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Higher Education, Enterprises and Regions: Partnerships for Innovation and Development throughout Europe

Report of the General Rapporteur

The following report summarises and interprets the key findings of the five work groups identified in the break-out sessions. They were in the format of interactive workshops, on the following themes:

1. Employability of professional higher education graduates.
 2. Innovation, applied research & development – common platform of higher education & business.
 3. In-company training & education provided by higher education institutions – motivation of different parties, success factors, quality requirements, preconditions.
 4. Third mission of higher education institutions – role and position within the regional development, mission & objectives of PHE institutions, scope of potential services.
 5. Missions & profiles of Institutes of PHE in the post-Bologna era.
 6. Human resources policy and management at professional higher education.
 7. Life-long learning at higher education institutions.
 8. Opening up to 'New learners': Recognition of prior learning including formal, non-formal and informal learning.
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Introduction

Until recently a worth-while objective for higher education was to establish bridges between organisations of all types and regions. Today's world, however, has developed faster than anticipated; it is not enough to build bridges. In fact, it is essential that all key players and stakeholders are integrated to face the challenges of the global environment. Within the European Union, the wider Europe and the World, interrelationships take place which are due to planned, but also unintended changes, caused by political, economic or educational objectives, partly identifiable in the strategies of the European Union, its Lisbon Strategy, the Bologna Declaration for Higher Education and the Bruges-Copenhagen Declaration for Vocational Education and Training. The Bologna and Copenhagen Processes are the identifiable initiatives to foster integration between the various actors in the field of higher education. The EURASHE conference thus had as one of its aims to foster partnerships which focus on innovation and development, first of all within its European members.

The creation of networks among stakeholders – extent and characteristics

The first set of items/issues to be dealt with was linked to the questions:

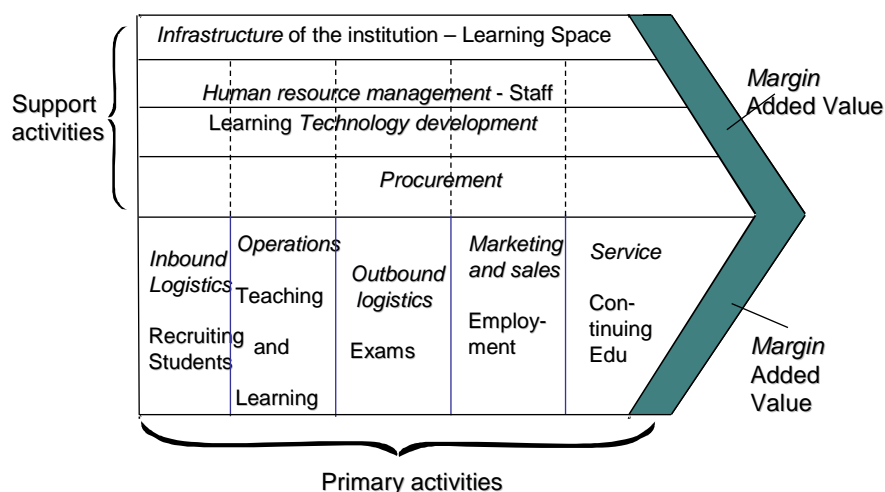
- To which extent do overlaps between actors already exist?
- Are these stable and sustainable?
- If changes have to be expected, how soon will they happen?
- Will the overlaps shrink or grow in the future?
- Will there be a one level playing field in the future?

In particular, institutions of higher education have to change their beliefs and assumptions to stay abreast of the developments. The model of the "ivory tower" is past; bridges exist in terms of exchanges, mobility and employability, in relations between organisations and institutions of higher education. For regions higher education has been seen as a prestige element but also a business factor, adding considerably to the purchasing power. Enterprises and regions exploited education and training for their regional marketing, also to attract human resources. A joining of all forces creates networks for innovation and development, based on creativity and most likely synergy effects.

Mariotti (The Power of Partnerships, 1996) summarised the critical success factors of such networks: Character, integrity, honesty, trust, open communication, fairness, self-interest and balance. In terms of the envisaged networking partnerships, this means:

- Character: the combination of qualities that distinguish one partner from another
- Integrity: adherence of all partners to the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes
- Honesty: not paying lip-service but becoming actively involved as integer partners
- Trust: reliance on the integrity, ability and character of the networkers
- Open Communication: Free exchange of information between the partners in the network
- Fairness: all partners have equal rights and duties
- Balance: rewards and risks have to be balanced - at least in the long-run, which can only be achieved if resources are invested.

These elements were discussed in several groups intensively, without giving explicit reference to Mariotti. The ideas can be identified, for example, when applying the model of the value chain from Michael Porter (Competitive Advantage 1985). The following diagram depicts primary and support activities of any business organisation and each of the activities is transferred into education and training:



Source: M.E Porter, Competitive Advantage, Free Press, 1985. Used with permission of The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc. Copyright 1985 Michael E. Porter.

Accepting that each partner in a network strives for added value, the whole network would achieve much more than the added value of all partners as it will not only identify effective and efficient ways and means but also initiate synergy effects as outlined above. Learning will take place anywhere, within and between partners, involving all in a multilateral relationship over time. Such value networks facilitate:

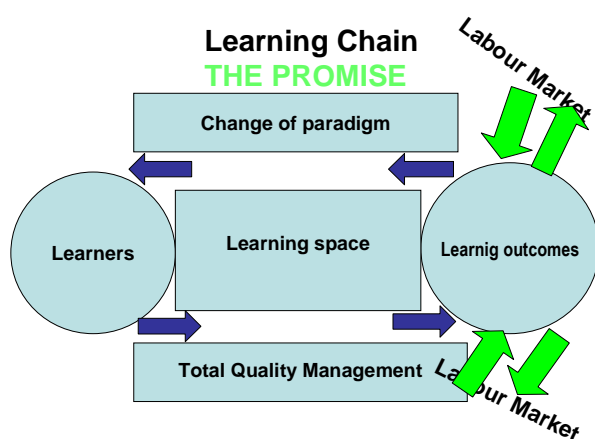
- the creation of common 3-cycle structure within the European Higher Education Area
- a common taxonomy in terms of subject and generic competences, documented within Qualifications Frameworks
- the customizing of learning pathways (individualised learning programmes on a modular basis to which credits have been allocated)
- a hub-and-spoke system with "stressless" mobility of learners within the EHEA on the basis of code-sharing through ECTS
- a one-stop-shop in which all services are being provided by the networkers on the basis of trust, related to learning outcomes and credits
- the forming of strategic alliances and joint ventures (transnational education)
- outsourcing of elements of teaching and learning
- selection of best partners
- identification of best practice (benchmarking exercise)
- change of role of partners (maybe formal with some, informal with other partners)
- sharing of activities and responsibility according to "who does what best"
- creation of "win-win-situations" for the networkers
- rather the acceleration than the multiplication of results (synergies)

However, the benefits are endangered if management of networkers and the overall network does not strike the balance between compatibility and control or does not cope with the national and organisational cultural differences within and between institutions, disciplines and stakeholders and does not develop an environment, a culture, of working together. Also, such a network is endangered if stakeholders are

not driven by the needs of those who should benefit from supplying funds, or a lack of self-control, or not being able or willing to work with others. The organisations and institutions have to be aware of the opportunities and threats networks offer and should be capable to manage upcoming change to protect and build forces to cope with the various driving forces from outside, not allowing for a dominance of red tape.

The learner-centred approach

However, the basic assumption of the value chain has to be challenged today. The conference participants did not mention this explicitly, but all their contributions direct towards it: the learner-centred approach. Whereas the value-chain model is input driven to achieve a positive result, the added-value is identified first in a learner-centred approach and thus all primary and secondary activities have to be developed on the basis of it. Learning - independent of age and institution, happens all the time, also unintended and can be organised as a step-by step approach or through building blocks - but does not have to. In any way, the direction is opposite to that of a value chain as outlined in the following diagram which documents as its wider outcome - among others - the employability of the learner as highlighted in the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes respectively. The employability is translated into learning outcomes which then start the whole process of curricula development, including assessment and advice of learners:



This change of paradigm - in contrast to the value chain model - is, in fact, a promise to the learner that he or she will achieve certain outcomes if identified learning pathways are followed. The whole process becomes very transparent and therefore liable to quality assurance and enhancement processes. This is underlined by Harden et.al. (1999):

In outcome-based education the educational outcomes are clearly and unambiguously specified. These determine the curriculum content and its organisation, the teaching methods and strategies, the courses offered, the assessment process, the educational environment and the curriculum timetable. They also provide a framework for curriculum evaluation.

These elements have not yet been achieved, neither within the Bologna nor the Copenhagen processes as for example outlined in the Bologna report 2009, a view which came up in all the work-groups in their sessions. The questions raised in this context were:

- How to integrate learning outcomes into the curriculum?

- How to ensure that the students can identify / know their skills/competences?
- How can we develop their skills/competences further?
- How are employability skills and competences measured?
- How to profile more clearly the professional orientation?
- How to build teams in education and training and measure their performance?
- How to operate "learning-by-doing"?
- How to integrate the various stakeholders?

The participants particularly challenged EURASHE to find ways and means to help, being fully aware that they themselves form EURASHE. They could see the need for profiling their institutions in the light of:

- Centres of Learning Excellence
- Based on applied research
- for a particular region
- networking without borders (neither geographic nor institutional)
- providing programmes effectively and efficiently according to the needs of the learner.

Recommendations

The participants agreed that networkers should always be prepared to face resistance and prejudice in the change process. They are aware that at most times no immediate sufficient support will be received as basically many cultures - either national or organisational - readily and easily jump at changes. Therefore regional, industrial and educational organisations and institutions should adopt networking as part of their fundamental mission:

- Higher education institutions should adopt cooperation with industry and regions in particular in continuing education and training
- Industry and regions themselves should design an explicit education and training strategy and within it establish an organised interface and platform with higher education which will encourage and facilitate access, dialogue and joint initiatives
- Best practice from industry, e.g. the platform model of the car industry, the hub-and-spoke system of the airlines and the "one-stop-shop" idea of banks could be examples
- Best practice from education and training, e.g. EUROPASS, Learning Agreement, learning outcomes, ECTS/ECVET, qualifications and quality frameworks, concepts for lifelong learning, inside and outside institutions, organisations and national boundaries could be benchmarks for business organisations and regions
- Programmes of the European Commission, such as Life-long-learning, ERASMUS-Mundus, can also give fresh impetus to new ideas.

The most committed collaboration will be achieved if there is a "quality dividend" resulting from pooling efforts in areas such as:

- The training dimension of the technology transfer process and the actual contribution of training to the transfer of technology

- The quality of graduates in terms of preparation for today's and in particular tomorrow's dynamic markets

It is a necessity to make available training materials and courses of high quality, both for business organisations, regions and higher education institutions themselves. However, the material has to be constantly and consistently updated according to changing needs, i.e. the culture of continuous improvement has to be strengthened. Greater pay-off from R&D investment will be achieved if they are linked to training efforts. In a working network increased investment will be paid by cost savings in traditional areas and by joint efforts. This will be fostered when the European Higher Education Area becomes much more linked to the European Research Area - as it is on the political agenda anyway.

A university map should be designed to communicate a very clear profile to the outside world. Six key dimensions can be identified:

- Educational profile
- student profile
- research involvement
- involvement in knowledge transfer
- international orientation
- regional orientation.

In brief: The Key Elements of the rapporteur's conclusions, interpretations and recommendations

- assure win-win situation for all partners in a "negotiated partnership"
- support the various partners to design and develop further a sustainable profile
- develop and enhance quality by considering investment and cost
- monitor the process carefully to allow for formative evaluation and pro-active actions
- create transparency to all partners as regards all ideas considered and activities taken
- improve the writing of learning outcomes and reveal the methods of assessment to create trust
- exploit the learner centred approach to the full extent so that flexible individual pathways can be created
- prefer the establishment of building blocks of learning to avoid a fragmentation and to allow for a step-by-step approach to lifelong-learning
- develop competences rather than knowledge only and avoid rigid rules and regulations so that accreditation of prior learning, including experiential learning will be accepted as normal
- assure the sustainable commitment of staff by transparent means of selection, forms of appraisal, rewards and development.

This approach entails a change of culture. Culture is learned, and as learning means change the first thing to do is to unlearn traditional values, beliefs and assumptions. Then new values have to be learned. A forcefield analysis implies to find answers to three key questions (based on Lewin in Johnson/Scholes 2008):

- What aspects of the current situation might aid change in the desired direction, and how might these be reinforced?
- What aspects of the current situation would block such change, and how can these be overcome?
- What needs to be introduced or developed to aid change?

On the basis of the forcefield analysis Lewin suggests to defreeze first of all existing attitudes, then to learn new ones which have to be frozen to become beliefs, assumptions and beliefs of the future - however, not for ever.

It is highly recommended to keep the diversity as a richness of lifelong-learning landscape throughout Europe. Implementing change means to find out whether the new initiatives and ideas are suitable for effectively and efficiently reaching the objectives, and whether they are likely to be accepted by all stakeholders. One should also ensure that they are feasible within a given framework, available resources (finance, human etc.), and a respective culture and are further sustainable in the long run, i.e. as "Microsoft" put it at the conference, taking into account the 3Ts: talent, technology and tolerance.

There is no alternative but to continuously improve while operating in networks on the principle of parity of esteem and really taking Bologna and Copenhagen Process at heart and not just talking and paying lip-service. To this extent the conference revealed a fair picture of the present situation and identified steps to be taken in the near future to achieve more than building bridges: to integrate business organisations, regions and institutions of higher education - leaving space for integration of all vocational and general education institutions - to 'live' the philosophy of lifelong-learning. The EURASHE conference paved the way.