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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Collaborative degree programmes in internationalisation policies: the salience of internal university stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the salience of internal university stakeholders in collaborative degree programmes from the perspective of the sustainability of such programmes. In terms of academics and administrators involved in Finnish-Russian collaborative degrees, the article explores what contributes to their salience, and their effects on the implementation of internationalisation policies at individual, partnership and programme levels. In order to deepen understanding of collaborative degree sustainability as a particular case of internationalisation activity, the article addresses the attributes of the stakeholders' salience as revealed during their interplay in Finnish-Russian double degree partnerships. Based on this analysis, the article highlights why the stakeholders in Finnish and Russian universities attribute their respective salience differently, identifies these differences, and assesses their impact on double degree sustainability.

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KEYWORDS

Collaborative degree programme; double degree; internationalisation of higher education; sustainability; stakeholder salience; rationales

Introduction

This article explores the salience of internal university stakeholders in collaborative degree programmes (collaborative degrees) provided by the universities of two neighbouring countries: EU member state Finland, and Russia. Collaborative degrees have played an important part in their internationalisation policies, being regarded as increasing international academic and student mobility in Finland, and demonstrating enhanced university competitiveness in Russia (RF Government Resolution 2012; Better Together for a Better World 2017; Jänis-Isokangas 2017; Shenderova, Antonowicz, and Jaworska *forthcoming*).

A 'collaborative degree' is understood here as an umbrella term for all degree programmes built on the principle of international academic collaboration. Within collaborative degrees, I focus in particular on master's double, or dual, degrees (DDs) issuing two individual qualifications as an option upon completion of the programme requirements established by two partner universities (Knight 2004; 2020). The growth

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in such programmes has been spurred by the Bologna Process and the Erasmus programme (JDAZ 2015; REDEEM 2021; Burquel and Ballesteros 2021).

Collaborative degrees between Finnish and Russian higher education institutions (HEIs) have previously been studied in the context of a broader political framework such as EU-Russia higher education (HE) cooperation (Sinyatkin, Mishin, and Karpukhina 2010; Burquel, Shenderova, and Tvorogova 2014a). The studies have concentrated on the conceptualisation of the development trends of collaborative degrees, drawing on the experiences of particular DDs offering a second degree as an option (Khudoley, Novikova, and Lanko 2010; Kompanets and Väättänen 2019). The developments vis-à-vis Finnish-Russian DDs have also been analysed with a focus on their institutional environments at university, and national policy levels (Lanko 2021; Shenderova 2018b, 2020).

However, less attention has been paid to the different roles of university stakeholders in Finnish-Russian collaborative degrees. Here, internal and external university stakeholders are the actors or their groups within and outside universities, with special interests in internationalisation, and their particular intersection vis-à-vis collaborative degrees (Castro, Rosa, and Pinho 2015; Willis and Taylor 2014). This article focuses on internal stakeholders operating within the partner universities to provide collaborative degrees, and contextualises them in the landscape of internationalisation policies in Finland and Russia.

The roles of internal stakeholders in collaborative degrees have not yet been addressed in relation to the sustainability of the given programmes. In previous studies, it has been argued that collaborative degrees are diverse as to their regulatory arrangements and may have vaguely allocated responsibilities within and between the partner universities (Burquel, Shenderova, and Tvorogova 2014a; Shenderova 2020). Diversity and instability in collaborative degree provision call for more research on stakeholders' rationales and their effects on the shaping of regulatory arrangements related to learning outcomes, internationalised curricula, funding, mobility options, and quality assurance (Knight 2020; Chan 2021). The article studies how internal stakeholders perceive their roles in the provision of DDs, and how this perception influences the programme's sustainability. To this end, I apply the approach of sustainable internationalisation (Ilieva, Beck, and Waterstone 2014) to a collaborative degree as a particular internationalisation activity. The sustainability of a collaborative degree is seen here as a continuing process of holistic interrelationships between academics, administrators and regulatory arrangements that occurs at the hierarchical organisational levels of partner universities in dialogic reciprocity.

In order to shed light on the interplay between internal stakeholders at three levels – individual, partnership, and programme – I use the concept of stakeholder salience (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997; Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008; Benneworth and Jongbloed 2010). Stakeholder salience is understood here as the extent to which the different stakeholders within partner universities are important for the leadership and regulatory arrangements of collaborative degrees. When examining the salience of individual internal university stakeholders in Finland and Russia, I juxtapose their academic, economic and political rationales for implementing a collaborative (including double) degree as a particular internationalisation activity. I combine the approaches of Willis and Taylor (2014) and Kallenberg (2020a, 2020b) to study the internal stakeholders operating at different hierarchical levels of the university, such as university top managers, academic leaders, as well as academic and professional staff. In so doing, I focus on stakeholders working in the central offices, faculties and departments

that are influential when it comes to the DD programme and partnership. Applying the concepts of stakeholder salience and sustainable internationalisation, this article addresses the following research questions: What is the salience of internal university stakeholders in collaborative (including double) degrees? What are the factors that contribute to the salience of internal stakeholders for those in partner universities? How do the attributes of stakeholder salience correspond with programme sustainability? Furthermore, I am interested in discovering what all of this reveals about the implementation of internationalisation policy at the individual, partnership, programme and university levels.

This study is based on primary data, as represented on university websites and in interviews with individual stakeholders in Finnish and Russian universities, gathered for the EDUneighbours Project; literature concerning key studies in field documents at international, national, university, programme and partnership levels; and my own academic and administrative experience in internationalisation and EU-Russia HE cooperation since the 1990s in different university stakeholder roles. The article is structured as follows. First, I will introduce my theoretical framework, namely debates about university stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008; Kallenberg 2020a; 2020b), including the stakeholder salience model (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2010), and about rationales for the internationalisation of higher education (IoHE). I will also explain how I apply the concept of sustainability in internationalisation (Ilieva, Beck, and Waterstone 2014) in relation to collaborative (double) degree programmes, and introduce the concept of collaborativeness. Second, I will briefly describe national contexts in which internal DD stakeholders act, namely internationalisation policies in Finland and Russia. I will then outline the methodology and the data-gathering process. The main part of the paper is devoted to the findings of the empirical analysis. Taking the example of Finnish-Russian DDs, I show why internationalisation may be ambiguous, and how this ambiguity was used by different stakeholders. In particular, relying on Balbachevsky et al. (2021), I describe how discrepancies in the compatibility of rationales for internationalisation contribute to differences in the perception of stakeholder salience in Finnish and Russian universities, and how this varying attribution of salience (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997; Benneworth and Jongbloed 2010) impacts DD sustainability.

Theoretical framework for studying stakeholder salience in collaborative degrees

Academics and administrators responsible for the regulatory arrangements of degrees, including those implemented in international collaboration, have been regarded as key internal university stakeholders in the IoHE. Their interplay with external stakeholders at supranational and national policy levels has been the focus of previous studies (Castro, Rosa, and Pinho 2015; Smolentseva, Knyazev, and Drantusova 2015), but there is less research clearly emphasising the differences between the agency of academic and non-academic employees (Calikoglu, Lee, and Arslan 2022) in IoHE partnerships at different hierarchical levels of the university, such as central offices, faculties and departments (Willis and Taylor 2014; Ma and Montgomery 2021).

In this paper, the focus will be on different roles taken by and given to internal stakeholders determining DD regulatory arrangements. For this purpose, I also apply the

models of stakeholder salience (Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno 2008) and rationales for internationalisation (Balbachevsky et al. 2021) to internal stakeholders (Willis and Taylor 2014; Kallenberg 2020a; 2020b) considered here as university employees in the roles of top managers, educational administrators, academic leaders, academic staff, and professional staff. Amongst them, I focus on the stakeholders mentioned in the interviews as important for DD regulatory arrangements related to learning outcomes, curriculum design, quality assurance, funding schemes, and mobility options. To this end, I juxtapose the perceptions that Finnish and Russian DD stakeholders have of their influence on these arrangements.

The rectors and vice-rectors are the *top managers* directly responsible for IoHE policy implementation, including the framework for the regulatory arrangements of the (collaborative) degree programmes. *Educational administrators* handle all degrees at university level in central offices, subordinated to the top managers, while the other stakeholders act at the faculty/department levels with regard to a particular programme in a field of study (and the partnership(s) therein). *Academic leaders* comprise deans, and heads of academic departments and/or degree programmes, including those implemented in collaboration. *Professional staff* include personnel who administer the DD process, including negotiations with the central offices. The *academic staff* concentrate on teaching and research in the DD field, but may also be mandated either formally or informally by duties related to DD administration.

Focusing on the individual, partnership, and programme levels, I shed light on the compatibility of IoHE rationales and the differences in the attributes of stakeholder salience in Finland and Russia. In so doing, I follow the approach of Balbachevsky et al. (2021) developed for the national policy level, but examine the compatibility of academic, economic, and political rationales for IoHE as determined by the stakeholder salience in examples of a DD as a particular internationalisation activity.

In this study, I suggest the consideration of personal rationales for participating in IoHE based on their revealed importance for Russian stakeholders (Shenderova 2018b, 2020). Personal rationales for internationalisation refer here to the gains that make a DD beneficial for a stakeholder, but are not oriented towards the programme and its sustainability in and of themselves. Thus, I include professional development concerns, derived from a stakeholder's involvement in a DD as an internationalisation activity, in academic rationales – unlike Willis and Taylor (2014), who considered these motivations personal. I regard the academic rationales of internal stakeholders as those that purport to contribute to the international dimension of the DD field of study, including the increase in teaching and the scientific merits of individual academics involved. The economic rationales include profit-making concerns (extra government funding, increasing the number of self-funding students, beneficial cooperation with business, etc.) and the importance of the stakeholders who provide these benefits. I use the term 'political rationales' for IoHE in contrast to previous studies where these were considered at policy level as contributing to foreign policy or security (Knight 2004; Willis and Taylor 2014). In accordance with the focus of my study, I define political rationales as the reasons for stakeholders' commitment to aligning their individual agency in DDs at partnership and programme levels with the goals of supranational (Bologna Process) and national policies, and the consequent interplay with the responsible stakeholders in order to gain influence within a university.

Drawing on Jongbloed, Enders, and Salerno (2008), I apply stakeholder salience theory to identify and understand the capacities and limits of the university stakeholders' influence on the sustainability of internationalisation. The salience of each particular stakeholder is understood here as the extent to which this stakeholder is perceived as important by the others in inter-relationships during DD implementation. I interpret the attributes of stakeholder salience (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997, 865–868) with regard to collaborative degrees and partnerships as follows. The stakeholder's *power* is their influence on the behaviour of the other stakeholders in the partnership. *Legitimacy* entails the appropriateness of the stakeholder's claims. *Urgency* implies the extent to which a particular stakeholder's claims command the immediate attention of the other DD stakeholders. The combination of these attributes determines the salience of each particular stakeholder: *definitive* stakeholders have three attributes, *expectant* stakeholders possess two, and *latent* stakeholders have only one attribute of salience (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2010, 571).

A stakeholder may neither be conscious of possessing an attribute of salience in a partner's eyes, nor use this attribute in decision-making processes (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997, 868) related to the DD and its regulatory arrangements because the attribution by stakeholders to each other's salience depends on national and institutional contexts (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2010). Various national traditions of governance and internal political struggles in universities contribute to the differences in attribution of a particular stakeholder's salience. I regard stakeholder salience as the extent to which the stakeholder's claims are prioritised by the other collaborative degree stakeholders in DD regulatory arrangements under the impact of internationalisation policies.

Having an influence on (collaborative) degree regulatory arrangements has particular importance for academic and administrative stakeholders in the sense that it is an object of internal university struggles (Kallenberg 2020a; Seeber et al. 2016). As a result, the internal salience of educational administrators and professional staff increases, in that they demonstrate growing ambitions and deep involvement in the regulatory arrangements of degree provision in comparison with the declined role of academics (Kallenberg 2020b). However, the growing salience of top managers and educational administrators may compel them to draw on incomplete or distorted information in their decisions regarding internationalisation activities. This leads to undervaluing the claims of academics (Langrafe et al. 2020) and a further decline in their salience in (collaborative) degree regulatory arrangements at programme and university levels. This trend is compounded by external stakeholders who control funding and require the universities to report on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for internationalisation policy more than to sustain internationalisation activities (Shenderova 2018a, 2021).

I also introduce the term 'collaborativeness' as the extent to which international partners are able to align, harmonise, and integrate the regulatory arrangements of a collaborative degree to provide its sustainability. It should be noted that two partner HEIs may establish regulatory arrangements for DD programme requirements separately in each university in accordance with its own traditions. In this case, the DD has *jointness* in the sense of Jane Knight's classic definition (2004), namely that programme requirements have been *jointly established* by partners in isolation, but the sustainability of the DD becomes questionable. Furthermore, when differences in traditions make joint regulatory arrangements inappropriate because of high transaction costs, the DD may have

asymmetrical/irregular enrolment and graduation, a curriculum based on occasional student and teacher exchanges rather than on obligatory mobility, and different funding schemes, student assessment and quality assurance arrangements (Shenderova 2018b, 2020). In this case, the programme loses its jointness but remains *collaborative*. That is why I use both terms in this paper, but see the ‘jointness’ of a DD as a narrower term than ‘collaborativeness’.

This highlights the centrality of those internal university stakeholders who interplay to align DD regulatory arrangements at programme and partnership levels during the implementation of national internationalisation policies, as observed in the next section.

Collaborative and double degrees in the context of internationalisation policies in Finland and Russia

Finnish and Russian universities developed collaborative degrees in their IoHE policies for the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of their national HE systems and the European Higher Education Area (Niemi et al. 2012; Rozhenkova and Rust 2018). At supranational level, the external university stakeholders for IoHE and collaborative degrees comprise the Bologna Follow-Up Group (EHEA), Erasmus offices (EU), international accreditation agencies, and world university rankings (WURs) (Shenderova, Antonowicz, and Jaworska *forthcoming*). At national level, the ministries responsible for HE (*Minobrnauki* in Russia and the Ministry of Education and Culture (*OKM*) in Finland) determine the regulatory framework for (collaborative) degree development. In addition, other bodies could be mandated for monitoring specific IoHE goals such as *Rosstrudnichestvo*, *Sociocenter* (18 altogether), and *EDUFI* (Shenderova 2018a, Shenderova 2021). In Russia, *Minobrnauki* and the government have a different agenda for internationalisation policy.

In Finland, *OKM* and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have specifically supported internationalisation at the university and programme levels, using such policy tools as the Finnish-Russian Cross-Border University (CBU), and the Barents Cross-Border University (BCBU, BCBU+) in 2004–2014. In particular, the CBU was aimed at developing common regulatory arrangements for master’s degrees in five Finnish and five Russian HEIs (Kallo and Semchenko 2016; Shenderova 2018b). The Finnish-Russian Student and Teacher Exchange Programme (FIRST) since 2000, followed by FIRST+ in 2018–2021, contributed to collaborative degree development as a policy tool for increasing cross-border mobility and international student recruitment (Korteniemi 2011; Jänis-Isokangas 2017). The Team Finland Knowledge programme (TFK 2021) was designed to support the networks established by Finnish universities aiming for long-term internationalisation activities, including DDs with Russia.¹

The government of Russia launched a National Project entitled ‘Education’ for selected HEIs, including additional funding for collaborative degrees from 2006 (Platonova 2019). The President of Russia (2012) established a goal under the name of the 5–100 Russian Academic Excellence Project (2012), whereby at least five leading Russian universities had to enter the top 100 of ‘at least one world university ranking’ (WUR) by 2020, although the goal was not achieved. Twenty-one universities had to increase the number of collaborative degrees in cooperation with EU (including Finnish) universities and report on other related KPIs to receive 5–100 funding

(Shenderova 2018a). The Russian government used these collaborative degrees as a soft power tool to demonstrate the enhanced global reputation of Russian HE (Mäkinen 2021; Shenderova 2021; Minaeva and Taradina 2022; Shenderova, Antonowicz, and Jaworska forthcoming).

Finnish-Russian collaborative degrees have been implemented in different national and institutional contexts and in accordance with different traditions for regulatory arrangements and stakeholder salience. Finnish HEIs independently develop their degree programmes based on a horizontal decision-making process and a clear division of administrative and academic labour. Russian universities undergo a top-down approach; government, ministry and accreditation agencies oversee how universities, rectors and vice-rectors enforce regulatory arrangements prescribed by Federal State Educational Standards for any degree provision. In addition, academic and international affairs are subordinated and monitored separately, which poses additional internal barriers for IoHE (Platonova 2019; Shenderova, Antonowicz, and Jaworska forthcoming). At university level, these traditions make academic leaders at least the expectant stakeholders of (collaborative) degrees in Finland, while in Russia the definitive stakeholders are those directly linked to the enforcement authorities.

Research methodology

My primary and secondary data collection as a part of the EDUneighbours Project has focused on master's programmes (120 ECTS) in Finnish universities that offer the option of obtaining a second degree with a Russian partner. In 2017, I reviewed the websites of all 38 Finnish universities at that time, and the websites of 45 Russian universities that Finnish universities mentioned as partners in collaborative degree activities; the databases and documents of government programmes in both countries (CBU, BCBU, FIRST+, 5–100, the 'Education' National Project); the catalogue of joint programmes between European and Russian HEIs (Burquel, Shenderova, and Tvorogova 2014b); as well as previous publications and personal contacts (including snowballing) to identify Finnish-Russian DDs, partnerships, their stakeholders, and regulatory arrangements. The research team was able to identify 18 DDs in five Finnish universities which offered a DD option with 23 Russian HEIs.² We decided to consider all Finnish universities implementing DDs at master's level with Russian HEIs in our study. Thus, out of 18 DDs, we chose seven DDs for the case studies, including various fields comprising Social Sciences and STEM, offered in 13 partnerships by five Finnish universities and their ten partners in Russia. Juxtaposing different partnerships within one DD clarified the differences in attribution of stakeholder salience depending on national and university traditions.

As for the ten Russian universities, we considered HEIs both in Moscow (three universities) – the capital city and educational hub – and in North-Western Russia, neighbouring Finland where seven universities in St. Petersburg, Petrozavodsk, and Arkhangelsk traditionally collaborated with Finnish universities. In addition, the selected HEIs represented different kinds of government support for internationalisation. One Russian university had received special funding since 2006; another had received special support as a federal university since 2010; three HEIs had been funded since 2008–2010, and additionally by the 5–100 project since 2013, while five Russian HEIs

had obtained no additional funding for internationalisation from the Russian government. Four Finnish universities used FIRST funding for providing student and teacher mobility in the DDs; three of them had CBU funding to develop the DDs in cooperation with four Russian universities included in our study.

Drawing on the aforementioned sources, we then identified the internal university stakeholders and conducted 15 semi-structured interviews in Finland, and 20 in Russia in 2017. We asked interviewees the same questions regarding their roles in the DDs, and rationales for participation in this internationalisation activity with particular partners (see also Shenderova 2018b, 2020). This ‘mirror’ principle also revealed inconsistencies or contradictions in the information given to us, namely different perceptions of the DD and its regulatory arrangements related to learning outcomes, internationalised curricula, funding, mobility options, and quality assurance, as well as differences in the attribution of stakeholder salience.

Our online survey in 2020 involved stakeholders we had already interviewed in 2017 and their successors in DD duties; the websites of partner universities were also reviewed again in 2020–2021. Amongst the stakeholders who responded to the survey, 19 represented Russian universities and six were from Finnish universities. The interview and survey data have been compared with the data regarding DD cooperation found on the given university websites in 2017–2021.

I conducted qualitative content analysis, and coded all interviews and survey responses manually in accordance with the personal, academic, economic, and political rationales of interviewees for participating in DDs as an internationalisation activity. In addition, I coded the attributes of the specific stakeholder salience according to the interviewees, including their importance for DD regulatory arrangements. I then juxtaposed the responses given by Finnish and Russian DD stakeholders, and the programme sustainability data provided in the responses and gathered from the websites in 2017 and 2020–2021.

In order to safeguard the anonymity of our interviewees and respondents, neither the names of people, programmes, unsustainable partnerships nor any other identifying details are included.

Findings: what makes a stakeholder salient?

The analysis below focuses on the rationales of internal stakeholders in Finnish and Russian universities for DD collaboration, and their perception of stakeholders’ roles, salience and influence on DD regulatory arrangements and sustainability. The analysis of common rationales furthers understanding of why Finnish and Russian internal university stakeholders established and developed DDs in different national and institutional contexts.

Stakeholder rationales for DD collaboration

When comparing the rationales, in addition to the analysis of the primary data for this project, I have also taken into account the results of previous studies on Finnish–Russian double degrees (Kompanets and Väättänen 2019; Shenderova 2018b, 2020a; Lanko 2021). As can be seen in Table 1, academic rationales are shared by internal stakeholders in

Table 1. Compatibility of internal stakeholder rationales for establishing and continuing DDs.

Rationales	Finnish stakeholders	Russian stakeholders	Compatibility of rationales	
Academic rationales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sustainable DD and research cooperation – International development and regional focus for academics, students, research and expertise – Partner's reputation in research, their expertise, and the good quality of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Skilled students integrated into global economy – Building new professional networks in DD field – Knowledge of Russia necessary for DD field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partner's flexibility towards changes in national/university regulatory arrangements – Demand from highly competitive domestic students – Joining global academic community 	<p><i>High: similar academic rationales provide the basis for a sustainable collaborative degree</i></p>
Economic rationales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Financial support from Finnish/Russian government programmes – Demand from self-paid students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Business demands to develop Russian focus of expertise – International student demand – International student recruitment 		<p><i>High: the vast majority of rationales are similar</i></p>
Political rationales		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bologna Process 		<p><i>Low: Finnish stakeholders perceive DD as a tool for increasing international incoming mobility, while Russian stakeholders should report on numerous controversial KPIs.</i></p>
Personal rationales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Government requirements to increase mobility and number of international students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Government, ministry, agencies and university's top managers required to report on the achievement of KPIs (number of DDs, international students, staff mobility with EU partners) and compatibility with Federal State Education Standards – Demonstration of university's attractiveness for potentially high-ranked international partners in WURs 		<p>Low: Finnish stakeholders rely on non-personal rationales</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not mentioned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of personal network/friendships/projects abroad not related to DD field – Development of personal skills in foreign languages and cross-cultural communication – Travelling abroad – Personal comfort 		

Finnish and Russian universities, and included positive experiences from previous research cooperation (Interviewees FI1, FI4, FI7, FI8, FI10, Interviewees RU3, RU5, RU18, RU19, RU20), more precise international development, and a regional focus provided by the DD (Interviewees FI4, FI6, FI7, FI8, FI10, FI12, FI13; Interviewees RU1,

RU3, RU11, RU14, RU16, RU17, RU18, RU19, RU20). Finnish academic leaders highlighted the partner's reputation in research and expertise in the DD field, as well as the good quality of the students (Interviewees FI4, FI7, FI11, FI12, FI13), while their Russian colleagues (Interviewees RU11, RU18, RU19, RU20) stressed '*the superiority of a Finnish partner in the field of study and expertise*', '*borrowing best practices in the field*', and '*a strong commitment to research cooperation*'. As an element of a programme's quality, Interviewee FI9 stressed the possibility of having '*a partner who can offer something that you cannot*', while Russian interviewees emphasised '*responsiveness to our local requirements*' [provided by university top managers and educational administrators] [Interviewee RU9] and the similarity of the programmes as important factors of collaboration (Interviewees RU4, RU5, RU10, RU13). However, it should also be mentioned that 40% of Russian stakeholders clearly identified academic rationales as the main reasons for establishing and continuing DD cooperation.

As for economic rationales, both sides prioritised the receipt of Finnish and/or Russian government funding to support DDs (Interviewees FI4, FI5, FI7, FI8, FI11, FI12; Interviewees RU4, RU6, RU7, RU8, RU10, RU11, RU12, RU13, RU14, RU16, RU19, RU20). A Finnish educational administrator also pointed out that:

'Local entrepreneurs, companies and businesses [...] put a high value on students being able to speak at least three languages: Finnish, English and Russian. Cross-border cooperation is also a guarantee of survival.' [Interviewee FI10]

Political rationales demonstrated low compatibility. Finnish interviewees highlighted DDs as a tool for international student recruitment in Russia (Interviewees FI5, FI6, FI7, FI8, FI9, FI10, FI13, FI14, FI15):

'One reason why we're doing double degrees is that we want to ensure student recruitment' [Interviewee FI14].

Russian interviewees stressed that their DD participation demonstrated their commitment to the goals of government policy reflected in KPIs (Interviewees RU4, RU6, RU7, RU8, RU9, RU10, RU19, RU20), and served as a means of confirming their loyalty to university top managers. This was particularly the case in those universities that received special government support for internationalisation.

'The rector personally oversees everything that is related [to the government programme supporting internationalisation]. He needs commitment. I should go abroad and establish the contacts.' [Interviewee RU10]

Russian educational administrators tended to report on KPI achievement more than the provision of sustainable DD regulatory arrangements at the level of central university departments. For example, the educational administrators mentioned the presence of a Finnish partner university in the top 300 of a certain WUR and its location in an EU member state as the main rationales for cooperation [Interviewees RU6, RU7]. Indeed, this DD allowed Russian administrators to report on KPIs in the number of international students attracted to this programme, the implemented mobility, DD programme development, and so forth. However, three years after the DD launch, a Finnish administrator highlighted the weaknesses of the DD regulatory arrangements in this Russian partner university:

‘Reasons for discontinuation could be that the double degree applicants are not good enough for some reason that we don’t know about. ... Many of the applicants applying to a DD programme from Russia are not Russian students but from totally different locations [...], and their background degrees (...) do not always meet our criteria. There have also been some challenges regarding the final project (thesis), and scheduling (the defence etc.)’ [Interviewee FI15]

It is striking that this study found a lack of compatibility in relation to personal rationales. A few Finnish interviewees mentioned ‘a friendly environment for collaboration’ (Interviewees FI1, FI9, FI13), but none of them emphasised personal relationships with a particular Russian stakeholder as a specific reason for establishing a DD and continuing it, unlike the vast majority (70%) of Russian stakeholders. The latter prioritised the personalisation of relationships with Finnish colleagues, calling them ‘our Finnish friends’ (Interviewees RU18, RU13, RU19, RU20), and emphasising, for example, that a Finnish colleague ‘visited my home’ (Interviewees RU2, RU8). Five Russian interviewees stressed that they had started DD cooperation on the advice of friends working at Russian or Finnish universities (Interviewees RU1, RU8, RU11, RU14, RU15). [Table 1](#) shows that personal rationales did not include DD sustainability, but were regarded as beneficial for a stakeholder [Interviewees RU2, RU5, RU8, RU11, RU12, RU14, RU15, RU20]. The more a Russian stakeholder was mentioned in personal rationales, the less collaborative the programme was in actuality, and the greater the extent of the isolation of the Finnish and Russian parts of DD regulatory arrangements from each other. Fifteen Russian interviewees emphasised that the DD enabled them to travel, satisfy personal curiosity, derive personal comfort, and establish other projects not related to the DD area. For example, an academic leader described their rationales for participating in DDs as follows:

‘My motivation was to learn a foreign language for professional communication. I like communicating with foreigners, to show them that I’m a person with whom they could collaborate in Russia. [...] Someone from abroad funded my travels [...]. I prefer to be involved in the administrative coordination of the projects more than in teaching.’ [Interviewee RU20]

However, a partner leading the same programme in Finland emphasised the questionable regulatory arrangements:

‘We don’t have many students from this university. The coordinator explained the difficulties students have in gaining recognition in the central offices for the period of study abroad ... for a particular university. We implement our own quality assurance procedures in our part of the programme.’ [Interviewee FI4]

DD stakeholders in Finland and Russia: similar roles, different duties

The analysis of DD stakeholders’ roles in Finland and Russia reveals clear differences. While Finnish stakeholders clearly determined their roles and limits of liability in DD partnerships, Russian stakeholders stressed that they are responsible for many issues in the DD regulatory arrangements. For example, an academic leader in a Finnish university explained the roles in the following way:

‘... the academic director is responsible for the curriculum, study-related issues, and the selection process. For quality assurance, we have a quality manager. And then of course

regarding the study counsellor, we have an appointed person who is a major link for the students, someone who is linked to us in the academic unit and the student affairs office. There's also someone who takes care of personal study plans.' [Interviewee FI13].

The comparison between Finnish and Russian academics revealed the difference between the administrative workload in their DD responsibilities, independent of their formal status. The administrative workload is considerable for Russian academics and, conversely, educational administrators intervene in DD regulatory arrangements. For example, an academic described the scope of their duties as follows:

'I'm deputy director of the faculty responsible for international affairs, a lecturer, and programme coordinator of our double degree [...]. I recruit international teachers and organise all the paperwork [...] I report to each [central] office on request. [...] I'm also responsible for curriculum design in accordance with the requirements of the ministry and university central offices.' [Interviewee RU9]

In Tables 2 and 3, the roles of DD stakeholders in Finland and Russia are classified in accordance with their duties mentioned in the interviews and on the websites to illustrate the differences between the roles. I also classify academic leaders as academics if they mentioned teaching and research in addition to their DD-related duties. Russian stakeholders increased their opportunities to participate in DDs when they had a relatively limited number of teaching contact hours, and/or gained access to internationalisation activities due to their informal roles. The latter gave the stakeholders the opportunity to become visible to international colleagues and receive funding from Finnish government support programmes for mobility and lecturing [Interviewees RU2, RU4, RU5, RU8, RU12, RU13, RU16, RU19, RU20].

Salience of internal stakeholders and DD sustainability

When Russia joined the Bologna Process (2003) and Finnish funding for collaborative degrees arrived (2005), academic leaders in Finland gradually became the definitive stakeholders, concentrating power (funding), the legitimacy provided by traditions, and urgency as international student providers [Interviewees FI1, FI2, FI4-6, FI9-FI15]. Professional staff gained urgency, and educational administrators acquired legitimacy for DD regulatory arrangements, being responsible for student enrolment, assessment and

Table 2. The roles of DD stakeholders interviewed in Finnish universities

Educational administrator	Academic leader	Academic staff	Professional staff
FI2	FI1	FI1	
		FI3	
	FI4	FI4	
			FI5 FI6
	FI7	FI7	FI8 FI9
FI10	FI11	FI11	
	FI12	FI12	
	FI13	FI13	
			FI14 FI15

Table 3. The roles of DD stakeholders interviewed in Russian universities.

Educational administrator	Academic leader	Academic staff	Professional staff
	RU1	RU1	RU1
	RU2	RU2	
	RU3		
	RU4		
	RU5	RU5	
RU6			
RU7			
RU8	RU8	RU8	
		RU9	RU9
	RU10	RU10	
	RU11	RU11	
RU12		RU12	
	RU13		
	RU14	RU14	
		RU15	
RU16	RU16	RU16	RU16
RU17		RU17	
	RU18	RU18	RU18
	RU19	RU19	RU19
	RU20	RU20	
		RU21(R)	RU21(R)
			RU22(R)
		RU23(R)	RU23(R)
		RU24(R)	RU24(R)
	RU25(R)	RU25(R)	RU25(R)

*RU21-25(R) – survey respondents only

quality assurance procedures. It should be noted that Finnish administrative stakeholders and university top managers denied any intervention in the curriculum and the content of domestic and collaborative degrees [Interviewees FI5, FI6, FI8, FI9, FI10, FI14, FI15].

In Russia, academic leaders traditionally had legitimacy as the heads of domestic degrees, subordinated to the deans and top managers responsible for implementation of the Federal State Education Standards; if an academic leader was responsible for the collaborative track only, his/her legitimacy decreased in the eyes of the other stakeholders within a domestic university. Those Russian academics who neither occupied administrative positions officially, nor influenced the teaching workload distribution as department heads, had over 800 contact hours per study year [Interviewees RU9, RU17, RU18, RU21, RU23–RU25]. Few Russian academic leaders [Interviewees RU5, RU13, RU19] confirmed their DD duties as formally documented and additionally paid as such; others mentioned the verbal directive of a top manager, dean or department head [Interviewees RU1–RU3, RU8, RU9, RU11, RU12, RU14, RU17–RU18, RU20, RU21, RU23–RU25]. One DD changed four academics responsible for administrative coordination in 2017–2020; all worked in the department headed by an academic leader of the programme.

Top managers and educational administrators responsible for international and academic affairs had traditionally been legitimised to intervene in any internationalisation activity and curriculum design. All Russian interviewees confirmed that new funding flows made them definitive stakeholders for DDs because all DD regulatory arrangements depended on those university stakeholders who distributed the teaching workload (together with the academic leaders who worked as department heads), and approved (or not) the curriculum design, learning outcomes, procedures for quality assurance,

funding, and mobility options for each student and academic. DD academic leaders acquired legitimacy and urgency (duly becoming the expectant stakeholders), but they gained power only by being in top manager positions. Finnish academic leaders did not regard Russian top managers and educational administrators as salient stakeholders by themselves *ex officio*, but readily included them in academic mobility programmes despite the lack of their research contribution. When Finnish additional funding ended, the DDs lost their jointness, but those that had been established on the basis of academic rationales continued to remain collaborative. Academic leaders as the definitive stakeholders in Finland also acted in the particular institutional context of the domestic degree development. In cases where the DD option did not align with the goals of the department and special DD funding ended, the positions of academic leaders and DD sustainability weakened.

Top-down administrative traditions in Russia heavily influenced DD regulatory arrangements in all partnerships, including those that used both Russian and Finnish special funding. When a DD head simultaneously occupied the position of a top manager or educational administrator, this combination did not necessarily harmonise the regulatory arrangements or increase the amount of Russian academic and student mobility. Finnish stakeholders had the power to influence Russian partners because they chose who could be invited (and therefore funded for travelling and/or teaching). But this power was not realised due to differences in traditions and rationales. Finnish stakeholders were not interested in aligning DD regulatory arrangements as jointly developed, or in knowing how they are organised within a Russian university. They implemented their own regulatory arrangements separately. As a result, the funding was provided for Russian stakeholders, 70% of whom mentioned personal rationales independently of DD sustainability.

To summarise, differences between stakeholder salience and its attributes in Finnish and Russian universities during programme implementation have led to a decrease in the number of double degree partnerships, despite the continuation of funding opportunities. The EDUneighbours interviews confirmed seven DD programmes implemented in thirteen partnerships in 2014–2017. However, in 2020–2021 only five master's programmes implemented by two Finnish and four Russian universities in four double degree partnerships were confirmed by both partners (EDUneighbours survey). Two Finnish universities and three Russian partner universities confirmed collaboration in student exchanges and research.

Discussion and conclusion

This article contributes to the studies on internal university stakeholders, focusing on their agency and interplay at individual, partnership and programme levels. The paper proposes a new approach to classifying the stakeholders in accordance with their roles in DD provision. The article shows that the crucial factors contributing to differences in stakeholder salience and DD sustainability are the stakeholders' rationales and the roles they play in the context of national and institutional traditions of IoHE implementation. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on rationales that the stakeholders enacted at programme and partnership levels in comparison with those previously developed for national HE systems (Knight 2004; Balbachevsky et al. 2021). In addition, in comparison

to previous studies (Willis and Taylor 2014; Ma and Montgomery 2021), I propose a new way of understanding personal rationales as the stakeholder benefits derived from participation in DDs, but not linked with the programme itself. Low compatibility between rationales and different national contexts determines different perceptions of the stakeholder's salience in Finnish and Russian universities. The academic rationales for internationalisation provide the legitimacy for a DD partnership for Finnish and Russian academics, while educational administrators prioritise such attributes of the stakeholder's salience as urgency (especially in Finland) and power (especially in Russia). Some partnerships lost their sustainability after the CBU funding that had provided compatibility between economic rationales was ended, although DD partnerships based on common academic rationales were able to diversify the spectrum of IoHE activities, and preserved sustainable collaborativeness even when the jointness of the programmes had decreased. Academic rationales determined the legitimacy of Russian partners for Finnish stakeholders to the greatest extent. Those DD partnerships where Russian stakeholders stressed their personal rationales and rarely mentioned academic, economic and even political rationales for collaboration had the weakest regulatory arrangements. Rationales with low compatibility led to differences in the attribution of stakeholder salience in partner universities, which in turn led to isolation of their parts of the programme, duly decreasing reciprocity and the sustainability of the DD. DD options had a greater chance of being prolonged by the Finnish side if they captured the interest of Finnish students, and provided good quality and the sustainable enrolment of Russian students. In addition, DD prospects derived from the academic rationales of the deans/department heads. The programme was downgraded to exchange options if the deans found that they were more useful for the department goals and took less time to implement. The departure of an academic leader from a university decreased the legitimacy of the other stakeholders in the respective HEI and could be sufficient reason to terminate a programme. The availability of extra funding by itself did not contribute to the growth of the degree programme's collaborativeness, supporting mobility as an element but not as an integrated part of a comprehensive degree programme. In general, the expectations, perception and usage of the attributes of salience by internal university stakeholders in Finland and Russia could contribute to DD sustainability being understood by stakeholders and supported by the state in line with the concrete results achieved by both sides in the cooperation.

To conclude, this study shows the significance of differences in stakeholder salience affecting collaborative degree sustainability. Some collaborative activities (e.g. separately developed curricula) may diminish the jointness of a *programme*, but they do not reduce the value of collaboration for its *individual stakeholders*, who may collaborate in the programme to a lesser extent but continue to develop the field of study if the academic rationale prevails for both stakeholders within a partnership. The option to obtain a second degree could disappear, but collaboration may continue through exchanges and research projects with the participation of students and academics. When each partner university implements its parts of the programme according to its own regulatory arrangements, a degree loses the jointness but preserves the collaborativeness, evolving from a double into a collaborative degree. Although the jointness declines, the collaborativeness of the degree remains, taking on other forms.

Notes

1. Russia's invasion of Ukraine ended TFK funding for all projects involving the participation of Russian HEIs from March 2022.
2. The programmes, initially based on the website information and documents, were verified in interviews with internal stakeholders as we acknowledge that the websites are not always accurate and up-to-date.

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