



Implementing the U-Map classification

Final Report

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Executive Summary

U-Map was developed in a series of consecutive projects funded by the European Commission to lay the ground work for building a classification of European higher education institutions (HEIs). U-Map (www.u-map.eu) aims to *map* the institutional diversity in the large and highly differentiated European higher education landscape. It does not *rank* the HEIs league-table-style, but describes (classifies) them on six dimensions, each representing an aspect of the HEIs' activities. The mapping reflects the profiles of HEIs in terms of their *activities*. U-Map covers universities, colleges, polytechnics, and other types of HEIs, presenting what these institutions do and how that compares to other HEIs. U-Map thus helps to increase transparency in the European higher education landscape. It provides sunburst charts – showing the 'activity profiles' of HEIs.

The U-Map transparency instrument was created through an intense and interactive process involving many higher education stakeholders that began in 2005. A prototype of U-Map was piloted in 2009, and in 2010 and 2011 the instrument was implemented in the Netherlands. The European Commission-supported project 'Implementing the U-Map classification' was the fourth stage of development of the U-Map tool. It has contributed to the fact that U-Map now has been 'rolled out' in large parts of the Estonian and Portuguese higher education systems, and currently covers a large number of individual higher education institutions.

U-Map was incorporated into the European Commission funded U-Multirank study on the development of a global multi-dimensional university ranking (see www.u-multirank.eu). This allowed covering an additional 150 institutions from 50 countries, with one-third of the institutions located outside Europe. In total, over 230 higher education institutions now have their institutional profiles included in the U-Map database. The dissemination activities within the framework of this EC-Lifelong Learning Programme funded project have led to an enhanced level of awareness of the U-Map tool and increased interest from the side of individual institutions to be part of the project in the future. U-Map was presented in various conferences and was received well. The general public was also addressed through the distribution of flyers, an Update Report and the U-Map website. The national dissemination conferences have raised the awareness of the potential use of the instrument in the two case study countries (Estonia and Portugal)

Initial reactions to U-Map have been very promising; representatives of participating institutions and policy-makers felt that the institutional profiles it produces are useful in increasing transparency and in informing institutional and national policy-making. On a European scale, U-Map offers the promise of a better understanding of diversity as an important factor in the further development of the European higher education and research systems according to the revised Lisbon strategy, the Bologna process and the recent (2011) European Commission Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education.

Thanks to this Lifelong Learning project, the sustainability of U-Map was boosted substantially. Although no concrete institutional model for 'housing' U-Map was decided upon, meetings with interested commercial parties and foundations did open

new vistas for the creation of a sustainable setting for U-Map in the future. The development of clear protocols and procedures and the application of these in three national systems (Netherlands, Portugal, Estonia) has contributed to the start of a follow-up project covering the higher education institutions of five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). Work is also underway to include Flemish higher education. All of this will allow us to make the U-Map profiles available to the general public later on. Most likely this will create a new momentum for the expansion of U-Map.

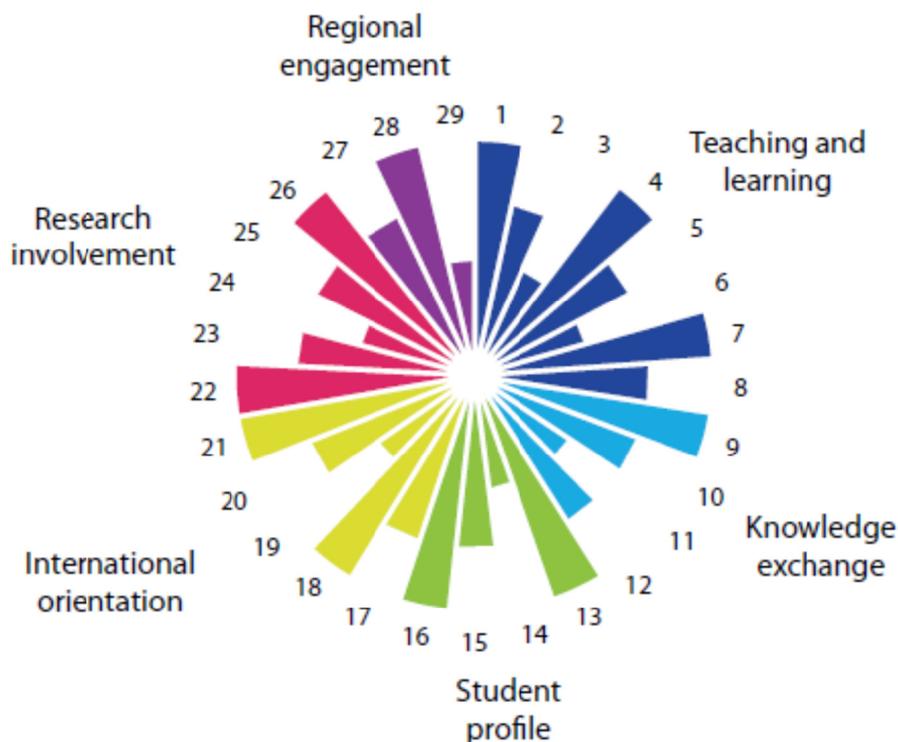
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1. Project Objectives

U-Map maps institutional diversity in the large and highly differentiated European higher education landscape. It does this by producing activity profiles for higher education institutions. By means of 'sunburst charts' (see figure below) U-Map provides a snapshot of the extent to which a higher education institution is engaged in six key dimensions of institutional activity. Institutional involvement in these activities is measured using a set of 29 indicators. U-Map's on-line database and user interface allows users to select institutions to be compared and to explore the activity profiles in more depth.

The diversity of each institution's activity is pictured in its sunburst chart, with its six colours representing the six dimensions of U-Map. Each 'ray' represents an indicator – the length of the ray indicating the extent to which the institution is engaged in this activity.



The U-Map classification has been presented to international audiences and its tools are seen as an innovative and intelligent way to characterise higher education institutions. To create this impact, the U-Map classification needs to cover a substantial proportion of European higher education institutions.

This Lifelong Learning (LLL) Programme-supported project was geared towards increasing this coverage of U-Map in a sustainable way, to allow the full functional display of the instrument, and to raising awareness of the U-Map classification. The project was to result in a classification of European higher education institutions with a substantial number of identifiable higher education institutions included. The project would need to contribute to the further elaboration of a set of empirically tested

procedures and protocols that help create a reliable and sustainable classification instrument. The project was to furthermore continue to explore an organisational basis for the U-Map classification.

In detail, the U-Map LLL project has three main objectives:

1. to have a substantial number of institutions participating in U-Map;
2. to disseminate the project to a wider audience
3. to explore the institutional setting for the future U-Map.

Policy makers at the international level were to be addressed through the project's general dissemination activities.

The project set out to incorporate a substantial number of higher education institutions in Europe. The institutions targeted are not limited to the traditional research universities but comprise all officially recognised higher education institutions in European countries. Higher education institutions will see the benefits of participating in the U-Map classification and of using it in their strategic development. This was discussed in the dissemination seminars organised in Estonia and Portugal and discussions during other conferences and public meetings.

At the national level there are a number of organisations that have a significant impact on higher education policy making. At the start of the project, these organisations (comprising ministries of education and training, associations of higher education institutions, funding agencies, science councils and others) showed a clear interest in a comprehensive classification to facilitate their analyses and decisions. These target groups were to be addressed through the project's general dissemination activities (website, conference addresses), including the national dissemination seminars held in Estonia and Portugal where they were invited to discuss the benefits of the U-Map classification for policy purposes.

Through the various project and dissemination activities, students and other stakeholders – as potential users of U-Map – will increase their awareness and understanding of U-Map. This will increase the ease of acceptance of future transparency instruments building on U-Map (e.g. a multi-dimensional ranking).

2. Project Approach

Recruitment of higher education institutions and data collection

Two approaches have been used to date to recruit higher education institutions: a system-level, national approach and an approach addressing individual institutions.

In the national approach, one or more national organisations (be it the ministry of education, or a rectors' conference) have taken the initiative to contact the U-Map team (or are invited by the team) to discuss participation. Participation of individual institutions remains on a voluntary basis but the participation of a group of institutions from the same country makes the analysis of national data bases for the purpose of pre-filling the questionnaire a viable option. It also makes tailoring data definitions to the national context and specific higher education terminology a much more efficient process. Finally, the inclusion of an entire (or most of a) national system provides the basis for seminars to explore and analyse the diversity of such a national system.

In the institution approach, individual institutions take the initiative to contact (or are contacted by) the U-Map team to discuss participation. In this approach, PR activities played an important role in the recruitment of participating higher education institutions. These PR activities are focused on individual higher education institutions. The channels of communication used are the internet and presentations at (inter)national conferences. The main access point on the internet is the U-Map website. The website was updated to facilitate the provision of up-to-date and specific information that is needed to inform institutions and to persuade them to participate. New channels of internet based communication (like social media) were used and explored. The U-Map classification was presented at a number of (inter)national higher education conferences. The call for participation of individual higher education institutions was part of those presentations.

U-Map uses a data gathering methodology that has been piloted extensively to test the indicators in practice and to incorporate informed comment from participating institutions and potential users. U-Map's activity profiles are based primarily on data submitted by the institutions themselves. The main data-gathering instrument is the on-line U-Map questionnaire for higher education institutions.

An online Glossary and an interactive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section as well as an email/telephonic Help Desk are provided to facilitate consistent and comparable data-collection across institutional and national settings. The FAQ also includes country-specific questions and answers.

U-Map also offers the facility to have the questionnaire partly pre-filled, using existing data from national databases provided by national statistical agencies or ministries of education. This reduces the institutional data collection burden and ensures the provision of comparable data.

The completion of the questionnaire by the institutions was preceded by a technical workshop where the U-Map team guided the representatives of the country's institutions through the questionnaire and discussed 'technical' questions regarding data elements and definitions.

Institutional data is validated by the U-Map project team in consultation with individual institutions and, where possible, data is compared with existing national and international databases. Outlying responses, unexpected results and inconsistencies are discussed with the institutions.

Once the (re)submitted data are approved, the U-Map team creates the activity profiles of the higher education institutions.

Indicator scores are divided into four categories (typically no, some, substantial or major) involvement in the activity in question). The boundaries between the categories are determined by cut-off points that depend on the distribution of the indicator scores across the European institutions in the U-Map database. At the moment quartile scores are used to establish the cut-off points. The category in which an indicator score is placed is reflected in the length of the corresponding ray in the sunburst chart. The activity profiles of the higher education institutions are published in the U-Map online tool on the U-Map website.

Dissemination of the project

The U-Map project has been presented in various ways at a number of conferences. The audiences of those conferences, mainly representatives of higher education institutions and other organisations active in higher education, have learned about the general idea of U-Map and the U-Map profiles, as well as the processes and protocols in the implementation of U-Map. Higher education institutions and national representatives have been informed about the opportunities for participation in U-Map.

To further facilitate and support the dissemination of the project, the U-Map team has produced promotional material. Next to banners and posters, a flyer on the project was developed. This flyer was distributed widely.

The general public was also informed by the U-Map website and the use of social media.

In addition, the results of the project (both in terms of the process and the resulting profiles) have been presented by the U-Map team in two national seminars.

Exploration of organisational setting

The options for establishing a sustainable organisational setting for the U-Map projects have been explored through meetings with representatives from international and national foundations, national organisations like ministries of higher education and rectors' conferences and other international organisations. At these meetings, various models have been discussed and potential commitment of discussion partners has been probed.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Recruitment of higher education institutions and data collection

By mid-October 2011, the U-Map database included data on 236 institutions. The targets set at the outset of the project (75 higher education institutions from two national cases and 20 'individual' higher education institutions) are met.

Currently the results of U-Map are visible only to the institutions that have submitted data and confirmed their activity profiles. The reason for restricted access at this stage is twofold. The first reason is related to the limited number of higher education institutions in the database.

U-Map uses institutional data to calculate indicator scores across the six dimensions and to determine the position of an institution. Indicator scores are divided into four categories (typically no, some, substantial or major involvement in the activity in question). The boundaries between the categories are determined by cut-off points that depend on the distribution of the indicator scores across the European institutions in the U-Map database. In order to be able to calculate robust and stable cut-off points and profiles, a minimum number of higher education institutions needs to participate in U-Map. At the moment this number is not yet reached, but when the recently started project on including the Nordic higher education institutions will be finalised, the process of opening up the database will be started.

Currently the data-base is divided into four sections and institutions can only view the profiles of institutions in their section (Portugal, Estonia, the Netherlands, or the U-Multirank pilot study¹). Once the total number of participating institutions is sufficiently large to establish stable and robust cut-off points, the "walls" between the different sections of the data-base will be removed and the U-Map tool will enter the public domain. Our target for achieving this is pre-summer 2012.

The second reason for restricted access lies in the 'experimental' character of U-Map. In the recruitment of higher education institutions it was clear that institutions are not familiar with the U-Map profiles and the underlying data collection. To gain their commitment, clear protocols have been used, according to which the institutions have the final say about the use of the data. To allow the institutions the necessary leeway to get used to U-Map in this early operational stage of the tool, it is considered by U-Map team important that access to the U-Map profiles is restricted.

The national approach to the recruitment of higher education institution has proven most successful. The individual approach remains possible but entails the submission of the complete data set by the institution which increases the relative cost of contextualising the questionnaire as well as the help desk function. National seminars are also not possible within this approach until a significant number of institutions in the country have volunteered individually. For these reasons the U-Map team hopes to increase the European coverage of U-Map primarily via the national approach.

¹ The links and access codes to these parts of the website are provided in the confidential report.

During the project, protocols and formats for seminars and workshops have been developed further. The experiences with the technical workshops (that have contributed to the development of FAQ sections and further development of the glossary) will facilitate an efficient future implementation of the U-Map instrument in other national higher education systems (in addition to Flanders and the Nordic countries representatives of other countries have expressed interest in participating in U-Map [Poland, Slovenia, Romania]).

Dissemination of the project

The project and its results have been disseminated through a number of channels. U-Map was presented at a number of conferences (see list below). Flyers presenting the project were also circulated at a larger number of conferences and international meetings. At the end of the project, an Update Report was produced and circulated among a wide range of stakeholders. The project was also presented through the website of U-Map. The results of the project were also disseminated and discussed at two national dissemination seminars (in Estonia and Portugal).

Exploration of organisational setting

CHEPS explored different organisational models for the institutionalisation of U-Map. We proposed the creation of a non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation that operates independently from its funding constituencies or stakeholders (or the use of an existing organisation of this nature). Funding could come from public or private sources as long as independence from these sources and sustainability is guaranteed. The operating organisation would have a board consisting of independent members and would be managed by a director supported by professional staff. The board of the organisation would be advised by a stakeholder advisory council and a scientific advisory committee.

CHEPS remains committed to this vision of an institutionalised U-Map but believes that to establish a new organisation at this stage would be premature for two reasons. Firstly, U-Map has still to reach the position where it includes a substantial proportion of European higher education institutions. Secondly, there are important developments taking place at the European level concerning transparency instruments. In the new Modernisation Agenda the Commission indicates that “evidence shows that a multi-dimensional ranking and information tool is feasible and widely supported by education stakeholders” and that “The EC will launch U-Multirank ... aiming to radically improve the transparency of the higher education sector, with first results in 2013”.

CHEPS was one of the lead partners in the CHERPA network that undertook the U-Multirank feasibility study and which suggested a similar organisational model for the institutionalisation of U-Multirank as we have done for U-Map. There are obvious potential synergies and we believe it is prudent to wait for greater clarity on the future of U-Multirank before establishing a new structure for U-Map.

In the meantime CHEPS will continue to ‘roll out’ U-Map across Europe (and potentially beyond) on a project basis and will continue conversations with national ministries, interested Foundations and the European Commission about potential ways of doing this. Our initial target is to have at least 1000 European higher education

4. Partnerships

Not relevant to U-Map

5. Plans for the Future

The U-Map project has resulted in an expansion of the number of higher education institutions for which a U-Map profile has been created. The data on those institutions are stored in the U-Map database and used for calculating the indicator scores and cut-off points. The U-Map profiles are, under certain conditions, available to the participating institutions. In Summer 2012, the U-Map profiles will be published on the public website (www.u-map.eu): all higher education institutions that have agreed to publication will be visible to the general public.

During the project the U-Map tool was updated and developed further. New features, like the FAQ section and online access to background documentation, were implemented. In the coming years this updating of the tool will continue. There are plans to expand the scope of information that will be available (background information that is most relevant to users but not used in creating the profiles) and introduce features that improve readability of the results.

Within two or three years, a revision of the indicators is foreseen. The experiences from implementing the tool in a number of national settings will be used to review the choice of indicators and their definitions and to amend these where necessary. Aligning with other European transparency instruments will be one of the criteria in this review.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The project has contributed to a more transparent European Higher Education Area. First, additional higher education institutions were included in the U-Map database and in the two national cases (Estonia and Portugal) stakeholders (both higher education institutions and policy makers) gained an innovative, multidimensional view on diversity in their national higher education systems.

The project has contributed directly to the modernisation of European higher education; to greater transparency and public understanding of the role of different institutions; it will facilitate more intensive cooperation between higher education and public and private partners; and it promotes the attractiveness of European higher education as a whole thereby contributing to greater staff and student mobility.

In the London Communiqué, Ministers call for the improvement of the information available about European Higher Education. A logical next step for Europe with respect to transparency measures (after the introduction of a 3-cycle degree system and a European Qualifications Framework) would be the implementation of a classification of higher education institutions. Such a classification should allow individual institutions to more effectively portray their own missions and profiles, while at the same time offering greater transparency to various stakeholders, as well as potential staff, students and partners both within and outside Europe.

Second, the project has boosted the wider implementation of U-Map. As a direct result of this, a project to 'map' all higher education institutions in the Nordic region has started recently. Once these institutions are in the database and U-Map will open up to the general public, it is most likely that more countries and more institutions will join the process thereby contributing to the momentum and the potential of the instrument to create transparency throughout the EHEA.

A more populated U-Map database will also push forward the integrated use of institution-level data in other transparency related projects initiated or supported by the EU (following up on earlier projects like the U-Multirank, the EUMIDA and the E3M).

Presenting U-Map and its role in the enhancement of transparency in the diverse EHEA has contributed to an increased awareness of EU policies in this respect.

