

Una Europa Future UniLab Integration Cluster

Is it reasonable to further integrate various dimensions of the university's mission, and how to do it?

Envisioning report

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Some initial thoughts about university:

- The university sometimes needs to be slow; this is the nature and tradition of the university.
 - The university should regain its appeal because quite often it is no longer “sexy” and attractive for younger generations.
 - The university is always a part of a much broader network and the nature of interconnections among the universities shapes the future of European University.
 - The main task of the university is to educate engaged citizens.
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1. The university has a very long tradition of being an “integrator” of various activities and various levels and the university should cherish and further develop this tradition. The main types of university integration include:
 - a) The integration of education, which means that the university should be involved in any possible and “impossible” type of education.
 - b) The integration of research, that should be understood as creating an umbrella-type of organization, to stimulate research collaboration of institutions of various types (thanks to this we could secure many facets of financial support for research).

- c) The integration of research and teaching and of teaching and global development (social impact) is equally important, the university should assume the role of driving force to start such collaboration.
2. The “integrating” university should be a meaningful part of life at every stage of human lives. In the ideal situation there would be no separation between society and university. Such university would reflect a “core and shell” type of organization: with layers of influences surrounding the core of the university (actual institution), the last layer, the furthest away from the university, presenting no barrier between university and society; so, the first layer might be research institutions; second: schools and other educational institutions and so on..., until the last layer simply being the society in general. (The visual metaphor of “core and shell” is represented here by the cross-section of the Earth.)
3. Thus, the university should be a self-organizing, adaptive institution. Self-organizing, that is open to networking, to new challenges (e.g., the Italian initiative - The Scuola di Orientamento Universitario, <https://www.sns.it/en/how-access-scuola-di-orientamento-universitario> - building the connections between universities to promote teaching hard sciences). Adaptive, which means being able to tame external (political and economic) constraints.
4. This concept of the university is based on the idea of a complex adaptive system: the system that can self-regulate and thus adapt to the changing circumstances. Such a system should also include the mechanism of controlling what is going on with the university and within the university. The system must include implementation, monitoring and updating, the full cycle of university activity/action. The complexity of modern university resonates with the issue of integration and diversity (partially opposing forces).
5. The role of the outer layer of the university (the closest to the society) means that the university must prepare people to face the future, with one key question remaining: who and how can identify these problems of the future to be worked out by the university. Understanding the concept of layers of proximity (and separation) the university should bring people closer to the core, substantially reducing the number of layers of separation. It is also important to notice the existence of the layers of separation within the university itself. Providing a safe space for informal chit-chats among various university groups (professors, administration, technical support, students) should help in integrating internal forces of all persons of the university, integrating and employing the energy of everybody working at the university.
6. The wisdom of the university is based on collective thinking. Free exchange of thoughts may be an inspiration for the changes of the university because it would support thinking without limitations, without prior biases. And when we are talking about European University, we should also take language limitations into consideration. The European University should not limit itself to the use of the English language as the only common way of communication.
7. We can understand university integration in a twofold way:
- Internal integration—how to integrate various, differing faculties, departments and faculty members into one university, sharing common vision; and
 - External integration—how to make the university an integrating factor in the world; there are so many conflicting voices and opinions, but the university should remain the place for dialogue and problem-solving.
- This is the growing responsibility of the university: to reconcile opposing voices. The task is even harder to achieve because of the growing mistrust within the university itself.
8. The university as a safe place to discuss even the most difficult problems could also harbor “Problem Incubators” (something similar to “Business Incubators”). That would be a place where “Global Problems”



could “grow” until reaching for the effective solution of the Problems. The university should regain its position as the place/forum/space for problem solving.

9. On the way to problem solving the university should first rely on the expertise and experience of people that had been already engaged in social, civic activities of the university. Every university has such engaged persons; thus, the first task of the university should be to get these experiences and engaged people to the “Problem Incubators”. With one important objection: the university should avoid an endogamic approach. The university should not limit “problem incubating” to the typical academic way of problem-solving: with professors having the final voice in identifying problems and selecting the method to tackle them. Society (according to our concept of core and shell, the outer layer of the university) must get the feeling that they are already an important part of the university: they are not just invited—they are an integral part! In such circumstances, the university would become an obvious, “natural” place to solve the problems.

