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# Internationalisation of Finnish Higher Education as a Policy Driver in a Merger Process—Towards Competition, Collaboration, or Sustainability?

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## Introduction

For the last two decades, internationalisation has been one of the main aims in the Finnish higher education policy (Välilä et al. 2014). Thus it is also topical in the restructuring of the organisational landscape of Finnish higher education, where mergers are used as policy instruments for transforming the system and in meeting higher education policy goals (Pinheiro et al. 2016; Geschwind 2018). Creating larger institutions through mergers is seen as a prerequisite to being international and competitive in the global higher education market. The Ministry of Education and Culture has strongly supported the mergers even though they may be considered voluntary and institutionally initiated (Skovdin 1999; Harman & Harman 2003; Cai et al. 2016; de Boer et al. 2016). The instrumental goals of mergers have generally been the professionalisation of higher education, and economics of scale. However, we argue that the more substantial aims of merger processes have been those that foster the international and national competitiveness of universities: internationalisation, global academic excellence, and prestige, as well as increased cross-disciplinarity of merged institutions (Tienari et al. 2015; Vellamo et al. 2020). Mergers are considered to stimulate change in national university systems and enhance institutional rankings (Docampo, Egret & Cram 2015; Ripoll-Soler & de Miguel-Molina 2019).

In this chapter, we explore the case of the Tampere merger, the internationalisation strategy of the new Tampere University and the ensuing identity as an international higher education institution that is being created in the process. Our case is the merger of two Finnish universities, the University of Tampere, (UTA) and Tampere University of Technology (TUT). We approach internationalisation as a top-down implementation process of higher education policy on an institutional level, in the case of the merger resulting in the formation of the new Tampere University in 2019. Our focus is on how *mergers* are justified by internationalisation from an institutional perspective. We are interested in the way in which national internationalisation discourses are used as a driver for the merger process. We focus on the different internationalisation discourses of competitiveness, collaboration, and sustainability and examine the political, financial, academic, and cultural aspects of the merger. In addition, we include critical approaches on internationalisation: greenwashing, academic tourism, and corporate university developments where internationalisation is a means to other ends.

Our data consist of documents at the institutional level, as well as national strategies of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. To understand the role of internationalisation discourses in a merger process, we analyse and compare the national strategies as well as documents related to the internationalisation of the newly merged Tampere University. Our research question is: How are national internationalisation discourses transferred to the merger process and how are they used as arguments for the merger?

## Discourses and Aspects of Internationalisation in Higher Education

Internationalisation has been an integral part of higher education since antiquity, but the notion of internationalisation dates from the 1990s (Jones & de Wit 2017) and has been defined, as “the process

of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of education” (Knight 2003).

The concept of globalisation has been associated with higher education somewhat later and connected to both economic and cultural globalisation (Marginson & van der Wende 2007). Globalisation may be defined as a set of processes of cross-border flows of capital, people, and ideas as well as the ascendance of a post-Fordist production model, which has transformed social, political, cultural, and economic relations worldwide (Kauppinen & Cantwell 2014, 138).

It is difficult to form an exhaustive list of the different aspects of internationalisation, as internationalisation has permeated the whole of higher education and it is not only a separate strategy. The motivations for internationalisation vary between institutions, countries, and historically Internationalisation may be classified into four distinct but connected aspects : academic, social/cultural, political, and economic (de Wit 1999). Academic aspects are those of quality and international standards but can also be associated with excellence and rankings. The social or cultural aspect is linked with national culture and language on the one hand, and with the globalisation effect and hegemony of English on the other, but also including the understanding of other cultures and languages. The political aspect is often associated with national policy but also with international influences.

The internationalisation of higher education based on different missions, education, research, and societal impact is manifested differently. Internationalisation of education has been extended from mobility to an experience, including curriculum and internationalisation at home, different transnational forms of education, strategic education partnerships and global recruitment of both students and academics (Jones & de Wit 2017; Weimer 2020). Research has gained eminence in internationalisation discourses as more attention is being paid to rankings, which are mainly based on research indicators (Woldegiyorgis et. al. 2018). International research collaboration is also found to increase productivity, quality, and dissemination of research results. The premises for international research and opportunities for funding vary between institutions, disciplines and individuals. The third mission may even be considered to be competing for resources with internationalisation, and the social engagement of internationalisation has been limited (Brandenburg et al. 2019).

Internationalisation has originally been defined into two somewhat competing and contradictory discourses, those of collaboration and competition. Collaboration stresses the positive aspects associated with international partnerships, complementarity, knowledge sharing and the possibility to solve global challenges together. From a social aspect, collaborative internationalisation would increase understanding of others and valuing multiculturalism in society. It has been claimed that particularly the political, cultural, and academic aspects are based on an ethos of cooperation (Perez-Encinas 2018), whereas the economic aspect is based on an ethos of competition (Knight 2003; Kauko & Medveva 2016).

The impact of globalisation and marketisation on higher education has had a fundamental effect on what is considered internationalisation and the emphasis on the competition discourse (Lewin-Jones 2018). The economic aspect is closely linked with the idea of internationalisation as competition and with national competitiveness in the global markets, as well as with the commodification of education and the possibility for institutions to produce revenue from education export and tuition fees, and education is also seen as an investment for the individual. From a social and cultural perspective internationalisation may even entail cultural hegemony over others and often the competition may be framed in geopolitical confrontations between Anglo-American, European or Asian higher education systems. Competition for academic excellence and success in rankings is the main aim for

competitive internationalisation. The goal may be reached through recruitment of best international scholars.

Alongside these two more traditional discourses of internationalisation, an emerging discourse of sustainability and global impact has proliferated recently (de Wit & Deca 2020). This approach can better incorporate the third mission, including global social responsibility, ecological concerns, and equality. In this collaborative approach there is an additional focus on sustainability and a global commitment and on reciprocal transformative cultural exchange. Internationalisation is seen as more inclusive considering refugees and vulnerable groups and including more accessible forms such as online and internationalisation at home.

At the same time, more critical voices on internationalisation, its definitions, policies, and activities are also emerging. International mobility has been criticised as international academic tourism where students can be considered as visitors to the destination countries and mobility is based on the attraction of travelling. Thus, personal, and non-academic interest override learning and academic aims and students become consumers of travel services. (Cerqueira Bento 2014; Martínez-Roget & Rodríguez 2020).

From the point of view of sustainability, internationalisation should acknowledge the environmental effects of mobility, such as carbon offset of flights, but also the aspects of equality and diversity which are tightly associated with sustainability (Lozano et al. 2015). The ecological effects of internationalisation are often not considered, or they are dismissed with symbolic declarations and forms of greenwashing. There has also been criticism of greenwashing and window dressing, acting to gain benefits of green positioning without behaving accordingly (Cislak et al. 2021), where some of the shortcomings of internationalisation have seemingly been addressed, but the main agenda is representing one's own activities in a positive light. The corporate university developments have also harnessed internationalisation to ends where international activities enhance rankings, competitiveness and financial gains of the institutions. International environmental sustainability has been included in the higher education rankings which makes (sustainable) internationalisation even more closely tied to the world-class university ideal (Lozano et al. 2015).

. Buckner and Stein (2020) challenge the consensus on internationalisation and reveal that there is a hegemonic discourse in defining its content and deeming internationalisation as necessary and desirable. They also disclose that internationalisation is reduced to nationalities and to a dichotomy between '*domestic*' and '*international*', ignoring intersecting differences within and between these groups, while at the same time disregarding cultural power, geopolitics, and privilege. When '*international*' is defined as '*abroad*' or '*foreign*', as opposed to '*local*' or '*national*', there is an implicit reductive and homogenising assumption about these identities. There is a Western dominance in defining internationalisation and engaging in it. National and institutional strategies and policies over-emphasise internationalisation above other policies irrespective that some internationalisation policies and activities can even be outright harmful. By criticising and pointing out the main pitfalls of the contemporary internationalisation discourse, Buckner and Stein (2020) also implicitly frame the aspects of an ideal inclusive and equitable international higher education. However, even when acknowledging these negative sides of internationalisation, is it possible to engage in internationalisation in a conscientiously inclusive, equal, equitable and sustainable way?

To summarise, there are three main discourses of higher education internationalisation, those of collaboration, competition and sustainability and an additional approach criticising internationalisation. In addition, four aspects of internationalisation, academic, social/cultural, political, and economic, can all be found in the discourses, but manifested in different ways. These

discourses and aspects are examined in more detail in the tables discussing the national (table 1) and institutional (table 3) internationalisation strategies.

### Higher Education Internationalisation Policies in Finland

In the following, we examine the Finnish internationalisation strategies of higher education in the past decade, to decipher what aspects have been prominent and to see what kinds of policy shifts can be identified, by comparing the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's internationalisation strategies of 2009–2015 and of 2017–2025 in a matrix of the different aspects (academic, social/cultural, political and economic) and the internationalisation discourses (collaboration, competition and sustainability).

In the early 2000s, international publishing and visibility of Finnish research had increased, student and teacher mobilities were on the rise, and the interest of foreign students towards Finnish higher education was ascending. However, the level of internationalisation was still not sufficient from the Ministry's perspective. The main aspects in the strategy were increasing the internationalisation of higher education communities to create a more multicultural society, to increase the quality and attractiveness of Finnish higher education, to ramp up knowledge export and to promote global responsibility. Goals were set for augmenting the number of foreign students and researchers, as well as foreign investment in research and development.

In the *2008–2015 internationalisation strategy*, internationalisation was already linked with the structural development of higher education, with institutional mergers as the main instrument defined as follows: structural development of higher education by restructuring universities, creating a national innovation strategy and national research infrastructure policy, and introduction of the four-tier researcher career. It is noteworthy that universities, as opposed to universities of applied sciences, were determined to have a different role in internationalisation from the onset. Universities were given the freedom to select their own strategic fields and disciplines in which they focus their internationalisation efforts and choose their own international partners.

The idea of global competition in higher education and research, which affects the competitiveness of the whole nation, emerged as one of the main justifications for internationalisation in the 2008–2015 strategy. The European context was the main reference point, and the USA the main competitor, but emerging economies such as China and India were also mentioned as new contestants. International rankings were named as the main indicator for international success.

The idea of education as an exported commodity was also introduced in this strategy, and tuition fees for international students were brought up, however, the focus was on educational export rather than on fee-based education in Finland. Marketisation of higher education is a global phenomenon, but the Finnish higher education system experienced this shift later than many other countries. The introduction of tuition fees to non-EU/EEA students came about as late as in 2017—in the period of the next strategy.

The *2017–2025 strategy*, titled '*Better Together for a Better World*', would, judging by its name, seem to take a more collaborative approach to internationalisation. However, the strategy does not differ markedly from the previous: international attractiveness is mentioned first, but otherwise similar themes are presented as in the previous strategy. The strategy stresses competition for excellence, profiling, high-quality in education and research, defining internationalisation as the key to these qualities and at the same time giving the 'freedom' or responsibility for internationalisation to institutions. The newer strategy offers very few concrete tools or implementation instructions to higher education institutions and the tone of voice seems to shift the responsibility for

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internationalisation even more to the institutions themselves. The strategy uses words such as ‘highest level’, ‘competitive’, ‘most effective’, ‘top-level’ and ‘world class’ in relation to higher education, research and universities (pages 6–7), however, these words are not defined in any way, and it is left to the readers to interpret and to define how to accomplish these qualities.

In the new strategy, education and research are linked to national wellbeing, economy, and competitiveness. As part of the commodification of education, the aim is to turn education into a marketable product. In the education market, competition is said to be ‘fierce, especially among the degree programmes’ (page 10). To tackle this point, there is a plan to ‘establish a company to accelerate investments and the pace of product development in Finnish education exports’ (page 10). The company would engage in national level efforts and in establishing a country brand, whereas universities benefitting from these centralised efforts would still compete each other in the market. According to the strategy, reforms and legislative changes have been made to allow more freedom for institutions to engage in education export. This view stresses the idea that institutions would have been pushing for educational export, rather than it being an aim set by national policy. This contrasts with the general response of Finnish higher education institutions, as they have expressed doubts in the education export policies (Cai et al. 2012; Juusola 2020).

There is only some mention of global responsibility and of solving global issues including statements, such as ‘Genuinely international higher education communities’, (page 2) which could be interpreted as inclusive. The statement that ‘We Finns must be prepared to educate and train others from all parts of the globe and to create first-class expertise’ (page 3) may be considered as inclusive and welcoming, or as positioning Finnish higher education up-scale in the global ranking or even a statement of cultural hegemony. Later, it becomes evident that education offered to people from all parts of the globe mainly refers to education export or to fee-paying students.

The main aspects of different internationalisation discourses in these two strategies are summarised in the following table, showing the similarities and differences between the two strategies.

Aspect of internationalisation (de Wit 1999)	Internationalisation as collaboration (Perez-Encinas 2018)	Internationalisation as competition (Knight 2003; Kauko & Medveva 2016)	Responsible internationalisation as sustainability and global impact (de Wit & Deca 2020; Buckner & Stein 2020)
Academic	Internationalisation as (proof of) quality of education and research. (Strategy 08–15)	International rankings as indicator of success. Competing for foreign students and researchers. (Strategy 08–15)	Not mentioned. (Strategy 08–15)
	Internationalisation as (proof of) quality of education. Networking for research and education. (Strategy 17–25)	Competition in education as ‘fierce’. Focus on leading-edge research fields to gain global prominence. Good reputation of Finnish education. (Strategy 17–25)	Sharing Finnish knowledge. Offering education for students from all parts of the globe. Graduates understand diversity, global challenges, and principles of sustainable society. (Strategy 17–25)

<b>Social/Cultural</b>	Creating a more multicultural society. Internationalisation as valuable in itself. (Shared) European context as the main reference point. (Bologna process) (Strategy 08–15)	European higher education competing against USA and emerging economies (Strategy 08–15)	Promoting global responsibility. (Strategy 08–15)
	Internationalisation at home. Education and research linked to national wellbeing. Cooperation in education, research and innovation with United States, China, India, Japan, countries of Southeast Asia, southern/western Africa, Latin American countries, and Russia. (Strategy 17–25)	Heightened competition with other higher education institutions nationally and globally.  Alliances (Strategy 17–25)	Genuinely international higher education communities. Diversity. Global community as the context. Linguistically and culturally rich society. (Strategy 17–25)
<b>Political</b>	The Bologna process as a political context. (Strategy 08–15)	National policies for innovation and research infrastructure. Higher education mergers and restructuring for internationalisation. (Strategy 08–15)	Not mentioned. (Strategy 08–15)
	Regional and national (innovation and economic) policies as drivers. (Strategy 17–25)	National competitiveness research is invigorated with new national policy instruments (the flagship programme). Institutional policies in profiling. (Strategy 17–25)	Enhance the competence of Finland and each partner country both jointly and individually to create benefits for both. Dialogue between the EU and third countries and regions. (Strategy 17–25)
<b>Economic</b>	Collaboration with industry in networks. Attracting foreign investments (in research). (Strategy 08–15)	Education export. Introduction of tuition fees and education as commodity. (Strategy 08–15)	Knowledge export (Strategy 08–15)

	Networking of institutions, industry, and funding bodies for research excellence. Cooperation with regional, national, and international stakeholders. (Strategy 17–25)	Education as exportable commodity, tuition fees, education export, education and research linked to national economic competitiveness. Turning education into product and marketing, it. Building the education brand. (Strategy 17–25)	Not mentioned. (Strategy 17-25)
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**Table 1** Summary of the Ministry of Education and Culture Internationalisation Strategies 2009–2015 and 2017–2025.

It may be said that responsible internationalisation has become an emergent discourse in the latter internationalisation strategy, but it is still the weakest discourse as aspects related to the discourses of both collaboration and competition are mentioned more often. The competition discourse is the most prevalent one and has gained even more prominence in the latter strategy. From a critical approach it seems that even though there are aspects of sustainable internationalisation, internationalisation is not critically examined but taken as granted and viewed mainly from the Finnish national point of view increasing the national and institutional competitiveness.

### Higher Education Merger Policies in Finland

The Tampere merger cannot be seen independently of the trajectories of the earlier mergers that have taken place in Finland in terms of the national and international discourses. At the national level, two principal factors can be detected: economic and political. The economic factors can also be seen from two overlapping perspectives. First, the funding situations of the Finnish higher education institutions, and second, the perceived role Tampere University could play in the Finnish science and higher education policy (Cremonini, Mehari & Adamu 2020).

The Finnish higher education system is a binary system, with a university sector that emphasises research, and the polytechnic sector that focuses on teaching. Currently (year 2022), the Finnish higher education system has 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences, altogether enrolling more than 300,000 students for a population of around 5.5 million. Even though the Finnish higher education system is perceived to be quality, the system remains expensive, fragmented, and lacks competitiveness. Cognisant of these shortcomings, the Finnish government has shifted its attention from expanding the higher education system to ‘strengthening, profiling and concentrating the operations into larger operational units’ (Ursin 2017) in a bid to enhance the responsive capacities of Finnish universities to global challenges and to improve their competitiveness in the global higher education arena (Aarrevaara & Dobson 2016; Ursin 2017; Cremonini, Mehari & Adamu 2018). This is also a transformation from vertical to horizontal diversity (Aarrevaara & Dobson 2016). The global trend towards larger, competitive units paved the way for universities to engage in developing their profile and strategies through wider institutional cooperation and mergers (Tirronen & Nokkala 2009; Melin 2015).

There is no straightforward evidence to suggest that university mergers in Finland are the direct responses of universities to government policy directives and pressures. However, it seems that



growing recognition of the two actors for the emerging dynamics and development in national and international higher education, and the necessity of a strategic response to position the Finnish higher education institutions as key players in the field, might have decisive roles in the move to mergers. On the one hand, the Finnish government has emphasised efficiency and effectiveness in the performance of universities, and responsiveness to national economic and social developments; on the other hand, there have been signs of an ever-decreasing public funding allocated for higher education institutions, which limits the efficiency and effectiveness of universities. The push for efficiency and effectiveness while decreasing public funding sends a clear signal to Finnish universities to engage in radical reorganisation processes, in which mergers are seen as a tool for economies of scale.

It is also important to recognise the fact that Finnish universities' engagement in mergers seems to be inspired by the increasing need for higher impact and international visibility. These two views are not mutually exclusive, in the sense that the economies of scale created through mergers would increase the financial capacity of universities, which in turn results in the enhanced performance of universities. Considering the increasing rate of university mergers in the past decade, the current mergers could be explained as a logical extension of the series of reforms initiated since the mid-2000s and of the new Universities Act of 2010 and its implementations (Välimaa, Aittola & Ursin 2014; Aarrevaara & Dobson 2016). Mergers that took place after the 2010 Universities Act exhibited elements of radical shift from the 'egalitarian and regional policy principle' (Välimaa 2012, p. 31) to the 'notion of national and global university competition' (Cremonini, Mehari & Adamu 2018, p. 296), and towards a more vertically differentiated approach and the increasing quest for a world-class university, such as, for example, the creation of Aalto University (OECD, 2017).

The University of Tampere (UTA), Tampere University of Technology (TUT) and Tampere University of Applied Sciences (Tampereen Ammattikorkeakoulu [TAMK]) merged in 2019 to form a new university consortium called Tampere Universities. In practice, the two universities (i.e., UTA and TUT) merged into Tampere University and became TAMK's largest shareholder. The voluntary merger process was carried out with staunch support from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Based on the findings of Cremonini, Mehari & Adamu (2018), the merger showed elements of regional competition between big universities in Finland. The assumption was that the Tampere merger would create one of the largest universities in Finland, which would play a key role in the science and higher education policy framework of the Finnish market, with significant economic power and voice contributing to a comparative advantage in pursuing its missions. In other words, the Tampere University merger strategy could be interpreted through the prism of Finland's 'regional politics' (Cremonini, Mehari & Adamu 2018) as a response to Tampere's perceived declining power in shaping Finnish science policy.

However, moving towards the internationalisation discourse, the impetus for the Tampere University merger also stems from two forces: the need to respond to global challenges, and to engage in global competition in higher education. First, the increasing need for responsiveness to societal problems is manifested through the new university's focus on multidisciplinary research, and its reorganisation of academic units—especially between technology, health, and society—is considered necessary. (Vellamo, Pekkola Siekkinen 2019). Second, the global competitiveness dimension of the merger is shaped in such a way that it strives for internationalisation, improvement of quality, an increase in competitiveness, clarification of profiles, enhancement of activities in order to cut down overlapping teaching, standardising of practices, and an increase in flexibility. The later aspect of internationalisation matches the overall Finnish internationalisation strategy (2008–2015) for mergers as a means for creating stronger, high-quality, and profiled higher education institutions that are more versatile.

## **Towards a More International Tampere University: Merger as a Tool for Internationalisation**

The Aalto merger set the stage for creating world-class innovation university climbing the global higher education rankings (Aula & Tienari 2011; Ripoll-Soller and de Miguel-Molina 2019). The Tampere merger has been, from the onset, a tool for the internationalisation of the university. In the Finnish context, mergers are a mechanism for increasing global competitiveness and go hand in hand with other higher education legal reforms aimed at increasing competitiveness (Ministry of Education and Culture publications 2018:33).

The relation between the merger and the institution's internationalisation aims may be examined in the merger documents. Already in the very early stages of the process, internationalisation was mentioned in the report by Stig Gustavsson commissioned in 2014, in which he emphasised the critical mass needed for the university to become internationally recognised. The merger was presented as a prerequisite for internationalisation and recognition also in an early SWOT analysis of the Tampere merger plan (18.2.2015). The size of the university was mentioned as pivotal for increasing its international importance and for ensuring its potential to become world-class. Size has become a mantra in the merger genre, explaining how internationalisation and recognition are gained. However, in the merger documents, there is no detailed explanation for how size ensures global success, albeit true to some extent that institutional size can predict ranking (McAleer et al. 2019). In particular, the number of full-time equivalent students and the percentage of international students improve an institution's ranking in many score tables; similarly, a higher number of academics could increase the rate of scientific publication. However, some researchers argue that there is no direct relationship between the size of an institution and its scientific productivity (Kyvik 1995; Ripol-Soller & de Miguel-Molina 2019). Therefore, size does not seem to be an overarching solution to reach world-class status.

Several different indicators are relevant for the rankings, and research is usually deemed the most important one, not only by the universities themselves but also as valued by peers (Altbach 2015). Ranking positions and becoming world-class emphasise the discourse of competition in internationalisation, but there are also possible linkages between collaboration and improved ranking. Rankings are important as institutional peers consider the university's rank prior to entering a discussion about collaboration, and rankings affect one's willingness to partner with the institution (Hazelkorn 2007).

Even if it is not completely evident through which means mergers increase universities' ranking, there is research to back up the expectation that mergers may increase institutional ranking. In a study of ARWU-ranked universities, Ripol-Soller and de Miguel-Molina (2019) found that all the studied universities except Aalto saw rankings as the main rationale for the merger, and almost all were able to improve their ranking through merger, including Aalto. The improved result might not be a direct result solely of the merger, but higher rank may have required substantial reorganisation of activities, applying best practices and in many cases increased funding (Ripol-Soller & de Miguel-Molina 2019).

Many universities want to claim the status of world-class university even if they have no real evidence to back up their claim (Huisman 2008; Ripol-Soller & de Miguel-Molina 2019). Altbach (2015) has criticised the concept of world-class university, as the term is used very loosely to depict all kinds of institutions in varied higher education systems globally. In his attempt to define the elusive concept of a world-class university, Altbach claimed that well-established elite institutions in Anglo-American countries prevail in rankings, and for others to reach a similar status, time, money, good leadership,

and sheer luck are required (2015, p. 6). Other aspects in becoming world-class included attracting the best academics with good working conditions and salaries, usually in the form of tenure as well as ensuring academic freedom.

It may well be asked, what is the actual level of international recognition at which the Tampere merger has set the bar? The national benchmark mentioned in the Tampere merger documents is Aalto University (Working group for international development plan 2019), whereas the international benchmarks have included top-100 international universities, Lund University (Gustavsson 2014) and Aarhus University (Internationalisation strategy 2020). It could be said that these benchmarks may display an aspect of mimetic convergence, an aim to imitate more successful competitors (Aniluoto 2020). In the Tampere planning documents (the 2015 working group instructions), it is stated that Tampere would aim to become one of the three internationally important universities in Finland (the first two being the University of Helsinki and Aalto University). However, even for large wealthy nations, the possible or even desirable number of world-class universities is one or two. For other countries, a world-class university is beyond the ability of the nation to support (Altbach 2015). Similarly, Urbanovic and Wilkins (2012) consider it an insurmountable challenge for small countries in which both the quantity and quality of higher education on an international scale are harder to reach, even through mergers.

There have been two somewhat contradictory discourses in the merger, one highlighting the multidisciplinary of the merger as key to international success, and the other insisting on choosing particular profiled areas in which to succeed in international rankings. It is very unlikely that a university could excel in all aspects, and many institutions have focused on a narrower specialised field and on building world-class departments, institutes, or schools (Altbach 2015). Institutional divergence may occur as universities specialise and form unique research profiles in order to succeed in the rankings in their own 'niche' (Aniluoto 2020, 35). High-ranked institutions specialising in a particular field usually simultaneously provide students with educational opportunities in a wide range of disciplines and interdisciplinary programmes (Altbach 2015). The global and local may be connected by selecting fields that are of special relevance to the national or regional economy. In the Tampere process, a strong regional aspect has been prominent, and the new university consortium has been considered as serving the needs of local industry. It may be questioned whether the policies for regional service and international excellence are antithetical and mutually exclusive, or if they can be consolidated. In a survey conducted by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 33% of university board members considered regional aspects irrelevant for a university aiming to become internationally recognised (Ministry of Education and Culture publications 2018:33 p.61).

In the Tampere case, the selected three profile areas of technology, health and society still seem too wide to become international research spearheads. The possibility of reaching a top-notch position in a specialised field was introduced in the merger documents, allowing Tampere to take a leading position nationally in certain profile areas: 'By 2030, the new university formed by the Tampere3 community will be an internationally renowned university that is the most influential in Finland scientifically and societally in the areas determined by the university's profile' (Research at Tampere3 Interim report of the Research Management Group 2017). The specific profile areas have since been refined into the following four: the future of well-being, sustainable cities, gamification and augmented reality and the revolution of light and image.

To summarise the discussion, the main rationalisation on the advantages of internationalisation is based on a competitiveness reach through stature; the size of the university increases international competitiveness and attractiveness, and the development of profiling areas and new multidisciplinary research (and teaching) will boost academic excellence and attract students. Collaboration and

international visibility would also be fostered, as the more highly ranked university would be more appealing as a partner.

## A More Competitive, Collaborative and Sustainable New University? The Tampere University Action Plan for Internationalisation

In the following, we will look more closely at the aspect of merger as a tool in internationalisation, and the other related aspects and discourses of internationalisation in the Tampere University *Action Plan for Internationalisation* (2020). To plan the internationalisation strategy of the merged university in 2019, a working group was established by the president consisting of academic members from both merged universities leadership, including deans and the directors of education, research, innovation, brand development, HR experts, and professors. The working group was supported by a series of pop-up cafés and consultative interviews of internal stakeholders. Thus, the development of internationalisation plan was directly connected to participatory identity work of university and aimed towards the creation of shared ownership and inclusive view on internationalisation. The participatory process was seen as a way to build shared identity, strengthen cross-disciplinary collaboration, increase internal communication on partnerships and networks as well as connect multidisciplinary programmes to profiling areas and increase joint marketing (Internal working group memo 29.4.2019)

The Action Plan for Internationalisation, supporting the accomplishment of the University's Strategy for 2030 and pertinent to the university's other plans, is built on four major pillars: *active collaborative partnership, global community, being an international forerunner in research, and an attractive study destination and digital campus* (see Table 2). The notion of an active collaboration partner seems to be guided by the university's motto 'human potential unlimited', in a bid to contribute to sustainable global development that aims to tackle climate change, preserve the natural environment, and improve the well-being and sustainability of societies.

Pillars	Description
Active collaboration partner	Our university is an active and well-known collaboration partner and a contributor to global sustainable development. We boost our international collaboration through partnerships and networks and promote our research and education internationally.
Global community	We are a global community with shared values and identity. Our people and culture are inherently international, and we provide a variety of opportunities for academic mobility. We invest in international recruitment of best talents, e.g., by setting up a competitive international recruitment strategy, by utilising the tenure track model, and launching a Tampere Fellowship programme, and we use English as a medium of our everyday operations.
International Forerunner in Research	We are an international forerunner in multi- and transdisciplinary research and acclaimed for work on open science. Our researchers are active on international academic forums and attract international funding. This is facilitated by international university networks and a five-year development programme on international collaboration partnerships.
Attractive study destination	Our university is an attractive study destination and a digital campus, where we support virtual learning in global context. Internationalisation is an integral part of all our degree programmes and implemented in personal study plans. We focus on providing international degree students and students with immigrant backgrounds support for integration and a path for employment.

**Table 2** A four pillars for internationalisation. (The Action Plan for Internationalisation, Tampere University 2021).

In collaborative partnerships, Tampere University aims to enhance its international relations through partnerships and networks and promote its research and education internationally. The Action Plan specifically targets building a future European University through the ECIU European university

## Final draft 2.3.2022

project, an initiative mentioned as an alliance network of excellence by de Wit and Deca (2020). In addition, Tampere University strengthens other international networks and sets a five-year development programme on international collaboration and partnerships, to cement its place as a leading research university internationally. There is both ‘coverage’ and ‘profiling’ as it is stated that there will be ‘region-specific development plans with priority areas’ and ‘strategic partners’.

Profiling is also done through the policy instrument mentioned in the national strategy—the flagship programme for research. The aim is to have collaboration in research and education with ‘top international universities’. It is evident from the strategy that the main aim of Tampere University is to collaborate with prestigious universities. By stating this, it is positioning itself as one of those top-notch universities or aiming to gain status through the collaboration. In many instances, it also seems that other cooperation is a way to boost Tampere University or to gain direct benefits, such as funding. Cooperation with assumedly less prestigious institutions or countries not deemed strategic is only touched upon in the mention of capacity building. What could count as global responsibility, such as capacity building projects and hosting Scholars at Risk, is harnessed to the service of the Tampere University brand when the reason for such activities is to ‘brand our university as a contributor to global sustainable development’. It effectively undermines the global responsibility aspect, if the main reason for such activities is in branding Tampere University, in which case global responsibility becomes merely a means to become top echelon university and enforces a view of corporate university development of internationalisation.

As an international forerunner in research, the university focuses its efforts on the values and identity of the global community through comprehensive academic mobility and a competitive international recruitment strategy. By utilising the tenure track model, launching a Tampere Fellowship programme, and using English as a medium of everyday operations, the university attracts international academics. Academic excellence may be achieved through competitive international recruitment of the best talent and utilising tenure track models adopted from prestigious Anglo-American universities and recently implemented in most Finnish universities.

Aiming to create an attractive study destination and digital campus, internationalisation is seen as an integral part of all degree programmes, and it is implemented in personal study plans. By integrating internationalisation in pedagogy, the university provides support for integration and a path for employment to international degree students and students with immigrant backgrounds (Action Plan for Internationalisation 2020). Attractiveness is seen as important in the education market, but education is not presented as a commodity quite as strongly as in the national strategy. Institutional reactions to the marketisation of education vary, but Finnish higher education institutions do lack the experience in marketing, and there is reluctance especially among academics in seeing education as a commodity. This also has disciplinary differences, as some degrees are easier to market and have greater global demand. Similar findings have been made by Kauko and Medveva (2016, 105) in their analysis of the internationalisation strategies of Finnish universities, as the authors ‘could not identify an overarching theme combining internationalisation with marketisation in the university strategies at the policy-making level’.

Education as a commodity is manifested in the plans for ‘financially sustainable transnational education’, where the expectation is that each faculty could find lucrative fields in which to sell education. In research, there are also aims for financial gains, in more actively applying for international research grants, particularly in cooperation with international research consortia, which are considered a medium for securing more funding. There is also mention of global responsibility linked to education, which is not exactly spelled out, but—as it is mentioned within the context of talent attraction and contrasted against market logic—it can be interpreted as providing education opportunities to academically talented international students and to minorities or individuals in

## Final draft 2.3.2022

vulnerable positions. A strategic scholarship system is identified as key for addressing the topic. However, at least in 2020, the aim of Tampere University was to lower the percentage of tuition fee-waiver scholarships in all international degree programmes and to have more fee-paying students. Even if the Action Plan for Internationalisation contrasts tuition fees and global responsibility, other institutional policies have a different approach. Again, the commodification of internationalisation enforces the corporate university aspect.

The third pillar states: 'Interdisciplinarity, principles of the open science and diverse global aspects are supported by the universities in order to support the solving of the challenges of sustainability', and furthermore, 'Universities include the responsibility, particularly global responsibility to the sustainable education, research and their own activity in a stronger manner' (UNIFI 2020). In the Tampere University Action Plan for Internationalisation, the aspect of sustainability is related to global collaboration, describing the university 'participating actively in capacity-building projects, acting as a host institution for Scholars at Risk and branding our university as a contributor to global sustainable development'. In addition, the multi- and transdisciplinary collaboration and impact can be considered a cross-cutting theme in the document, enabling solution seeking to the big global challenges, i.e., to environmental issues, including sustainable development. The aspects of environmental sustainability have also been alluded to in the Tampere University plans on reducing campus facilities (mainly working spaces), although this has received criticism on masking financial cost savings with environmentalism (c.f. Melles 2020). There is similar criticism levelled at university leaders that environmental declarations are mere greenwash if the strategy declarations are not converted to accountable targets and actions. Signing declarations is a popular and potentially indicative strategy of commitment but in reality, has only limited or no significance as many sustainability declarations are aspirational and non-binding. (Bekessy et al. 2007; Lozano et al. 2015; Melles 2020).

To sum up, internationalisation is presented as a strategic process led by the organisation's leaders, with defined responsibilities and close ties to other strategies and plans. The Action Plan for Internationalisation talks about branding the university, its education, research and services to international scholars and students. It seems that internationalisation is predominantly about brand and thus part of the competition discourse mainly as well as a representation of the corporate university developments. The link between merging the universities and internationalisation is not clear from the internationalisation strategies but it can be elaborated from the merger motivations, especially those discussing the means to reach better rankings. The aspects and discourses of internationalisation in the Tampere University internationalisation strategy are summarised in the following table.

Aspect of internationalisation (de Wit 1999)	Internationalisation as collaboration (Perez-Encinas 2018)	Internationalisation as competition (Knight 2003; Kauko & Medveva 2016)	Responsible internationalisation as sustainability and global impact (de Wit & Deca 2020; Buckner & Stein 2020)
Academic	International partnerships for education and research.	'International forerunner in multi- and transdisciplinary research'. Profiling (flagships and centres of excellence).	Not mentioned.

		'International recruitment of best talents'.	
<b>Social/Cultural</b>	'Active and well-known partner', partnerships and networks as the main way of internationalisation.	Branding of education and research partnerships and networks as a means for gains in internationalisation.	'Contributor to global sustainable development'. 'Global community'.
<b>Political</b>	Not mentioned.	Local and national policies to increase attractiveness of the city and the university and labour policies. University has global impact.	European Universities Initiative (EUI). Capacity building.
<b>Economic</b>	Not mentioned.	'Financially sustainable transnational education'. Active application for international grants.	Not mentioned

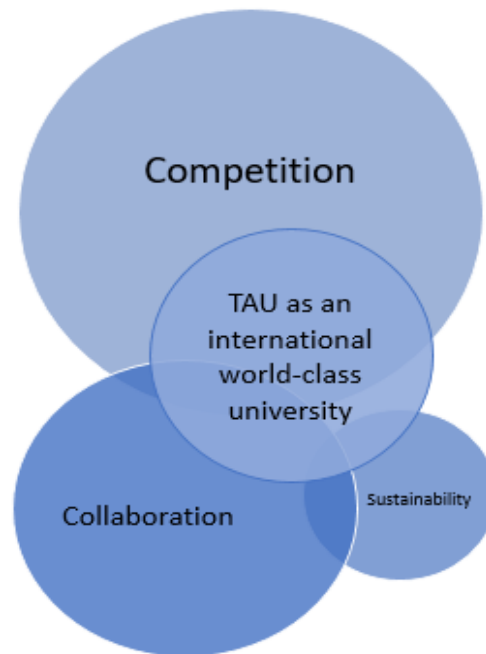
**Table 3** Summary of the aspects and discourses of internationalisation in the Tampere University Action Plan for Internationalisation

The Action Plan for Internationalisation remains on a relatively superficial level, but the predominant discourse is that of competition. Somewhat surprisingly, the discourse of collaboration is relatively weak. The discourse of sustainable internationalisation also remains on a general level with vague references to global sustainable development and capacity building, but is manifested in other statements and strategies (such as Scholars at Risk or the national UNIFI sustainability goals). However, they may also be considered as more like unbinding statements. The merger is not mentioned in the Action Plan for Internationalisation, and we may ask whether this merely reflects changes in the Ministry's internationalisation strategies, or whether the topic of merger still plays a role in the development of internationalisation in the new Tampere University. The Action Plan for Internationalisation, and the justifications for the merger are parallel: competition for becoming more internationally visible and recognised. Competition is the dominant discourse in the aims of the merger, as well. What could be assumed in the aim of the merger are transferred to the aims of the merged university.

The main arguments for internationalisation in the merger documents of size, profiling areas and multidisciplinary research, surprisingly have not been carried over to the Action Plan for Internationalisation. Academic excellence and attracting international academics are points of convergence in both the merger aims and the Action Plan for Internationalisation; the merger aims to attract these groups with profiled research and multidisciplinary, whereas the Internationalisation plan offers services in English, facilities, and an internationally recognised tenure track model. However, the Action Plan for Internationalisation sees student also as a potential source of revenue in the form of tuition fees. Whereas being able to attract internationally acclaimed scholars, the ranking of the university could be increased.

The following figure summarises the weight of the different discourses in the Action Plan for Internationalisation and places Tampere University as an international world-class university based

on global competition between institutions and through strategic collaboration with renowned international partners.



**Figure 1** Internationalisation discourses in Tampere University

## Conclusion

By utilising the Tampere University merger process as a case example, the objective of this chapter has been to discuss how mergers are justified by internationalisation in an institutional perspective, and how the national discourses on internationalisation are transferred to the merger process and used as arguments for mergers.

Contrary to expectations based on world-class university discourses, mergers are not explicitly presented in the internationalisation strategies of the Ministry as a means by which to transform universities into more international institutions. However, this does not mean that there would not be any benefits resulting from mergers to support a greater level of internationalisation. Stronger orientation on internationalisation may well be a result of, rather than the cause for merger. The discourse of internationalisation as competition seems to shape higher education reforms in Finland and mergers are presented as a prerequisite for entering the global higher education race.

We discovered that the predominant discourse in the case of Tampere University, was that of competition, while the discourse of collaboration seems to be relatively weak. The discourse of sustainable internationalisation remained on a rather general level, thereby offering no concrete justification for the merger, but rather appearing like window dressing. When comparing the Ministry's strategies and the Tampere University Action Plan for Internationalisation, it can be concluded that they have very little in common. One explanation for this could be that the strategies serve different purpose: the Ministry's strategies are more about proclaiming the distinctiveness of the Finnish higher education system and setting the direction for areas of improvement for the future,



whereas the Tampere University Action Plan for Internationalisation is more about establishing the newly formed university to be more well-known internationally. Another interpretation could be that the University did not want or did not even understand how to align its strategy with that of the national level. This would then question the meaningfulness and importance of national-level internationalisation strategies from the perspective of institutions.

What can be said about the main rationale for implementing the Tampere University merger from the political, financial, academic, and cultural aspects? Clearly, for the Ministry, mergers were supported to a large extent due to political factors. International trends in higher education policy point towards the larger size of institutions, backed by assumptions related to a higher level of international visibility (bigger institutions draw more students, staff, and produce more teaching and research outputs). From the institutional perspective, academic and financial rationales seem to matter most. Academic aspects include expected positive synergies with collaborating researchers, and a larger educational impact due to more efficient coordination. Financial aspects include assumptions based on improvements in economies of scale (greater efficiency) in both teaching and research (the cost side of) activities, and better possibilities with which to attract the most talented students, more research funding, and other third-party sources of funding (the revenue side). As a whole, having different rationales on the system and institutional levels does not necessarily make the rationales mutually conflicting, but rather, mutually reinforcing. Larger size and visibility are expected to create a positive halo effect on institutional prestige, which then can yield benefits for both the academic and financial aspects.

Our case offers perspectives that are not entirely in line with the assumptions derived from the theoretical base. We assumed that the emerging discourse of sustainability would have been more visible in the actual Internationalisation plan. However, it is more present in other (loosely) related documents and activities although it often remains on a declaration level and possibly being more a form of greenwashing and window dressing than truly sustainable internationalisation. Furthermore, competition is an all-encompassing discourse in the institutional and structural contexts, and it is often interpreted as a discourse that opposes academic rationale while supporting the financial and political agenda. However, it has a strong academic rationale. Internationalisation is argued from the perspective of collaboration and global impact; however, it is mainly related to institutional and international competitiveness. Apparently theoretical models are useful for drawing attention for different aspects of internationalisation discourses, but in practise, the complexity and overlapping nature of goals and processes of internationalisation goals escape simplicity of the ideal type models.

## Analysed material

“Better Together for a Better World: Policies to Promote Internationalisation in Finnish Higher Education and Research 2017-2025” Ministry of Education and Culture

International Development Plan—Working group on international development plan, 16 April 2019 (power point presentation) Tampere University

International Development Plan—Working group on international development plan, 29 April 2019 (power point presentation) Tampere University

Korkeakoulu-uudistusten vaikutusten arviointi Opetus—ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2018:33 [Impact evaluation of higher education reforms] Ministry of Education and Culture

Research at Tampere3 Interim report of the Research Management Group 2017

Stig Gustavsson Case Tampere, Selvitysmies, vuorineuvos Stig Gustavsson YouTube · VideonetChannel 14.12.2014 (watched January 24, 2021)

Tampere3-alaryhmä Tutkintorakenne ja -ohjelmat: sisäänrakennettu kansainvälisyys 10.4.2015 [report of the Tampere3 working sub-group on degree programmes: how to include internationalisation]

Tampere University (2020). Action Plan for Internationalisation supporting Tampere University's strategy 2030. Retrieved December 22, 2020, from <https://www.tuni.fi/en/services-and-collaboration/international-tampere-university/international-strategy>

Tampere3-vararehtoriöryhmän raportti 13.5.2015 [report on the Tampere3 working group of vice presidents] and its appendices

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