UNIVERSITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND INNOVATION

Wim Van Petegem, Johannes De Gruyter, K.U.Leuven – AVNet, Leuven, Belgium
Ellen Sjoer, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands
Bente Nørgaard, Aalborg Universitet, Aalborg, Denmark
Markku Markkula, Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland

INTRODUCTION

We are currently moving towards a global knowledge-based society, driven by digitization with a growing importance and influence by innovation, entrepreneurship and citizenship. Lifelong learning is considered as an all-permeating success factor to prepare and further develop our human resource potential for this new era. Therefore lifelong learning is high on the agenda of many organizations at different levels in our society. Also universities (and other higher education institutions) are facing the challenges of new learning needs and are questioning their role in creating and sharing knowledge.

They have to review, refine and/or develop their strategies for learning, and especially lifelong (and life-wide) learning, in order to better implement their three-fold mission, i.e. research, education and service to society, the latter sometimes interchanged with ‘innovation’.

In this paper we will first elaborate on the way Europe and its nations are responding to current needs in society by a lifelong learning agenda. We will then focus on a couple of universities that are in the process of adapting their vision on teaching and learning to include a lifelong and life-wide dimension.

And this will, to our understanding, lead towards interesting and inspiring ideas for further discussion.

CONTEXT FOR LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND INNOVATION

The concept of lifelong learning (LLL) has been around for more than 50 years now. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go back in history that far. We start in 1996, when the OECD published its ‘Lifelong Learning for All’ approach, ‘from cradle to grave’. They wanted strategies for lifelong learning ‘respond to the convergence between the economic imperative dictated by the needs of the knowledge society and the societal need to promote social cohesion by providing long-term benefits for the individual, the enterprise, the economy and the society more generally’. The same year 1996 was also the European Year of Lifelong Learning, which had a major political impact at European level by putting lifelong learning centre-stage and by involving new players in a field which until then had been reserved for specialists. The EU's contribution to the global debate on lifelong learning was marked by a broad concept embracing the same ‘cradle to grave’ approach which does not subordinate learning to economic imperatives and gives full place to such issues as personal growth, participation in the democratic decision-making process, recreational learning and active ageing.

In March 2000, the European Council formulated its Lisbon Strategy, aimed at making the European Union (EU) the most competitive economy in the world and achieving full employment by 2010. It was based on innovation as the motor for economic change, on a ‘learning economy’, and on social and environmental renewal. In response the European Commission published a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning to foster the debate at European and Member state level to reach these goals. It was recognized that LLL was key to growth and jobs, as well as to allow everyone the chance to participate fully in society.

Although national governments are responsible for education and training political cooperation was considered as imperative and this has been done through the Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001 and its follow-up, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’) adopted by the Council in May 2009. Striking to see is that ‘making lifelong learning and mobility a reality’ is identified as one of the four long term strategic objectives, translated into the EU-level benchmark indicator that ‘an average of at least 15 % of adults (age group
25-64) should participate in lifelong learning' by 2020. A number of instruments have been developed to support European citizens, learning providers, companies, guidance counsellors and educational authorities and allow them to fully exploit the potential of the European lifelong learning area and the EU-wide labour market, since 'The challenges posed by demographic change and the regular need to update and develop skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances call for a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems which are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world. While new initiatives in the field of lifelong learning may be developed to reflect future challenges, further progress with ongoing initiatives is still required, especially in implementing coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies.' To make this happen the European Commission has also integrated its various educational and training initiatives under one single umbrella, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), replacing previous education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006.

One specific activity under this LLP was the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009). It aimed to stimulate research, to raise public awareness, to spread information and to promote public debate on creativity and the capacity for innovation, as essential elements for the future success of Europe and its long-term economic competitiveness.

Together with the Lisbon Strategy and all its related initiatives we are implementing the Bologna Process in Europe. It is the process of creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is based on cooperation between ministries, higher education institutions, students and staff from 47 countries, with the participation of international organisations. In April 2009, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the then 46 countries of the Bologna Process met in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve to establish the priorities for the EHEA until 2020. In their Communiqué ‘they highlighted in particular the importance of lifelong learning, widening access to higher education, and mobility.’ Would this be the real start for making lifelong learning a reality in higher education?

**A DEFINITION OF UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING**

Lifelong learning is a complex concept, with many important dimensions. In addition, there are also different opinions about what lifelong learning really is or should be, which have evolved over the past 50 years of its history.

In its ‘Lifelong Learning for All’ the OECD adopted ‘a more comprehensive view that covers all purposeful learning activity, from the cradle to the grave, that aims to improve knowledge and competencies for all individuals who wish to participate in learning activities.’ Four main features are distinguished: a systemic view (learning opportunities all over the whole lifecycle, from pre-school education until after retirement, covering all forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning), centrality of the learner (meeting learning needs rather than supply-side driven), motivation to learn (‘learn-to-learn’) and multiple objectives of educational policy (like personal development, knowledge development, economic, social and cultural objectives). The European Commission initially used a much narrower definition, describing lifelong learning as ‘all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence.’ This definition was later adjusted to its current version, with similar accents to the OECD description: ‘Lifelong learning should be understood as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.’

To realize this lifelong learning process, it is clear that many partners need to be involved. In order to offer people and organisations the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and competences to manage their professional, economical, social and cultural tasks, in a rapidly changing society, a strong interplay between many different actors in the field of education and training is required. Universities are crucial partners in this dialogue. Yet in spite of the ambitions of the EU and national governments, the actual implementation of lifelong learning still remains in its early stages and a clarification on the role of the university is often absent. Except for the few references in the Bologna process, there are few indications to the particular expectations of universities in all these European-wide LLL strategies. Two European networks in particular, the European University Association (EUA) and the European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) have noticed this gap and have taken the initiative to bring forward a generic ‘scenario’ on ‘university lifelong learning’.
In the BeFlex project (2005-2007) EUCEN has built a picture of the state of play at present in 'university lifelong learning'. As a result of a ‘benchmapping’ exercise, it was stated that ‘ULLL is a field of enormous complexity and diversity’ and therefore a working definition is required that reflects this diversity in the present situation:

ULLL is the provision by higher education institutions of learning opportunities, services and research for:

- the personal and professional development of a wide range of individuals - lifelong and life-wide; and
- the social, cultural and economic development of communities and the region.

ULLL is at university level and research-based; it focuses primarily on the needs of the learners; and it is often developed and/or provided in collaboration with stakeholders and external actors.

In a follow-up project, BeFlex Plus, a new update on ULLL was made and it was further studied how universities could be supported (in terms of recommendations) in the development and implementation of regional strategies for ULLL.

In 2008, the EUA joined this debate on the role of the university in the lifelong learning process by drafting a European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning. It is written in the form of commitments in the first instance for universities in addressing the development and implementation of LLL strategies. However, it is well understood that these commitments are hardly realised by European universities if not accompanied by concerted actions of governments and regional partners in providing appropriate legal environments and funding. So, the Charter also includes a set of (often forgotten) commitments for governments at all levels.

**Towards a (Revised) University Lifelong Learning Strategy**

Both the EUCEN and EUA perspectives offer an interesting starting point for universities to define their own position, within their regional/national context. Once the role of university lifelong learning is clarified, the next crucial step is to find the right strategy and corresponding business models in order to implement policies and structures to enable the necessary change. EUCEN formulates this exercise as “how to move from university lifelong learning to lifelong learning universities?”, which was also the theme of their Spring Conference in 2009 in Leuven.

Currently there are a number of European projects that indicate that universities with different profiles seek for opportunities to revise, develop and enhance their strategic LLL approaches, in interactive discussion with colleagues from all over Europe.

The EUA, in a consortium with the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), the European Access Network (EAN) and EUCEN, is addressing the ‘strategy topic’ in its recently launched project, called SIRUS (Shaping Inclusive and Responsive University Strategies). This project supports Europe’s universities in implementing the commitments made in the European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning and thus assists them in developing their specific role as lifelong learning institutions forming a central pillar of the Europe of Knowledge.

A similar project called USBM (University Strategies and Business Models for LLL), coordinated by EADTU, is working on the same question in a collaborative setting of open universities, conventional universities and associations in distance education. USBM aims to present, analyse and share current and intended institutional strategies and business models (including examples of good practice) for ULLL.

A last project we want to mention here is EUGENE. It is a thematic network of engineering universities and their stakeholders. One of the lines will develop concepts and tools to help universities in their LLL practices and processes and thus to help European working life to meet the requirements of fast change towards the new business logic of global industrial value networking. The focus of this project is on a) processes in the university-industry cooperation interface, b) innovation management and leadership, and c) ICT and project management for university productivity. All four universities, represented by the authors of this paper, are strongly involved in this EUGENE project line.

In addition to these projects, there are also a number of regional/national initiatives, where universities are at different stages of LLL implementation. This is in particular the case with the universities where
the authors are affiliated with. In the following section of this paper we describe the different settings in which we are revising and/or developing those LLL strategies, which steps have been or should be taken, and where we want to land in the near future.

CASE STUDIES

K.U.LEUVEN (BELGIUM)

In its Strategic Plan for 2007-2012 the K.U.Leuven has already mentioned that the university should foster an attitude of LLL. In its Business Plan for Education 2006-2009, it was stated that education at the university should create conditions for LLL. And finally, in its revised Vision on Teaching and Learning, it says that the educational offer should address networks for lifelong and society wide learning in Flanders, Europe and the world. The university is well aware that these phrases are only marginally touching the subject of LLL, when compared to the more elaborated description above. Taking into account these international considerations and after an internal reform of its teaching and learning support centres at the university K.U.Leuven decided to renew and adapt its vision and strategy towards Lifelong Learning. A dedicated working group with representatives from different bodies within the universities is drafting a new policy. Special attention is paid to link the developments of the working group to what is happening in the knowledge transfer centre of the university. Indeed, while they are focusing on regional development through the creation of spin-off activities and other ways of entrepreneurship, we should also consider LLL initiatives as potential means to transfer research-based knowledge from the university towards the community and society in general. In this way we could through lifelong learning nicely link the three pillars in our university’s mission, i.e. research, education and service to the community with the knowledge triangle, based on research, education and innovation.

In the current stage of the work, we finished a SWOT-analysis as a snapshot of where we are now with LLL at the university. From here we are now deriving strategic and operational objectives for the short and mid-long term. We realize that this will be only possible in collaboration with stakeholders and external actors, even in the early stage of drafting our new policy. Therefore we decided to benefit from our involvement in international projects and networks to organize proper peer assessment of our process and its outcomes with colleagues from other universities.

DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (NETHERLANDS)

At Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) LLL is connected to research, education, and particularly to knowledge valorisation, the third core task of the university. One of the priorities 2009-2010 in its Strategic Plan 2007-2010 is: ‘TU Delft would like to develop structural collaboration agreements with multinationals, major technical companies and relevant government bodies. This will be done by making strategic and long-term agreements about research, and preferable about training and degree programmes (LLL), knowledge management and facility sharing.’ Regional development and being a ‘networked university’ are spearheads of the university policy: TU Delft is aiming to generate new economic activity by creating the Science Port Holland, together with local and provincial governments and to strengthen relationships with small and medium enterprises. Key player in this is Delft Top Tech BV: ‘[Their] programmes aim to strengthen the innovative capabilities of individuals and organizations from both the private and the public sector.’ Worthwhile mentioning is also the OpenCourseWare initiative, offering free access to TU Delft course content online for ‘scientists from outside TU Delft, potential students and lifelong learners, former students who wish to continue learning’.

To conclude, LLL is part of the current vision and strategy of the TU Delft. The executive board has been starting the discussion to set priorities that apply university-wide for the next strategic plan for the years 2011-2014. Further research is necessary to reveal the extent to which the mentioned initiatives are based on learning centred educational models that suits adult learners/professionals.

AALBORG UNIVERSITET (DENMARK)

During the years Aalborg University (AAU) has developed into an international oriented network university which strategic goal is to contribute to the global society knowledge and the Danish society’s wealth, welfare and cultural development and to support regional knowledge sharing and
development. AAU is always prepared to get involved in binding collaborations with the surrounding society concerning creating, exchange and/or applying new knowledge. AAU has a long tradition in continuing education, e.g. for the last 15 years AAU has dedicated the 3th week in August as ‘LLL-WEEK’, a week where AAU invites their graduates (alumni) to join a week of lectures and networking free of charge.

In 2001 the Danish Ministry of Education encouraged the universities to put more effort into the LLL area. AAU at that time started looking at more specific needs in the regional companies and found out that more tailor-made continuing education was necessary. Based on AAU’s pedagogical approach Problem Based Learning (PBL) courses were developed to match those needs of the individual companies and also to meet the preferences of the employees. The PBL approach in an industrial context has been named Facilitated Work Based Learning (FWBL) and has been further developed during the last decade.

In the draft strategic plan of AAU for 2010-2015 it is put that the university should further develop its offers of research based continuing education. A strategy of LLL is not explicitly mentioned but innovation is highly in focus, and within this strategy for innovative collaboration LLL is considered as a strong mean to reach the goal.

**AALTO UNIVERSITY (FINLAND)**

Finland has initiated a university reform to develop an educational and research agenda that can respond to the challenges of globalization and internationalization as well as changes in population structure, working life and other areas. A flagship of this reform is the Aalto University – a foundation-based university through the full merger of three universities: Helsinki University of Technology TKK, Helsinki School of Economics HSE and the University of Art and Design Helsinki TaiK. Aalto has set the goal to become an inspiring and ambitious community which encourages lifelong learning. The goal is to create a place and context in which art and science meet and in which societal issues are approached through a comprehensive research approach. According to the Aalto University strategy a learning-centred culture challenges teachers and researchers to reform their teaching methods, based on the real case and real life principle and a new networking culture. Blended learning as well as the production and open sharing of teaching and learning materials will become key aspects of the learning community’s operations.

A more detailed strategic process for LLL will be drafted in spring 2010. Some of the major guidelines will be derived from the Lifelong Learning Strategy approved by the TKK Board in 2007. This strategy defined a set of development targets. Corresponding actions were determined by TKK’s Adult Education Committee and their realisation was implemented according to TKK’s annual working procedures.

The on-going development can be described with the expression *Knowledge Triangle*, i.e. increasing synergy between research, education and innovation. This means, as well, multidisciplinary education and training services to be built and continuously developed in Aalto University. Based on collaboration with experts from various disciplines, these services will enable the integration of research, basic and postgraduate education, lifelong learning, and development projects. The Aalto Factories and Aalto Entrepreneurship Society, as well as other collaborative venues and platforms, connect undergraduates, graduates, postgraduates, working life experts, business people, and pensioners in joint learning and development projects. Every learner group has its own role but all of them share the same general interest.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper we went through the landscape of innovative concepts, definitions, strategies and implementation plans of LLL in an international context, illustrated by some European universities addressing this issue currently high on their agenda. It goes without saying that this is just a snapshot of where we are at the moment and that this is work to be continued. We will benefit from the international community to further fine-tune our plans, share our knowledge (as real lifelong learners ourselves), and create real innovation in this field.
We conclude here with mentioning the Aalto Camp for Societal Innovation. This is a meta-level innovation platform that networks international researcher and user communities. It builds up a global, self-renewing collaboration and integrates global innovation activities for learning, research and rapid implementation. All authors of this paper will contribute to this new-generation concept of societal innovation and make it an international (lifelong) learning experience.

REFERENCES

(1) OECD (1996), *Lifelong Learning for All*, OECD, Paris
(2) European Year of Lifelong Learning, see: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11024_en.htm
(3) Lisbon Strategy, see: http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisbon_strategy_en.htm
(4) Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, see: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/other/c11047_en.htm
(6) LLP, see: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm
(9) EUA (2008), European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong Learning, EUA, Brussel
(10)BeFlex project, see: http://www.eucen.eu/BeFlex/index.html
(11)BeFlex Plus project, see: http://www.eucen.eu/BeFlexPlus/index.html
(12)EUCEN Conference, How to transform a University into a Lifelong Learning University, March 2009, Leuven, see: http://www.eucen.eu/node/3547
(14)USBM project, see: http://www.eadtu.nl/usbm/
(15)EUGENE project, see: http://www.eugene.unifi.it/
(16)K.U.Leuven, see: http://www.kuleuven.be
(17)Flanders in Action, see: http://www.flandersinaction.be/nlapps/default.asp
(20)Delft University, see: http://www.tudelft.nl
(21)Delft Top Tech BV, see: http://www.delft-toptech.nl
(22)OpenCourseWare initiative at TU Delft, see: http://www.ocw.tudelft.nl
(23)Valorisation Centre of TU Delft, see: http://www.valorisationcentre.tudelft.nl
(27)Mission and Vision of Aalborg University, see: http://www.aau.dk/Om+AAU/Strategi/Mission+og+vision/
(28)LLL-WEEK at Aalborg University, see: http://www.livslang.aau.dk/