

Societal quality assurance – news roles and processes in shifting the paradigm towards an exploiting knowledge based society

The organizers of CIMQUSEF'2008 are to be praised for their boldness when choosing the ever-unsatisfactorily answered question of how to best plan and evaluate research to be the focal point of discussion at the congress. Evaluation is often the long end (or short beginning) of the financing equation; how to manage both cannot but unfold into a discussion to the level of intrusion each researcher sees fit to allow into his or her own work, which in turn will leave us in the realm of autonomy - with financial autonomy being a reality in state of flux in most developing and developed countries. While taking management, evaluation, financing and autonomy at the heart of my presentation I will bring to your attention a project that the Luxembourg based European University Foundation has been fostering since 2006 called “Bologna meets Lisbon”, as the underlying mechanics of the project can entail far-reaching consequences as far as new opportunities for researchers and research units are concerned.

The European University Foundation-Campus Europae (EUF-CE) is a network of 19 excellent universities from Germany, Luxembourg, France, Italy, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Turkey and the Russian Federation that is under the patronage of the Government of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg that aims to educate a new generation of highly motivated, skilled and polyglot European citizens. The member universities thus bring to their student's fruition vastly articulated academic exchange agreements and students studying abroad for two years during their BA and MA are to receive a Campus Europae Degree issued by EUF-CE.

With student exchange and intense strategic cooperation at the core of the network the Rector's Council has added a third pillar to this ambitious project, one that is to provide an integrated response to the challenges set forward by the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda, as well as add value both to the mission of EUF-CE and to each individual participating institution. This is to be accomplished through a system of study-related internships by which foreign exchange students will be given the opportunity to work in companies and organizations up to 12 hours a week during a full academic year. What makes for the uniqueness of this system is that the scope of the internship shall be defined on a project basis, with companies being asked to entrust students with the resolution of problems that fall beyond the capacities of their operating staff. The multitude of possibilities are endless, ranging from industrial engineering to the design of business and strategy plans, reinforcing international cooperation, training for IT or simply widening the range of languages in which commercial partnerships can be established.

The utter objective of the Bologna meets Lisbon project is to improve the international employability of students and to strengthen cooperation between universities and society at large. The benefits from the stakeholders viewpoint can be articulated as follows:

- the universities and faculties will expand and consolidate their network of contacts with companies and employers. Having an increasingly high number of students working in partner companies will facilitate future strategic collaboration as universities and companies learn about each others needs, expectations and interests.
- the employers will have access to highly trained and motivated students, eager to make use of their portfolio of aptitudes within the “problem based learning” context that the companies will provide. Their international background may also add value to the company, not only from a social and cultural perspective but also from a commercial and technical point of view. Last but not least, the employers will become better acquainted with the potential of future partnerships with the universities.
- the students will have an upgraded learning experience, thanks to the combination of studies and study related internships. The challenge of pursuing a university-based development work and combining it with its ongoing practical implementation within the companies will link the academic and professional realms *de facto*. Such internships will also allow for a more immersive social and linguistic experience in their country of destination, which will impact positively in their intercultural development.

At this point it may seem we are diverging from the concerns articulated at the first paragraph, but the detour is necessary as to establish a new avenue on which research-related questions can be clearly articulated. How far can the capacity of conventional research management models be optimized? Is it legitimate to avoid the burden of fostering co-financing opportunities and turning a blind eye to the universities capacity to enthuse social innovation? And what can be learned from the different research funding instances that are to be found in the United States and continental Europe?

The paths that are being explored in Luxembourg and in each of the EUF-CE universities will not likely bring about any revolution as far as fundamental research is concerned – at least not on the short term; however establishing new links is not an end in itself but a way to raise awareness for the potential for cooperation that lies unused and to generate demand for new joint projects. This in turn will stress horizontal evaluation and leave the exploitation potential to arise as a gauge for a relevance-related quality assessment. From an organic viewpoint it will entail that research units will articulate its actions not as much in a vertically regulated hierarchy but also be assisted by third services and

encouraged to review the way their achievements are communicated. I would expect to discuss these matters extensively at the Congress as they may shed some light on matters that in several countries of the European Union are already being put at the core of the reforms of the higher education systems.

Because the “Bologna Meets Lisbon” comprises other dimensions that while noteworthy (i.e.: developing a parallel student support system) are not relevant for the discussions at hand its implementation is strictly phased. The Universities of Vienna and Hamburg are leading the way as they have implemented it fully, with about six other EUF-CE universities due to achieve their first results during 2008. But even if the programme is still in its early days it has captured the interest of political and economical stakeholders alike, which can be seen as evidence for its potential in delivering the above mentioned outcomes.

Ultimately debating about autonomy and the contradictory challenges of improving both on quality and equity in access is a necessity that can be traced back to the very first universities: Bologna, Paris, Magnaura or the Al-Karaouine University, all were idiosyncratic in their mission and way to adapt to the surrounding religious, political and economical context. Those who take interest on such matters cannot help avoiding owing a great deal to the genius of Wilhelm von Humboldt when he married teaching and research almost 200 years ago. The upcoming anniversary of the Humboldt University would be a more than appropriate time to rediscover the outstanding visions of its founder and breathe new life into the notion that a student-centred university culture can be the key for expanding our Higher Education Institutions research potential further than ever before while putting to rest the impression that a diving line stands between high quality education and research.

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