. It receives its meaning from the context where it is used and the operationalization it is given, as in the following example about teaching ‘Such methods must underpin the **quality of teaching**, increase learning intensity and help free up time for increased interaction between academic staff and students’ (University of Copenhagen [UoC] 2017, p. 17, emphasis added). Here, *quality of teaching* is not attached with any particular attributes and is hence empty, as the remainder of the sentence moves on to discuss learning intensity and increased interaction.

We also found that *quality* is rarely attributed with only one characteristic, but several may overlap. The following example from UCL presents an example of a case where *quality* can be interpreted both as empty (‘quality of education’ without attribute) or as development (‘improving further’): ‘Respondents made clear the overall scale of ambition for maintaining

the quality of education at UCL and improving further [...]’ (UCL, 2023, p. 11).

Similarly, the next example from AU can be read both as empty (‘highest quality’ without operationalization) and excellence (‘highest’): ‘The university’s goal of the highest quality of research requires more diversity among research staff’ (Aarhus University [AU] 2019, p. 20).

If we look at the individual strategies, it is notable that UCL does not mention excellence in the context of quality, whereas all the three other strategies do. This is most strongly evident at AU. JYU, on the other hand, is talking most strongly about quality as development ‘The University systematically **develops and monitors the quality of teaching**’. (University of Jyväskylä [JYU] 2018).

How is the notion of quality then linked to internationalization in the strategies? Using the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2012), we now turn our attention to the underlying assumptions inherently present in the strategies in relation to the three most mentioned categories of *excellence*, *development*, and *empty*.

In the category where the notion of quality is used in relation to development we find the following example from the JYU ‘Our Interdisciplinary Visiting Scholars programme supports the development of **research quality**, cooperation between disciplines and the international networking of researchers’. (JYU, 2018).

Development of research quality is here linked to the international and interdisciplinary Visiting

scholars programme, supporting interdisciplinary cooperation and networking. Quality as development can thus be said to respond to the problem of developing quality internally by attracting incoming international visitors.

The following example from AU, in turn, shows how quality is linked to developing research quality, implying a need to *improve* (i.e. strive for something more). *'Aarhus University's research is free and independent. The university will further improve the quality of its research as it strives to achieve the highest international level'*. (AU, 2019). In terms of Bacchi's frame, the problem seems to be framed as 'quality not quite there yet' and consequently the need to build on an already existing quality (by using the wording 'will further') and thus to achieve a bit more, in order to reach 'highest international level'. This example also illustrates the overlapping nature of these categories, as 'quality of its research' alone is empty. The vagueness is the point here – it makes the category empty.

A further example of the category *empty* is the following one from UoC *'As an organisation, the University of Copenhagen must endorse the vision of high-quality research and education taking place in collaboration with staff and students across the entire university and with the surrounding world'* (UoC, 2017).

The example shows how the strategies present quality with a presupposition of 'self-evident quality' in relation to the international. However, the vision is not stated explicitly, which is another characteristic of these 'quality goals', they are mostly implicit. The use of 'must' states that UoC has a responsibility to endorse something that already self-evidently exists, responding to the internalized need of Nordic higher education institutions to internationalize (Musiał, 2023).

In sum, it appears that the link between quality and internationalization in the strategy documents is often implicit, hinging on the contextual factors that operationalize quality and internationalization as an activity (such as mobility) or main task (such as research). Throughout our analysis of the strategies, however, we also found examples of how the universities presented their quality by geographical positioning and using spatial metaphors of 'world-class research and education' or 'the highest international quality'. This prompted us to move on to a spatial analysis.

Geographical positioning of the universities in their strategies and the use of spatial metaphors

Inherent in the word *international* is a focus on geography; this begs the question how is geography related to quality and internationalization of higher education? Therefore, we analyse how the four

universities position themselves geographically and which linkages are apparent in relation to their physical location, the surrounding society, the world and to internationalization and quality. In the strategies, spatial metaphors are often used especially in relation to internationalization, which shows how internationalization is a spatial endeavour. As the spatial reading was to a large extent conducted based on our own context knowledge and the discussions we had during this writing process, we have included vignettes that illustrate our positions and previous experiences with the universities and link them to the spatial reading of the data.

University of Copenhagen (UoC) strategy: Talent and collaboration

Vignette, Taina

While analysing the UoC strategy with Lene and Hanne, I was reminded of a visit to the university over 10 years ago. Conducting interviews with faculty and administrative staff on internationalisation, I was struck by the air of self-evident attractiveness of UoC as a host for international students and staff. This seemed surprising at a time when universities were designing internationalisation strategies and, particularly in the Nordic countries, setting up English Medium Instruction to attract students. Staff coordinating internationalisation efforts were extremely friendly and helpful, but the reactive 'we don't have to do anything, they come anyway' attitude was apparent. Now reading the strategy, the same air of self-evident excellence is still visible in the formulations of 'highest international level' and in the first page picture showing the Queen at a formal University event in a festive and traditional hall.

From the very beginning, the strategy uses geographical positioning to claim the quality of the university: *'UoC is among the universities in Europe that have the greatest academic breadth, research depth and range of degree programmes. We are ranked among the best universities in the world. And we can and will do it even better'* (UoC, 2017, p. 1) and it has the vision to *'be among the world's best universities measured by the quality of research and education and to be recognised for excellence'* (UoC, 2017, p. 3). For the university to deliver on this, the strategy states the importance of *'recruiting, retaining and developing talented academic staff'* (UoC, 2017, p. 8) and at the same time points to the international competition involved in reaching this *'the international competition to spot, attract and retain academic talent is considerable'* (UoC, 2017, p. 8). The strategy strongly promotes UoC as an university that can compete and be part of the international society of universities: *'Internationally, it must be evident that [UoC] is a strong international partner'* (UoC, 2017, p. 24). However, interestingly it also sees certain values as

national by stating ‘*While the University of Copenhagen is an internationally oriented university, it is still anchored in Danish culture with shared values such as trust, equality, dialogue and work/life balance*’ (UoC, 2017, p. 24).

The strategy draws on history and states, as a mark of quality, that UoC was one of the first universities in Northern Europe and the first picture showing the queen in the old main building of the university supports this image. However, compared to the strong focus on being among the best universities in the world very little is stated about Europe in the strategy.

Similarly, the local level is rarely mentioned in the strategy, mostly on a general level e.g. the responsibility of the university to meet the society’s needs. However, the city of Copenhagen is mentioned “*we create knowledge for and with the surrounding world and contribute to attracting knowledge-intensive jobs to Denmark and Greater Copenhagen and to starting businesses based on new knowledge and inventions which originate in the universities*” (UoC, 2017, p. 21). Here, the strategy highlights UoC’s role for the local job-market. But the geographical positioning is mainly at the global scale with an emphasis on UoC becoming even more world-class. In this way, the strategy appears detached from its local context and instead speaks from a universal position.

Aarhus University (AU) strategy: strategy 2025

Vignette, Jo

I visited Aarhus University a while ago now, in the ‘pre-Covid-era’. I still very much remember how I felt; although I struggle to conjure up many specific details, the details I do remember largely relate to the space of the building and some of its contents. The building we were in was quite spacious and concrete. It felt quite clinical. However, this was offset by an abundance of green potted plants. I also remember the ‘coffee room’ and how ridiculously well-equipped it was. I recall imagining at the time how much caffeine I would consume if I worked there and comparing it to my own experience of working at universities in the UK where communal spaces were less obviously valued. I also remember the nice lunches that were delivered to us. There is no doubt that the space and its materialities oiled if not shaped our academic interactions during our meeting. This feeling of being in a place that appreciates everyday life by creating life in the buildings aligns quite well with the image presented in the AU strategy with pictures showing everyday life situations with students and faculty in a somewhat cosy or relaxed atmosphere.

The strategy of AU focuses on its academic portfolio as ‘*broad ranging*’ and outlines how the current strategy ‘*sets new and higher goals for academic development and the scope of national and international collaboration*’ (AU, 2019, p. 6). Compared to UoC

this is a rather modest point of departure when positioning the university and it leads to the following goals ‘*to strengthen its position among leading research-intensive universities while also creating decisive value for the individual and for society as a whole*’ (AU, 2019, p. 6).

Quality is mentioned numerous times and often together with the world international: ‘*the highest international quality*’ (e.g. page 10, 11, 14). Thus, quality and international are connected through a spatial metaphor, ‘the highest’. In its vision, AU places itself together with other universities in relation to the international. For example, by stating ‘*with their strong tradition for international collaboration, the universities have a special responsibility to take the lead at a time in which international collaboration is facing political challenges, and in which the need to work together to find solutions to global societal challenges is greater than ever*’ (AU, 2019, p. 11). Also, AU sees itself as an institution that connects and facilitates this relation: ‘*What drives Aarhus University’s international collaboration is the vision of working to connect Denmark to the global society through the university’s activities*’ (AU, 2019, p. 11) and ‘*in addition to facilitating connections between Denmark and the world*’ (AU, 2019, p. 10). Here, we see AUs geographical positioning as a Danish university, which also has strong connections to the somewhat undefined ‘international’.

A central issue in the strategy is the university’s relation to society. Here, focus is on using the academic strength and breadth of the university as well as its international position: ‘*Aarhus University will intensify and increase its contribution to solving society’s major challenges, globally and nationally*’ (AU, 2019, p. 38). AU positions itself as striving to become more international (whatever that means) and at the same time emphasizes its contribution to society, both nationally and to some extent locally. Hospitals are mentioned specifically at the local level as a place where AU has and will contribute to society.

University College London (UCL) strategy: strategic plan 2022–2027

Vignette, Hanne

Together with Lene and Taina, I analysed UCL’s strategy. UCL’s strategy is an unusual one in its honest outline of the problems related to maintenance. We were laughing at the strange combination of bragging that ‘UCL is an extraordinary place, filled with people with a hunger for excellence and strong creative drive. Over the last decade, these qualities have accelerated our rise into the ranks of the very best universities in the world’ (UCL, 2023, p. 2) and honest admission of poor maintenance and neglect of physical premises ‘UCL’s maintenance backlog is higher than other comparable universities, at

between £600-£800 m' (UCL, 2023, p. 21). The descriptions of the lack of quality at the physical spaces, the backlog of repair and maintenance had us pondering about broken pipes and unpleasant toilets in this world-class university. Something I had forgotten about when visiting Jo at UCL some months later. After working for a while, I kindly asked for directions to the toilet. Upon entering with Jo's polite excuse for the state of the room in my ears, I realised – this is what they wrote in the strategy. Leaving the toilet, I had a new view on the building, seeing it through the words of the strategy. It was a run-down estate housing really esteemed professors. It was UCL as described in the strategy.

The UCL Strategic Plan 2022–2027, however, is quite different from the other three in its blunt recognition of the many difficulties UCL faces in the near future. The *'university has become a maze of complex, fragmented, and often overlapping administration'* (UCL, 2023, p. 2), the staff are overworked, the students not satisfied, and the buildings in dire need of maintenance. Additionally, it seems that there is a certain hesitance to change the current status quo, disrupting it too fundamental: *'In some ways, this strategic plan is relatively modest in ambition. That is because UCL is, at its core, an extraordinarily strong institution, with a deep commitment to excellence and a track record of remarkable success'* (UCL, 2023, p. 27).

In this context, UCL's self-image seems interesting: *'UCL is now one of the world's top universities, with broad disciplinary excellence in research, innovation, education and impact. We operate on a large scale and nevertheless deliver exceptional academic performance: an achievement that has few parallels internationally'* (UCL, 2023, p. 5). This image as one of the world's leading universities does not seem to be due to the satisfaction of the staff or students, nor due to the quality of UCL's facilities; instead it appears to be built upon UCL's university rankings.

Another way of understanding UCL's geographical position is its slogan. Since 2014, UCL has described itself as 'London's Global University' (University College London, 2023, p. 5). This very spatial slogan roots UCL at two scales simultaneously – the local and the global. The remaining strategy, however, mainly refers to the global scale *'Since 1826, we have challenged orthodoxy and applied ourselves to making the world better'* (UCL, 2023, p. 5), while London is *'one of the world's great cities'* (UCL, 2023, p. 3). The strategy does not mention Europe at all and UCL does not position itself in relation to the UK either.

With the many references to the materialities of the building and the infrastructure, the UCL strategy has an implicit geographical positioning in London. However, the greatest emphasis is on its abstract global reputation. The quality discourse of the UCL strategy oscillates between the very physical, material

and local problems, described as the problems with neglected buildings and burdened staff, and the abstract, elevated and global statements of 'remarkable global success' regardless of the problems. The image is that of a prestigious university, but one with a neglected infrastructure, and hesitance to change its winning strategy.

University of Jyväskylä (JYU): Wisdom and Wellbeing for us all

Vignette, Lene

Taking the train from Turku to Jyväskylä moving slowly into more and more forest gave me an idea of the atmosphere. However, nothing could really prepare me for the actual experience of the University of Jyväskylä as I climbed my way up to the buildings surrounded by trees in what seemed to be a forest area. Everything was just impressive although in a much-understated way. The buildings were so thoughtfully integrated into the landscape, the paths were winding but I never felt lost – I had this feeling of a place made for people to study and live. Next day, when I walked into the canteen, this lovely place with huge windows facing directly out so I had the experience of sitting in the middle of the forest, I found myself climbing over sleeping bags, banners with statements, and sleepy students organising a protest – this was clearly a place that matters for a lot of people.

The University of Jyväskylä strategy is named *Wisdom and wellbeing for us all*, with a vision of JYU being *'one of the world's leading research universities in the study of learning, wellbeing and basic natural phenomena, reshaping competence to build a sustainable society'* (JYU, 2018). Its vision includes geographical positioning: *'Our vision is to be a global leader in the study of learning, wellbeing and basic natural phenomena, reshaping competence to build a sustainable society'* (JYU, 2018). While aspiring to be a *global leader*, the visual presentation of the strategy ties it very much to the forests and lakes of Central Finland, combined with references to Alvar Aalto's architecture that is both locally situated and globally appreciated.

In the 2018 strategy, *quality* is very much linked to the development of the university and wider community in different ways. It is operationalized as five development programmes that focus on education, research, university community, campus, and digitalization. In all four development programmes, high level of international research, staff wellbeing, societal impact, and multidisciplinary cooperation is emphasized. The dimension of internationalization is relatively vague, and the emphasis on community development localizes and regionalizes the university in an interesting way not seen in other strategies.

A further emphasis on the local nature of the JYU strategy is brought by a clear inclusion of regional aspects of cooperation to the discussion of internationalization ‘*Close cooperation between the University and the City of Jyväskylä increases international experts’ interest in the region*’ (JYU, 2018). This regional aspect is part of the university’s declared wider societal impact mission, linking societal impact into quality goals.

The JYU identity stems from our legacy as an international university with societal impact. We are proud of this tradition and want to nurture it. Our uniqueness is recognised and widely respected in Finland and internationally. .

(JYU, 2018)

This emphasis on uniqueness stands out, both Aarhus University and especially University of Copenhagen seem to aspire to the highest international quality and excellence by becoming more like other universities ‘in the top’. In the two Danish strategies, there appears to be an implicit understanding that becoming more international is related to becoming detached from the place the university is localized and what the place has to offer.

From a spatial perspective what seems to characterize JYU is its relatively vague operationalization of the international and a more concrete and local and regional perspective both physically (as represented by the campus images) and in more abstract ways (as references to the local and regional community). The regional references amplify the community aspects and societal impact tasks of JYU.

To sum up, the spatial analysis of the four strategies provided us with insights into the local, regional, and global aspects of the universities, and how the universities position themselves relationally to global hierarchies and rankings. These spatialities had implications for the ways in which the universities represent quality and internationalization as attached to or detached from their location and positioning.

Discussion: four university strategies and their spatialities

Vignette, Lene and Hanne

Having worked together for years, we have had numerous encounters of the differences between the two Danish universities in terms of everyday practices such as implementation of GDPR. We have joked about AU being the well-behaved bigger sister always doing what she is told, while UoC was the indifferent sibling postponing to do the dishes (or implementing GDPR) in the expectation that this task did not apply to her. When reading the strategies, we could not help - with a big smile - noticing how our caricatures of the two universities seemed to materialise in the strategies. They went from being

boring documents with little connection to our everyday lives to being a mirror of our experiences.

In this discussion, we bring the thematic and spatial analyses together to see how the strategies relate to each other. Hereby, we provide insights into national differences and metropolitan/city differences as well as the global hierarchy of universities. All universities present a personal characteristic. UCL can be characterized from the contradiction between the prestigious image of a globally and locally leading university, with the simultaneously shabby image of the lacking maintenance, somewhat atypical of the strategy genre. AU seems to profile as the good and dutiful big sister type, doing everything properly and by the book. JYU strategy, admittedly different in its web form, mirrors an outdoorsy community in the Aalto region of Central Finland with its lakes and forests. UoC appears to be the one most detached from its place, appearing as the university striving to play in a somewhat abstract manner in the world league without local aspirations.

There are, however, also some similarities between the universities. UCL and UoC both want to ‘operate on a large scale’. The large scale of these two seems to imply a global hierarchy where the university strategies in different ways are used to showcase both the mark of quality and internationalization. AU and JYU, in turn, show more resemblance. While we did not analyse the pictures in the strategies as such, the visual likeness of the AU and JYU is striking, with images of a modern campus with informal gatherings or individual students and staff at work. We ponder if the similarities between JYU and AU is also due to their location in cities, whereas UoC and UCL are both metropolitan universities and the biggest university in the metropole. Both UoC and UCL have a self-image and geographical positioning that seem somewhat detached from the regional context they are part of. In contrast to this, AU and especially JYU are aware of their regional positions. These universities would also sometimes be labelled ‘regional universities’ - as if only certain universities were located in a region. The UoC strategy, however, seems to perceive UoC detached from its regional surroundings.

The perceptions presented above relate to the directionality of quality. By directionality of quality we refer to where quality is found, whether it is ‘out there’ or something the universities have themselves. It seems that UCL offers quality, and students can come to UCL to get quality. At AU, international collaboration gives quality. Both UoC and JYU seem to want to attract international talent to the university, making the spatiality a receiving direction, but they do so in quite different ways. UoC is visualized clearly closer to the top (occupied by UCL) and needs

international staff to get there, whereas JYU's willingness to 'grow and develop', together with the references to the community, give an almost internal image of the location of *quality* within the community.

Concluding remarks: quality and internationalization as related concepts

In this paper, we use four university strategies to understand the peculiar relationship between quality and internationalization in contemporary higher education. Thereby, we aimed to use small stories to tell big stories. By having two Danish universities, one Finnish, and one British we were able to explore to what extent university strategies appeared to be a reflection of the country of location. Interestingly, there was little similarity between the two Danish universities, while the two 'town' universities (Aarhus University and University of Jyväskylä) showed quite a few similarities just as the two 'capital' universities (University College London and University of Copenhagen) did. Finally, we did not see any specific differences between the Anglophone and the non-Anglophone, which is probably due to the fact that language was not mentioned at all in the strategies.

We began the analysis by searching for the occurrences of 'quality' in the four university strategies and discursively analysed those occurrences, looking at what meanings are assigned to quality in connection with internationalization, and what kinds of values, ideologies, and geographies they represent. While quality and internationalization are often treated as if they feed into each other, quality promoting internationalization and internationalization increasing quality, we showed that much of the discourse about quality in relation to internationalization is 'empty', without links to operationalizations or activities related to it. Interestingly, the way quality is spoken about and related to internationalization in the four strategies is spatial, and the variation between the examples appears to relate more to the position of the university as 'capital' versus 'town' than to the country within which the university is located.

Our spatial approach adds to the literature on quality and internationalization that often relies mainly on discourse analysis. We argue that this way of teasing out the spatialities of quality and internationalization and our use of vignettes as 'small stories' allows us to explore their implicit relationship critically. This way, we add new dimensions to studies of the intertwined relationship between internationalization and quality more broadly. The spatial approach allowed us to see how the universities position themselves in the world and in relation

to their surroundings. Both 'capital' universities seemed rather detached from the town and region within which they are situated, instead they related to the 'global' and the 'international' in abstract ways. University of Copenhagen and University College London thus portrays themselves as situated in an 'international space' and interestingly this is where quality is located. In contrast, the two 'town' universities, Aarhus University and University of Jyväskylä, expressed closer connections with their surroundings and saw themselves as situated in towns and especially JYU also in a region. For these two town universities, quality also has a spatial component by being related to something 'out there' that can either come to them through mobility of staff and students or be reached through international networks.

Finally, by using our insider knowledge in the second part of the analysis and by adding vignettes of our experiences from visiting each other's universities and from our collaboration over the past five years, we added a novel perspective to the iterative analysis of strategy documents. The workings and nature of the universities became experiences that have made the strategies come alive. Hence, the strategies are not only texts detached from the material reality of the universities but are embedded in and need to be understood in their own contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond.

ORCID

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8080-5030>

Lene Møller Madsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7149-9142>

Taina Saarinen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5117-2756>

Johanna Waters  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4545-2495>

References

- Aarhus University. (2019). *Strategy 2025. Strategy 2020-2025 (au.dk)*. Aarhus University. Date read September 25, 2023.
- Adriansen, H. K., Juul-Wiese, T., Møller Madsen, L., Saarinen, T., Spangler, V., & Waters, J. L. (2023). Emplacing English as lingua franca in international higher education: A spatial perspective on linguistic diversity. *Population, Space and Place*, 29(2), Article e2619 <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2619>

- Adriansen, H. K., & Madsen, L. M. (2009). Studying the making of geographical knowledge: The implications of insider interviews. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 63(3), 145–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291950903238966>
- Ala-Vähälä, T. (2020). *Coping with diversity in higher education in the European Higher Education Area: The case of quality assurance*. JYU dissertations 183. University of Jyväskylä. <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/67194>
- Bacchi, C. (2012). Introducing the ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’ approach. In A. Bletsas & C. Beasley (Eds.), *Engaging with Carol Bacchi Strategic Interventions and Exchanges* (pp. 21–24). University of Adelaide Press.
- Ball, S. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13(2), 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630930130203>
- Barnett, R. (1992). *Improving higher education: Total quality care*. Society for Research into Higher Education.
- Bergh, A. (2015). Local educational actors doing of education – a study of how local autonomy meets international and national quality policy rhetoric. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015(2), 28146. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.28146>
- Borch, I. H. (2020). Lost in translation: From the university’s quality assurance system to student evaluation practice. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6(3), 231–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1818447>
- Coffey, A. (2014). Analysing documents. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 367–379. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>
- Cornut, F., Giroux, H., & Langley, A. (2012). The strategic plan as a genre. *Discourse & Communication*, 6(1), 21–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17504813111432521>
- de Wit, H., & Altbach, P. G. (2021). Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, 5(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1820898>
- De Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Polak, E. E. (Eds.). (2015). *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies.
- Dill, D. D., Massy, W. F., Williams, P. R., & Cook, C. M. (1996). Accreditation & academic quality assurance: Can we get There from Here? *Change, the Magazine of Higher Learning*, 28(5), 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1996.9937136>
- El-Khawas, E. (1998). Accreditation’s role in quality assurance in the United States. *Higher Education Management*, 10(3), 43–56.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2011). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the socio-material*. Routledge.
- Galloway, N., Numajiri, T., & Rees, N. (2020). The ‘internationalisation’, or ‘Englishisation’, of higher education in East Asia. *Higher Education*, 80(3), 395–414. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00486-1>
- Gulson, K. N., & Symes, C. (2007). *Spatial theories of education: Policy and geography matters*. Routledge.
- Guzmán-Valenzuela, C. (2023). Unveiling the mainstream narrative and embracing critical voices in the era of internationalisation in higher education: Considerations from Latin America. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. Online first. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2023.2254209>
- Hartsock, N. (1987). Rethinking modernism: Minority vs. majority theories. *Cultural Critique*, 7(7), 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354155>
- Harvey, L. (2022). Critical social research: Re-examining quality. *Quality in Higher Education*, 28(2), 145–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2022.2037762>
- Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293930180102>
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2007). Transforming quality evaluation: Moving on. In Westerheijden, D., Stensaker, B., Rosa, M. J. (Eds.), *Quality assurance in higher education: Trends in regulation, translation and transformation* (pp. 225–245). Springer Netherlands.
- Hughes, R., & Huby, M. (2004). The construction and interpretation of vignettes in social research. *Social Work & Social Sciences Review*, 11(1), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1921/swssr.v11i1.428>
- Johnson, G., Whittington, R., Scholes, K., Angwin, D., & Regner, P. (2017). *Exploring strategy. Text and cases* (11th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Karlsson, S., & Rytberg, M. (2016). Those who walk the talk: The role of administrative professionals in transforming universities into strategic actors. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2016(2–3). <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v2.31537>
- Kim, S. (2016). Western faculty ‘flight risk’ at a Korean university and the complexities of internationalisation in Asian higher education. *Comparative Education*, 52(1), 78–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2015.1125620>
- Knight, J. (2003). Updated definition of internationalization. *International Higher Education*, 33(fall 2003), 2–3.
- Komotar, M. H. (2018). Quality assurance of internationalisation and internationalisation of quality assurance in Slovenian and Dutch higher education. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 8(4), 415–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2018.1458635>
- Lane, J. E. (2002). *New public management: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Lin, T., & Lei, J. (2021). English-medium instruction and content learning in higher education: Effects of medium of instruction, English proficiency, and academic ability. *SAGE Open*, 11(4), 21582440211061533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211061533>
- Lundin, H., & Geschwind, L. (2023). Exploring tuition fees as a policy instrument of internationalisation in a welfare state – the case of Sweden. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(1), 102–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2021.1994867>
- Mok, K. H., & Han, X. (2016). From ‘brain drain’ to ‘brain bridging’: Transnational higher education development and graduate employment in China. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 38(3), 369–389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2016.1174409>
- Musiał, K. (2023). Internationalization as myth, ceremony and doxa in higher education. The case of the Nordic countries between centre and periphery. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 9(1), 20–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2023.2166344>
- Neave, G., & van Vught, F. (1991). Conclusion. In G. Neave & F. A. Van Vught (Eds.), *Prometheus bound: The changing relationship between government and higher education in Western Europe* (pp. 239–255). Pergamon Press.
- Neave, G., & Vught Van, F. A. (Eds.). (1991). *Prometheus bound: The changing relationship between government and higher education in Western Europe*. Pergamon Press.

- Nielsen, G. B. (2011). Peopling policy: On conflicting subjectivities of fee-paying students. In C. Shore, S. Wright, & D. Però (Eds.), *Policy worlds: Anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*. (pp. 68–85). Berghahn.
- Ozer, O. (2022). Internationalization and Quality from the Perspectives of Stakeholders in the English and Turkish Higher Education Sectors. *European Education*, 54(3–4), 116–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2022.2158106>
- Paechter, C. (2004). Metaphors of space in educational theory and practice. *Pedagogy Culture & Society*, 12(3), 449–466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360400200202>
- Pieczka, M. (2018). Strategy as ideology. In *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication* (pp. 1–6). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Online. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0183>
- Power, M. (2000). The audit society — second thoughts. *International Journal of Auditing*, 4(1), 111–119. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1099-1123.00306>
- Ringarp, J., & Waldow, F. (2016). From ‘silent borrowing’ to the international argument – legitimating Swedish educational policy from 1945 to the present day. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2016(1), 29583. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v2.29583>
- Ruan, N. (2021). Accumulating academic freedom for intellectual leadership: Women professors’ experiences in Hong Kong. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 53(11), 1097–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773797>
- Saarinen, T. (2008). Position of text and discourse analysis in higher education policy research. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(6), 719–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802457090>
- Saarinen, T., & Ala-Vähälä, T. (2007). Accreditation, the Bologna process and National reactions: Accreditation as concept and action. *Higher Education in Europe*, 32(4), 333–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03797720802066195>
- Sahin, B. B., & Brooks, R. (2023). Nation-bounded internationalization of higher education: A comparative analysis of two periphery countries. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(5), 1071–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193723>
- Scott, P. (1995). *The meanings of mass higher education*. SHRE and Open University Press.
- Sison, M. (2018). Strategy as ideology. In *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication* (pp. 1–6). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Online. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0184>
- Skilling, K., & Stylianides, G. (2020). Using vignettes in educational research: A framework for vignette construction. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 43(5), 541–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2019.1704243>
- Staub, D. (2019). ‘Another accreditation? what’s the point?’ effective planning and implementation for specialised accreditation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 25(2), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2019.1634342>
- Stein, S. (2019). Critical internationalization studies at an impasse: Making space for complexity, uncertainty, and complicity in a time of global challenges. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(9), 1771–1784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1704722>
- Trow, M. (1973). *Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education*. Carnegie Commission on Higher Education.
- University College London. (2023). *2022-2027 Strategic Plan. ucl_strategic_plan_2022-27.Pdf*. University College London. Date read September 25.
- University of Copenhagen. (2017). *Talent and Collaboration*. University of Copenhagen. Date read September 25, 2023. It now no longer exists online as a new strategy has been issued.
- University of Jyväskylä. (2018). *Wisdom and Wellbeing for us all. Strategy 2030. Wisdom and wellbeing for us all - Strategy 2030 - University of Jyväskylä (jyu.fi)*. Date Read September 25, 2023.
- Vaara, E., Sorsa, V., & Pälli, P. (2010). On the force potential of strategy texts: A critical discourse analysis of a strategic plan and its power effects in a city organization. *Organization*, 17(6), 685–702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410367326>
- Vabø, A., Alvsvåg, A., Kyvik, S., & Reymert, I. (2016). The establishment of formal research groups in higher education institutions. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2016(2–3), 33896. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v2.33896>
- Vidovich, L. (2001). That chameleon ‘quality’: The multiple and contradictory discourses of ‘quality’ policy in Australian higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 22(2), 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300120072400>
- Wang, X. (2015). “Englicization” under the flag of internationalization: A case study of Shanghai University. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 263–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2015.1037083>