EADTU conference 2016

"European higher education in the digital age: opportunities and impact of new modes of teaching"

Message of Rome

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Universities face challenges with regard to enhancing quality for increasing student numbers and lower staff/student ratios; the employability of graduates throughout their lifetime; and the growing diversity of students, especially by migration flows and the refugee crisis.

EMPOWERing universities

European universities should enrich the learning experience and the quality of higher education by using the potential of new modes of teaching and learning.

The EMPOWER program, organized by EADTU, supports European higher education institutions in their transition to new modes of teaching and learning, sharing expertise from leading experts with European higher education institutions. Blended on campus education and flexible education for adults are both important innovations in higher education. To realize this, much expertise and organization is needed at the level of institutions.

Blended or hybrid education for on campus students combines in an optimal way face to face and online teaching, based on a design of active learning.

Flexible education for adults needs also structure to avoid drop-out and to promote study progress.

Both are complex processes and have to be founded on multi-disciplinary expertise, which is delivered by EMPOWER in twelve expert groups by online webinars, seminars for individual universities on site and by the European Online Learning Leadership Academy (EOLLA) for university executives. All aim at   continuous institutional innovation and transformation of European universities through ICT-based modes of teaching and learning.

Short Learning Programmes and continuing education

Europe is under-educating its adults, while they are facing longer career paths.

Short learning programs (SLPs) respond to the demand of large categories of students, who return to the university while working or changing jobs. SLPs should lead to an award, a certificate or a diploma at diversified qualification levels, according to the European Qualification Framework. Institutions can recognize MOOCs, prior learning and work-based experience as part of SLPs, where appropriate.

Students should have the possibility to integrate credits obtained by SLP modules and courses as building blocks in broader degree programs.

During the EADTU Summit with the European Commission in April 2016, the open universities have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, confirming their intent to promote short learning programs (SLPs). They will conceive SLPs new paths to educate adults in their institutional provisions, recognize each other's modules and courses belonging to these programs, and develop joint SLPs with related mobility schemes.

As specialized institutions, EADTU members will set standards and benchmarks for SLPs as part of the Bologna process and consequently, as part of all national higher education systems. They will also seek partnerships with companies, public services and research and development institutes to develop and to deliver SLPs. Hence, SLPs will contribute to the further development of continuing education and professional development.

MOOCs

Europe should use MOOCs as an instrument to open up education to citizens and to re-use them as innovative parts of continuing education and degree education.

In 2012, the current MOOC movement started in the US with some Ivy League universities. This movement has been important for the global development of higher education. It has recognized the potential of online and flexible education for universities and it has opened courses for free to the general public. This in itself was a kind of a disruption with the past.

Most of the European open and distance teaching universities have a long tradition in large scale educational provisions. They have responded to this new development by developing MOOCs capitalizing on inclusive and highly interactive pedagogies.

OpenupEd, created by EADTU, is a portal for MOOCs. It does not offer a MOOC platform because most of OpenupEd partners are operating successfully with their own platforms.

After almost four years of operation and growth, EADTU has taken the initiative to review the role of OpenupEd in relation to other MOOC platform providers and to contextual changes.

With OpenupEd, EADTU will better collaborate with European platforms as Futurelearn, FUN, Myriadix and institutional platforms to strengthen the European dimension of each. This European-wide collaboration will create an added value by sharing expertise, by exchanging MOOCs and by stimulating the use and re-use of MOOCs. Universities in Central Europe, where MOOCs are not yet enough spread, could then also be better involved.

These platforms together should share a joint strategic forum to optimize the development, delivery and use of MOOCs in a European MOOC-consortium.

Together, they should stimulate business models which contribute to open education and broaden the use and re-use of MOOCs/OER in continuing education/CPD/short learning programs and degree education. They also should develop policies for the assessment and certification of MOOCs, jointly with the platforms. They should look how MOOCs and short learning programs can be integrated in education and training for employability. Finally, they should monitor together the further developments of MOOCs in Europe, describing trends and stimulate developments which are relevant to the European universities.

Flexible education and the refugee crisis

European higher education should give a better response to diversity in society, in particular to the refugee crisis.

After six years of war in Syria, Europe has ended up in a refugee crisis. Many European countries belong to the world's top refugee host hotspots. Even far more refugees are registered in Turkey , Lebanon, Jordan , Iraq, Egypt and Lybia, many of them living in camps. Within Syria, 6,5 mio persons are displaced, of whom 1,7 mio in camps or collective centres.

Beyond this, there are the migration flows of the last decades from all continents.

This diversity causes problems with regard to social and cultural integration, education and employment. Solving these problems is not only a social and economic, but also an ethical duty.

By their already inclusive pedagogical and organizational models, open and distance education seems to be the most timely and sustainable solution for reaching-out to refugees and migrants.
This is even more the case, where conventional universities seem to have difficulties with reaching these students.

Open and distance teaching universities and EADTU work on a cohesive European strategy to develop higher education for refugees and displaced persons. This includes access to free courses for higher education preparation; short, accredited conversion courses to meet European qualification equivalences; short learning programs which can be used as stepping stones into higher education or as building blocks for qualifications; vocational study programs to support transition into employment in areas of skills gaps; and flexible degree and higher level study options.

All this should be done through flexible study modes, using mobile technologies, study centers in camps and trained support workers.

In the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, we should be united on the refugee crisis and involve European universities in order to better reach refugees and migrants.

The Changing Pedagogical Landscape in Europe

The funding inequality in university systems is a barrier for an equal development of universities in each of the European countries. Since this has also consequences for the economic and social developments in the EU, it should be considered that the structural funds are used to support the innovation agenda European-wide.

In particular, European governments have to support institutional leadership with regard to innovation.

Therefore, they should promote the professional development of teaching staff, especially with regard to new pedagogies for online course design and delivery. They might also support platforms for exchanging good practices and for sharing courses material. They should also organize evaluation and research on in digital teaching and learning, monitoring progress. Funding regimes should stimulate innovation of universities by the increased use of technology in teaching and learning.

This doesn't require a high additional cost to higher education systems. It is a matter of a visionary policy making. This would be a best investment the European Union can do for its universities.