


FORUM

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education

UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

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06

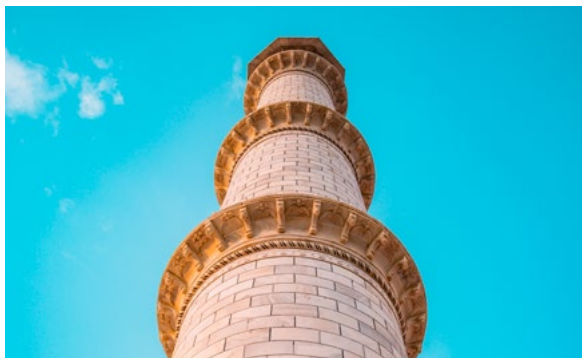
“It has been common during the crisis for individuals to host Ukrainian refugees at their homes and provide them with shelter, food, clothing and assistance”

**SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE:
THE VIEW FROM NEXT DOOR**

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“The period from now to 2030 has the potential to become the decade of community engagement in higher education in Europe”

**IN CONVERSATION WITH
NINOSLAV ŠČUKANEC SCHMIDT**



30

“Universities should get out of their ivory towers and put their resources and wisdom in the service of society”

**IHES CATALONIA LAB:
OPENING UP THE IVORY TOWER**

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“In moving around, we gain a broader perspective of our surroundings – but only by immersing ourselves in our environment do we make this a meaningful endeavour”

MINDFUL MOBILITY



EDITORIAL

The connections between higher education institutions and their communities are frequently discussed – what place is there for civic engagement in institutional strategy? How connected to the local community is the research undertaken by academic staff? How does an institution connect with prospective students and their families in a meaningful way?

In the context of international education, these questions turn to definitions of community which extend beyond local geography and national belonging – how does a university engage meaningfully with its alumni who live abroad? What value is placed on the global networks of higher education institutions to which a university belongs? And, importantly, how do the international activities of an institution inform and enrich approaches to community engagement at home?

At a time when the global pandemic has forced us to live locally, re-engaging with our local communities in the face of strict lockdowns in certain countries and discouraged (or even prevented) from international travel through public health directives, is it perhaps the case that many in our society have turned their backs on the world beyond their immediate locality? Increasing concerns about climate change are also discouraging many from air travel post-pandemic. As such, how will our institutions continue to nurture their community ties abroad in the face of possible disengagement at home?

These questions are put under the microscope in the Winter 2022 issue of *Forum*, which presents perspectives from across Europe and further afield on the intersections between higher education institutions and their multiple communities.

Pressingly, in the face of ongoing military aggression by Russia against Ukraine, the international education community worldwide has sought to express solidarity with members of its community in Ukraine in meaningful and tangible ways, and I'm delighted that the two initial contributions to this issue address key perspectives on community engagement in this context. The EAIE's vision is for an equitable world in which international education connects diverse perspectives and fosters greater understanding. As such, there is no more contradictory act to the ethos of international educators than war between nations.

Other articles selected for this issue of *Forum* reflect on global citizenship and mobility, and their connections to community engagement locally. Further contributions reflect on the local democratic mission of higher education in Europe and the use of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in community engagement.

I am delighted that Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt, Executive Director and Founder of the Institute for the Development of Education in Croatia, agreed to be interviewed for this issue. Ninoslav has significant expertise in the social dimension of higher education, and his organisation has spearheaded two EU-funded projects designed to build the capacities of universities, policymakers and stakeholders in Europe for mainstreaming community engagement in higher education. Reflecting on seven dimensions of community engagement in higher education, Ninoslav recognises that internationalisation can be ingrained in each of these dimensions. Furthermore, he highlights the ways



in which community engagement is emerging as a policy priority in higher education in Europe.

It is certain that internationalisation has the potential to play a transformative role in society and in the various communities of higher education institutions. What is less clear still is how higher education itself conceives of the connections between community engagement and international education. Hopefully the development of new frameworks and policies at a European level will support clearer pathways to action worldwide.

In closing, I am reminded that the EAIE itself is a community and would like to thank the members of the 15 EAIE Expert Communities for their guidance and support to the work of the Publications Committee. A warm debt of gratitude also to Ragnhild Solvi Berg who joined me in reviewing submissions for this issue.

I hope that you enjoy reading this edition of *Forum*.

— DOUGLAS PROCTOR, EDITOR
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IHES CATALONIA LAB OPENING UP THE IVORY TOWER

International higher education is abuzz with talk of ‘internationalisation in higher education for society’ – but what does it actually entail? An Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership between two universities in Spain and the Czech Republic has resulted in two regional ‘IHES laboratories’ to help translate theory into practice. At the Catalonia lab, it’s becoming increasingly apparent that the time for universities to start learning with and from the communities beyond their walls is now.

In the past few decades, higher education has been making itself more available to the wider community and the society it serves. In most higher education institutions, this pledge to social commitment has taken the form of incorporating new objectives linked to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals into their university policies and strategic plans. At the same time, universities have realised that they possess a wealth of experience in terms of internationalisation and that the international values they promote can greatly contribute to a more open and fair society if taken outside the university walls.

A renewed objective has therefore emerged: internationalisation in higher education for society (IHES), a concept defined by Uwe Brandenburg,

Hans de Wit, Elspeth Jones and Betty Leask in 2019, which explicitly aims to benefit the wider community, at home and abroad, through education, research, service and international or intercultural engagement.¹

The concept and practices of IHES are being thoroughly tested in an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership also entitled IHES, led by Palacký University in the Czech Republic. The Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) in Spain is a partner in this project and is responsible for implementing two regional IHES laboratories: one in Catalonia (Spain) and another in the Olomouc region (Czech Republic).

These two laboratories have been created to develop and implement a set of university activities aimed at incorporating a strong internationalisation





component within society. These IHES activities will be evaluated from the perspective of promoters, actors and beneficiaries, and may serve as examples for others to follow suit.

TRAINING AS A FIRST STEP

In order to create the Catalonia lab, the first step was to raise awareness of the importance of this 'new' concept within our institutions. To this end, a training course for all the promoters and actors of the planned IHES activities was organised. The three-day course had the following main components:

- Internationalisation of higher education: what it is, its objectives and global trends
- Intercultural communication: basic concepts and ready-to-use tools
- IHES: what it means, key components, objectives, benefits and challenges

Participants were immersed in this highly interactive peer-learning experience, which allowed them to rethink and redefine through an internationalisation lens the social engagement activities that they were already conducting. At the end of the training, they all presented their projects and received feedback from their colleagues, while finding new collaboration synergies.

VARIED ACTIVITIES

The Catalonia lab was then ready to start in the academic year 2021–2022 with the following eight activities: bringing the Erasmus experience to secondary schools via URV Erasmus alumni; international service learning placements; a project to send used computers to those in need; sports including canoeing and hiking; videos and poster presentations on climate change realities from around the world; international activities at 15 locations in the Tarragona region; international lectures for senior citizens; and a language programme for incoming international students.



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With their international component, the lab's activities have an impact on the local community by interacting with different systems and networks, such as the regional primary and secondary education system, public administrations, non-governmental organisations, small businesses, volunteers, town councils, active members of the university community and society at large.

THREE C'S

Alongside the great opportunity that the IHES project has brought about for the URV and its region come great challenges. One of these is stakeholder

proper system of evaluation, a crucial tool to prove the worth of IHES to all those in doubt. The survey system set up within the IHES project will produce results in due course and a full evaluation report will be published in 2023. Nonetheless, what this experience has highlighted so far is the importance of the 'intangible', which is so present in the internationalisation of higher education, so difficult to 'sell' to scientific minds and yet so meaningful for the human experience.

Another point that has emerged with regards to connection is that in order to strengthen the IHES commitment, higher education leaders must find ways

seemed easy to implement turned out to be challenging or even impossible to put into practice, while other activities that initially seemed more complex showed unexpected potential or became a great success. Some have even had such an impact that society itself is demanding more such initiatives. Interacting with the wider world undoubtedly leads to new and surprising results, if only we are willing to look outside our institutional walls and learn with and from society.

To conclude, we believe that the IHES concept is here to stay in deeper ways than we can now envision. It could very well become a future indicator for assessing the quality of teaching, research, innovation and other higher education activities. And universities should, as it has long been suggested, get out of their ivory towers and put their resources and wisdom in the service of society. But are universities truly ready to address or lead the way in tackling growing and ever more complex and urgent societal needs? IHES could be a possible first step in the right direction.

— SUSANA DE LLOBET MASACHS, JOSEPA GARRETA-GIRONA & MARINA CASALS SALA

What this experience has highlighted so far is the importance of the 'intangible', which is so present in internationalisation

engagement. In order to reach society, the university community needs to be part of the process and engaged in its vision, but it can only do so if it understands what IHES is about (comprehension), knows how to engage (competence) and has opportunities to contribute (connection). The training course was considered key to making a start on the first two Cs of this 'three Cs' approach.²

This engagement needs to be maintained in the implementation phase through the addition of the third C: connection. This can be done through follow-up meetings, through appointing a coordinator for the lab who is there to assist and accompany the different actors in the field, and through implementing a

to recognise its protagonists. Our experience thus far tells us that a key asset and undisputed leader of IHES is the student – both the international student and the local student with international experience – because they have the potential to naturally transmit to younger generations the importance of social commitment in today's world. Consequently, recognising the engagement and commitment of all those who play a role in IHES is key in ensuring that institutional change is enduring and profound.

OUTSIDE OUR WALLS

At the Catalonia lab, we have learned to be adaptable and open to the unpredictable. The fact is that some activities that

1. Brandenburg, U., de Wit, H., Jones, E., & Leask, B. (2019, April 20). *Internationalisation in higher education for society*. University World News. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190414195843914>

2. Hudzik, J. K., & McCarthy, J. S. (2012). *Comprehensive internationalization: From concept to action*. Washington, DC: NAFSA, Association of International Educators.

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