Reconceptualizing and Navigating Tensions within Global and Local Collaborations in Higher Education: A Comprehensive Perspective of Organizational Change

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Internationalization, global collaborations, and diversity are currently under attack in many countries worldwide. However, most higher education institutions have always been international and diverse and collaborated both locally and globally. It is the meanings and implications of internationalization, collaborations, and diversity that have changed over time. Therefore, this article explores what we can learn from organizational change perspectives to work effectively with tensions within global and local collaborations in higher education.

In the case of the University of Groningen, a university founded in 1614 in the north of the Netherlands, near Germany, the first Rector was German, and the first students came from various European countries. At the same time, this university was initiated by the local governments and has always been strongly rooted in the region. Over more than 400 years, the institution has evolved from four faculties (Medicine, Law, Philosophy, and Theology) with a small number of students to a broad, classical research university with 11 faculties and approximately 33,000 students today. In response to continuous changes in the external environment, the university has faced numerous tensions. On several occasions, it has even been threatened with extinction (cf. Van Berkel; Termeer 2021). Still, the university has always adjusted and survived. What has not changed throughout these 411 years is

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the dual character of this higher education institution, being both local and global. The high tensions today regarding internationalization, global collaborations, and diversity reflect the difficulties we encounter in connecting the global and local. Given the continuous character of these tensions throughout centuries, we must develop a better understanding.

Since its inception in 1614, this university in Western Europe has collaborated internally and externally, locally and across borders. At times, the university has experienced internal tensions stemming from differences in religious beliefs. At other times, the institution had to respond to attacks from western parts of the country or rulers from neighboring countries. Initially, collaborations were small-scale and more personal, as seen with the University of Gottingen. Gradually, due to technological developments, mobility increased and collaborations turned into agreements for student and staff exchange, shared research and educational programs and joint supervision. Recently, more attention has been given to collaborating with diverse societal organizations, including public authorities, research organizations, and companies. The cooperation between the universities of Groningen and Gottingen evolved into institutional and faculty- and program-level agreements, and, later, the U4 network, together with the universities of Ghent in Belgium and Uppsala in Sweden. Currently, the universities of Groningen and Gottingen and their former U4 partners, participate in ENLIGHT,[1] one of the European University Alliances.

In developing these collaborations, leadership and strategy appear critical. Due to its location in the north of the country, which some perceive as somewhat distant, the university of Groningen has often played a pioneering role. The U4 network facilitated more intensive cooperation with a wider range of stakeholders and introduced new dimensions that resulted in early innovations in research, education, management, and governance among these four universities in Western Europe. The senior leadership strongly influenced developments and innovations in these global and local collaborations. According to staff members involved in the U4 network, the shared leadership of these four universities was visionary, characterized by a global and entrepreneurial mindset, and comprised excellent researchers, educators, and strategists. Developing critical thinking, educating and inspiring, while navigating many boundaries with adequate support and perseverance, proved essential. In the case of this U4 network, significant early improvements in digitalization were supported, and Schools based on societal themes such as energy, healthy ageing, sustainable society, and digitization were established early on. Also, U4 involved the first double degrees and student initiatives. Altogether, this network was founded on a strong commitment and trust established between senior leaders from four institutions. Foundations were laid for the next phase of larger-scale, increasingly complex and diverse collaborations within a European University Alliance (cf. van den Berg 2018).

[1] http://www.ENLIGHT-eu.org.

The European University Alliances (EUAs) concept was first mentioned in the 2017 Sorbonne speech by Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic. It became a reality in 2019 and was first implemented as part of the Erasmus+ program. The idea is backed by a long-standing tradition of cooperation and exchanges between European Universities that dates to the Middle Ages. The EUA initiative was initially designed to promote student mobility between campuses and to advance pedagogical innovation. The first alliances were launched in 2019 and became an immediate success. While the original idea was to launch just 20 alliances, 65 alliances now exist, bringing together more than 570 universities and representing over half of the student population in the European Union. The open and inclusive nature of the calls of the European Commission have enabled the participation of universities of all sizes, types, and regions, including smaller institutions and those in the outermost parts of Europe. Much more than networks and projects, the European Commission aims for these alliances to be bridges and drivers for innovation and transformation (cf. European Parliament 2025).

One example of early European alliances founded is ENLIGHT, which stands for '**E**uropean university **N**etwork to promote equitable quality of **L**ife, susta**I**nability and **G**lobal engagement through **H**igher education **T**ransformation.' The highly ambitious, profound, and extensive character of this alliance is reflected in its mission:

> ENLIGHT aims to conduct an impact-driven and challenge-based transformation of European higher education to empower learners as globally engaged citizens with future-proof knowledge and skills, while synergising our R&I potential with and for our societal partners, to tackle major societal transitions and to promote equitable quality of life and sustainability. By joining forces, ENLIGHT aims to establish an open integrated space for our learners, teachers, and researchers to study, learn, and work together, enabling the free movement of students and staff and lifelong access to the best education environment, to connect R&I capacity and maximise impact by systemic sharing of resources. (EN*LIGHT)*

With ten larger-scale universities in ten European countries, each with multiple languages, cultures, and strategies, all located within their respective national systems for legislation, funding, and administration, the process presents numerous challenges. Nowadays, profound and extensive cross-border collaborations like ENLIGHT need to engage not only their staff and students, but also work together with diverse societal stakeholders, both locally and globally. As Jones and de Wit (2025) review, internationalization in higher education in Europe has evolved into a *comprehensive* means that should not only enhance the quality of all three missions (research, education, and innovation) but also ensure societal relevance, sustainability, and inclusiveness. As a consequence of this increased complexity and diversity, potential tensions have also multiplied.

For ENLIGHT, increased complexity and diversity can be expected in areas such as developing a shared strategy and governance for ten universities across Europe, engaging all students and staff across various levels, disciplines, and domains, and working with diverse societal stakeholders. Following its mission, a critical issue for ENLIGHT is how to work effectively with all diversity and develop equally accessible, safe, welcoming, inclusive communities of practice and campuses which are green, sustainable, and globally engaged. To achieve its high ambitions, ENLIGHT is building on established networks and trust, as well as its first achievements, recognition, and support from the European Commission, along with the strong beliefs and commitment of many staff, students, and societal stakeholders. The key question is how to deal effectively and meaningfully with tensions and create synergy and new opportunities.

The history of cooperation between the Universities of Groningen and Gottingen shows that such tensions are related to the significant changes required from the leadership, staff, students, and societal stakeholders, as well as their organizations, systems, communities, and societies. Therefore, organizational change theory might help develop a deeper understanding of such continuous tensions and how to address them.

1 Organizational Change Theory and Perspectives

Internationalization in higher education has frequently been *conceptualized* as a process of change; however, it has not been investigated much with change theory. Additionally, these conceptual studies have primarily focused on planned, rational processes of change as the single 'change theory'. Practice, however, demonstrates that values, emotions, and dynamics play an equally relevant role and often create non-intended outcomes that make the processes less effective and meaningful (Van den Hende; Whitsed; Coelen 2023).

Just like with internationalization in higher education, this rational, planned approach has long prevailed in organizational change research. In response to the increasingly complex, diverse, and dynamic contexts in all types of organizations worldwide, scholars have come to recognize that organizational change processes, such as developing global and local collaborations, necessitate multiple perspectives. Smith; Skinner; Read (2020) explain how seven perspectives are interrelated, offering a more comprehensive understanding of individual and organizational change processes. They distinguish between rational, planned, and emergent or organic change, with management foci on institutional pressures, resources, systems, psychological, cultural, and power dimensions, and dualities. Similarly, scholars in the internationalization of higher education have frequently stressed the need for more comprehensive or holistic, theory-based frameworks and structured approaches (e.g., Cai; Leask 2024). Based on recent research (Van den Hende 2024), this article presents three perspectives of organizational change developed into a comprehen-

sive framework for working with internationalization and diversity in higher education.

The first perspective adopts a comprehensive view of organizational change, drawing on the work of Pettigrew (1987) and Pettigrew; Woodman; Cameron (2001). This perspective was chosen for its ease of understanding and its relatively general critical dimensions of context (why), content (what), and process (how). Pettigrew (1987: 657f.) views organizational change as a 'multi-level, continuous process in context'. According to Pettigrew, formulating the content of any new strategy entails managing its context (both internal and external) and process, and includes dimensions of level and time.

The second perspective uses the Dynamic Resource-Based View (DRBV) of organizational change (cf. Mintzberg; Ahlstrand; Lampel 1998, Eisenhardt; Martin 2000, Helfat; Finkelstein; Mitchell; Peteraf; Singh; Teece; Winter 2007, Smith et al. 2020). DRBV is a targeted lens to investigate the impact of institutional strategies, critical resources, staff and student competencies, core processes, and the characteristics of organizational contexts. DRBV departs from individual and organizational strengths and achievements to create value for all stakeholders and ultimately achieve a competitive and strategic advantage for organizations (Van den Hende; Riezebos; Coelen 2023).

The third perspective involves a duality approach to organizational change. This perspective implies acknowledging and appreciating seemingly opposing views as co-existing, complementary dualities, thereby accommodating complexity, diversity, and dynamics within a specific context. Tensions are approached as dualities creating synergy rather than dilemmas or dichotomies (cf. Boonstra; van Offenbeek; Vos 2017, Covey 2010, Smith et al. 2020, Boonstra 2024).

When applying these three perspectives of organizational change with internationalization and diversity in higher education three critical, interrelated influencing factors were identified: strategy, resource management, and engagement (Van den Hende 2024). This research demonstrates that strategies are often not sufficiently explicit and integrative and fail to develop conceptual clarity and shared understandings. Furthermore, resource management encompasses not only access to financial resources but also human resources, including mindset, knowledge, skills, and leadership, and adequate management. Staff and students can only be engaged when adequate drivers, cognitive and affective competencies, and opportunities are present. Moreover, strategies, resource management, and engagement of relevant stakeholders must be strategically aligned with the specific context to achieve successful organizational change (cf. Van den Hende 2024).

Altogether, this research has developed a comprehensive framework of organizational change, providing a new, theory-based perspective for working with internationalization and diversity in higher education:

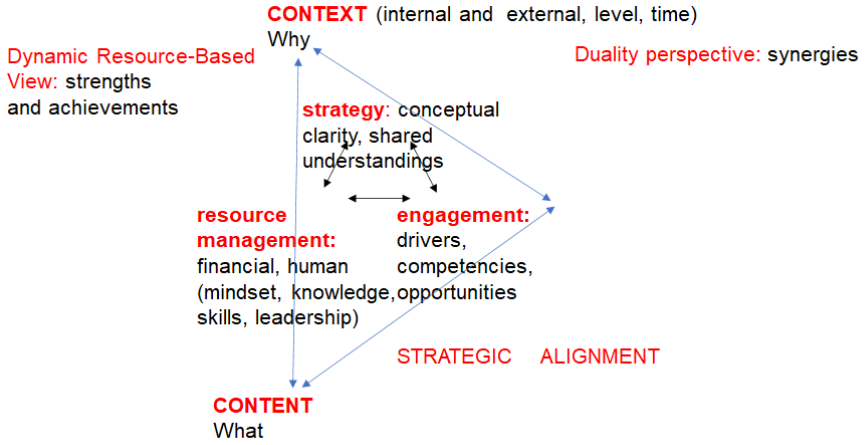

Fig. 1: A comprehensive framework of organizational change for internationalization and diversity in higher education

Additionally, based on this comprehensive perspective of organizational change (Figure 1), actionable process strategies can be developed. Such a process strategy should include a scope, approach, pace, and style of organizational change that are all consistent with the specific context, content, level, and time dimensions (Pettigrew 1987, Pettigrew et al. 2001, Boonstra et al. 2017, Boonstra 2024), as shown in Table 1 below.

Tab. 1: Process strategies

Context, content, level, and time		
Scope	larger scale	smaller scale
Approach	planned	emergent
Pace	high-speed	low speed
Style	top-down	bottom-up

By applying this comprehensive perspective of organizational change (Figure 1) and these process strategies (Table 1), this study aims to explore how tensions in profound and extensive global and local collaborations, such as European University Alliances (EUAs), can be reconceptualized and navigated to sustain, innovate, and transform these collaborations through more effective and meaningful processes of individual and organizational change. Following this comprehensive theoretical lens from organizational change, the three questions guiding this study are:

1. How can tensions in profound and extensive global and local collaborations in higher education that aim to be sustainable, innovative, and transformative, such as European University Alliances (EUAs), be reconceptualized through a comprehensive perspective of organizational change (Figure 1)?
2. How can such tensions in these collaborations be navigated based on process strategies (Table 1) as part of this comprehensive perspective of organizational change?
3. What are the implications for strategy and policy development, practice, and future research?

2 Method

This conceptual study adopts three perspectives of organizational change as a comprehensive theoretical framework (Figure 1), including process strategies (Table 1), to address the three questions guiding this study (see above). Current profound and extensive global and local collaborations in the European higher education context that aim to be sustainable, innovative, and transformative are reconceptualized as examples of processes of individual and organizational change. This research connects organizational change studies that discuss or deploy multiple perspectives of change with literature about transformative global and local collaborations, specifically European University Alliances, and working with internationalization and diversity in higher education. The study builds on recent research (Van den Hende 2024) and 33 years of experience in higher education, spanning various academic and professional roles and diverse contexts. As such, perceptions and experiences are complemented with empirical research, conceptual studies, reports (e.g., European Commission, European University Association), and examples from practice.

The European University Alliance of ENLIGHT and, specifically, the University of Groningen, serves as an illustrative example. The alliance and institution were selected due to their longer-term experience with global and local collaborations, and their focus on internationalization and diversity in strategy and practice. Additionally, the author has a wide access to and good understanding of these particular contexts. This scholar-practitioner perspective enables more profound insights into the everyday workings of these higher education institutions and alliances, and provides good access to the literature, documents, actors, and reports.

A systematic, theory-based approach was followed to address the three questions. First, based on the literature about European University Alliances and the example of ENLIGHT, recurring tensions, as frequently reported and encountered, were identified and reconceptualized as processes of individual and organizational change. Following Figure 1, the critical dimensions of context, content, process, level, and time (comprehensive perspective), strengths and achievements (DRBV),

and dualities as synergies were analysed together with the influencing factors of strategy, resource management, engagement, and strategic alignment.
Second, actionable process strategies (Table 1) for European University Alliances and similar profound, extensive global and local collaborations were developed based on the identified tensions, as part of the comprehensive framework of organizational change. Thirdly, this article examines implications for strategy and policy development, practice, and future research. See Figure 2 below.

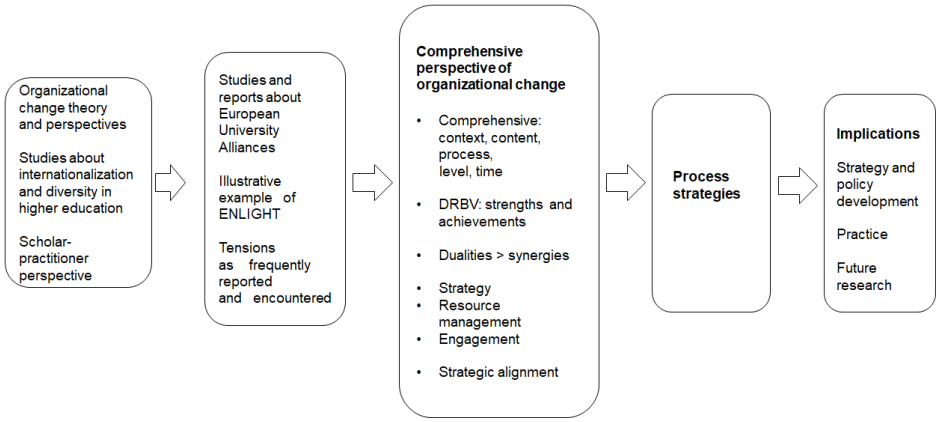

Fig. 2: Research structure

3 Analysis

Next, following Figure 2, tensions as frequently reported and encountered were identified based on studies and reports about European University Alliances and the illustrative example of ENLIGHT.

3.1 Tensions in European University Alliances

The high ambitions and strong support for the European University Alliances are evident in the European Commission's 2025 report on outcomes and transformational potential (EU Commission 2025). The aim is to make European higher education more attractive and competitive through intensified and extensive global and local collaborations. The objectives are to develop a common European education and research area characterized by diversity and to establish new, more open, integrated spaces by connecting autonomous higher education institutions with diverse staff, students, and societal stakeholders across different countries. These ambitious aims contain the potential tensions of 1. collaboration versus competition, 2. global versus local, 3. shared versus individual, and 4. open, integrated spaces versus institutional and national autonomy.

The 349-page report is based on extensive desk research, stakeholder consultation activities, and piloting exercises. The responses from multiple stakeholders and networks (e.g., European University Association, the League of European Research Universities (LERU), Coimbra Group, The Guild, CEASAR, and ACA) reflect the potential and strategic momentum of these alliances. The European Commission reports an unprecedentedly high level of interest across all EU countries and beyond in these new forms of collaboration. The report highlights the first achievements.

Still, the report and responses also point out the remaining challenges and the need for further upscaling, mainstreaming, and integration, which will create additional complexity and potential tensions. For example, despite the European Commission's first blueprint for a European degree (2024), numerous national and local legal barriers remain. Equally, the current funding, particularly through the Erasmus and Horizon Europe programs, is found to be limited and overly project-based. Meanwhile, European policies and programs are often perceived as contradictory or confusing, and many stakeholders have stressed that application procedures need to be simplified and streamlined.

In short, in addition to the tensions identified in the overall ambitions, more specific tensions can be identified in 5. high strategic relevance versus inconsistencies, unclarity, and lack of integration in policies, programs, and procedures, 6. strong support from the European Commission versus a lack of longer-term and diversified funding, 7. the ambition of a common European degree versus specific national and local guidelines and frameworks.

Next, the example of ENLIGHT was studied to explore how the overall tensions described above and potential other tensions manifest within one of these alliances.

3.2 The Example of ENLIGHT

First, more context information is needed for a good understanding of potential tensions. The ENLIGHT alliance is currently in its second phase, from 2024 to 2027, building on achievements from its first phase (2020–2024). In its mission statement, ENLIGHT uses a lighthouse to illustrate the guiding values and principles of the alliance, 'to lead, enable, and support their students, staff, and societal stakeholders as sailors to shore to become life-long learners and agents of change to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.' Just like the objectives of the European Commission, diversity and inclusion play a critical role in the mission of ENLIGHT. For ENLIGHT, diversity is a broad concept, including diversity in, e.g., gender, age, and cultural, social, and educational backgrounds, as well as organizational diversity in disciplines, departments, academic and societal cultures. ENLIGHT aims to work effectively with diversity to ensure equal accessibility and an inclusive environment which will advance excellence, sustainability, and innovation. In sum, ENLIGHT utilizes these guiding values and principles as a key point of departure, with a strong focus on diversity and inclusion.

Accordingly, several shared objectives were agreed upon, which can be summarized in developing open, integrated spaces, increasing and diversifying forms of mobility, empowering and connecting students and staff, sharing and building know-how and capacity for joint research and innovations, and establishing a vibrant, green, and inclusive ENLIGHT community. The shared ENLIGHT objectives were operationalized through an impact-driven approach, based on concepts of change with intended impact, expected outcomes, and indicators, utilizing activities and resources across various domains. Accordingly, networks, task, and work forces have been organized, and activities, networks, tools, and good practices have been developed and disseminated. For example, thematic networks called 'Regional Academies' have been created to stimulate European dialogues in specific local contexts and connect academics with societal stakeholders.

After the first three years, it has been concluded that more attention had to be given to bottom-up, experimental initiatives and challenge-based collaborations in addition to strategic, top-down processes. Additionally, further attention is required to qualitative indicators and narratives that complement quantitative indicators and measurements, enabling monitoring and assessing impact and adjusting processes if needed. Other points of attention concern the consistency and clarity of change terminology, the predominant focus on the impact of research and less so on education and guarding ethical dimensions in line with the shared values and principles.

Altogether, all potential tensions identified in the overall ambitions for the European University Alliances manifest within this ENLIGHT alliance. The example of ENLIGHT illustrates particular approaches to addressing these tensions. Additionally, the experiences within ENLIGHT reveal tensions encountered in: 8. strategic, top-down versus bottom-up, experimental processes, 9. quantitative measurements versus qualitative narratives, 10. focus on the impact of research versus education, 11. value-driven approaches versus guarding ethical dimensions. All tensions identified are summarized in Tab. 2:

Table 2: Tensions in European University Alliances

1.	Collaboration	Competition
2.	Global	Local
3.	Shared	Individual
4.	Open, integrated	Autonomous
5.	High strategic relevance	Inconsistencies, unclarity, and lack of integration in policies and procedures
6.	Strong support and high interest	Lack of longer-term and diversified funding
7.	Common European degree	National and local guidelines and frameworks

8.	Strategic, top-down processes	Bottom-up, experimental, challenge-based processes
9.	Quantitative indicators and measurements	Qualitative indicators and narratives
10.	Impact of research	Impact of education
11.	Value-driven approach	Guarding ethical dimensions

Next, to address the first question, these identified tensions were reconceptualized using the comprehensive framework of organizational change (Figure 1).

3.3 Tensions Reconceptualized

First, all processes in these European University Alliances towards achieving shared ambitions and objectives were reconceptualized as processes requiring individual and organizational changes. Following the *comprehensive perspective* of Pettigrew (1987) and Pettigrew et al. (2001), each process needs to be developed and designed based on the specific context (internal and external), starting with the question of *why*. The context may involve the entire alliance, or one or more institutions, disciplines, domains, programs, communities, or societal stakeholders, including, e.g., senior leadership, management, academic and non-academic staff, and students. The shared strategic objectives and principles determine the content (*what*) that can be changed, the process of *how* this should be done, monitored, and assessed, when (timing), and with whom (level). The example of ENLIGHT demonstrates that the process can be operationalized as an impact-driven change approach, characterized by expected outcomes, outputs, quantitative and qualitative indicators, and inputs.

Second, the *Dynamic Resource-Based View* (DRBV) highlights the strengths and achievements of an alliance as a whole, or of one or more of the participating higher education institutions, programs, departments, societal organizations, communities, or individual stakeholders, which need to be recognized and connected to create value for all stakeholders and, ultimately, competitive and strategic advantage for an organization, or an alliance. For example, ENLIGHT can build on achievements like the 'Regional Academies' and the strength of particular expertise.

Third, potential tensions must be acknowledged, appreciated, and accommodated as *dualities* or synergies that can create new opportunities, rather than dilemmas or dichotomies. For instance, in these 'Regional Academies', global expertise can be applied in a specific way to benefit a local context.

In line with the operationalized context, content, and process of change, as well as strengths, achievements, and dualities, the *strategy* must be made explicit, consistent, and integrative. In line with the strategy, adequate *resources* should be available and managed. Resources may include a sufficient budget, adequate space and time, and appropriate knowledge, skills, mindset, and leadership. Furthermore, the engagement of all relevant stakeholders needs to be facilitated by ensuring adequate

drivers, cognitive and affective competencies, and opportunities. Finally, for successful processes of change, strategic alignment between strategies, resource management, and stakeholder engagement in a specific context is essential. For example, if these alliances aim to establish new, open, integrated spaces, they require explicit, integrative strategies, aligned with sufficient and adequate financial and human resources to facilitate active engagement from all relevant stakeholders.

After reconceptualizing tensions in these profound and extensive global and local collaborations (question 1), actionable process strategies can be developed to address the second question guiding this study.

3.4 Process Strategies

First, the specific context, content, level, and time dimensions determine the process strategy. In this process strategy, the *scope* can be larger or smaller in scale, which determines the type of approach, pace, and style of organizational change (cf. Pettigrew 1987, Pettigrew et al. 2001, Boonstra et al. 2017, Boonstra 2024), as shown in Table 1. Recent research by Van den Hende (2024) examined process strategies of organizational change in the context of working with internationalization and diversity in higher education.

Larger-scale changes are more appropriate where there is unanimous support in a homogeneous environment. A highly competitive external environment can create a sense of urgency and drive larger-scale changes. Such changes, with a larger-scale *scope,* have a higher, longer-term impact on organizations, domains, and stakeholders. These significant changes necessitate a planned, integrated *approach* based on shared goals and detailed plans, accompanied by adequate guidance and resources (e.g., blueprints and best practices). The *pace* of such major changes is high speed and characterized by strategic timing and bold strokes. The matching leadership style is top-down and directive, with primarily one-way communication.

Smaller-scale changes are better suited to a more heterogeneous context that requires differentiation and flexibility. Changes with a smaller-scale *scope* have a lower, shorter-term impact and demand an emergent, bottom-up approach, involving pilots, experiments, and quick wins. This approach involves frequent reflection, negotiation, and consultation. The management of resources requires considerable self-organization based on specific interests and expertise. The pace of change is lower speed, incremental, and lenient, with flexible planning. A bottom-up style of leadership, with tailor-made arrangements and much two-way communication, is appropriate. In addition to the scale or scope of change, the level and type of *diversity,* as well as the *timing,* are critical factors in determining an adequate process strategy in a higher education context (cf. Van den Hende 2024).

Different process strategies can be combined simultaneously or in different phases. Depending on the specific developments, strategies can be adjusted by changing one or more of the dimensions specified in Table 1. Developing and

applying a comprehensive process strategy requires a profound understanding of the specific context and its stakeholders, as summarized in Figure 3 below.

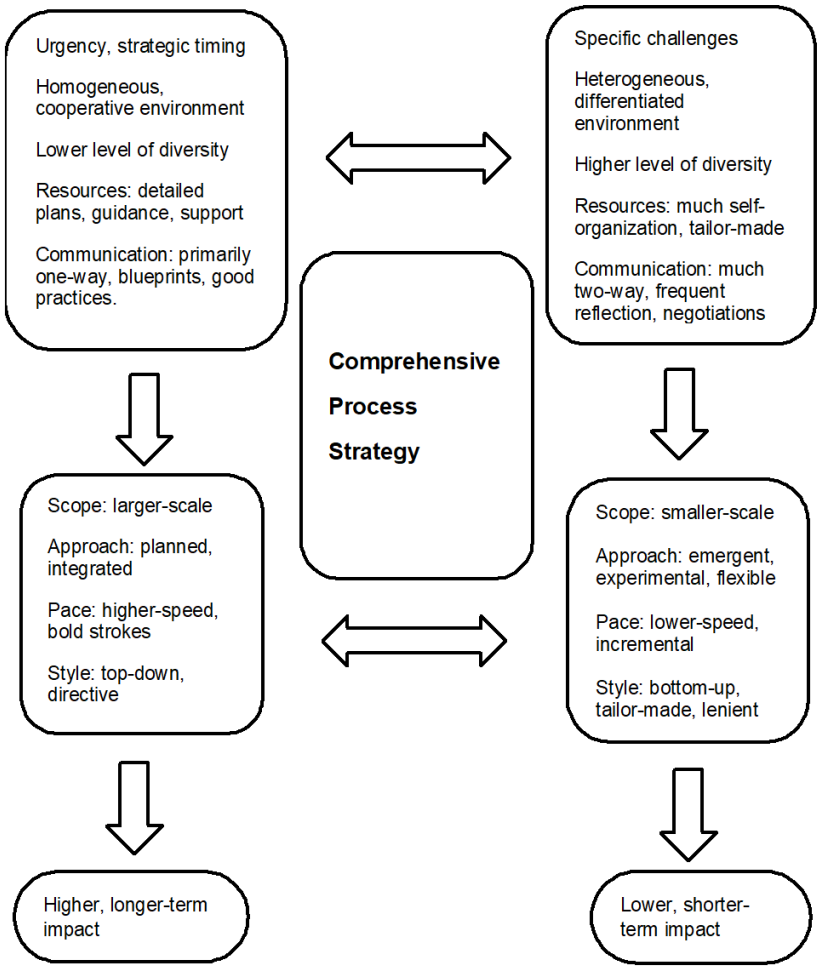

Fig. 3: A comprehensive process strategy for global and local collaborations in higher education

4 Implications

Having addressed the first two questions, the implications are discussed next. The applied comprehensive framework of organizational change by a scholar-practitioner offers new conceptualizations from a theory-based, comprehensive perspective, and actionable process strategies to extend higher education research, strategy and policy development, and practice.

Regarding the theoretical implications, reconceptualizing tensions in the context of transforming collaborations such as the European University Alliances (EUAs) reveals that the dual character of these collaborations is often not sufficiently acknowledged, appreciated, or accommodated. The main focus has been on the global character, common values, shared objectives and principles, the value of diversity, and on creating open, integrated spaces, while less attention has been paid to specific local and institutional contexts, and individual, organizational, and national autonomy, strengths, and achievements to preserve. Likewise, studies on internationalization and diversity in higher education have predominantly described tensions as *dichotomies* between 'blockers' versus 'enablers' (Van den Hende 2024). The urgency of crossing boundaries within these collaborations has recently been addressed by the European University Association (2024), introducing the concept of '*operability*'. Still, a theory-based approach, specifically, a duality perspective explaining *how* to cross dichotomies or boundaries has rarely been used in higher education studies. Unlike higher education, scholars in philosophy, sociology, psychology, and organizational studies have applied a duality perspective. For example, Schimmelpfennig; Razek; Schnell; Muthukrishna (2022) point out that dualities are evident in the so-called 'paradox of diversity' that illustrates that more organizational diversity empowers innovation but complicates communication and coordination.

This study challenges the prevailing conceptualizations of tensions in higher education as dichotomies or boundaries by providing a more comprehensive, synergetic perspective that incorporates *dualities* related to specific contexts, strengths, achievements, diversity, and dynamics. For EUAs, this duality perspective implies reconceptualizing seemingly opposing views in collaborations as co-existing and complementary dualities that can be synergized into new opportunities.

Second, the process strategies presented in this study (Table 1 and Figure 3) provide a structured, actionable approach to navigate tensions. By applying multiple perspectives of organizational change (comprehensive, dynamic resource-based, and duality, Figure 1), this study connects a process strategy not only to the specific context but also to the content, resource management, engagement, and the particular level and time of change. Additionally, the level and type of diversity play a critical role.

The example of ENLIGHT demonstrates that, in the initial phase, the focus has been on achieving larger-scale changes at a high speed through rational, planned approaches, quantitative measurements, and top-down leadership. At the same time, diversity, achieving shared goals, and inclusiveness play a critical role within ENLIGHT. Figure 3 demonstrates that a higher level of diversity and a more heterogeneous environment require more experimental, bottom-up approaches with more two-way communication and self-organization at a smaller scale and lower speed. ENLIGHT can integrate these theory-based, structured process strategies with the existing impact-driven change process approach. As such, this study provides an actionable approach to develop adequate process strategies in specific

contexts, simultaneously, or in different phases. In the case of ENLIGHT, this implies creating an adequate balance in its second phase, with greater focus on process strategies in more heterogeneous contexts and adjusting strategy, policies, and resource management accordingly.

For strategy and policy development regarding European University Alliances, at the European level and in local and institutional contexts, this comprehensive perspective of organizational change implies that strategies, policies, programs, and procedures need to acknowledge and appreciate the impact of specific contexts, integrate multiple perspectives, and accommodate adequate process strategies and support to engage all relevant stakeholders. For example, to develop a common European degree, the diverse contexts, dualities, strengths, and achievements need to be taken into account, and policies and programs must be made consistent, explicit, and integrative. For societal debates and political discourses, this comprehensive, dynamic resource-based, dual perspective can be utilized to broaden, contextualize, and synergize fragmented and polarized narratives, enabling new perspectives, connections, and approaches.

5 Conclusion

First, this conceptual study provides a theory-based explanation of how tensions in global and local collaborations that aim to be sustainable, innovative, and transformative, such as European University Alliances, can be reconceptualized as comprehensive processes of organizational and individual change. Second, it proposes actionable process strategies to navigate such tensions effectively. Our study of higher education literature and practice with this new theoretical lens reveals that the impact of the required changes, and their related contexts, dynamics, and diversity is often underrecognized, undervalued, and inadequately addressed. The prevailing focus tends to be on one dimension, level, domain, or group of stakeholders at the expense of others, creating dichotomies, boundaries, and barriers that hinder a comprehensive understanding, embedding, and integration of global and local collaborations in specific contexts.

This conceptual study offers implications for future research, strategy and policy development, and practice related to global and local collaborations in higher education that aim to be innovative and transformative. The findings demonstrate the usability of a comprehensive perspective of organizational change to understand better the complex and dynamic processes in such profound, extensive global and local collaborations, and the dualities involved. The academic contribution is in connecting studies on internationalization and diversity in higher education with organizational change perspectives.

This study has developed a theory-based, comprehensive approach for reconceptualizing and navigating tensions in global and local collaborations in higher education as dualities in dynamic, contextual processes of individual and organizatio-

nal change. This comprehensive, dual, dynamic resource-based perspective adds new options to the predominantly rational, planned approach to change that has prevailed in the related literature and in the higher education field. The theory-informed approach is based on a thorough review of relevant reports, practice, and literature in both fields (e.g., Pettigrew 1987, Eisenhardt; Martin 2000, Boonstra 2024, Jones; de Wit 2024, Van den Hende 2024), enabling greater theoretical generalization. The example of ENLIGHT illustrates how a comprehensive perspective of organizational change can be applied in a particular context, while the theoretical approach offers new insights and an actionable process strategy that is more widely applicable.

In terms of future research, it is recommended that further empirical studies be conducted to apply this comprehensive framework of organizational change in diverse contexts, such as other European University Alliances, and similar global and local collaborations across other continents, to make these processes more effective and meaningful. Specifically, more longitudinal, comparative studies across disciplinary, institutional, local, and global contexts are needed to address the impact of time, level, and diversity.

Finally, given the frequently reported urgency of transformative changes in higher education (Van der Zwaan 2017, Marginson 2023) and more theory-based comprehensive frameworks (Cai; Leask 2024), it is time to adopt new perspectives and approaches. This comprehensive, dynamic, resource-based, dual perspective of organizational change with actionable process strategies provides a synergetic new way to rethink fragmentation and polarization, broaden narratives, connect people and perspectives, improve collaborations, and contribute to sustainability, innovation, and transformation in higher education and society, both globally and locally. Opposing views and diversity are essential for driving transformative change. The key question is how to radically change our ways of thinking, learning, and working together to find synergetic alternatives.

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