Future-ready Universities and Graduates: Quality Education Beyond the Horizon

Commissioned Paper
Working Group #2: Lifelong Learning - Holistic and Global Education

Lifelong Learning - Holistic and Global Education

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“Universities seem to have a survival guarantee as they possess the socially granted privilege to be degree-awarding HEIs. But if they want to defend their place as main source of innovation and places for competence development for future graduates, they have to rethink their key work processes. Changing cultures requires the liberation of creative resources that are currently bound in often too large and inflexible institutional hierarchies. Universities have to push for a change of long-standing values, habits, believes, of both management and faculty level.”

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1. Lifelong Learning: Re-thinking Higher Education

It is clear today: the prosperity in both social and economic terms of human societies around the globe will depend on the opportunities individuals have to learn and develop throughout their entire life. Individuals, organisations and nations have to ask themselves how suitable learning ecologies to allow this growth can look like and can be achieved. Lifelong learning (LLL) is not a clearcut concept but rather a leitmotiv which comes with multiple forms, shapes and realities. We cannot create it but will notice if it is not supported.

A recent UNESCO report (UNESCO, 2016) shows that, although considerable efforts can be identified to create LLL policies on national, regional and institutional level we are still in the beginning to understand how best to support continuous learning for individuals, organisations and regions. Specifically, in the field of higher education a LLL turn has not yet taken place nor has it even begun to take shape. Therefore, it is an important question how we can turn the big tanker of academia globally into revolutionary leaders of this field – how we can rethink higher education. In societies in which the majority of a cohort of young persons will soon be choosing some kind of higher education, they are the gatekeepers which are leading graduates the way into their LLL career.

One important aspect is to strengthen the third mission of heigher education institutions (HEIs). Whereas HEIs have focussed predominantly on “mode 1 knowledge production” with a focus on disciplinebased, curiosity-driven, individual pursuit of new knowledge, they are now evolving in response to the challenges of a changing society and economy and develop their third mission (Gibbons, Limoges, & Nowotny, 1994). In line with Boyer’s idea of the four roles of higher education highlighting university engagement, the notion of HEI engagement has become connected with widening participation, outreach, university-business collaboration and other third mission activities (Boyer, 1990). Typical of the new HEI model is ‘Mode 2 knowledge production’: a mutually beneficial approach to university-business/society collaboration, which is problem-oriented and solution-driven, and is typically conducted by interdisciplinary teams, actively engaged with society (Gibbons, Limoges, & Nowotny, 1994).

However, despite the emerging debate on the universities’ third mission, if we take a look at HEIs the field of LLL is still underdeveloped. In our book, Changing cultures in higher education scholars and academic practitioners expressed the need to revolutionise higher education and to speed up changes in the higher education landscape (Ehlers & Schneckenberg, 2008).

Some HEIs will continue to stay as they are today, while many others are likely to transform themselves into different types of organisations, to be a partner to society, so that global and holistic LLL can become more a reality than a gap. This transformation will be visible in several aspects. From the outside in the way institutions of higher learning look like, how they relate to students, organize themselves, in the way they define structures and detail specific functions, and how they relate to civic and community engagement, as Watson phrases it (Watson, 2007). The transformation will also be visible from the inside where change is characterized through the evolution of organizational cultures and affects values, believes and everyday practices of all stakeholders in the field of higher education and surrounding LLL community. New forms of HEIs are likely to appear which will challenge both our experiences with and our concepts for universities as institutions for research and teaching, in favour of a stronger developed third mission.

2. Learning for Life and Being: State of the Art in Policy and Reality

The report of UNESCO (UNESCO, 2016) states that the evolution of the political discourse on LLL can be divided into three phases: Until the late 1970s, the LLL discourse was heavily influenced by a humanistic vision, and its focus was on the design and development of learning within educational institutions. The Faure report Learning to Be (Faure, 1972) advocated lifelong education as the master concept for educational policies in both developed and developing countries. It was seen as a turning point and the start of a period of optimism in international education policy, as it recognized that education was no longer the privilege of an elite, or a matter for one age group only. Instead, it concluded that education should be both universal and lifelong. Essentially, this meant moving to a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education (Ouane, 2011). With the UNESCO report on “Learning: The Treasure Within” (Delors, 1996) and the OECD report on “Lifelong Learning for All” (OECD, 1996) LLL was linked to the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges that societies and communities face. There was a stronger orientation towards the principles of human capital and employability. In the European Union, the LLL discourse entered into a third phase from the year 2000, influenced by the EU’s goals of creating the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world and ensuring social cohesion. With the Lisbon Process, the EU’s plan for economic growth, education and training was made a generally accepted policy area for the first time in EU history. This led to the development of national LLL policies within the European Union3.

1 Schuetze already talks about LLL since the early 1970s (Schuetze, 2006) other terms used in the past are ‘recurrent education’, ‘lifelong education’ and ‘permanent education’.
2 The scholarship of discovery that includes original research that pushes the knowledge frontiers; The scholarship of integration that involves synthesis of information across disciplines, place discoveries in a larger context and create more interdisciplinary conversations; The scholarship of application (or the scholarship of engagement) that refers to the service within or outside the University and involves application of research results that can be shared with/or evaluated by others; The scholarship of teaching and learning.
3 The ideas of the Lisbon Process are reflected in similar conceptions of LLL across the European countries (e.g. European Commission, Memorandum on LLL, 2000; European Parliament, Commission report on lifelong learning, 2002; European Parliament, Commission proposal for the introduction of a new action program to promote LLL in the 2007-2013 period, 2006). Third mission refers to an additional function of the universities in the context of knowledge society. The university is not only responsible for qualifying the human capital (Education – the first mission) and for producing new knowledge (Research – the second mission). Universities must interact with societal needs and market demands by linking the university’s activity with its own socio-economic context. Today universities begin to develop their strategies around these three missions. Governments develop third mission policies allocating funding to this role while policy-makers and experts are implementing specific indicators, with the aim to foster regional development. See also (OECD, 2017).
The understanding of learning as a lifelong process has also changed within research. There are two main conceptions of LLL in the academic discourse. The first posits learning as an existential continuous process involving a lifelong biographical transformation that “occurs whenever we are conscious and it needs no objective in itself, although it frequently does have a purpose” (Jarvis, 2007). This conception – also rooted in education science and sociology – sees learning as an essential part of conscious living (also: learning as pleasure). The second conception sees learning as a functional episodic process. Such research is shaped by the idea of individuals accumulating knowledge for certain (work-related) purposes.

The research on HEI as ‘LLL facilitator’ is still in beginning phase and connected to the debate of HEIs ‘third mission’ which, as a concept is fairly new to HEI. However, the strong changes mapped out above will demand a change within the HEI itself. The principle of LLL is by now a global norm or “new master narrative” (Ioannidou, 2014, p. 208) in education policy, promoting a certain understanding of how education systems should be built in order to meet the challenges of the knowledge economy. National governments are increasingly relying on similar principles and values in relation to LLL.

In terms of governance, education is a complex, multilevel system, ranging from supranational agendas to local programmes and activities. Education systems are not formed by any one actor, such as the government; instead, a multitude of actors at different levels are involved in establishing and changing an education system (Altrichter, 2015). This calls for openness towards a variety of concepts and theories about LLL.

All in all, it can be noted that although there has been an increase in national LLL policies and also institutional efforts, over the past fifteen years, the implementation of the concept has been insufficient, esp. in the higher education sector. It is interesting to see that Bernhardsson (2014) argues that this has to do with “contradicting values which are inherent in the concept of LLL” (Bernhardsen, 2014). On the one hand, the creation of “economically meaningful active persons, who feel responsible for their own employability” (ibid.) is propagated, on the other hand communitarian values and social cohesion is promoted. The ambition to create a society that is competitive and at the same time inclusive and cohesive entails conceptual discrepancies which need to be reflected in any national or institutional LLL concept.

3. Lifelong Learning: Drivers, Consequences and Gaps

Lifelong Learning has always been important but gains new and accelerated meaning due to several drivers:

1. A changing demographic development leads to an aging society in which individuals are asked to stay longer in working life and contribute actively to society, and thus need to continuously update their skills and abilities.

2. A stronger vertical and horizontal mobility of individuals in society which leads to biographies of changing job episodes and involvement into different contexts of life and demands for continuous learning and relearning. At the same time knowledge and information growth accelerates and make it necessary to update qualifications in shorter cycles.

3. Digital technology has a growing impact on all context of life and work and leads to a continuous rising need to update and reskill qualifications.

These developments have consequences for work and education. They are leading to a modernization of the world of work with significant consequences in at least three fields:

1. Resolution of system of fixed professions (Lisop, 1997): More and more the clear defined boundaries of professions are blurring. New professions are developing and existing professions are expanding and blending their profiles with other professions and skills.
2. From lifetime employment as standard model and desired objective, often in a single profession, to episodical employment throughout the lifetime but not in the same profession (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1996).

3. From employed professionals to entrepreneurial professionals: In the age of knowledge worker (Drucker, 1969) employees have to act much more self-responsible and entrepreneur-like, often within the frame of their employment (Voß & Pongratz, 1998).

For education, as well this results into a process of flexibilisation in many fields:

1. Flexibilisation of degrees: Recognition of informal and non-formal education/learning and prior learning as credits within degree programs (supported through national qualifications frameworks)

2. Flexibilisation of curricula and of learning contexts: In order to meet the needs of individuals in their various life contexts (old, young, education after family phase, job-integrated or accompanying study programs, etc.), curricula and learning designs have to be responsive to the demands of varying contexts, and more often have to be adapted to shorter cycles and more flexible combinations.

3. Change of contents: If job profiles changes more and more quickly, key qualifications and competence gain relevance over pure knowledge.

4. Flexibilisation of methods and learning design: In LLL contexts, self-organised learning processes will gain importance since the responsibility is put to the individual for updating their qualifications and fulfilling learning demands.

For HEIs, these changes have consequences. Universities are affected by the effect of these demographic, technological and learning behaviour changes, as well as the flexibilisation processes. The nature and pace of change is faster today than ever. Under the line it means that we have to better enable students to improvise, to deal with new situation, to charter on change, to make sense of change. But how can we understand the new demands and become fit for shaping a changed higher education world? How can we in turn help students to shape a changing world in which we do not know if what we teach to them today will be relevant for their jobs and their lives of tomorrow? One important element is to integrate reflection and reflective development into learning processes (Kolb, 1984). They are vital for coping with new situations and being able to take reflective action rather than merely following and reacting. The excellent model of the reflective practitioner by Schön is suited to prepare students for dealing with uncertainty (Schön, 1983).

However, a second aspect gains importance: Along with the increasing rate of change, more and more things are interconnected. Individuals increasingly need to be their own instructional designers and need to know how they learn and what is good for their learning and development. Less and less we can put those things we need to learn into a creditable course, more and more those things we need to learn are between disciplines, lie in the social sphere of collaboration, demand from students to build their own frames, meaning and contexts and make sense of them. It is needed to focus on new competences. Today we have an ecology of thought that spreads across many disciplines, fields of applications and communities. Means from different fields are increasingly interrelated, processes are more problem driven than disciplinary driven. Network artist or reflection professional – that is what the vision of students coming out of university will look like more and more. The great challenges of our planet are not structured into boundaries of disciplines and schools, however HEIs still are.

Lifelong learning in a holistic sense can be conceptualised under three fundamental aspects, which are mutually interdependent needs: To build:

- identity capital: to develop and maintain our sense of identity, self-confidence, control over our lives, and engagement with other people. This is critical to well-being and mental health, and includes developing powers of creativity and reflection.
- human capital: to develop the skills and knowledge needed to find and retain sustainable and satisfying employment, both paid and unpaid. This may be more complex over a longer working life in a more rapidly changing labour market, and as the numbers of people in the ‘third age’ expand, it will be more important to understand the learning needs of the voluntary labour market
- social capital: This comprises developing capabilities to participate actively in society, the larger and closer community we live in, including our families, and shaping the social context which we are choosing to live in. Lifelong learning can help to raise levels of trust, a sense of common identity and respect for difference, and help ensure that the talents of every individual are put to best use.

Lifelong learning is so central that the responsibility for it cannot be put to the non-formal sector. School, vocational education and training and higher education – they all have to open up to reach out in order to both prepare their learners for a LLL journey and also offer programs. If we analyse the HEIs role in LLL, we can see that it varies across countries and institutions, but overall HEIs do not play a major role in the provision of LLL in Europe – but obviously should do so. With respect to the rising need for LLL and the specific and important role of HEIs to provide LLL we can identify a threefold gap:

1. A gap between policy rhetoric on the importance of LLL, and the actual proven commitment of HEIs to provide LLL programmes. A first analytical look shows, that while the channels for academic education are well developed for students’ education, the channels to develop and provide educational offerings to employers and adult learners are not (yet) well developed. This is true for the operational level (institutional conditions, funding and processes) to provide LLL programs, as well as the strategy level of HEIs.

2. A gap between the importance of LLL and the awareness, demand and the ability of citizens to enter into reskilling and upskilling processes. The participation on LLL activities and programmes is not yet well developed. The cause lies in too little awareness about the necessity
for up- and re-skilling processes.

3. A gap between the existing opportunities and the potential of LLL offerings directly to the workplace or in the practice context and its actual usage and acceptance in practice. Digital technologies revolutionise the possibilities to provide educational programmes flexibly in time and place and thus directly to the workplace where needed. However, HEIs have not yet sufficiently developed platforms and programs to involve employers and employees into strong networks of knowledge and LLL.

4. Towards a new, holistic Lifelong Learning Culture in Higher Education

For HEIs, the new agenda for LLL will have a significant impact. Usually referred to as the third mission of universities, they need to open up to the needs and developments within the community they are set in, and contribute to the development of smart regions. In order to do so, LLL programs and offerings will become essential as they form the bridge between graduates’ LLL process and the HEI. Through these efforts, graduates will have a chance to maintain relevant skills for the labour market, and develop in their life. Of course, it is not the sole responsibility of HEIs but they form an important part in the community and network of education providers. The integration of LLL skills into academic programs becomes increasingly important. This comprises the integration of LLL skills into existing academic curricula in order to prepare students for their LLL pathways, as well as the concise development of offerings and programs for LLL of HEIs.

To realise the turn within higher education and start supporting students for a LLL journey, HEIs need to develop LLL cultures. There are three different dimensions to learning cultures. On the individual dimension, there are theories that either cover and typologize learning strategies and habits of the students (see Isler, 2006) or that focus on statements about characteristics of young people that are important for their learning (e.g. Prensky, 2001; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Twenge, 2006). On the interactional dimension, approaches emerge that derive from models and concepts of an ideal image of learning and teaching. As research tells us in many examples (see Reussner, 1995, Scheerens & Bosker, 1997), the quality of interaction between teachers and students has a major influence on the result of learning. On the institutional dimension, there are different approaches exemplified by the terms “learning organization” (Senge, 2006), “organizational learning” (Kluge & Schilling, 2000), „organizational energy“ (Bruch & Vogel, 2005) or “corporate learning culture” (see Sonntag et al., 2004; Friebe, 2005). Organizational factors such as the appreciation awarded specific types of learning, resources devoted to it, incentives provided etc. also may have an effect on the learning processes of students. HEI need to take into account all three dimensions of learning, individual, interactional and organisational in order to be able to develop holistic concept for LLL.

In order to foster the development of new LLL cultures policy makers, institutions and learners need to come together in a common effort. They all have to contribute to a new, holistic LLL agenda:

- Students have, due to the changed demographics and growing diversity, a growing need for competence development rather than knowledge transfer, for practice oriented, authentic learning scenarios rather than artificial “as-if” education, and enforced mobility needs.
- Teachers, trainers, professors and lecturers are demanding a redefinition of the balance between teaching, learning and research. In particular faculty has to shape a new university landscape by breaking down disciplinary boundaries and by adopting new forms of flexible and learner centred educational models which are oriented towards innovation and competence development.
- Teachers are requesting to change their roles from information transmitters in a distributive paradigm, to coaches who support social interaction, innovation and invention, and who deal with new, unanswered questions as origin for student’s learning processes, in a participative and reflective paradigm of learning. Learning in a holistic LLL agenda will be reoriented along paradigms of collaboration, reflection and interaction. Learning processes, their assessment and measurement will focus on relevance for practice and competence.
- Teachers have to become artists, playing with the dialogical nature of learning and teaching. They have to find more creative ways to provide education in a diverse range of pedagogical models. New activity patterns concerning dimensions of locality and space, time and topics need to be practiced.
- University administrations have to develop into teaching and research support centres which suggest ways of organizing higher education ahead of pressing challenges, and which gain a better understanding on the need for restructuration. More than merely organizing higher education processes, these new administrative entities stand for the values, believes and everyday practices that are increasingly adopted in modern universities. They will play a decisive role in supporting the whole institution in particular on issues like the integration of ICTs for learning and teaching, the interplay between research and administration, the creation of knowledge flows and public understanding of science.
- Higher education institutions today are often overmananged and underlead. A new role for higher education management will be the systematic and strategic development and implementation of visions on how HEIs can be turned into revolutionary and forward-leading learning organizations.
- Finally, government, the public sector, and civil society will find new ways of relating to universities as major actors in the development of societies capability to contribute to solve current and future problems, and to serve the citizens’ well-being and economic prospering.

Way forward and policy recommendations:
1. For national and European policy makers:
   a. Shape national and European policies which support the funding of the development of new and innovative networks and platforms between world of work and HE institutions.
   b. Support the development of legislative frameworks which allow recognition of prior learning mechanisms in order to enable employers to document their LLL achievements and biography and use it for their employers.

2. For HEIs:
   a. Monitor demand and potential to provide LLL.
   b. Analyse existing structures and develop operational platforms in order to deliver LLL programs.
   c. Develop concepts for recognition of prior learning, as well as concepts in order to enable employers to document their LLL achievements and biography and use it for their employers.

3. For employers and employers’ associations:
   a. Support awareness raising for the need of constant up- and reskilling of individuals on the labour market.
   b. Shape the conditions for enabling better LLL provision by entering into regional networks with PHE Institutions.

5. Conclusion

I believe that the above mentioned changes will not only be visible at the surface but will alter the very core constitution of what higher education presents and how it is interwoven with society. We think that the current change processes can in their essence be characterized by a paradigm shift towards a new paradigm of organisational and individual learning, rather than a gradual drift towards diversification. Such a major paradigm shift requires in turn a more strategic approach to institutional change which differentiates itself from evolutionary processes which have characterized universities in the previous decade. Deep changes involve the whole higher education governance community into a combined effort to create a new and all-embracing concept for universities.

The development of third mission strategies including a strong LLL agenda will lead to a different but not unanimous look of the higher education landscape. Universities will have to deal with a number of fields which emerge as cornerstones of change today but which are often not consequently understood in their potentials to reform the current landscapes of universities. Amongst them are the following topics:

- New LLL programs: Universities will become major actors in providing opportunities for learning, reflecting, and engaging citizens into learning processes on their LLL path. While this requires a willingness of citizens to continue to learn, it also requires a commitment to provide educational opportunities and spaces which go beyond the current “cycle oriented” provision of higher education.

- ICT adoption into all levels of education: An adoption approach which is not restricted to distribution and presentation of course materials or information, but aims to connect students and teachers from universities around the world into a seamless web of communities which are collaborating, reflecting, developing and learning for innovation.

- Ubiquitous learning: Ubiquitous learning scenarios which are asynchronous (anytime, anyplace) and available in a whole range of different learning provision patterns. These include courses, ateliers, short and long-term commitments, ad-hoc groups and international study panels, as well as traditional lectures, seminars and classes – which will nonetheless not only be used for knowledge transfer but stimulate debates and discussions. Learning opportunities will be made compatible with and correspond to different lifestyles and needs of a diversifying student population.

- Affordable education: Affordable education, which is within the reach of all citizens, whether it is made possible through open educational resources, low cost structures and/or subsidies.

- Collaborative Learning: Interactive and collaborative learning modes, which focus on engaging groups into reflection on real problems, break disciplinary barriers and establish cross-disciplinary curricula.

- Diversity: Diversity education, which is capable to serve an increasingly diverse population with diverse needs and goals.

- International: International and intercultural education, as universities are increasingly focal points for global debates of change, innovation and competence development in a variety of fields that are relevant to local, regional and global needs.

- New forms and patterns: Patterns of change, as future universities will develop different patterns to serve higher education in different configurations between episodic and sequential provisions of education, research and service to the public.

The concept of openness will play an important role. Open innovation and open leadership approaches will enable universities to work together beyond disciplinary and organizational boundaries. Openness will lead to universities’ crossing national borders and tapping into partnerships of excellence where collaboration of the best minds generates mutual benefits from collective intelligence. The movement of open educational resources will increasingly lead to open educational practices which will turn educational scenarios into laboratories for reflection and participation of learners into communities of practice, learning from sharing experiences. Universities will be less organisations of knowledge but more institutions of learning and reflection. Educational materials and knowledge will cease to constitute the academic “holy grail”, instead universities will earn fame and reputation through refined and dedicated educational methodologies, providing educational opportunities in collaboration with industry and civil societies and sharing their resources in mutual beneficial partnerships. Not knowledge but wisdom, not information but reflection, not exclusiveness but inclusiveness will be constituting
characteristics of higher education excellence.

Future universities might change their appearance, their structure or their educational portfolio – but first and foremost they will be recognized by their altered cultures, their enhanced way of employing learning and institutional research to rethink their own structures and to integrate all stakeholders for the joint development of core values and practices. It is from this perspective that universities have to come to an improved understanding of institutional transformation. It is not the primary goal to achieve a specific set of predefined goals, but rather to build the continuing capacity, energy, motivation, and commitment to move toward bold visions of university futures. In summary, the first – and most important objective of all LLL and innovation efforts is to build the capacity for strategic change – a change which is necessary in order to enable universities to respond to changing societies and a changing world.

ICT plays a crucial role in this change, both as driver and tool for innovation. E-learning will be a natural part of all learning activities. Mainstreamed technology which enables people to better connect into efforts of joint developments around commonly defined projects will be naturally available. Learning and teaching will follow different paradigms, less acquisition and more participation. Universities have to make efforts to turn into learning organisations in order to build their capacity to transform themselves into entirely new entities. The key challenge for higher education stakeholders is to collaborate for providing an environment in which change is not perceived as a threat, but welcomed as opportunity to engage into learning as the primary activity of a university in its many different forms. The ability of universities to adapt successfully to the challenges they face will depend to a great extent on their collective capabilities to learn and to continuously improve their core competencies (Ehlers, Schneckenberg, 2008). Only a concerted effort of planning, management, and governance to understand the challenges of the present and the possibilities for the future can enable institutions to prosper during times of fast and deep change. There is an increasing need for holistic, transversal change strategies to innovate education. While this is obvious in theory, it is a challenging task to put into practice.

Universities seem to have a survival guarantee as they possess the socially granted privilege to be degree-awarding HEIs. But if they want to defend their place as main source of innovation and places for competence development for future graduates, they have to rethink their key work processes. Changing cultures requires the liberation of creative resources that are currently bound in often too large and inflexible institutional hierarchies. Universities have to push for a change of long-standing values, habits, believes, of both management and faculty level.
References:


The 6th edition of the ASEF Rectors’ Conference and Students’ Forum (ARC6) will address the topic of “Future Universities and Graduate: Quality Education Beyond the Horizon” and invites over 280 representatives from academia, governments, business and industry, students and youth associations as well as NGOs and IGOs.

The ARC6 consists of 2 programme elements: 1) a Students’ Forum 2) followed by a Rectors’ Conference. Close linkages between the Rectors’ and the Students’ is assured through a synergic exchange in which 4 Rectors’ attend the Students’ Forum as Mentors and 4 Students’ participate throughout the Rectors’ Conference.

Specifically, ARC6 aims to:
- Contribute to the policy dialogue on higher education in Asia and Europe and provide input to the agenda of ASEM Education Ministers
- Support the implementation of the SDGs
- Facilitate cooperation and long-term partnerships among universities across Asia and Europe
- Enable collaborations among student networks and associations
- Strengthen the linkages between universities, governments, business and industry, IOs and NGOs, and local communities

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ASEF’s contribution is with the financial support of the European Union.