

Eurashe 1990 – 2000 Anniversary Conference

Theme:

Higher Education in the 21st Century,
Challenges and Potentials

Date:

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Place:

Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania, (MAICh)
Alyllion Agrokepion, Chania, Crete, Greece



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Identity

When EURASHE was founded ten years ago, its members, by and large, came from the non-university sector of what was then a clear binary divide in most countries. Later, representation was expanded to cater for not only national organisations of Polytechnic-type institutions but, also, individual institutions including colleges, polytechnics and, indeed, universities. While most members who joined EURASHE are dedicated to the separate mission of their institutions – to focus on undergraduate teaching, on applied research and development and having a strong regional focus to their activities – they, nevertheless, I believe, feel uncomfortable seeing themselves portrayed negatively as non-university institutions. Indeed, the British Polytechnics and the Dutch Hogescholen which were founder members of EURASHE departed from us, I believe, because they felt their current self-identity and status could not be adequately represented by our association as it is currently perceived. I believe that EURASHE must take up the challenge of seeking to enhance the self-image and social esteem of all higher education institutions committed to the application of knowledge, to teaching and learning in all its forms, to relevance and to a regional focus in its activities. Such institutions now include many universities throughout Europe due to the convergence now occurring in the structure of higher education generally. We should, I believe, leave behind us the negative image of representing only non-university institutions and see EURASHE as a comfortable umbrella organisation for all those higher education institutions whose mission and ethos commits them explicitly to relevance in their teaching, a closeness to economic life in their research and development and a regional focus in much of their academic activities.

European / International cooperation

While it is true that the institutions we represent have a deep commitment to local and regional responsibilities, they must look outwards to ensure an increasing international dimension to their activities. Business, industry and, indeed, the labour market has become globalised – and higher education institutions must do the same and join with each other across national borders in order to learn to share and share to learn. It is instructive to note that, while the institutions we represent have a strong involvement with industry and the commercial world, the participation by the non-university institutions in programmes such as LEONARDO and its predecessor, COMMET, was not noticeably greater than even the more traditional university sector. Similarly, for a sector like ours which has had a long tradition of engagement in part-time and continuing education, our participation in European lifelong learning networks has, so far, not been so spectacular. EURASHE, through the active participation of its members, can act as a catalyst to stimulate greater trans-European cooperation through participation in European Networks now emerging in the areas of particular strength in our institutions. I would, also, like to suggest that we look again at our EURASHE constitution and, at least, explore the possibility of inviting representatives from the world of business and industry to join our organisation through, perhaps, some form of associate membership.

A vision of the Future

We will, I hope, over the next two days get a good insight into the future that lies ahead for higher education due to the array of eminent speakers who will address our Annual Conference. For that reason, I will confine my remarks to a few comments on the Bologna Declaration and its relevance to the future tasks that lie ahead of us in EURASHE.

The Declaration, which is a political statement signed by twenty-nine countries in Europe set out the need to create a European area or space for higher education which is seen as essential to confront the new environment now marked by globalisation, new communications technologies, increased competition and growing commercialisation. A whole new educational sector is now emerging throughout Europe which is competing with the traditional state-regulated institutions in Europe. Foreign / overseas universities are increasingly recruiting students in Europe – for the first time in the 1990s, the number of Europeans studying in the USA exceed the number of Americans studying in Europe. At postgraduate level, the numbers of foreign students studying in the USA now far outstrips those coming to Europe to study. Universities and other higher education institutions in Europe must take up the challenge to join forces at European level to build up a compatible system within Europe that will be competitive towards the rest of the world.

I believe that EURASHE has a major responsibility to articulate the core values and ethos of the institutions we represent in order that they can be enshrined in whatever emerges from the Bologna proposals. Chief among these are a commitment of inclusivity in terms of types of students, levels of awards, lifelong learning and a responsiveness and accountability not only to our primary stakeholders, the students, but, also to the communities at local, national and European levels that we are privileged to serve.