A Case for a Networked University. Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

There is an historical convergence in globalisation of the economy, the International and European legislation, in the developments in communication and learning technologies and the demand for a flexible, accessible and relevant education that resembles the formation of Medieval universities. This paper presents a case for an international networked Higher Education (HE) system. Looking at the history of university formation it draws a comparison with the present to present a possible scenario for the future of HE learning.

Globalisation, the internationalization of many leading universities, the use of English as 'lingua franca' and the movement of workers across the globe bring the demands for HE to a new level. On the international arena, the inclusion of education within the WTO TRIPs and GATTs Agreements, the provisions for the free movement of people within the EU of the Lisbon Treaty and regional soft laws such as the Bologna Declaration [1], offer valuable instruments that combined together could facilitate the development of collaboration between centres of research and education across borders, institutional and legal divide. In addition, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) based on web 2.0 and web 3.0 make communication and collaboration and even learning easier, unbound by physical space and time line.

While increasing population and globalization have produced conflicting demands for a flexible, highly specialized, constantly updated and capable of renewing its abilities workforce, the high costs of innovation and education risk to creating a two gear society divided among those who know and will continue to know even more and those who are left out, an information feudalism [2] that will undermine European prosperity. This suggests a re-thinking of the educational offer to take into account the opportunities and the risks generated by advances in technology, globalisation [3] and intenational agreements. Unlike the radical changes in society, European universities have not gone through a substantial reform [4]. University needs to adapt to the world in which younger generations are moving and are called to take leadership [5]. Starting from historical models of university formation and intersecting with constructivist approaches to learning, this paper intends to demonstrate that there are conditions for an alternative model of higher education based on student-lead modular curricula within a international,[6] multi-site, multi-media networked structure for the delivery of post-secondary an higher education.

References

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