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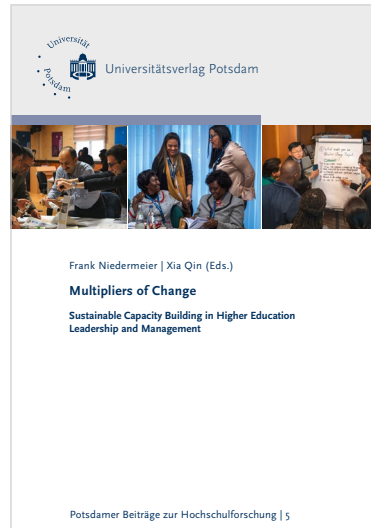
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## Enhancing Internationalisation for Peacebuilding among Higher Education Institutions in Post-Conflict Colombia

**ABSTRACT:** This article collected the results of a qualitative study focused on Colombian Higher Education Institutions' representatives partaking in the training 'Internationalisation for Peacebuilding 2018'. The selected Higher Education Institutions and representatives were all located in regions acutely affected by the Colombian armed conflict, now experiencing multifaceted challenges and opportunities in a post-conflict scenario. Interviews with participants of the training were conducted to analyse

the skills acquired and to identify possible improvements brought about by the training at the institutions. The article further identifies specific needs of the institutions, to be taken into account for future courses on internationalisation for higher education institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** internationalisation for higher education, capacity building, international cooperation, peacebuilding, quality in higher education

## 1. Introduction

In 2017, a group of Colombian alumni of the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies-DIES Management of Internationalisation of Higher Education Training Course devised a National Multiplication Training proposal entitled 'Internationalisation for Peacebuilding'. The backdrop of the proposal was the historical moment of the country, given the then recently sanctioned peace agreement with the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces guerrilla (FARC for the acronym in Spanish), which ended a sixty-year-old armed conflict. The proposal reflects a commitment from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst—German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD alumni, all seasoned international managers at leading Colombian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to contribute to peace by lending their expertise toward regional capacity building in higher education.

The targeted HEIs were located in regions of the country that suffered the most acute consequences of the civil armed strife. At the very least, it can be argued that the strife reinforced Colombia's profound geopolitical asymmetry in terms of economic development, the rule of law, and the promise of good governance. Consequently, many Colombian HEIs had either been slow or unable to react to innovations in management, teaching, and research. The training course established the notion of internationalisation as a key driver of quality and innovation, an essential, core concept of global Higher Education, which had been left largely unattended in the conflict-induced isolation of peripheral Colombia. The peace agreement now brings the opportunity of opening these regions and their HEIs up to the world, as well as accesses the expertise of Colombian colleagues in the field.

Thus, the training was built upon the notion of internationalisation beyond strict quality considerations, spreading knowledge and expertise that are key to regional peacebuilding. This paper thus commented on the rationale for the training, its development, and the findings of impact assessment. The assessment also provided the opportunity to identify future topics for new training in internationalisation with equal social impact on the local and global community, which could set the ground for the development of similar experiences around the globe.

## 2. Internationalisation for Peacebuilding: The Rationales

Internationalisation, in its most current definition, states that it is “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function, and delivery of post-secondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (Hunter et al., 2016, p. 11).

On the other hand, ‘global citizenship’ is a term usually associated with consequences of internationalizing Higher Education. A study requested by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education on the understanding of Internationalisation of Higher Education in the European context (De Wit et al., 2015) when discussing global citizenship, mentions the need of rethinking the purposes of higher education, or that, at least, for it to include a focus on peacebuilding, and to highlight three main dimensions: social responsibility, global competence, and civic engagement.

Thus, international cooperation in research and teaching is not only relevant for positioning and visibility, or even for rankings, but it could contribute in bringing communities together, and in promoting the development of global citizenship and innovation for the solution of common challenges. The societal aspect of internationalisation of higher education (HE) gains more relevance regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Brandenburg et al. (2019) discuss in an article for World University News the great potential of internationalisation on societal impacts, and the need to move beyond dimension aspects like mobility, towards a comprehensive internationalisation that transcends campuses, thus highlighting the need for inclusion.

However, inclusion and equality are not widespread concepts in internationalisation. The 2014 (Egron-Polak, 2014) and 2018 (Marinoni, 2019) International Association of Universities (IAU) Global Survey on Internationalisation of Higher Education show that the most significant risk of university internationalisation is that international opportunities may be made available only to students with economic resources. In the same surveys, the majority of the respondents identified the lack of financial resources as the greatest obstacle to the development of internationalisation processes.

The same is also the case for Colombia, where a significant percentage of the student population has socio-economic limitations (if they get to access higher education at all). The possibility of having an intercul-

tural experience to enrich the students' academic curriculum with additional skills that add value to their university education, whilst preparing them both as economic and social global beings, should be made realistic goals. However, this is not the case for many HEIs in Colombia, where, according to a national study developed in 2013 by the National Ministry of Education, only 48% claimed to have a curriculum internationalisation strategy and, within those institutions, most of the strategies implemented are not up to date with international trends.

### **3. Internationalisation for Peacebuilding: The Training**

The training focused on capacity building for international management of HEIs located in former conflict regions of Colombia, as a means to enhance quality and contribute to territorial peacebuilding. Four key streams matching this capacity-building focus were identified: (a) internationalisation at home, (b) 21<sup>st</sup>-century pedagogic strategies, (c) international visibility, and (d) international resources allocation. As a result, four specific objectives were established for the training:

1. To raise awareness about the linkage between internationalisation and quality in higher education;
2. To provide practical knowledge on building global citizenship curricula;
3. To develop the necessary tools to implement internationalisation at home initiatives;
4. To showcase international resource mobilisation strategies and assist participants in developing their own.

The target group for the training had to involve leadership and hands-on staff. It was thus decided to increase individual participation per institution, with the hope of a higher diversity of participating HEIs in mind. The decision was taken to improve the probability of success for the individual change projects. Thus, participants included Academic Vice Presidents, Deans, Academic Programme Directors, International Officers, and Academic Quality Officers coming from nine different regions in the country.

The training combined basic theoretical discussions with creative thinking techniques—creative problem-solving and active learning methods, such as world-café and networking opportunities. The training, designed to allow participants to relate theories to their institutions

and to strengthen individual projects, gave access to cognitive and practical tools, as well as real-life scenarios, by putting learning into practice, further developing skills. Internationalisation at home was key in motivating the internationalisation of HEIs in vulnerable territories, contributing to the enhancement of quality education and peacebuilding in the country.

Two workshops were divided into the four identified streams, with a webinar in between, conducted by a regional expert.

- Stream 1, Strategy building for internationalisation at home. This section focused on the foundations of internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum (concepts, trends, rationales, actors).
- Stream 2, Faculty development for innovative pedagogic strategies for internationalisation at home. This section focused on conceptualisation on teacher training and capacity building and integration and implementation of 21<sup>st</sup>- century educational skills.
- Stream 3, International resource mobilisation. This section focused on a management model and strategy to implement international resource mobilisation in Higher Education, plus practical tools for proposal writing.
- Stream 4, International visibility and positioning. This section focused on an overview of concepts and best practices for implementing an international visibility strategy and development of a map of stakeholders and a differentiator matrix.

It is important to highlight the development of the first on-site workshop that took place within the framework of an event that has become a milestone for international academic cooperation in Colombia: Catedra Europa. Hosted and organised by Universidad del Norte (part of the Expert Committee) since 1997, this event brings the latest global debates in Higher Education development cooperation and provides unique networking opportunities for European and Colombian institutional actors in both fields. Thus, the first on-site workshop, besides providing sessions for instruction, conceptual and practical training and providing the foundations and rules for the development of the change projects, allowed participants to move from theory to practice, by engaging them in real networking activities, therefore enhancing the skills acquired during the three-day workshop and adding value to project development (see Table 1).

Table 1: Kick-off Workshop Outline

Topics	Content
<b>DAY ONE</b> Strategy building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keynote lecture on internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum concepts, trends, rationales, and actors</li> <li>• Best practices on internationalisation of at-home strategies</li> <li>• Creation of international environments created at home. World Café methodology to promote creative, and collaborative thinking for inspiring practices</li> </ul>
<b>DAY TWO</b> Faculty development for innovative pedagogic strategies for internationalisation at home  International resource mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualisation on teacher training and capacity building</li> <li>• Integration and implementation of 21<sup>st</sup>-century educational skills</li> <li>• Best practices on internationalisation of the curriculum (inside the classroom)</li> <li>• Briefing on existing international agencies; programmes and calls financing Higher Education projects (Erasmus+; DAAD; NUFFIC; FULBRIGHT, etc.)</li> <li>• Management model and strategy to implement international resource mobilisation in Higher Education</li> <li>• Proposal writing for a specific international programme or call</li> </ul>
<b>DAY THREE</b> International visibility and positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of concepts and best practices for implementing an international visibility strategy from an International Relations Office perspective</li> <li>• Starting from scratch: The main inputs of an international communication strategy for cooperation purposes</li> <li>• Guidelines on how to develop an institutional internationalisation stakeholders map and a differentiator matrix for positioning purposes</li> <li>• International positioning starts from inside the institution: Identifying the key indicators and strengthening the information systems for decision-making.</li> <li>• Main trends on international communication in HEIs: Where is the world going?</li> <li>• The international communications plan: Key elements, realistic goals and follow-up</li> </ul>

The webinar, placed in between the two workshops, served as an opportunity to address needs that were identified during the first workshop, which had to do with sharing concepts, rationales, and tools for internationalisation at home at their institutions. Thus, this webinar reinforced the acquired knowledge and served as space for sharing good practices in the implementation of internationalisation at home and in the identi-



fication of concrete actions. For greater impact and benefit, participants were asked to invite key players that needed to be involved in the internationalisation-at-home process at their institutions, so teams of five to ten people per institution were formed. This allowed participants to set the ground for the establishment of important synergies and gain supporters towards a more inclusive internationalisation strategy in the development of their projects. The webinar started with a general presentation from the regional expert, followed by a Q&A session, an institutional group discussion, and a feedback session from the entire group of participants. In addition to the webinar, the mentors followed up on the participants at least once a month and aided in the development of the change projects.

The second workshop's main objective was a proper training wrap-up, providing participants with a final input on how to strengthen the internationalisation strategy of their institutions, and how to facilitate dialogues between them and key stakeholders of the Higher Education sector in Colombia. Furthermore, two intensive sessions of thematic seminars were conducted. These focused on topics identified throughout the Programme as critical for the participants and their institutions: strategy management and intercultural competences. Participants were also able to have direct dialogues with decision-makers in the Colombian Higher Education sector to help them better understand the logic behind the HEI internationalisation context and to set up a networking environment for future projects that they might develop.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Study Objectives and Design**

The study aimed to (a) analyse the improvement of internationalisation management in the HEIs participating in the 'Internationalisation for Peacebuilding' training conducted in 2018; and (b) instruct participants in the areas of innovative methodologies of higher education, mobilisation of international resources, international visibility, and internationalisation at home. The study, which is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, considered the points of view of the participants by describing their experiences of the world from a representation of the subjects (Colás, 2009). Gibbs (2012) explains that qualitative research analyses the experiences of individuals or groups to delve into social phenomena.

The rationale behind this study was to find out about the internationalisation skills acquired by the participants during the course and to identify changes generated in the management of internationalisation processes. Finally, it was also important to collect information about topics that the participants considered relevant in the field of higher education, for implementation of future training in Colombia.

The specific research objectives are specified thus:

- Objective 1: Characterise the skills acquired during the course to improve the quality of internationalisation management.
- Objective 2: Identify the changes generated at the institutional level for internationalisation management structure, internationalisation at home, and the mobilisation of international resources.
- Objective 3: Propose content for future courses on internationalisation, based on the suggestions made by the participants.

## **4.2 Data Collection Method**

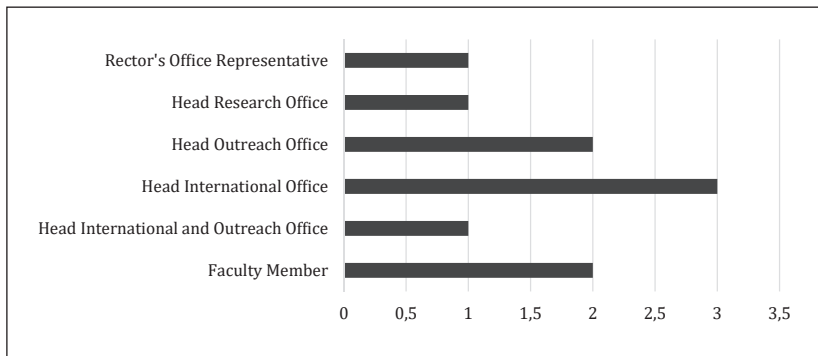
The data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. Martín (2018) explains that semi-structured interviews allow the construction of questions as a guide for the interview, which can be adapted to the interviewees. Moreover, answers to these formulations are usually open, leading to the obtaining of more information, whilst the interviewer encourages the subjects to describe their experiences and actions (Kvale, 2011). According to Flick (2017), the perspectives of the interviewees can be collected, since conversations on specific topics are flexible. The interview script was divided into three dimensions: (a) the first focused on the skills acquired for the improvement of internationalisation management; (b) the second aimed to identify the institutional changes generated through the attendance in the training; and (c) the third sought to identify suggestions by the participants for contents of future courses oriented towards the internationalisation of higher education.

### 4.3 Participants

For the study, ten participants from the training ‘Internationalisation for Peacebuilding’ in 2018 were interviewed. From the nine institutions participating, seven were represented. The interviewees were administrative officials and professors from Higher Education Institutions located in diverse regions of Colombia which were affected by the Colombian conflict. The fieldwork was carried out on February and March 2020.

Since the original training was attended by 17 participants, the study strived to interview at least 50%. Ten interviews were conducted with former participants representing institutions from seven Colombian regions and occupying different positions in universities, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

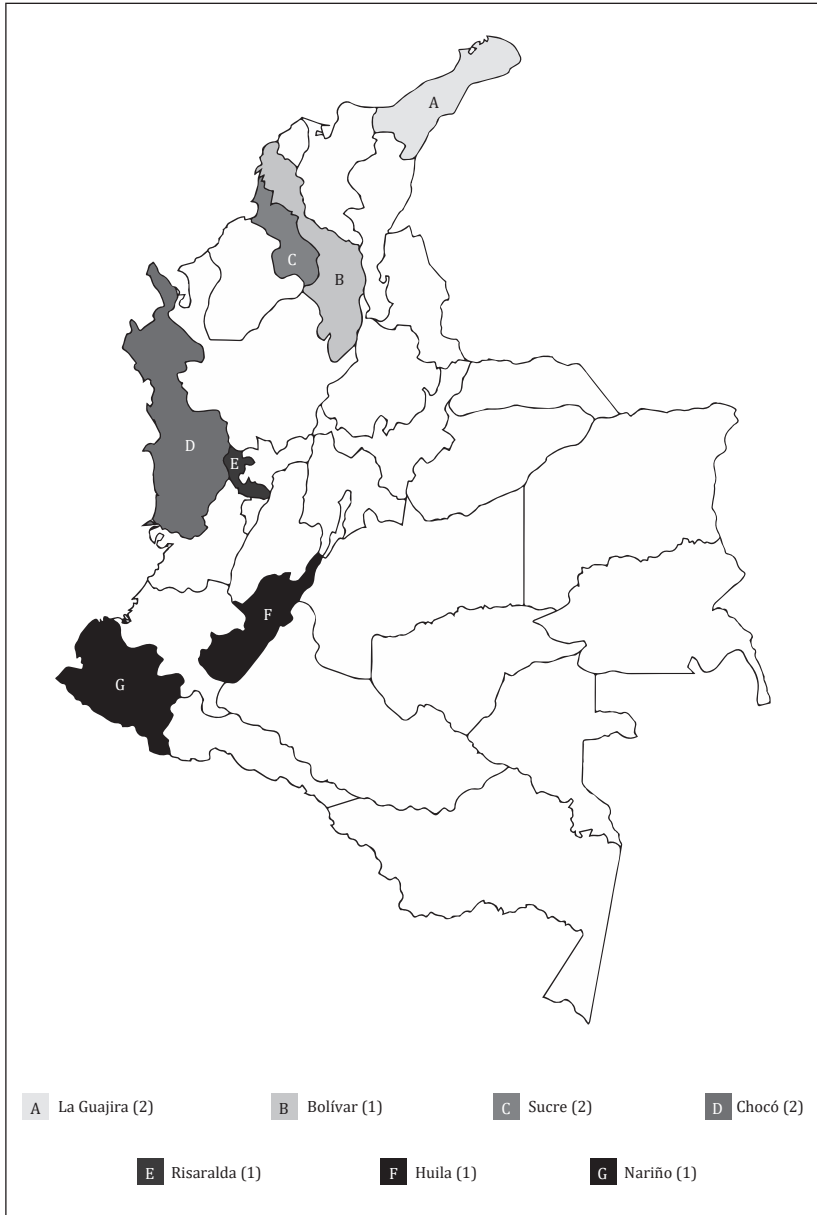
Figure 1: Positions of the Participants



### 4.4 Data Processing Method

The method used in processing the collected information was qualitative content analysis. According to Mayring (2010), a content analysis seeks to organise into categories the data collected. Ruiz (2012) explains that analysts can build their categorisation system. For the analysis of the interview data, categories and subcategories were generated, taking into account the research objectives. The data collected, associated with the specific research objectives, are presented in the following chapter.

Figure 2: Colombian Regions of the Interviewees

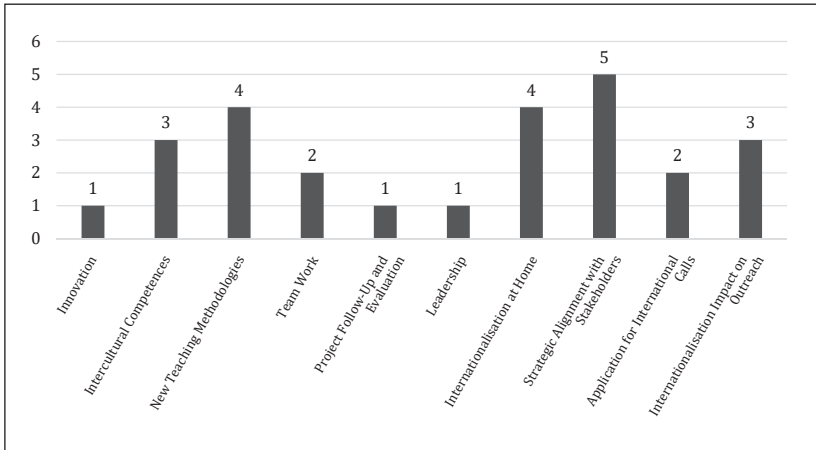


## 5. Results and Discussion

### Objective 1: Characterise the skills acquired during the course to improve the quality of internationalisation management.

To answer the first objective of this research, participants were asked about the internationalisation skills acquired during the course. They explained that the course gave them skills for the strategic alignment with stakeholders, for internationalisation design activities at home, and new teaching methodologies. Participant 10 explained that the ability to articulate internationalisation activities with academics was strengthened in her institution. Further, it also fostered intercultural competences and strengthened alignment between internationalisations at outreaches. In addition to this, the participants expressed that they learnt teamwork skills for projects, the follow-up and evaluation of projects, and the application for international calls. The following figure shows the participants' responses:

Figure 3: Skills for Improved Internationalisation



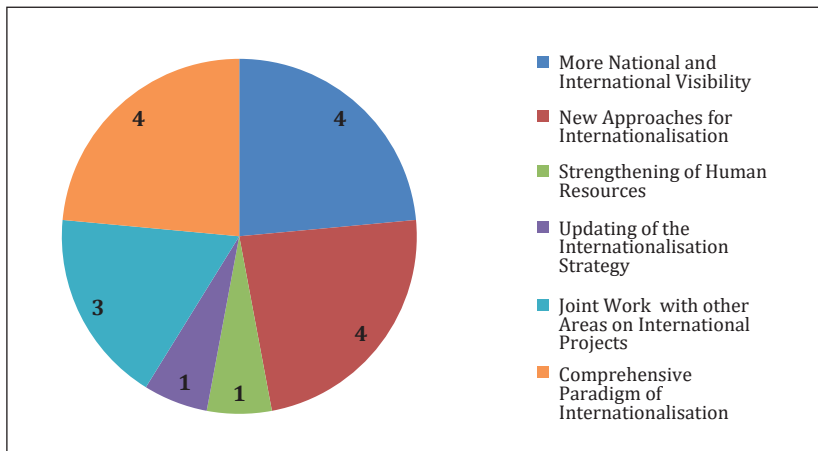
### Objective 2: Identify the changes generated at the institutional level for internationalisation management structure, internationalisation at home, and the mobilisation of international resources.

By analysing the changes generated in the management of internationalisation after the course, the participants explained that they worked on

the improvement of the image of internationalisation in the institution, generating new ways of the national and international visibility of the institution, in some cases. New approaches for internationalisation were also strengthened by presenting a shift towards a comprehensive paradigm of internationalisation, that is, beyond mobility. For instance, one institution located in the region of *La Guajira* has focused internationalisation on capacity building and community work. Participant 2 explained that the paradigm of internationalisation changed in her institution: “We thought that internationalisation was only an issue of incoming and outgoing mobility, and also of curricular developments. We forgot that internationalisation can have an impact on communities and transform people’s lives. You can impact a community from the organisations that are present in that community through internationalisation and leave installed capacity”.

Participant 5 remarked that the alignment of the various actors within the institution has been strengthened and also “the institution’s internationalisation strategy has been updated and two professionals have been added to the internationalisation team”. Interdisciplinary working groups for internationalisation were also created within institutions and one institution updated the internationalisation strategy, as shown in Figure 4:

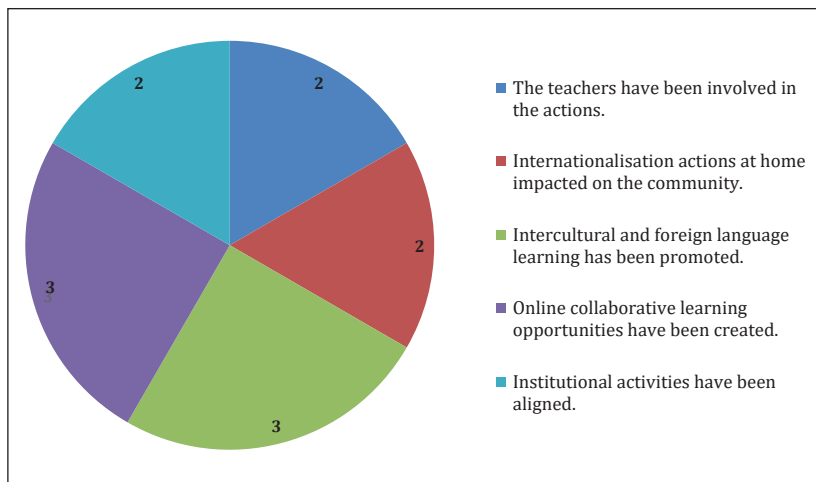
Figure 4: Changes Generated for the Management of Internationalisation



An important aspect of the ‘Internationalisation for Peacebuilding’ training to be considered by regional institutions was the transmission of knowledge about internationalisation at home, a strategy not as expensive as international mobility and one in which students enjoy an international atmosphere without leaving their domestic environments. Participants explained that they learnt to generate tools and resources for internationalisation activities for teachers in the classroom thereby empowering them. Their internationalisation-at-home strategy became participatory due to institutional alignment, with different members from the community participating in the process (teachers, students, and administrators). Participant 1 remarked that her internationalisation-at-home strategy has become more participatory: “Not only the international office participates, but also all the professors. The students and staff are also important actors in becoming much more involved”. One institution designed a virtual learning guide for the implementation of internationalisation-at-home activities. Professors from some participating institutions received training for the design of activities and materials, as well as for the topic ‘new pedagogies for internationalisation’. One institution began with the implementation of formative research projects to improve the impact of internationalisation in classes. Online collaborative learning opportunities were thus created.

Furthermore, some institutions (see Figure 5) overcame institutional barriers, impacting communities near campus with their internationalisation activities at home. Participant 3 explained that she has reached “various communities in the Chocó region”, to build capacities with other teachers, about internationalisation-at-home activities. Finally, intercultural and foreign language learning activities were carried out on campus, with students from other institutions located in the same region also participating. The changes generated by the promotion of internationalisation at home by the participating institutions are shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5: Changes Generated by the Internationalisation at Home



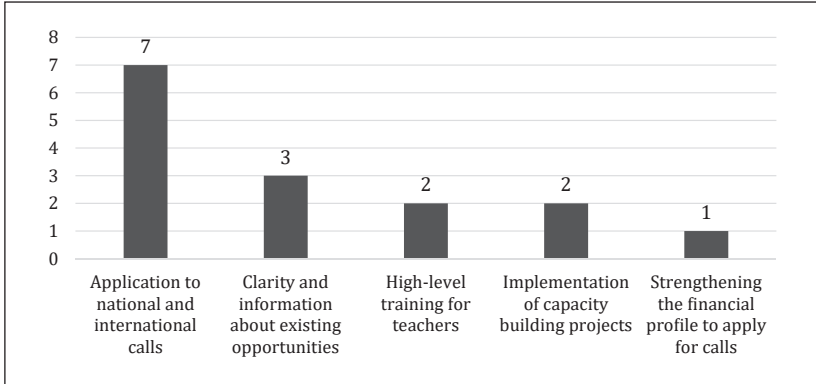
Another meaningful element in the training was the knowledge transmitted for the management of international resources. The participating institutions had the opportunity to learn how to manage different resources (experts, financial resources, scholarships), which could strengthen their institutional capacities. From the changes made by participating institutions, it was observed that they had consolidated their capacities to receive more international resources and to gain more clarity about existing opportunities. The institutions have applied to increased calls, from both national and international agencies, either for the management of experts or for capacity building projects. They have promoted high-level training for their professors by their applications to international calls for doctoral studies. Administrative and teaching staff have also applied to short-term courses promoted by foreign governments. Participant 6 explained that both financial and technical resources have been managed and that her institution is implementing courses with international institutions: “We have applied to ERASMUS + with Spain and other European allies, and we are now offering advanced courses”.

Some institutions also have carried out capacity-building projects, such as Participant 10. “We are participating in a project with Canada for the empowerment of women, and installed a capacity which will be left



in the university for sustainable entrepreneurship”. The results of the generated changes can be seen in Figure 6:

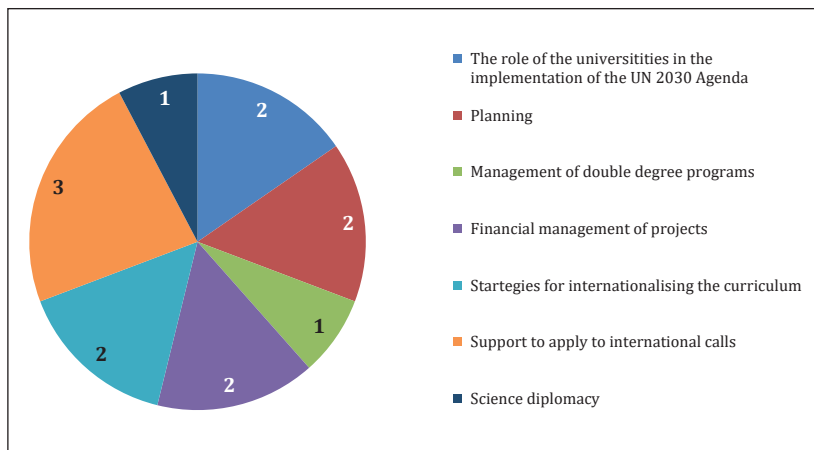
Figure 6: Changes Generated for International Resource Mobilisation



### **Objective 3: Propose content for future courses on internationalisation, based on the suggestions made by the participants.**

Finally, participants were asked about their suggestions for future courses on the topic of internationalisation. The interviewees expressed the need to understand better the role universities take in the implementation of the UN-2030 Agenda, and the application to international calls for small or regional institutions. Likewise, the participants wanted to learn more about the financial management of international projects, institutional planning, internationalising the curriculum, and the coordination of double degree programmes. Participant 8 recommended future workshops and more support to the adaptation of the projects to the context and regions of universities. Lastly, an institution manifested the need to understand Science Diplomacy schemes and the role that internationalisation of higher education takes in this process, which is mainly led by governments.

Figure 7: Suggestions for New Courses on Internationalisation



## 6. Conclusion

The ‘Internationalisation for Peacebuilding’ training was created to transmit knowledge to Higher Education Institutions located in remote areas of Colombia, which suffered the armed conflict and unrest. The Training Committee understood the concept of ‘Internationalisation of Peacebuilding’ as the possible means of accessing knowledge and opportunities for cooperation among institutions located in the different regions of the country. Learnt knowledge could be channelled to academic communities thereby paving the way toward a build-up of internationalisation strategies.

Through the interviews conducted, it was identified that the training held gave the participants tools for the management of internationalisation, as well as generated changes in the management model of the participating institutions, such as the availability of more resources (financial and human) for internationalisation, or the creation of interdisciplinary teams to work on international projects. Internationalisation at home was also strengthened with tools and resources from the internationalisation of learning experiences with teachers. International cooperation was also promoted through the institutional alignment for the reception of international financial resources, as well as the application to national and international calls for experts and other forms of

cooperation for capacity building such as scholarships for the staff of the institution.

Lastly, the further strengthening of the internationalisation capacities of the institutions in the regions is observed to improve the quality of the academic programmes and other missionary functions of the institutions, considering a scheme which is based on the transfer of knowledge that empowers participants and turn them into generators of new knowledge and leaders of institutional transformations.

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