Conference Conversation Starter

BOLDER. BRAVER. GO.

EAIE

European Association for International Education

EAIE 2021 | COMMUNITY EXCHANGE

28 SEP–01 OCT

Bolder. Braver. Go.

Edited by Laura E. Rumbley

Table of Contents

Foreword

Each year, the EAIE Conference Conversation Starter essay series features a curated selection of in-depth, thought-provoking reflections on different facets of the theme of our annual gathering. Under the overarching theme of *Bolder, braver, go*, the essays for the 2021 EAIE Community Exchange: virtual conference and exhibition explore various aspects of some of the most daunting concerns of our time and suggest specific lines of action for *bolder* thinking and *braver* action in response to these challenges.

Why do bravery and boldness matter today? The challenges facing societies around the world – at local, national and global levels – are complex and urgent. This is evident in everything from the multitude of interlocking problems the Sustainable Development Goals seek to address, including the climate emergency, to the havoc introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher education institutions, as key social actors, have a vital role to play in helping to define the nature and scope of these challenges. Particularly if they bring to bear resources and sensibilities that span the spectrum from the local to the global, they are uniquely positioned to convene the expertise that can suggest workable solutions to help us overcome moments of intense uncertainty and difficulty, as well as guide us in planning for longer-term resilience.

The authors of the essays in this series represent or speak to the realities of individual higher education institutions, national programmes and initiatives, policy organisations, an intercontinental regional university network, and a coalition of European youth-led networks. Grounded in direct experience, they provide us with current, data-driven perspectives on such topics as the transformation of institutional structures and practices to support the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals across an entire university; the ongoing development of a new national mobility scheme in Wales in the wake of the UK's exit from the European Union and the Erasmus+ programme; and the internationalisation realities and ambitions that today characterise one of Europe's closest regional neighbours, *ie* the Middle East and North Africa. Generation Climate Europe's passionate call for attention by educators and policymakers to climate restoration as a part of the European climate action agenda, and Flanders' multifaced approach to ensuring equitable international mobility opportunities and experiences for underrepresented populations, round out the collection.

Highly distinct in their individual focus, collectively these essays highlight the powerful pull of and necessity for activism in international higher education today – *ie* bold, brave action in the face of opportunities and adversity – in a complex and fast-moving world. Boldly and bravely, it is up to each of us to carry this activism forward.

Laura E. Rumbley
Associate Director Knowledge Development & Research EAIE

Universities and the global sustainability agenda: a view from Bologna

— *Angelo Paletta, Khatereh Ghasemzadeh, Camilla Valentini and Giancarlo Gentiluomo*

Since the 2015 adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations (UN), higher education institutions (HEI) – and universities in particular – have played a central role in the effort to attain these goals. But what does it really mean for an institution to commit deeply and actively to the SDGs, as a matter of both strategy and daily operations? Motivated by an appreciation of its long historical legacy and a growing awareness of its effects on society, the University of Bologna (UNIBO) has committed fully to the values of sustainability. By sharing details about the main activities undertaken and the key management and governance processes leveraged to embed the 17 goals within the university, we aim to add our voice to the community of higher education institutions leading the way forward towards greater impact in this vital area.

UNIBO'S SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS

Established in 1088 AD, today UNIBO is an internationally prominent university with over 85,000 enrolled students and more than 200 programmes offered across five campuses. Given its size and broad scope, UNIBO has become increasingly aware of its social, economic, and environmental impacts, and has taken urgent and effective actions to address the SDGs. In less than a decade, UNIBO's efforts have led to significant outcomes. In 2020, UNIBO was ranked sixth in the Times Higher Education Global Impact Ranking, in recognition of its pioneering commitment to the SDGs.

Since the 2030 Agenda is not merely a set of 17 discrete goals but rather a coherent action plan, UNIBO has taken a holistic approach, integrating the SDGs into the institution's life and each of the four main pillars of the university, namely Teaching, Research, Third

Mission, and Institution (the last of which refers to the actions oriented toward the internal community of the university).

Given the crucial importance of the young generations for the future of this planet, UNIBO pays particular attention to teaching activities and projects that connect students to the SDGs. As of 2019, 3,860 UNIBO courses contribute to awareness, understanding or engagement with one or more of the 17 SDGs. To track these connections and ensure the SDGs' visibility within the courses offered, each teacher must tag their course with indications of SDG relevance, which is published on the university portal, per UNESCO guidelines. UNIBO is also interested in understanding the extent to which gaining knowledge and abilities with relation to SDGs improves graduates' employability. Hence, efforts to track these kinds of correlations are also actively underway. Furthermore, UNIBO provides a specific online course (in collaboration with ASVIS, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development) for professors and staff to raise their awareness about the SDGs.

Given the crucial importance of the young generations for the future of this planet, UNIBO pays particular attention to teaching activities and projects that connect students to the SDGs.

Research is at the heart of transforming our societies into more sustainable and dynamic places. Thus, UNIBO has dedicated various resources and financial supports to promote research on sustainability and the SDGs, and created several national and international collaborations with other organisations and universities. Amongst the most important research projects in this area are NANOMEMC2, which is aligned with SDG 9 and focuses on creating more sustainable production with lower CO_2 emissions; PLOTINA, Project to Promote Gender Balance and Inclusion in Research connected to SDG 5; and the SMART COASTS project, winner of the first Horizon Impact Award, and dedicated to addressing climate issues outlined in SDG 13 through smart development of European coastal areas and people-centred solutions to climate change.

UNIBO develops partnerships with local and international communities, and society more broadly through its Third Mission activities. Aiming for maximum positive impact, UNIBO established the AlmaEngage initiative (University of Bologna, 2021a), a virtual structure designed to monitor, support and promote all the development cooperation and social engagement projects undertaken by the university in partnership with other institutions and NGOs. The Green Office, a hub co-managed by UNIBO students, professors and technical-administrative staff to help spread the culture of sustainability, is an equally significant initiative offering a place to discuss and implement concrete programmes and plans.

Finally, the institutional actions of UNIBO are measured by reflecting on the university's performance against indicators connected to internal community matters. For example, UNIBO has adopted various internal policies and measures in relation to gender equality, water and renewable energy consumption, waste separation and collection, as well as the use of electric cars and public transport for employees, and the installation of green roofs for thermal insulation, soundproofing, and bioclimatic improvement.

UNIBO'S UNIQUE APPROACH

UNIBO has crafted management and operational models based on the principles of sustainable development, forming a strategy that combines economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The "Multicampus Sostenibile" model (University of Bologna, 2021c) focuses on managing and operating the multi-campus system with Sustainable Development principles.

UNIBO's success in implementing and addressing the SDGs across the university's different echelons was achieved by fully including the 2030 Agenda in the University strategy and adopting the SDGs as the driving standards for action, rather than mere parameters of analysis. Instead of identifying the SDGs targets and indicators that would conveniently align with the university's actions, UNIBO adopted a reversed approach. They redesigned the university's strategy based on actions that could deliver on the SDGs. This could not have been achieved without strong support from the highest levels of governance in the university and a thorough improvement of the traditional measurement criteria.

Instead of identifying the SDGs targets and indicators that would conveniently align with the university's actions, UNIBO adopted a reversed approach.

A very critical step towards this aim was to reform the Strategic Plan of the University (2019–2021) to align with the 17 SDGs, reconciling the key strategic goals with related SDGs and articulating the required actions and strategies to achieve these goals in the short term. Moving from the strategic to the operational level, the dedicated initiative known as AlmaGoals (University of Bologna, 2021b) organises activities and actions at the university-wide and the single campus level. In addition, AlmaGoals assesses UNIBO's sustainable development performance against key indicators and metrics, which is then reported to the public primarily via an annual Social Responsibility Report.

Most importantly, UNIBO elaborated a novel methodology, created by a specific Scientific and Technical Committee, to produce the university's annual UN SDG report (University of Bologna, 2019a). Each institutional pillar (Teaching, Research, Third Mission, Institution) is analysed using a specifically formulated set of metrics. For example, teaching activities are assessed through three measures, namely course units, the number of students choosing these courses, and the number of collaborations, teaching, and mobility projects. Likewise, the dimension of research is measured using six items, including (but not limited to) the number of publications in and cited by Scopus and the number of funded research projects. Notably, the keywords used to analyse UNIBO's scientific output were extracted from each SDG.

Analysis of the Third Mission, referring to the role of the university in the knowledge society, mainly involves looking at the number of cooperation and social engagement projects worldwide but also considers specific measures for some SDGs, such as students and teachers on lifelong learning programmes (SDG 4), spin-off and start-ups born of academic entrepreneurship (SDG 8), and events with public engagement (SDG 11).

The fourth pillar, *ie* the Institution, is measured by considering the university's impact through its institutional governance and management. For example, UNIBO cares about gender parity among its teaching staff, therefore it monitors this with a glass-ceiling index. Likewise, UNIBO provides support and protection to staff with disabilities.

UNIBO cares about gender parity among its teaching staff, therefore it monitors this with a glass-ceiling index.

The tailored methodology created by UNIBO to assess its performance against the SDGs is a crucial element that distinguishes it from other universities. Numerical indicators have been carefully chosen to represent the university actions and initiatives in relation to all 17 of the SDGs; and for each SDG, both quantitative and qualitative information is organised according to criteria specifically articulated by the relevant institutional documents adopted by the university.

UNIBO'S HOPES FOR OTHER INSTITUTIONS

We hope that UNIBO's approach, which has required both internally and externally oriented adjustments and buy-in, can be a role model for other universities. From our experience, this work requires a harmonised set of activities across the board. For UNIBO, this has involved redesigning institutional strategies, rethinking organisational structures and management models, and certainly not least in terms of importance, integrating the planning, control, and accountability towards the stakeholders. Several years of rigorous effort towards embracing the SDGs have taught us that robust work is needed to coherently orient internal decision-making processes, effectively allocate resources, and create an incentive system for teaching and research. Cultural sensitivity is also a must for a holistic understanding and implementation of the SDGs in universities, which can be achieved by establishing strategies for teaching and learning, fluid internal communication and collaborations, and dedicated offices and initiatives.

Robust work is needed to coherently orient internal decision-making processes, effectively allocate resources, and create an incentive system for teaching and research.

By encouraging our institutions to connect boldly, bravely and meaningfully with the SDGs, together we can create a sustainable, peaceful, and just world for all, without compromising the opportunities of future generations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent is your higher education institution truly willing to invest in contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, including internal paradigm shifts?

2. How does your institution measure the impact of its internationalisation activities on the SDGs?

3. How can your institution enhance its engagement with local organisations, entities and communities?

4. How can your institution enhance cooperation with other higher education institutions with respect to the SDGs, and in what particular domains?

REFERENCES

University of Bologna. (2019a). Report on U.N. *Sustainable Development Goals.* Retrieved from https://www.unibo.it/en/attachments/reporting-on-united-nations-sustainable-development-goals-2019/@@download/file/UN-SDGS-2019.pdf

University of Bologna. (2019b). *Strategic plan 2019-2021.* Retrieved from https://www.unibo.it/en/attachments/strategic-plan-2019-2021-in-italian/@@download/file/STRATEGIC%20PLAN%202019%20web.pdf

University of Bologna. (2021a). ALMAENGAGE! *Development Cooperation and Social Engagement at the University of Bologna.* Retrieved from https://site.unibo.it/almaengage/en

University of Bologna. (2021b). ALMAGOALS. T*he University of Bologna for the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.* Retrieved from https://site.unibo.it/almagoals/en

University of Bologna. (2021c). MULTICAMPUS SOSTENIBILE. *The University of Bologna for sustainability.* Retrieved from https://site.unibo.it/multicampus-sostenibile/en

Bold aspirations for post-Brexit mobility schemes

— *Rudolf Allemann and Eevi Laukkanen*

Universities in the United Kingdom have witnessed seismic shifts in the landscape of international student mobility in 2020 and 2021. The immediate impact of COVID-19 on our international engagement is now well-recognised but the pandemic and its legacy will likely continue to shape our international partnerships and world-wide activities for years to come. We are also beginning to see how the UK's exit from the European Union is playing out in practice. Exploring how the UK's new arrangements for international student mobility will play out in the post-Brexit era and how UK universities may engage with the new agenda to support their bold aspirations for exchange partnerships is an important exercise at this moment in time, both for UK-based higher education institutions and their many partners and stakeholders across Europe and around the world.

RETHINKING A WINNING FORMULA

The value of international learning mobility is widely recognised by governments, university leaders and students. The benefits of participation in international mobility for academic and personal development and their employability, together with the wider benefits for local economies, make these activities a priority for national education policy and higher education institutions. With the growing number and variety of opportunities available to learners, the engagement in higher education student and staff mobility had been on a strong upward trajectory before being severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Erasmus+ 2019 report detailed the achievements of 'yet another record year', both in terms of distributed funding and number of participants (European Commission, 2020). Similarly, the picture for the UK had been one of year-on-year growth in the number of students going abroad to study, work or volunteer during their undergraduate degree, with participation rates reaching 7.8% for the 2016–17 graduating cohort (Universities UK, 2019). The UK is one of the most popular destinations for incoming international students in the world and was, for example, the fourth most popular host for Erasmus+

exchanges in 2018 (European Commission, 2019). In practice, the UK has consistently hosted significantly more incoming students than those going abroad (64% more through Erasmus+ in 2018).

In practice, the UK has consistently hosted significantly more incoming students than those going abroad

---

For many in UK higher education, the UK Government's decision to associate with Horizon Europe but not Erasmus+ came both as a shock and with a sense of disbelief. The Erasmus scheme has been such an important part of the institutional landscape that it was with profound disappointment that the UK chose to leave what had become a familiar community. However, as the dust settles, many are now seeing this as an opportunity to rethink the way in which we approach international mobility. Moving outside the Erasmus structures provides a stimulus to create new ways of working that further enhance the student experience.

TWO NEW INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY SCHEMES IN THE UK

The UK Government's commitment of more than £100m to the Turing scheme in 2021/22, as a national scheme for international placements, clearly demonstrates the importance the government attaches to international learning mobility. Not only is this a substantial investment in its own right, but the scheme has also been set up to support a comprehensive variety of outgoing placements and to widen participation in an inclusive manner. It is anticipated that in its first year the Turing scheme will support around 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on study and work placements across the world. For UK universities, an important aspect of the Turing scheme is its global reach, opening opportunities to provide a much broader range of fully-funded placements for outgoing students.

It is anticipated that in its first year the Turing scheme will support around 35,000 students to go on study and work placements across the world

---

In a major shift of emphasis, the Turing scheme will only support the outward mobility of UK-based students. This lack of reciprocity of funding was one of the reasons behind the Welsh Government's decision in March 2021 to establish its own International Learning Exchange (ILE) programme. With a £65m funding commitment, the ILE programme aims to support 15,000 outward and 10,000 inward mobilities between Wales and the world, for students and staff across higher and further education, vocational education and training, adult education, youth work settings and schools. The ILE programme places notable emphasis on the value of reciprocal exchange and the role of staff mobility in underpinning collaborative engagement. In a departure from the Turing scheme, the ILE programme was launched with an initial commitment to support mobilities over four years from 2022 to 2026, with a particular aim to enable existing partnerships in Europe to continue and to establish new ones.

RE-POSITIONING THE UK ON THE GLOBAL MOBILITY MAP

Looking to the future, what are the implications of these shifts in the funding landscape for UK and European universities that wish to continue to work together to grow their international learning mobilities? At the outset it is worth stating unequivocally that the UK and Wales remain open for student exchanges. The first bidding round to the Turing scheme has demonstrated strong, sustained demand across UK institutions for study and work placements in Europe. The strength of partnerships, the high quality of the learning environments, language and cultural diversity, and geographical proximity are just some of the reasons why Europe will likely remain the UK's most important partner region for outgoing student mobility for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, EU students may be deterred from coming to the UK due to reduced funding, the cost of UK visas, health surcharges and potentially higher living costs. However, European universities with a commitment to maintain and develop their exchange partnerships with UK institutions, and a vision for ways to achieve balanced flows of students, will be pushing at open doors with their expressions of interest.

Europe will likely remain the UK's most important partner region for outgoing student mobility for the foreseeable future

Departing from the familiar Erasmus+ framework for renegotiating agreements will be a learning curve on both sides but also an opportunity to review, refresh and recalibrate. The new Erasmus+ programme, the Turing scheme and the Welsh ILE programme have notable commonalities. They all support a wide variety of mobilities, including short-term programmes. All have a strong focus on social inclusion with a solid commitment to widening participation among those with otherwise limited opportunities for international experiences. When universities participating in Erasmus+, Turing or ILE invest in the development of new and more inclusive forms of mobility, additional opportunities for collaboration will emerge for those motivated to seek them. All three programmes have a global remit. Up to 20% of the Erasmus+ higher education mobility funds will be eligible to support mobility outside Erasmus+ programme countries. The Turing scheme and the Welsh ILE programme have no such cap and allow students to undertake mobilities to countries anywhere in the world. Given that all three programmes have a shared ambition to cover the widest possible geographic scope, opportunities for UK and EU institutions to team with global partners for the delivery of multilateral mobility will open up.

A multifaceted system is emerging in the UK. All UK universities have access to the Turing Scheme, whilst those in Wales have access to both Turing and the ILE programme. Students in Northern Ireland may be able to access Erasmus+ via Irish universities. Scotland, no doubt, will be weighing its national options, supplementing what is offered by Turing, just as the ILE programme does in Wales. These new asymmetries will have implications for how universities engage in international exchange partnerships. From the perspective of Cardiff University, we see this as an opportunity for innovation in our approach to mobility. The Welsh Government have entrusted us with hosting and co-developing their new ILE programme and the new funding landscape in the UK and Wales has the potential to support more customised exchange arrangements with European universities. The future

of mobility partnerships may be shaped less by symmetry and direct reciprocity but more by the specific needs and priorities on either side to deliver mutual benefits, potentially by different means. At Cardiff, we will be seeking ways to better integrate international mobility across our education provision, our research and innovation activities, as well as our civic mission strategy. As the institution with the largest volume of international student and staff mobilities in Wales, we will have a keen interest in the development of new high-quality short-term programmes with our partners alongside the more traditional year and semester abroad activities. We would also like to invite our partners to innovate with us to make our exchanges more sustainable in a net-zero carbon environment. In this context, the virtual component to international mobility, which we have come to appreciate over the last year, will be an important area for further development.

TIME TO INNOVATE

It is worth reminding ourselves that the initial Turing scheme commitment is only for 2021/22 and that the multi-annual ILE programme is still in its infancy. For both programmes, the coming year provides a unique window of opportunity for universities in the UK and Europe to redefine their relationships and explore new forms of collaboration through which to deliver international mobility activities. If universities are proactive, innovative and prepared to adapt their ways of working, Turing and ILE offer real opportunities to shape the scale and future direction of these funding instruments in a visionary way. The ILE programme in particular offers additional scope for novel multidimensional and multilateral exchange actions for those willing to explore the boundaries of what is possible.

The new international exchange landscape offers opportunities for those brave enough and bold enough to embrace new approaches

In the spirit of the theme for this year's virtual meeting of the EAIE, the new international exchange landscape offers opportunities for those brave enough and bold enough to embrace new approaches for the benefit of their students and staff. At Cardiff University, we welcome the opportunity to further develop our exchange programmes with our existing and new partners.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the positive opportunities that the UK's new mobility programmes offer to your university's aspirations for developing student and staff exchanges?

2. What prospects might you see for your institution to begin to identify a smaller number of more strategic partnerships, built on a wider range of opportunities, or around deeper relationships?

3. How do we maintain the attractiveness of the UK to European students as a destination for study and work placements?

4. How do we find mutually beneficial partnerships in situations where student flows between institutions are imbalanced?

REFERENCES

European Commission. (2019). *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2019*. Retrieved from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30af2b54-3f4d-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1

European Commission. (2020). *Erasmus+ Annual report 2019: statistical annex,* annex 15. Retrieved from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/381dc9a5-3f4d-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search

Universities UK. (2019). *Gone international: rising aspirations.* Retrieved from https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-rising-aspirations.aspx

Learning from Flanders' inclusive mobility roadmap

— *Valérie Van Hees and Dominique Montagnese*

Just last year, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) renewed its 2030 aspiration to see 20% of member states' graduates undertaking a study abroad experience (Rome Communiqué, 2020). Although the trend of internationalisation is growing, and the EHEA has paved the way for large-scale student mobility and increased its quality and attractiveness, only a few European countries have implemented strategies to strengthen the social dimension in mobility programmes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020). Indeed, according to European Commission official data, the portion of the student population receiving special needs financial support is stagnating between 0.11% and 0.15% (European Commission, 2009–2018). As the new Erasmus+ Programme and the EHEA aim to achieve better inclusiveness in mobility programmes, it can be helpful to explore examples of policies and practices where inclusion is centrally situated. The Flemish Community (Belgium) approach to widening participation of underrepresented groups in mobility programmes is one such roadmap worth considering.

FLEMISH POLICIES

The Flemish government adopted the 'Brains on the Move' mobility action plan in 2013. The action plan is composed of a broad range of initiatives that contribute to the further realisation of internationally-oriented, high-quality education in Flanders. The focus lies on the mobility of students. In this internationalisation strategy, inclusion was given a central place and a benchmark was set concerning the mobility of underrepresented groups in higher education. As a result, the Flemish government strives for 33% of all outgoing mobile students to belong to underrepresented groups. Currently, these groups are defined as students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and working students.

Furthermore, concrete actions have been taken to promote mobility among these groups. A monthly top-up scholarship is available for these students and at least 25% of the

Flemish outward mobility grants must be awarded to students from underrepresented groups. The implication is that, in order to use the full budget that is available for mobility actions, there must be enough applications from students from underrepresented groups. So the opportunities for all mobile students (underrepresented or otherwise) are connected, compelling higher education institutions to identify these groups of students and encourage them to apply for a mobility grant.

The portion of the student population receiving special needs financial support is stagnating between 0.11% and 0.15%

Conferences and communication campaigns are used to stimulate underrepresented students to go abroad. For example, the 2015 Handbook of the Flemish Community of Belgium on Study and Internships Abroad includes one chapter dedicated to students with disabilities and features mobility portraits of disadvantaged students. In addition, the Flemish Erasmus+ National Agency developed an easy funding application process for preparatory visits, which allow a trusted person/coach to accompany a student with disabilities on an advance visit to their mobility destination to ensure that any reasonable adjustments recommended for the student are put in place where possible; if not, alternatives are negotiated.

The Flemish government also created the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) to support higher education institutions. It supports both policymakers and higher education institutions to implement equity and inclusion measures. Drawing together international officers and inclusion/disability officers from the 18 Flemish higher education institutions, SIHO created a learning network on the topic of inclusive mobility. The network supports international officers and policymakers in planning and making their daily practices and policies on mobility more inclusive. Based on the identified needs, SIHO develops tools to support higher education institutions, national agencies and ministries of education to implement a sustainable mobility strategy at the institutional and/or national level. It also actively contributes to international cooperation on inclusive mobility, by coordinating the Inclusive Mobility Alliance (IMA), an alliance of European organisations that aims to make mobility inclusive for students and youth from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

As the Flemish internationalisation strategy has been in place since 2013, Flanders has generated five years of comparable data on this issue, which is fairly unique in the EHEA. The percentage of underrepresented students is increasing. Statistics show that in the academic year 2018–19, 22% of all "initial mobile degrees" are attributed to students from underrepresented groups. A new Flemish internationalisation strategy is currently under development for the period 2021–2030 and will have a universal design as a transversal theme, emphasising that mobility and other internationalisation actions should be an option for everyone.

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

One of the biggest barriers reported by inclusion officers and international officers is the lack of current and reliable information on the available regulations, funding and support services in the different countries and difficulties with the portability of support services for students with disabilities (Flemish Education Council, 2018). To overcome this challenge, the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and SIHO have coordinated the EPFIME project (Establishing a thought-out Policy Framework for Inclusive Mobility across Europe). EPFIME is a two-year (2019–2021) project co-funded by Erasmus+. During this project, an international consortium and experts examined in-depth the needs and expectations for inclusive mobility of national authorities, students with disabilities and higher education institutions across Europe. Their focus was improved collaboration between stakeholders to ensure the quality and the transferability of support services for both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities in exchange programmes.

Mobility and other internationalisation actions should be an option for everyone

Based on desk research, focus groups and large-scale surveys (collecting 1134 responses from students with disabilities, 114 higher education institutions and 23 ministries of education across the EHEA), a research report and a booklet created in November 2020, contains policy recommendations and good practices on making mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities. In April 2021, the platform InclusiveMobility.eu was launched. Developed jointly by the Erasmus Student Network and SIHO, the platform strives to serve as a one-stop shop for all information about inclusive mobility, serving all relevant stakeholders: higher education institutions, national agencies for Erasmus+, ministries of education and students. The platform offers stakeholders the opportunity to provide detailed information about their strategies, processes and support services on inclusive mobility in the EHEA. Prospective students who are considering studying abroad can access relevant information quickly and easily. The platform also provides students with disabilities with clear information about existing mobility opportunities and testimonials from other students who went abroad. Meanwhile, the platform is connected to the inclusivemobilityframework.eu website, including the project outcomes: a *Toolbox on Inclusive Mobility, Frameworks, Self-assessment tools* and *Guidelines to make mobility programmes more inclusive*, providing higher education institutions, national agencies for Erasmus+ and ministries of education with strategic objectives and concrete action points for implementing inclusive mobility strategies and processes at the institutional and/or national level.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and SIHO are also coordinating the PLAR-4-SIMP project (Peer Learning Activities and Resources for Social Inclusion in Mobility Programmes), a 2-year (2020–2022) project co-funded by Erasmus+. This project expands on the EPFIME project by focusing more broadly on disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented students.

This project supports peer-learning activities on social inclusion in mobility programmes, and works to strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of practices between EHEA countries at different implementation stages. Notably, SIHO will also publish a comprehensive policy report, data matrix and a database on national social inclusion measures and practices, which will purposefully highlight innovative inclusive policy initiatives. Furthermore, the consortium will develop a hands-on communication package to communicate the benefits of outward mobility towards students of underrepresented groups in an inclusive way. Following the structure of the EPFIME framework, a blended training package will also be developed to equip staff of higher education authorities and institutions with skills, knowledge, attitudes and tools required to best organise inclusive student mobility in the 21st century. These tools will be integrated into the Inclusivemobility.eu website by February 2022 and are directly implementable. As such, they will contribute to a more inclusive new Erasmus+ programme in the short term.

CONCLUSION

As the new Erasmus+ Programme and the EHEA aim to achieve greater inclusiveness in mobility programmes, higher education authorities and institutions should take bold action to implement reforms to widen the participation of students from disadvantaged groups. Inspiration and support can be found in a variety of places. Flemish policies, for example, offer useful current examples of national-level action, while the outputs of a number of European inclusive mobility projects provide practical inspiration at more operational levels. With these various tools, higher education institutions, national agencies and ministries of education can be empowered to implement inclusive mobility strategies at all levels. In providing students with fair opportunities to participate in international exchange programmes, higher education authorities and institutions can enhance students' personal development, prospects for employment and their active engagement in democratic citizenship for generations to come (Paris Communiqué 2018). The Flemish Community and SIHO are excited to be at the forefront of this work.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does your country have a nation-wide policy to expand access to mobility? Is it being acted upon? Has it borne results?

2. Is there anything from the Flemish experience that your country could replicate?

3. At your institution, what is the ratio of disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented groups accessing mobility, compared to their percentage of the total student population?

4. How does your institution support inclusive mobility? Is there anything from the Flemish experience that you could replicate at the institutional level?

REFERENCES

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2020). *The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Flemish Education Council (2018). Advies over de internationale mobiliteit van studenten met een functiebeperking. Vlaamse Onderwijsraad. Brussels.

Flemish Government (2013). Brains on the Move! Action plan for mobility. Brussels: Flemish Government.

Paris Communiqué (2018). EHEA ministerial conference Paris 2018. Retrieved from European Higher Education Area website: http://ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communiques

Rome Communiqué (2020). EHEA ministerial Rome Conference 2020. Retrieved from European Higher Education Area website: http://ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communiques

Bolder, braver internationalisation in the Southern Mediterranean

— *Marco Di Donato*

In a region like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where internationalisation is mainly (if not exclusively) equated with physical mobility towards Europe and the Global North more generally, it is quite easy to understand the dramatic impact of the 2020–2021 pandemic crisis on local institutions. Indeed, for the MENA region, this has been a new crisis on top of already existing crises: post-war scenarios, economic emergencies, social tensions, political instabilities, and humanitarian disasters such as the 2015 refugee waves. All of these developments have widely affected the MENA region, much of which already struggles with the endemic weakness of its welfare infrastructures.

Being bold and brave in a Western context means to be capable of overcoming occasional crises, taken one by one, in a relatively stable context: that is, being capable to solve case-by-case difficulties. In the MENA region, however, this means having to build up your resilience on a daily basis over the long term. Of course, it is not possible to generalise, but if we think (just as an example) about the last 40 years in the life of an Iraqi professor, the pandemic is only the latest in a long series of crises that have extensively affected his/her life, including the 1980–1988 Iraq-Iran war, the 1990 Kuwait invasion and the resulting First Gulf War, the international embargo, then the 2003 invasion of the country and, finally, the rise of ISIS. Other examples from the region are also indicative: consider the last ten years of turmoil in countries like Egypt and Tunisia, the recent war in Libya, crisis and conflicts in Palestine and so on.

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY THROUGH RESILIENCE

It is on top of all the above, that the consequences of the ongoing pandemic should be factored in. COVID-19 has caused an intense feeling of isolation, having made it hard for students to attend courses and for all stakeholders to experience the social side of university life. There is also a general feeling that disadvantaged groups have been more severely especially negatively affected. For instance, the dramatic increase in the use of online resources in the last year has exposed a real digital divide, which created significant

barriers for some categories of students. The gender gap is another example; this was already evident in the statistics collected by UNIMED for the report, showing few female administrative staff members accessing internationalisation opportunities and, generally speaking (with some exceptions, obviously), higher numbers of males experiencing outgoing mobility from the MENA region. Today, it is still too early to clearly evaluate the long-term impact of COVID-19 mobility restrictions on these gender gap trends and their variations by country, but this is an important area to monitor.

In the MENA region, being bold and brave means building up your resilience on a daily basis over the long term

Far from crushing their hopes for a turn of events, it can be argued that the continuous difficulties faced by people in the MENA region over the years have amplified their resilience and, consequently, their ability to respond positively to the pandemic crisis today.

We all find ourselves in the midst of uncertainties and fears for the future. This is a shared feeling: in Europe as in the MENA region, and likely everywhere in the world. The differences between us lie in the attitude we adopt towards fear. If fear is considered an inescapable part of our life, an integral part of our destiny, then it makes us, hopefully, more resilient and determined in considering every crisis, at the end of the day, as an opportunity. The Arabic-Islamic perception that everything is already written and destinies already decided for each one of us (captured in the Islamic cultural notion of *kullu maktub*) is partly responsible for the perception of the pandemic as a transitional condition. Accepting one's destiny does not mean having a passive attitude towards life, but rather being more capable of understanding that negative and positive events are both inextricable parts of the same plan. Accepting destiny does not imply not struggling for a better future, or a better life, but rather quite the opposite: it means being more capable to accept crisis and to use crises as opportunities. One can argue that this can be a useful key in allowing MENA practitioners to even see the COVID-19 pandemic in a 'positive' (if we may use this word) light.

Cultural and social differences may therefore require redefining the meaning of "bold and brave". In this part of the world, the pandemic's hardship has been diluted among other unavoidable ones, in contexts where the only way to survive is to react. And so, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are doing just that, such as female academicians and administrative staff who are quickly reinventing themselves trying to find positive aspects in a clearly negative scenario. The same holds for students facing the digital divide and lack of access, refugees living in camps, and colleagues teaching in and from remote areas.

AN UNWAVERING THIRST FOR PHYSICAL MOBILITY...

Indeed, optimism in the face of adversity is one of the key high-level takeaways from a recent wide-ranging study on internationalisation in the MENA region undertaken by the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED) for the Union for the Mediterranean and entitled *The internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean: current and prospective trends.*

This resilience is probably the reason why a Palestinian professor from an-Najah University, when interviewed for the UNIMED report, described the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity as much as a crisis; an opportunity for testing new forms of partnerships (especially for research labs) in a country where restrictions of movement have always been a fact of life.

Even now, the 'European dream' remains intact and aspirations for migration almost unchanged

This is likely why the UNIMED researchers found that MENA students continue to dream about studying abroad, and particularly in Europe, despite restrictions to their freedom of movement. Even now, in a Europe fatigued and strained by the COVID-19 crisis, the 'European dream' remains intact and aspirations for migration almost unchanged. MENA youth are ready to go – eager to travel, restart physical mobility and cross borders. This is a huge difference in attitude in comparison with what appear to be the current European perceptions and feelings, where higher education practitioners seem to be indefinitely locked down in online meetings and online courses, and in most cases not ready (or willing?) to resume in-person activities.

The UNIMED report has clearly documented that, in the MENA region, internationalisation is physical mobility and vice versa. This irreducible equation seems to continue to drive the logic of internationalisation in the region, even if the COVID-19 crisis will clearly have some impacts on local higher education systems. For example, the UNIMED research finds that Moroccan universities are ready to prepare a cultural shift "based on the experience gained in this pandemic period" towards "mixing distance learning and face-to-face teaching", and in Palestine "the growing technological capacities of institutions in the Gaza Strip has recently grown faster 'thanks' to the pandemic". These are just two of many examples.

... THAT EUROPE MUST BE READY TO QUENCH.

For frontline actors and observers of Mediterranean realities, it is clear that there is pressure coming from the 'South', pressure that is increasing on a daily basis. What if MENA youth aspirations remain frustrated by current restrictions? Will they turn to more welcoming systems with no restrictions and no visa problems? As the UNIMED research notes, "[…], China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Malaysia are the most active actors in the Mediterranean area, constantly boosting cooperation with Arabic-Islamic countries and higher education institutions (HEIs). These countries are becoming very active actors in the region, gradually replacing historical countries that have always been the main partners in terms of internationalisation and, more specifically, mobility".

This is why it is necessary to support the role of European and MENA regional university networks, as well as intergovernmental actors such as the Union for the Mediterranean, to promote the international dimension of HEIs – and the important connections between Europe and the MENA region – more than ever before. These networks play a fundamental role in facilitating academic mobility and cooperation at all levels, especially

in conditions like the ones we are all facing today. These networks can play a crucial role in re-establishing a 'new normal', by resuming positive aspects of the past and including new opportunities learnt from the last two years.

"If a wind blows, ride it!" - اذا تَبَه اذِا رياحُكَ فآغتَنِمها
(Arabic proverb)

This article is based on the study "The Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Mediterranean. Current and prospective trends" commissioned to UNIMED – the Mediterranean Universities Union – by the Union for the Mediterranean. The views expressed do not reflect the official policy or position of the Union for the Mediterranean.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How could your university or institution benefit from enhanced partnerships with the MENA region?

2. What measures is your university or institution willing to put in place to ensure that the partnership is on an equal standing?

3. Would your university or institution be prepared to allow physical mobility to and from the MENA region?

4. If mobility is not possible (or must be limited), what other options could be explored that could respond to the needs and desires of MENA students and partners?

5. Do you consider international networks of HEIs to be a resource for the post-pandemic restart of the internationalisation process?

Taking action towards ecosystem restoration

— *Paola Lupi and Venetia Galanaki*

In recent years, the Youth Environmental Movement has grown in numbers, strength and determination to change our relationship with the planet for the better. As young people, we have a unique perspective on long-term issues. Decision-makers failing to address the climate and biodiversity crises right now only means that the problem is allocated further down the line.

For this reason, young people all over the world are taking a stance for the health of the planet and its people. This is the spirit in which Generation Climate Europe (GCE) was created. GCE is the largest coalition of youth-led networks at the European level, pushing for stronger action from the EU on climate and environmental issues. GCE brings together 460 national organisations across 47 countries in Europe. We are guided by the voices of 20 million young Europeans demanding that we restore our planet.

THE NEED FOR ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Ecosystem restoration refers to any activity that aims to aid the recovery of an ecosystem through repairing its structure and function and bringing it back to a healthy state. Importantly, by focusing on the notions of repair and restoration, this phrase goes beyond simply reducing damage to the environment. According to the Living Planet Report 2020, "Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in millions of years. The way we produce and consume food and energy, and the blatant disregard for the environment entrenched in our current economic model, has pushed the natural world to its limits. The damage caused to ecosystems is so severe that only protecting healthy ones would not be sufficient to deal with the climate and biodiversity crises" (WWF, 2020). Losing ecosystems means that we lose the functions they perform, such as providing habitats for wildlife to thrive, carbon dioxide absorption and climate regulation, flood protection, filtration of water, nutrient cycling and many other such activities vital to the planet's health.

Such functions are essential for us to thrive and survive, and – in addition to their importance to our physical environments – also play a huge role in the global economy. The cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of action, and that is a big concern for young people. The longer we avoid addressing the crisis, the more consequences we will suffer. Recognising the responsibility that decision-makers have towards future generations is pivotal to steering policy and action. Restoration is a long-term process and it needs to begin now to ensure that we make progress towards intergenerational justice. In addition, it is essential that young people are given opportunities to be involved in, and supported by, restoration efforts.

Recognising the responsibility that decision-makers have towards future generations is pivotal to steering policy and action

Even though financial considerations are important, they push us to regard nature through the capitalistic lens that caused the problem in the first place. The intrinsic value of nature has to be rediscovered for real restoration to occur.

In 2020, the deadlines for many long-term environmental goals passed, and yet again, we are left with unfulfilled promises and missed targets. The level of ambition shown by decision-makers, especially in Europe, has not been backed by tangible action, leading to ever-increasing degradation of the planet. The current pandemic is yet another illustration of our impact on the Earth's systems. According to the IPBES Pandemics Report, "the underlying causes of pandemics are the same global environmental changes that drive biodiversity loss and climate change" (IPBES, 2020, p.2).

WHERE ARE WE HEADED AND WHY?

Ecosystem restoration is becoming more prevalent in the global agenda, yet young people are weary of ambitious targets. In 2019, at the General Assembly of the United Nations, El Salvador's Environment Minister proposed devoting the next decade to ecosystem restoration. The proposal was accepted and the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration now runs from 2021 to 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. As stated on the official UN website, "[it] aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean", a very ambitious plan to reverse current trends on climate change and ecosystem degradation, while also trying to lift people from poverty.

Although financial considerations are important, they push us to regard nature through the capitalistic lens that caused the problem in the first place

So, where does Europe stand on ecosystem restoration? A study conducted in 2019 showed that, on average, €124.8m was allocated to ecosystem restoration in Europe by the EU, specifically thanks to the LIFE+ budget in 2007–2013, every year since 2010 (UNEP-WCMC, FFI and ELP, 2020, p.16–20). Although this sum looks massive, it is important to note that funding has been reduced since 2014 and that it is far from being

evenly distributed across all countries and ecosystems. For instance, countries in Eastern Europe received much less funding than countries in Western Europe. In addition, terrestrial ecosystems in Europe receive far more funding than marine ecosystems, leaving these very crucial ecosystems underfunded in the European context. It is also important to look at how the EU is allocating the rest of its budget. For instance, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has received a total of €386.6 billion (European Commission, 2021), all the while being harshly criticised for its inability to protect farmland biodiversity (Kelleher, 2020) and contributing to the continuous loss of biodiversity around Europe, showing discrepancies within the EU agenda and proving a lack of commitment to the protection of ecosystems.

It is refreshing to see that, after being disregarded for so long, ecosystem restoration is finding its place within the global and European policy sphere. However, it is also important to keep a critical eye on some projects. Ecosystem restoration has a long history of being used as a tool against Indigenous populations or local communities. For example, states introduce protections on some lands in order to preserve them; in doing so, however, they force their inhabitants out. Part of creating a real paradigm shift in the way we address our relationship with nature is recognising the different actors involved and how different techniques and practices can be inclusive. It does not only mean reconnecting with nature, but also addressing underlying issues and inequalities within our society and mending them through a larger understanding of what nature is and means for all of us.

THE ROLE OF (INTERNATIONAL) HIGHER EDUCATION

Although ecosystem restoration may seem like a niche topic to address, and one that not many can have a say in, everyone can contribute to a better relationship with nature. Being a part and following the lead of Green Erasmus and many other projects around Europe striving to make education not only excellent but also sustainability-oriented is also an important step to take.

> Green Erasmus and many other projects around Europe are striving to make education not only excellent but also sustainability-oriented

For instance, as international education professionals and members of higher education institutions, one could consider financing a youth group or a student group that is committed to biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration. Other key supports include giving official and formal platforms for these groups to be heard on campus and to be involved in key discussions at an institutional level; often, such involvement is a struggle for youth and student groups to achieve independently. It is also useful to research organisations working on ecosystem restoration and support them. An example of this work at a European level is Generation Climate Europe, which brings together volunteers from across Europe working collectively for a better world, giving young people responsibility and a platform from which to be heard. GCE and other organisations like it, working in tandem with higher education institutions and other stakeholders committed to the future of the planet, are vital in the process of enabling students and young people in Europe to be bold, brave and effective in their battles for sustainability.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are you aware of initiatives of ecosystem restoration in the community where your higher education institution is based?

2. Is your institution directly involved in initiatives of ecosystem restoration, or in research on it?

3. How can international higher education institutions join forces to step up the efforts towards ecosystem restoration?

REFERENCES

European Commission. (2021). Common agricultural policy funds. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/financing-cap/cap-funds_en

IPBES. (2020). Workshop report on IPBES workshop on biodiversity and pandemics. Bonn, Germany: IPBES. Retrieved from https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf

Kelleher, L. (2020, June 7). CAP: billions spent on biodiversity with little impact – auditors. Retrieved from https://www.arc2020.eu/cap-billions-spent-on-biodiversity-with-little-impact-auditors/

UNEP-WCMC, FFI and ELP. (2020). Funding ecosystem restoration in Europe: a summary of funding trends and recommendations to inform practitioners, policymakers and funders. Retrieved from https://restorationfunders.com/funding-ecosystem-restoration-in-europe.pdf

WWF. (2020). Living planet report 2020 – bending the curve of biodiversity loss. Gland, Switzerland: WWF. Retrieved from https://f.hubspotusercontent20.net/hubfs/4783129/LPR/PDFs/ENGLISH-FULL.pdf

About the authors

Rudolf Allemann, Pro Vice-Chancellor, International and Student Recruitment and Head of the College of Physical Sciences and Engineering at Cardiff University, UK

Marco Di Donato, Research Unit, UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union, Italy

Venetia Galanaki, Biodiversity Working Group Coordinator, Generation Climate Europe, Greece

Giancarlo Gentiluomo, Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit, University of Bologna, Italy

Khatereh Ghasemzadeh, Research Fellow at the Department of Management at the University of Bologna, Italy

Eevi Laukkanen, Business Manager for the Pro Vice-Chancellor for International and Europe, Cardiff University, UK

Paola Lupi, Board Member, Generation Climate Europe and Liaison Officer, Youth and Environment Europe, France

Dominique Montagnese, Inclusive Mobility Expert, Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education, Belgium

Angelo Paletta, Delegate of the Rector for Budget, strategic planning and process innovation, University of Bologna, Italy

Camilla Valentini, Head of the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit at the University of Bologna, Italy

Valérie Van Hees, Coordinator of the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education, Belgium