



“European” teaching and learning? Institutional responsibility between pedagogy and politics



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# Two remarkable decades of policies and politics in European higher education

- What place for teaching and learning? What place for HEIs? Looking back, looking forward
  - The development of higher education policy in Europe after 1999-2000 has been fascinating (“unprecedented”).
  - For most of this period, teaching and learning came second, after research, or were largely ignored.
  - Major changes in European higher education (good for the most) came top-down, from the spheres of European policies (EHEA and EU) or politics.
  - The tide is changing, positively, for teaching and learning, but still top-down.
  - Is this about politics, policy or pedagogy? What is the responsibility of HEIs? (there are problems here!)

# Good news for higher education - for teaching and learning in Europe

- A new policy framework for teaching and learning has been emerging in Europe.
  - Possibly leading to a European model for teaching and learning in HE?
  - A new model of HEI?
  - A new intellectual framework as well?
  - A new "social contract"? (2021 UNESCO report)
- Other than "frameworks": new concrete policy initiatives in teaching and learning – and new tools in education/teaching and learning (*discussed at this event*)

# Major changes – not to be taken for granted

- Education is strongly and finally to the fore, after it was ignored when the focus in Europe was mainly if not exclusively on research, in the name of competitiveness (knowledge society narrative married with neo-liberalism).
- Building a European ethos and demos through higher education, not just the European market, cannot be done only with structures and frames--content/curriculum and pedagogy matter. HEIs should matter.
  - *ERA (2000) preceded EEA by a lot*
  - *Horizon budgets vs Erasmus budgets.*
  - *Anything comparable to the ERC in the area of teaching and learning?*

# The European Universities Initiative

One of the most daring initiatives even of the EU.

Aims to create *de jure* not just *de facto* a new type of HEI (ambitious **political** goal – transnational/European/non-national universities).

Focus on education not just research (new **policy** balance).

Focus on collaboration and innovation in teaching and learning - **the new mantra (intellectual, social)**

**Concrete new pedagogic and other tools** and to address concrete new challenges, but together (micro-credentials, FLP)

Very small funding triggering unprecedented change – **the leverage of international organizations.**

How should  
HEIs position  
themselves?

- The “comply or lament” syndrome.
- Criticize and dismiss? Opting out is not an option.
- “Reflexive engagement” to reach a reasonable degree of clarity of positioning -between politics and pedagogy (**not only how we do what we are told to do, but what and why too**). Assume responsibility and acknowledge limitations and risks/dangers.

# European Universities Indicatives –what can go wrong?

- It is almost purely top-down. An enabling framework or a straitjacket? Restriction of university autonomy: free to implement, but not to design (no strategic autonomy).
- Reform by prompting new models or mass social engineering?
- EU vs Europe (EU *sine* Europa)?
- Europe vs the World (Europe *sine* Mundo?)
- Prescribes format (new and innovative) and policy language, but also the content?
- Selection of challenges and tools – who can guarantee it is complete and valid? By complying only (blindly), don't we risk to leave out other important elements?

# Institutional responsibility and the EUI

- The primary responsibility of the university is to its students, their education and learning. What about research? What about society at large?
- Universities, not public authorities, have the primary responsibility for the education of students. Public authorities need to create enabling regulatory frameworks, not prescribe content (curriculum, pedagogy). HEIs themselves have the responsibility (obligation) to design, not only deliver the content of education.
- Do not forget the institutions' own responsibility for fundamental values.



# A final thought



- With all caveats: the EUI is a great opportunity for universities in Europe: they can transform, adapt in new ways (the emergence/strengthening of a European model of teaching and learning is possible).
- Universities can now exercise institutional responsibility (to students, society) together, but not with “comply or lament” attitudes – ***reflexive engagement is needed, must be allowed, promoted and assumed in these networks.***
- CIVIS should be praised for doing this!

