The internationalisation of a university as local practices: A case study

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Abstract
This article presents a case study of the internationalisation of an Engineering School at a leading Swedish University. The case study is an attempt to sketch out a more qualitative analytical approach to the study of internationalisation, focusing on the interplay between agency and structure and policy and practice as constructed by actors on the ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ levels of the organisation. We aim to provide a contribution to existing empirical studies that have usually focused on the national and institutional level of policy setting and implementation without adequately taking the perspective of local actors or local organisational cultures into account. The results of the case study show that internationalisation is materialised in many forms within the School, sometimes as a policy or a set of practices derived from the agency of specific actors (administrators or academic leaders), but equally as specific, varied local educational practices and cultural meanings construed within various micro cultures of academics working directly through their own global-local networks.

Keywords: internationalisation, higher education, academics, educational practice

INTRODUCTION
The internationalisation of universities and higher education systems has been one of the most widely asserted and researched policy trends in the past 20 years (Yang, 2002; Bartell, 2003; Teichler, 2004; Stensaker, Frolich and Maassen, 2008). Over the years, calls have been made for localised studies of changes to the governance and practice of higher education in relation to globalisation and internationalisation (e.g. Deem, 2001; Bacevic, 2010). Despite this, national or state-centred conceptions of policy change in higher education have largely dominated the literature (Shahjahan and Kezar, 2013; Robertson, 2006).

Important calls to understand internationalisation as a “multi-level exchange” (Maassen and Musselin, 2009: 10) have been made by researchers of internationalisation and higher education policy, yet we know little of how such dynamics might work in practice within an institution. Where relevant institutional studies do exist, they invariably focus on the practices of strategic planning and management of institutional policies or diagnosing the state of institutional integration of...
internationalisation agendas (Stensaker, Frolich and Maassen, 2008) or, most recently, they have focussed on the interplay between international agreements, national policy-making and institutional governance, broadly defined (e.g. Curaj et al., 2012). In fact, Dolby and Rahman (2008) assert that much of the literature on internationalisation has been written by and for university administrators. Luxon and Peelo (2009) also point out that the activities and experiences of actors delivering and experiencing the core activities of internationalisation (the curriculum inclusive of teaching and learning practices) have largely been ignored in the policy-driven studies of university internationalisation.

In order to fill this gap, this article provides an analysis of the internationalisation of an Engineering School at a Swedish University (henceforth referred to as ‘the University’). The study aims to sketch out a more fine-grained, qualitative analytical approach to the study of internationalisation within an institutional setting than the more usual policy-focused approaches. We argue that a ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ institutional focus in the context of the global-national-local policy/practice dimension allows for a deeper understanding and constructive critique of the concept of internationalisation. It will reveal some of the vertical dynamics materialising as institutional actors and higher educational practitioners in different locations in the organisation who engage in the internationalisation of their teaching.

The material presented in this article involves an analysis of how internationalisation is constructed within an organisation, on different levels and by different actors. While doing this, we construct an understanding of internationalisation as a process of cultural change within the institution embodied in academic practice by actual educators as well as administrators and academic leaders. We also draw on the fact that one of the researchers is an insider of the organisation, although without direct connections to the internationalisation policy, and that the other researcher is an outsider primarily interested in the construction of academic identities and educational practices related to internationalisation.

I. THE CONTESTED MEANINGS OF INTERNATIONALISATION
The study of internationalisation can be subsumed under the profound ideological shifts in work in higher education which promote the creation of a new type of academic culture: competitive, neoliberal, consumerist, and managerialist (Wedlin, 2011; Kim, 2010; Shore, 2010; Deem, Mok and Lucas, 2008). However, in contrast, the processes of internationalisation are also assumed to promote cosmopolitan, engaged, critical and collaborative academic orientations in research and teaching (Leask, 2007; Teekens, 2003). It is therefore a deeply ideological but also a productive arena of action for institutions, educators and students (e.g. Trondal, 2010; De Vita, 2007).

In line with the policy-analysis-driven and descriptive approach of many studies of internationalisation, a commonly accepted and recent definition of
internationalisation sees it as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004: 11). An older yet still widely known definition of Knight (1994, quoted in De Wit and Knight, 1999: 16) focused on similar practices located on the institutional level: “Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service function of the institution”. To that end, most existing studies investigate university-level internationalisation policy development and implementation (e.g. Elkin, Farnsworth and Templer, 2008; Taylor, 2004; Yang, 2004; De Jong and Teekens, 2003). This basic understanding lends itself to an acceptance of the nation-state as primary driving source rather than problematising the relationship between different levels (Shahjahan and Kezar, 2013; Luijten-Lub, Van der Vende and Huisman 2005; Robertson, 2007).

Some researchers have proposed that internationalisation policy has become the actual expression of wider European and global policy agendas, with their often economising and political ideological drives (Bache, 2006; Robertson, 2006). It can, in fact, be argued that universities of today internationalise partly in order to integrate the education systems of higher education, i.e. to Europeanise (Maassen and Musselin, 2009). However, the degree of such integration, convergence, collaboration or policy-borrowing between European national higher education systems is highly contested (e.g. Dobbins and Knil, 2009, Enders, 2004), as is the effectiveness of flagship European Union interventions in this such as, for example, the Erasmus student mobility programme (Souto-Otero et al., 2013, Teichler and Jahr, 2001) or Erasmus Mundus joint degree programmes (Papatsiba, 2013). Some researchers have pointed out that in this domain universities often act ahead of national policy in pursuing their own instrumental aim of gaining access to international students and/or research funding (e.g. Batory and Lindstrom, 2011).

Further, internationalisation has been understood in many studies to promote an agenda of globalisation. Britez and Peters (2007: 355) summarise this well: “In those instances internationalisation of higher education as a set of strategies to position higher education systems and institutions in a global context seems to be informed by the demand of neo-liberal capitalist economies and a neoliberal cosmopolitical view of the university”. This means that calls for cosmopolitan and international values in higher education are part and parcel of strategies of transforming universities into self-sufficient and income-generating industry-like institutions, fully embedded in an international political economy of knowledge creation and an international market for education (Peters and Britez, 2010; Jang, 2008; Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). Similarly, critical and feminist researchers have pointed out that globalised and internationalised mass higher education may serve to uphold the national stratification of higher education rather
than eradicate ‘persistent inequalities’ in terms of underprivileged groups’ access to high quality educational institutions (David, 2009: 62).

In contrast, internationalisation has been understood as an academic and ‘benevolent’ set of practices of cross-border academic collaboration preceding recent policy agendas and advancing the scientific and intellectual development of academics and students (Altbach and Knight, 2007). In this respect, the most recent studies of changes in the academic profession are also a useful reference as they may shed light on the material and cultural barriers to the emergence of an ‘internationalised’ European academic professional (Teichler, 2012). Terri Kim critically analyses such an identity construction using a case study of foreign academics working in the UK (Kim, 2010, 2009). There are some other studies from educational researchers who engage with these issues, in particular one by Pyvis and Chapman (2005) who investigated student experiences and student learning in international programmes, and the studies of Arenas (2009) and Walsh (2010) that examined the effects of such programmes on teachers’ teaching approaches. Perhaps most relevant for our purpose here are the study by Luxon and Peelo (2009), who investigated various academics’ approaches to course design and curriculum building based on the internationalisation of a single university, and research by Qualter and Willis (2011) who examined the crucial role of middle managers (heads of department) in both defining and acting upon university internationalisation strategies.

In this research context of definitional uncertainty, we find it important to further investigate together with other empirical case studies how academics and academic leaders interact with and enact internationalisation, and what the footprints of these processes look like inside academic departments. Thus, in this paper we are concerned with the need to account for how internationalisation, as described above, is embraced within an institution; how local actors and institutional sub-structures are involved in negotiating and co-constructing the meanings of internationalisation locally, nationally and consequently also globally.

The initial and directly relevant theoretical construct describing the global-local dimension in relation to the globalisation of higher education is the “glonacal agency heuristic” developed by Marginson and Rhoades (2002). It is a productive concept in that it attempts to problematise existing studies of transnational change in higher education that often obscure or overlook the dynamic interaction between the local, the national and the global since they often focus on national systems, markets and nation-states. The glonacal agency heuristic relies on both aspects of the term agency: as an institutional structure and as individual or collective action (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002: 289). It attempts to present the relationship between structural and individual agency as dialectic rather than separate.

This perspective becomes useful as we wish to unpack the local significance of the actors and agencies implementing the policies and practices associated with the
creation of an international university. The dialectic may be perceived as collapsing the distinction between agency and structure. However, this is necessary if we do not want to lose the focus on agents who embody educational practice and help constitute institutional policy (whilst being constrained and enabled by it). Whilst various other critical theoretical approaches to understanding the dynamics and practices of internationalisation and globalisation in higher education institutions have been developed (Cantwell and Maldonaldo-Maldonaldo, 2009; Kim, 2009; Jang, 2008), Marginson and Rhoades’ concept remains a useful first step in theorising the complexities of local-global interactions within and between higher education institutions, (see, for example, Shahjahan and Kezar, 2013; Stensaker, Frolich and Maassen, 2008).

However, our contention is that the existing studies privilege institutional level policy (structure) or an analysis of institutional actors (as representatives of agencies), and do not pay adequate attention to regular (mid-level and micro-level) actors who embody and enculturate these new educational tendencies or processes in their day-to-day academic and leadership work, thus enabling a new institutional culture. In other words, we are interested in understanding the interaction between academic internationalisation (inclusive of research, curriculum and teaching practices) and institutional internationalisation (inclusive of strategic planning and policy development), conceived as “the balancing act between these two worlds of change” (Trondal, 2010). This approach necessitates close attention to the organisational culture (Alvesson, 2002; Schein, 2004) of universities as specific institutions, and to the dynamics of academic work and practice in academic communities (Wenger, 1999) as well as the construction of academic identities (e.g. Becher and Trowler, 2001). Regarding both of these aspects, attention to discursive practices (narratives, repertoires) is a useful tool for gaining insights into the processes of change and adaptation (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

II. RESEARCH APPROACH

This research is a case study of internationalisation within a university structure and combines interviews with relevant actors (leaders, administrators and a selection of experienced academic teachers) and documentary sources and statistics pertaining to the internationalisation strategy available at the institution. More precisely, our approach was to connect an inquiry into the meso-level of the organisation, that is the managerial/policy/strategic working of the internationalisation agenda, with an analysis of the micro-level interpretations, artefacts and practices of internationalisation as undertaken by academics located within departments. The meso-level analysis focuses on formal structures and policies as they play out within the organisational structure under study (a school of engineering within a large university), while the micro-level analysis includes practices within a department, a course team, a working group or an informal network of academics working together, often
delivering a specific programme or curriculum (Roxā and Mårtensson, 2009; Luxon and Peelo, 2009). In this study, we aimed to construct a picture of these micro-level practices by interviewing individual academics from several departments and sub-departments (“avdelning”) of the Engineering School about the teaching practices they engage in, together with their colleagues in work groups and programmes.

Four interviews with key actors at the meso-level were carried out (two within the central university administration and two in the school administration), along with ten interviews with experienced senior academic teachers and researchers from across the Engineering departments who regularly engage in teaching international students. These teachers might be considered close allies of the internationalisation agenda of the School and they regularly teach in English, a second language to both them and most of their students. Another six academic teachers who do not teach courses in English were interviewed who may therefore be considered as positioned in opposition to or on the margins of the development of internationalisation within the school. The teachers were selected and contacted by email from a larger sample known to one of the authors who works at the institution as a senior academic developer and through contacts suggested by heads of department.

The documents we considered important for building the case study material were obtained from official websites dealing with internationalisation and its administration, or institutional policy papers produced by both the central level of the University and the School (most of these were available in both English and Swedish). In addition, some statistical information on courses in English across different departments was provided by the international office at the School of Engineering.

The semi-structured interviews and all other data gathering were undertaken during three periods when the external researcher visited the University (in 2010 and 2011). Documentary analysis was carried out both on and off site. The interviews with teachers elicited general experiences of teaching international students, teaching an international curriculum and of teaching in English. Further, concrete narratives or stories related to internationalisation in the classroom were collected from the interviewees. The interviews of academic leaders and administrators elicited their personal knowledge of internationalisation policy development and their assessment of the current state of policy implementation at the relevant institutional level. The interviews were transcribed and first read and analysed separately by both researchers with a view to identifying several distinct elements. Several coding and categorising strategies were then used to look at the material from different perspectives. In particular, we considered the cultural spread of the institutional discourse of internationalisation as a legitimate repertoire of university life, particularly discourses giving legitimacy to aspects of internationalisation, specific educational practices adopted to enact internationalisation in the classroom and the curriculum within this particular cultural, disciplinary and institutional
context. A separate study concerned the extent to which narratives of such practices travel across departmental contexts (Roxå and Renc-Roe, 2013).

III. THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The University is an established old comprehensive institution with a strong research tradition which is combined with a more recent entrepreneurial approach stressing external research funding and the economic sustainability of programmes of study and academic departments.

The internationalisation discourse is firmly integrated into the University’s Strategic Plan and Internationalisation Policy. The strategic plan states that internationalisation is one of four pillars of the University’s strategy: “While a number of areas will attain the highest international class, the University as a whole shall be one of the absolute foremost in Europe” (University Strategic Plan, 2006: 3). It is clearly a goal for the University to “become one of the premier universities in Europe” (Internationalisation Strategy, 2007). The University is seen as an Erasmus ‘success story’ by the European Commission, having over 600 exchange agreements with more than 50 countries and more than 400 Erasmus contracts. In 2007, the University sent around 1,000 students abroad (600 under the Erasmus programme) and received 1,700 visiting students (European Commission, 2007).

The strategic importance of the internationalisation agenda on the European level is maintained by continuing to retain the centrally located position of a Bologna Coordinator who cooperates closely with the Pro-Vice Chancellor. The central International Office (around 30 employees divided into two units) is responsible for collaborating in relevant international networks (for the University as a whole, this includes the European University Association, League of European Research Universities, Universitas 21, the Utrecht Network). The office is working towards increasing the international mobility of students and staff, in particular through the Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus programmes (Head of International Office, interview 12).

Far from just administering student-exchange arrangements, current lines of policy-related involvement include investigating and anticipating new areas of policy collaboration understood as part of the Bologna 21 agenda, such as conceptualising what student-centred education should look like. The University level’s institutional policy actors are also engaged in closely monitoring, anticipating and responding to relevant national legislation: the 2008 government Research Bill and Internationalisation Bill were anticipated in the last strategic plan, whilst the 2007 Government Bill on Higher Education is credited with institutionalising Swedish Higher education as a system that is currently classified as “100% Bologna compatible” (Swedish National Report of the Bologna Process Implementation, 2007). More recently, the institutional actors’ attention has focused on the Swedish government’s decision to introduce fees for non-EU students after the 2011–2012 academic year.
which are perceived as a threat to international student recruitment (Interview 12).

The overall university internationalisation strategy is becoming increasingly linked to other moves towards the perceived importance of global competition among universities. This is evident in the common reference being made by actors to the University’s rising position in the global university rankings. The University website called “Rankings, Facts and Figures” lists both the exact number reached in the Times Higher Education 2010 ranking and the resulting position in the bracket of the top 70–80 bracket in the Times Higher Top Universities by Reputation 2011 ranking. Although the discussion on rankings often involves calls by the University administrators for these to be “taken with a pinch of salt and sugar” (Interview 11), the global ranking and global visibility are an explicit element of the institution’s advertising strategy (since it is the highest placed comprehensive Scandinavian University). Despite their obvious limitations as an indicator of internationalisation, rankings are being used to add credibility to the University’s building of an institutional culture premised on a desire “to stand among the very best universities in Europe” (Strategic Plan, 2006: 2). The explicit internationalisation objective is very clearly linked to the acceptance of an international political economy of a fully competitive and mobile labour force as students are to be “more attractive on an increasingly global labour market with a university education that is distinctly international in profile” (Internationalisation Policy, 2007: 2).

It is, however, quite clear that this institutional culture which seems to embrace internationalisation was not developed overnight or simply in response to recent international agendas and trends in university management. For instance, the historical roots of student exchange at this University appeared well before the EU programmes; in fact, the first two-way exchange was established in 1966 with the university of California (all main campuses) and this exchange programme is still active (Interview 14).

The establishment of relevant agencies early on and the direct human agency of the institutional actors interested in internationalisation explains the University’s ongoing presence in the international arena as a strong institutional supporter of internationalisation processes. This is illustrated by the story of Bengt Nilsson. He was the first director of the International Office at the University and is widely acknowledged as the author of the concept of ‘internationalisation at home’. This specific actor, working in his leadership capacity after having moved to a neighbouring institution, is understood as having directly influenced the European networks of internationalisation strategists and policy development across the university sector (Wächter, 2003), (Nilsson, 2003: 27).

The Head of the International Office (and formerly a close collaborator of Nilsson), who was interviewed for this study, similarly stressed the importance and
relevance of her own direct and active engagement with the relevant agenda-setting organisation:

  So on several levels, connected to these networks, research level you have research groups, you have ... yeah so ... it's acknowledged and it's also supported. Me coming here now to work, I of course explain that I have ... that I'm currently involved in the EAIE and they said great. Good. Go for it, I think they ... the competence is developed for you it's also showing the universities' keen interest in [internationalisation] ... (Interview 12).

Thus, even the institutional context already provides a strong indication of internationalisation from below. Specifically, we have evidence of the direct agency of local actors engaged in creating institutional agencies and practices of internationalisation of university management and working on the global level to co-construct the dominant discourse of internationalisation in higher education. In this specific university context, on the level of university administration there is no sense of internationalisation being a global policy development experienced mainly as pressure from above. Instead, there is a sense of the individual agency of top university administrators working as part of the global network of internationalisation policy actors. This is also an important illustration of the cultural and strategic landscape in which the engineering faculty, the meso level of our analysis, is embedded.

IV. THE MESO-LEVEL ANALYSIS
The meso-level in our analysis is the Faculty of Engineering, hereinafter referred to as “the Faculty”. The Faculty is a 50-year-old part of the University and has 19 large departments that offer degrees in engineering, architecture, industrial design, food technology and safety engineering. The Faculty has nearly 7,000 students and 1,400 employees and a turnover of SEK 1.3 billion or around EUR 150,000,000 (Interview 14), which constitutes around one-quarter of the University’s overall turnover.

Approximately 400 courses each academic year are offered in English and advertised as suitable for exchange students. In addition, at least 10 new two-year International Master’s Programmes are also offered in English. Around 450 international students take part in courses, and 300 international students take the master’s programmes per year.

The internationalisation of education is formally coordinated by an Internationalisation Office (with seven employees) and a Vice-Dean for International Relations. Three key policy documents (Internationalisation Policy, Strategic Plan and Language Policy) are designed to work in tandem with the University strategy but also to specify policies that are to be a unique strength of the Faculty (Interview 11). The Faculty’s Strategic Plan seeks to increase student exchange levels across the study programmes (the plan aims for 25% of home students to have spent at least
three months abroad during their course of study). This includes plans to increase the number of courses offered in English, and to achieve the more successful integration of foreign students into the local student community (Interview 11).

The actors at this level (including both professional and academic leaders) stress their use of the University-level strategy but also engage in their own policy-making and strategic activities (both at home and in the national and international arena) in order to create a specific set of policies and conditions to benefit the Faculty. This distinctness is clearly expressed: “As a leading faculty at [the University], the Faculty of Engineering embraces internationalisation as a fundamental strategy to maintain excellent research and education”². The concept of Internationalisation at Home is widely used by the relevant actors to create the dominant cultural discourse (in dealings with their own departments) that all students benefit from intercultural and international education, including Swedish students.

Looking down from the central university level, the Faculty actors are highly successful with this agenda: “They have a very strong culture of internationalising, it’s fantastic, what they do there ( . . . ) They have their own business people, as always, they’re very much ahead and wanting to do their own thing” (Interview 12, Head of the University Internationalisation Office). One example of this leading role is that the Faculty’s Language Policy was used as a model to create the University-wide language policy (Interview 14). Apart from the collaboration between the two respective internationalisation offices, the Faculty is connected to the University’s decision-making processes through the participation of its Vice-Dean for International Relations in an internationalisation ‘policy group’ convened by the University’s Pro Vice Chancellor.

On this level of the organisation, there is a clear recognition of the engineering school’s specificity regarding its disciplinary, national and international counterparts or competitors. On the national level, the Faculty uses its excellent exchange opportunities as an advertising strategy while competing for students with the two bigger institutes of technology (Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm and the Chalmers Institute in Gothenburg). On the international level, the school is also a member of different networks of engineering schools and these collaborations are often perceived as fundamental to its internationalisation strategy. The Faculty advertises itself as the school with the best internationalisation prospects for incoming Swedish students (Interviews 13, 11). To promote successful student exchanges, European agreements are only signed with carefully selected partners, usually members of the same strategic networks (Interview 11). On the international level, the Faculty is more than happy to use its unique position as a technical school fully integrated into a large university to stress that incoming students can benefit from broader science courses and from course offerings at other faculties (Interviews 13, 14).
Importantly, on this level, this strong internationalisation strategy also has a clearly identifiable and distinct local history independent of and preceding the rise of European Union-sponsored programmes such as Erasmus and traceable, again, to a single actor. A dean of the Faculty in the late 1970s was a mathematician with a strong interest in languages. This particular dean wanted local engineering students to learn European languages and, for that purpose, he contacted several other European technical schools (Lausanne, Zurich, Toulouse, Paris, Grenoble, Dortmund and Darmstadt). Arrangements were made whereby the students would receive a stipend towards their living expenses or a shared room in a flat rented for them by the University so that they could attend courses at the respective university (Interview 11, Head of the Internationalisation Office). This programme sent 15–20 students abroad every year throughout the 1980s. Therefore, although internationalisation as a coherent and pervasive university strategy is associated with the start of participation in the Erasmus programme in the early 1990s, from the perspective of actors at the Faculty it is seen as an “explosion” of exchange opportunities but not its beginning (Interview 11).

The role of a specific disciplinary outlook and of personal agency derived from working at the Faculty is also exemplified in the actions of a Vice-Dean for Undergraduate Education during the planning stages of implementing the Bologna reform in the national legislation. This actor and his colleagues realised that keeping the current length of study for an engineering degree would not be productive either for the purpose of local competition with other institutions or for increasing student exchange (Interview 13). He used his experience in local government and his academic contacts to cooperate with the other deans of Swedish institutes of technology in order to lobby the Swedish government to include in the new law of education a special provision for an “integrated engineering degree” (Interviews 14, 13). The result of this successful action was that the new law included the traditional engineering title, and the length of study was changed from 4.5 to 5 years (now including the first and second cycle of higher education with the possibility of exit after the first three years upon completion of a BA thesis, but without any requirement to reapply for the second cycle). This provision was argued for specifically on the grounds of better prospects for European exchange and for attracting international students. At the same time, the possibility of offering separate two-year, second-cycle degrees was also established, leading to the possibility of offering international engineering Master’s degrees taught in English (Interviews 11, 13). This level of direct engagement of school-level actors with national policy-making of the new degree architecture is another example of the ‘glonacal’ logic in play in this case. We can clearly trace how the agency of actors (and their agencies) located on the meso-level contributes strongly to the Faculty’s internationalisation ‘success story’.
V. THE MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Looking at the level below the Faculty, we now consider practices and policies created by academic departments and practitioners at the micro-level, where courses and programmes of study come into being, that is to say, where academic practitioners embody and enact internationalisation in their working practices. The Faculty is a ‘matrix organisation’ in which research and teaching are managed through different institutional structures – the former through sub-departmental (division) heads and the latter through programme directors responsible to programme boards (Interview 14). This means that groups of academics and academic leaders will often work in interdisciplinary teams on designing and delivering educational programmes which are not always embedded in traditional (discipline-based) departments. This organisational structure clearly extends the capacity for collaboration in designing curricula and programmes in comparison to either a very centralised or a very department-dependent curriculum structure.

Most of the interviewees on this level who teach in English expressed a strong ideological identification with the goal of creating an international university. This widespread acceptance of the trend to provide some programmes and courses in English and to supervise and recruit graduate students in English has developed over the last ten or more years into a discourse of the ‘normalisation’ of teaching in English and teaching international students. In fact, several interviewees struggled to remember current or past problems they may have experienced when engaging in these practices:

I mean we’re so used to it now it’s umm, well I mean, if I think about it obviously I can come up with some ideas [about possible problems] but, but to us, it’s so natural now that, pfft, it’s nothing special (Interview 5).

The analysis of the interviews with professors working on this level of the organisation (Roxã and Renc-Roe 2010) reveals that internationalisation as ‘normal’ practice is constructed through the persistent use of particular linguistic-discursive justifications. Various widespread discourses supported this prevalent orientation, in particular the discourse of English as a lingua franca of science-based and engineering research and postgraduate study, and English as the dominant language of the engineering industry. Overall, there was an internalised view of the Faculty as an international school where teaching in English has become a normal aspect of the academic work.

What is far more striking and interesting is that the actual teaching practices related to ‘the international classroom’ display a surprising variety of applications. In some programmes, teaching in English is attributed to the beginning of the Erasmus student exchange, although a couple of programmes started delivering courses in English before that time. Most programmes commonly place their English courses
towards the upper end of the first cycle and in the second cycle of the integrated degree, which is understood as facilitating the hosting of exchange students. But there are programmes which start teaching in English (in some selected introductory courses) already from the first semester of the first cycle. Similarly, there is at least one division where teaching in English is almost non-existent. There is one single course for doctoral students (focusing on academic practice, presentations and writing in English), that is provided on a particular senior academic’s personal initiative (and is carried out without any financial remuneration). Overall, the ‘International Classroom’ at the Faculty may involve the following practices:

1. teaching a course in English, with English textbooks, exams and practice tasks whether or not the students are foreign or Swedish;
2. switching the language of instruction depending on the presence of exchange students;
3. delivering the course in Swedish but organising special English-language tutorials and project groups run by international teaching assistants (usually doctoral students);
4. having the course material in English but investing additional resources to help Swedish students maintain their knowledge of relevant terminology in Swedish; and
5. teaching the course in Swedish but having all written projects and the final assessment submitted in English.

For example, in one specific case the decisions on what language teaching materials should be in was based on the existence of a particularly well-regarded textbook in Swedish that the teacher and his colleagues liked. In another case, it was the individual teacher’s decision to invest significant time in translating their teaching materials into English based on an understanding that it had become the most ‘logical’ way to teach a particularly small and specialised subject. This was based on the professor’s own understanding of and engagement with research and publication venues in the subject matter, which were all in English. Even more interesting is the practice that, in one specific division, the practice of internationalisation entailed giving all international doctoral students intensive teaching in Swedish (paid for by the programme) so they could be ready to teach an introductory undergraduate course in Swedish after about two years of their doctoral education. This was seen as the established and logical way of socialising students into the local academic culture of this sub-department through teaching.

This alternative set of practices and orientations towards what internationalisation actually entails is visible in that even individual decisions about internationalisation have been taken for many years by these actors independently of or in parallel to the University policy. For example, some academic leaders used new
policy terms or institutional decisions to justify their own practice and, on occasion, they used it as an opportunity for a specific change strategy on the division or programme level. In the following quote, a discussion on the internationalisation of study programmes among two leaders of related engineering study programmes occurred around the time of the Bologna implementation, although the policy change is not explicitly referred to:

And that change started in 2006 I think when we . . . So we decided to have more English. And then there was this discussion – should the entire three years be in English? Or should it not? And then we had numerous discussions on that (Interview 4).

Similarly, the academic leaders of programmes who undertook significant pioneering projects in constructing the international classroom did so through collaboration with centrally positioned units, and were aware of institutional politics, but proceeded by maintaining complete academic ownership over the process and product of their efforts:

So we did for that programme, we started a special project focused on teaching and learning in, in another language. (…) It was really fun. (…) I, I realised . . . and we had to be careful, because I mean, I think we had eyes watching what we were doing, so we started a project with the [collage from the central educational development unit]. So we had like a project which was aimed at both the professors and the students. (…) And we actually presented eh, that in an engineering conference in Stockholm. (Interview 5)

Some of the interviewed academics did not derive their own practices from the University strategy at all but from their personal and professional networks and their self-identification as internationalised researchers and academic entrepreneurs. They used their research status to directly engage in fundraising for student exchange programmes at the graduate level:

I have a formalised collaboration with Korea, I have a professorship in Seoul, I have, the, the, [student name], my Chinese student, that’s a collaboration with China, eh, and, part of that initiative is that, I like to set up a more long-standing collaboration, one start of that is to exchange a student for a year. (…) And, eh, I have international collaboration with the USA, you know it’s, it’s moving all over. So whenever there are, there’s a, a match in between us and there is an opportunity to get funding, I’ve been trying to get some projects going with Japan . . . (Interview 6).

It is very clear from the interviews that the internationalisation of teaching was made possible and culturally acceptable by a significant and already existing internationalisation of the academic identity among engineering teachers through their own research, postgraduate study and global academic networks. In this particular case, the engagement with international programmes and exchange students is part and parcel of the strategy of maintaining a focus on the development
of personal and departmental research. This is implied in the widespread reference to the usefulness of first-cycle student exchange for the recruitment of postgraduate students:

It is important [to have exchange students], I mean we recruited several of the PhD students from eh, well, from exchange students (…) and of course they are good and we would have missed them (otherwise) (Interview 7).

We may conclude from this data that while there is significant overlap between the academic identity and practice of these practitioners and the policy goals of the Faculty, the latter facilitates but does not determine the former. It is the international elements in the identity of being an academic in engineering and the recognition gained by having international collaboration that fuels internationalisation.

Unsurprisingly then, there are also academics based in departments where few courses are offered in English since Swedish remains an established academic language of those particular fields. The academics we interviewed located in such departments and not engaged in teaching in English have a much more critical approach to the subject, and often ignore, question or simply dismiss the University-wide calls for more widespread internationalisation (Interviews 15–21).

We found that their views of the importance of teaching in Swedish are constructed by a discourse of the relationship of a programme to specific labour markets where either the knowledge of the local language and specialist terminology is paramount or the industry itself takes on the burden of preparing some of its workforce (usually at a more senior and experienced stage) for work in the international market:

Another aspect which is very important is the, is the … Those who are going to employ these students, they want the students to learn the Swedish terms. Especially in my subject, which is very technical (Interview 16).

These meanings are supported by a narrative of Swedish as the natural language for teaching and for student understanding, even by appeals to preserve the national cultural heritage. In this respect, it is interesting to note that several defenders of the role of Swedish as the main language of instruction were in fact academics with a non-Swedish or a migrant background who valued their acquired Swedish national identity. They worried how students of another national origin might deal with having to switch to studying in English, instead of learning and practising Swedish. These academics viewed teaching in English as less natural and requiring too much oversimplification of educational content; it will thus lower the educational quality:

The problem would be to get students to ask questions, on the lessons, I think, if they, eh, if they had to speak in English. […] But perhaps that’s eh … it’s more difficult to … eh, yeah, to discuss things in another language then your own. (Interview 15)
The drive of the University-Faculty policy towards further internationalisation is also acknowledged and expected to grow in prominence by these teachers, and is looked upon with concern for the quality of the student learning experience. At the same time, in a situation of falling student numbers international students are seen as a potential new addition and a source of funding so the stance of these practitioners is somewhat ambivalent and uncertain as to the future. For this group of teachers, the policies connected to the creation of international programmes may provide material for identity work, presently as material which is negatively loaded, something to identify oneself with:

No, we don’t talk about this very often [whether to teach courses in English]. Because there are more, no, no, no, because there are more, eh, relevant topics to talk about. (…) As ah, there has been a huge reorganisation recently. So people want to eh, work, eh, with the real issues, not the organisational issues (…) We have redesigned whole programmes since 2007. Three plus two [two cycles]. And this has been a huge effort for the ones who were involved in education here. (…) Now people are more interested in education and research. That’s it (Interview 19).

The faculty of engineering thus emerges in the interviews as an international institution where teaching in English is normal and expected to be even more so in the future. It is also an institution displaying significant variation in the practice and significance attached to this process. Our interviewees strongly confirm that pedagogical processes are not simply understood as services or products, and they do not easily change in response to an imposed reform.

VI. Conclusion

The research described here investigated how internationalisation is constructed in academic practices. It emerges as mediated but not determined by policy developments. We argue that the justification for these varied adaptation and change practices was generated by the interlinking of the trans-institutional as well as sub-institutional location of academic identity and academic practice for these practitioners. This internationalisation strategy is at the micro-level in particular clearly a whole different world to the university-level strategy (Trondal, 2010). It is likely that central and faculty-level policies and the overall institutional, national and global development provide important material for practitioners (for example, by helping ensure there are more exchange students in courses), but they neither dictate nor explain the actual and varied forms the work takes.

This study confirms research (Roxå and Mårtensson, 2011) carried out in the same context in that it reveals how micro-culture leaders create successful practices that match their localised interests best. They are thereby able to preserve and stabilise their local practices over many years. Once established, an innovative
pedagogy or practice introduced from the bottom up tends to very quickly become
taken for granted as it becomes fossilised into an established institutional practice:

One of the courses I teach, we always gave it in English (Interview 5).
The aim has always been to give them in English (Interview 9).

What the above shows is that, by choosing to teach in English and thereby adopting
strategies for internationalisation, local actors at the micro level pursue their own
globalised interests and, further, they do so based on specific formations of academic
identity and practice. Through this perspective, the policies provided to academics
are used during identity construction. Decisions related to teaching practices will
follow the frames of this identity. The result is a highly diversified practice of
internationalisation, but also leads to power structures among the groups favouring
internationalisation and those more sceptical of it.

We thereby see the applicability of the ‘glonacal agency heuristic’ as a useful
perspective for locating our case study in a wider framework, as an alternative to
top-down policy implementation and strategic management approaches. The flow
of policy development, often perceived as from the level of the institution, or its
significant actors, to the level of national and international policy surfaces as being
more complex in nature. Local actors here emerge as significant policy definition and
policy agenda sources. The flow is not so much of disembodied policy ideas but of
human bodies and identities travelling across the relevant multiple sights of
governance (also at the supranational level). Thus, the case study of this University
locating itself near the peak of European policy development in higher education
clearly supports Marginson’s argument that “people movement [is] often ahead of
the development of international relations in governance and policy” (Marginson,
2006: 1).

These local actors use networks and arenas where they can further legitimate new
processes or meanings and interact with the relevant policy agenda. The result is not
the implementation of the policies but their realisation as integrated parts of their
academic identities. These actors have the potential to create their own “windows of
opportunity” for policy conceptualisation and practice (Maassen and Musselin,
2009). However, it has to be stressed that this sort of international circle of policy
entrepreneurs is more accessible to institutions which are already positioned at the
perceived top of the emerging global stratification of higher education institutions.
Therefore, research on marginally positioned institutions on the peripheries of the
emerging international system is important and would most likely reveal a very
different version of the interplay between policy and local practice (Bacevic, 2010;
Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Tomusk, 2007). More qualitative,
comparative and ethnographic studies of ‘the international classroom’ at different
institutions of higher education, in terms of the experiences of both teachers and
students (but also of the administrators and academic leaders), are needed in order to find out how internationalisation is experienced and enacted in different higher education institutions, and not only those located in English-speaking or Western systems.

What needs to be further challenged is the assumption that simply providing a policy context or framework, or even funding, on the national or international level can steer universities to a successful pathway of internationalisation. We provide some evidence in this study to suggest that the processes involved are far more complex, and context-specific.
Notes

1 The Faculty Website (2011), 'Facts and Figures'.
2 The Faculty Website (2011), 'International Relations'.
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