



THE 11TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

**Educating Integral Innovators in a European Academic
Network**

**New Horizons for Innovation in
European Higher Education Institutions**

Gabriela Marchis¹

Abstract: In today's European society, the first signs of economic recovery is facing difficulties in recruiting *qualified staff with a high level of skills that can adapt quickly* to changes that appear, in order to meet our European ambitions: to create a **Union of Innovation**. The transition to a *green, smart and innovative* economy, in line with the objectives of "Europe 2020" strategy can only be achieved by **decisive actions** oriented to labor factor development. Thus, one of the vectors of labor reconstruction starts from the principle of "lifelong learning" and envisages the **validation** of *non-formal and informal education*, the **orientation** towards *learning outcomes* and last but not the least, it aims to **integrate learning** and *career guidance* systems. This paper intends to guide and inspire those people that have the *responsibility for management and coordination of HEIs*, as well as those engaged in academic activities like *professors, students, alumni* or other *stakeholders*, by searching the answers to a simple question: **What global society needs and/or desire from HEIs?**

Keywords: quality assurance; life-long learning; education; ITC; competences

1. Introduction

Education, this "universal art to teach everyone everything" (Comenius, 1970) is not a very easy task in this dynamic millennium, characterized by *globalization, innovation* and *transfer of technology*.

Within the European Union, the balance between *socio-economic cohesion* and *global competitiveness* can only be achieved by shifting European societies towards **development** based on **knowledge, research** and **innovation**, which requires that higher education institutions (HEIs), through their *educational offer*, be ready to respond to the society's needs.

In this context, it is increasingly clear that HEIs must diversify their *manner of providing education*, focus on *digital learning* and stimulate student participation in projects of *international cooperation*. Through this approach, **students**, along with *qualifications*, will acquire, in the academic environment, the *experience* to activate and face the competition on the global market. This dynamic of academia includes, naturally, in a globalized world, new directions concerning the development of *cross-border* and *transnational* higher education.

¹Associate Professor, PhD, Department of Economics, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, Tel.: +40372361102, Corresponding author: gabrielamarchis@univ-danubius.ro.

These transformations that shape the evolution of the academic universe, give a new dimension to the **professor's** role in this system. Withal, in this process of reform and adaptation to globalization, the professor's role is dictated by *the role in the society of the HEI* they are representing.

Moreover, in the context of harmonization of European educational system, enhance of **quality assurance** both on *institutional* level and on the level of the *study programme* is mandatory for a *forward-looking* and an *open-mind society*.

Finally, this work intends to be *informative* and *inspirational* for those involved in designing the development process of Romanian higher education system in accordance with the European tendencies in this field.

2. What Global Society Needs and/or Desire from HEIS?

From the very beginning, the universities have played a major role in community development, but lately, their role has definitely changed, from higher education institutions specializing in the *creation and transfer of knowledge*, into institutions whose strategic plan aims at *catalyzing all stakeholders in development process of the community*, bringing together various forms of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge models locally. The position of universities in local development process is influenced back and forth by *microeconomic* (companies, local legislation, the state of our local community, etc.) and *macroeconomic* (government policies, the national legislation, international agreements, etc.), along with the *environment* in which these factors are manifested.

When aiming to improve the socio-economic development level of a community, it is imperative to create a framework for collaboration on several levels between the *university* (as an institution promoting knowledge), *business* and *government authorities*. (Davidson & Lockwood, 2008).

By their specific work, HEIs are **key-players** in local economic development, playing the role of *a network node* in this global production system focused on innovation. (Chaminade & Vang-Lauridsen, 2008)

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that universities are operating in a socio-economic context defined at national level, being legislative “fenced off” to respond primarily to national development model. (Kwiek, 2008) Therefore, the pace of adjustment of universities to global market demand is often dictated by the pace of development of the society they come from. The challenge for HEIs is *to prepare after national “patterns” labor force for the international market*.

In this context, a new question emerges.

2.1. Are Traditional Academic Universities Ready to Cope With The Challenges That Are Generated By Globalisation and Internationalisation and Accelerated by Global Economic And Financial Crisis?

In Europe there are “almost 4000 higher education institutions in Europe, of all shapes and sizes, from new universities of technology and arts colleges to ancient seats of learning and research; from metropolitan universities to small institutions in far-flung parts catering for specific local needs.” (European Commission, 2013).

The diversity of educational, linguistic and socio-cultural traditions that characterizes the EU-28 society, combined with the multitude aspirations and expectations generated by the need to adapt to

international competition resulting from globalization, determines the University, on a general level, to assume *multiple purposes*. (Figure 1.)

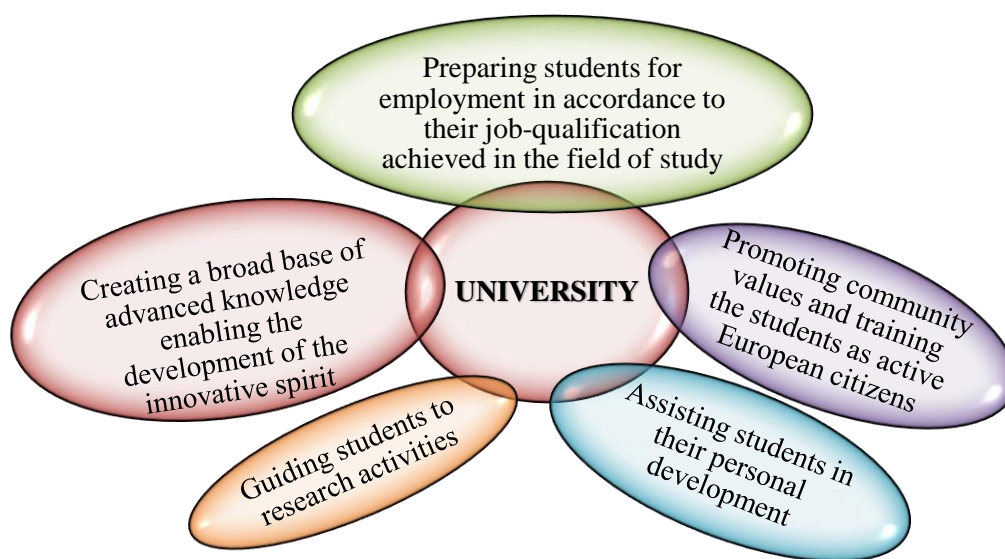


Figure 1. The role of HEIs in contemporary society

Hence, education and training systems must provide an appropriate range of *knowledge, skills* and *competences*, necessary for European citizens to succeed in the labor market.

The wave of globalization has extended the forms of cooperation among universities, thus the transition from *collaborations between universities from the same state*, to the *transnational, cross-border*, and *interregional cooperation* was done fairly quickly and has generated redefinitions in how to address the direction of concentrating efforts in order to promote the development of the society as a whole.

Therefore, *building mutual trust* among HEIs is essential and European higher education systems must operate in a more transparent manner in order to demonstrate the *quality of the educational services* that they provide.

2.2. Is There a Proper Manner to Define Quality Assurance Among Heis?

One of the most remarkable tendencies in European HEIs evolution is to *enhance the quality* of their programmes and qualifications, in order to attract more students.

Being a cultural phenomenon and thus contextual, the concept of quality assurance among HEIs has not standardized definition. Nevertheless, a set of criteria that reflects common-sense aspects of quality in education, are spread among European HEIs (Bollaert, 2014):

- quality as *excellence* – exceeding high standards (Nadea Comaneci);
- quality as *perfection* – doing things right, from the beginning;
- quality as *fitness for purpose* – meeting the mission statement and strategy of the institutions;
- quality as *value for money* – high standard specification at reduced costs;

- quality as *transformation* – the student is not regarded as a customer or a number for statistical purposes, but an active participant in the educational and learning processes.

Confidence in the performance of HEI can be built and strengthened over time if there is implemented a *system of quality assurance* that provides information regarding *learning and teaching* activities to all “stakeholders”, both those within the institution (students, teachers, staff-support) and the external ones (employers, employees, partners). In this respect, since 2005, a **set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance** has been established at European level, and it was valid for the entire European Higher Education Area. In 2015, this set of standards was revised and the current edition (*ESG 2015*) is based on the following *principles* (ENQA; ESU; EUA; EURASHE, 2015):

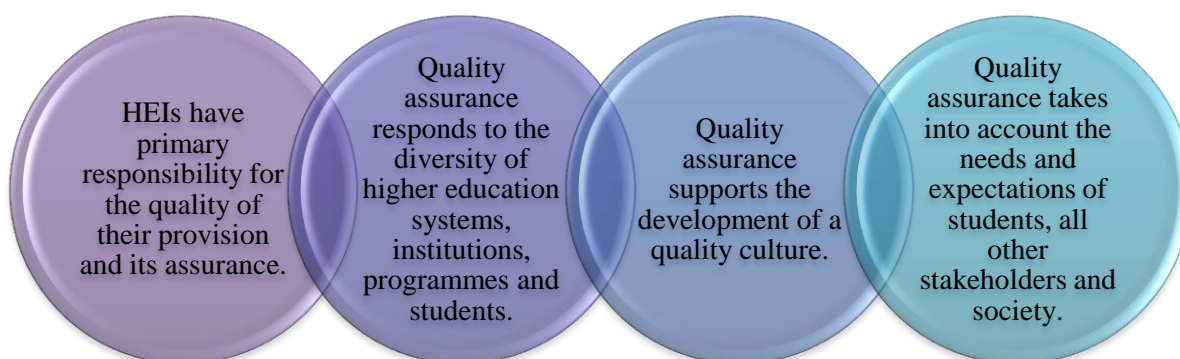


Figure 2. Principles of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

As a conclusion remark, the most well-known *proofs of progress among traditional academic universities* in the field of *quality assurance*, refers to “formulating minimum [of] competences and striving towards creating the most added value between input and output through the process of teaching and learning”. (Bollaert, 2014)

2.3. Is There a Right Profile of Experience and Expertise for Nowadays Professors?

The main actors of education, responsible for the success of this ambitious endeavor of transforming European society, are the professors. But, the high quality academic staff is built up over time, following a **complex process** of *initial* and *continuing professional development* at the highest possible level, both in *specific fields* and in *didactics, pedagogy* and *methodology*. The mismatch between these two dimensions, generates either *researchers* or *trainers*.

Current guidelines of “open education”, which consists mainly in offering courses globally via the web for all those interested (e.g.: Massive Open Online Courses – the MOOC model), has an important influence on the international prestige of HEIs. In these circumstances, the efforts of teaching staff involved in this kind of open-courses, should be rewarded in an adequate way, and legislation should be updated in order to protect the copyrights. On the other hand, providing open educational resources entails **the need to develop digital skills among teachers**. Therefore, nowadays professors should follow the *digital pedagogy courses*, in order to learn about new methods of *digital-assisted teaching*.

Withal, specific for academic didactics is the *heterogeneity of students*, both in terms of age and level of preparedness, some coming directly from high-school, while others being considered elite in a

particular field of study. The challenges for university teaching derived from this context, that professors has to face, refers primarily to adapting the teaching so that it can respond closely to the needs of each student. **Student-centered education** requires more *customization* and a close relationship between *formal* and *informal learning*, digital assisted learning providing optimal solutions for the ongoing educational process.

Consequently, innovation in pedagogical approach would materialize in:

- *personalized learning activities* (whereby students learn in ways relevant to their own training, experience and area of interest);
- *individualized learning activities* (through which teachers adapt their teaching to individual students' ability and their training needs, and facilitates educational activities at their own pace);
- *collaborative learning activities*, which facilitates acceptance and integration of all students in the community (teamwork), regardless of age, gender, socio-economic environment, ethnicity or disability.



Figure 3. Innovative pedagogical approaches.

Professor's mission in this context translates into providing a good *quality education* in an *inclusive environment*.

Developing a favorable environment within HEIs, that enables the achievement of an *individual development* (through the accumulation of knowledge and useful skills for both social and professional integration and also for cultural life in the community) as well as the provision of opportunities and conditions for *lifelong learning* at different levels of education can be achieved either by appealing to technology and the multiple (re)sources of information, and by applying the traditional method of 'learning by doing'. In this context, professors can provide **high quality educational services** through their *continuous training* and *permanent adjustment* to new skills requirements generated by the evolution of the European society.

3. Final Remarks

The 'ESG 2015' provides some benchmarks of quality assurance in the European Union universities in terms of learning and teaching at communitarian, national and institutional levels, the ultimate goal being that of getting recognized the qualifications in the European area by removing the barriers caused by the diversity of educational systems and also by educational traditions that are characterizing the EU28. Under the aegis of the European dictum 'unity in diversity', it is necessary that the entire higher education system of the European Union permanently redefine itself under the auspices of the **common framework** that allows to enhance quality assurance in the European HEIs.

Consequently, the current concerns of universities should *focus*, in a *balanced* manner, on the following issues:

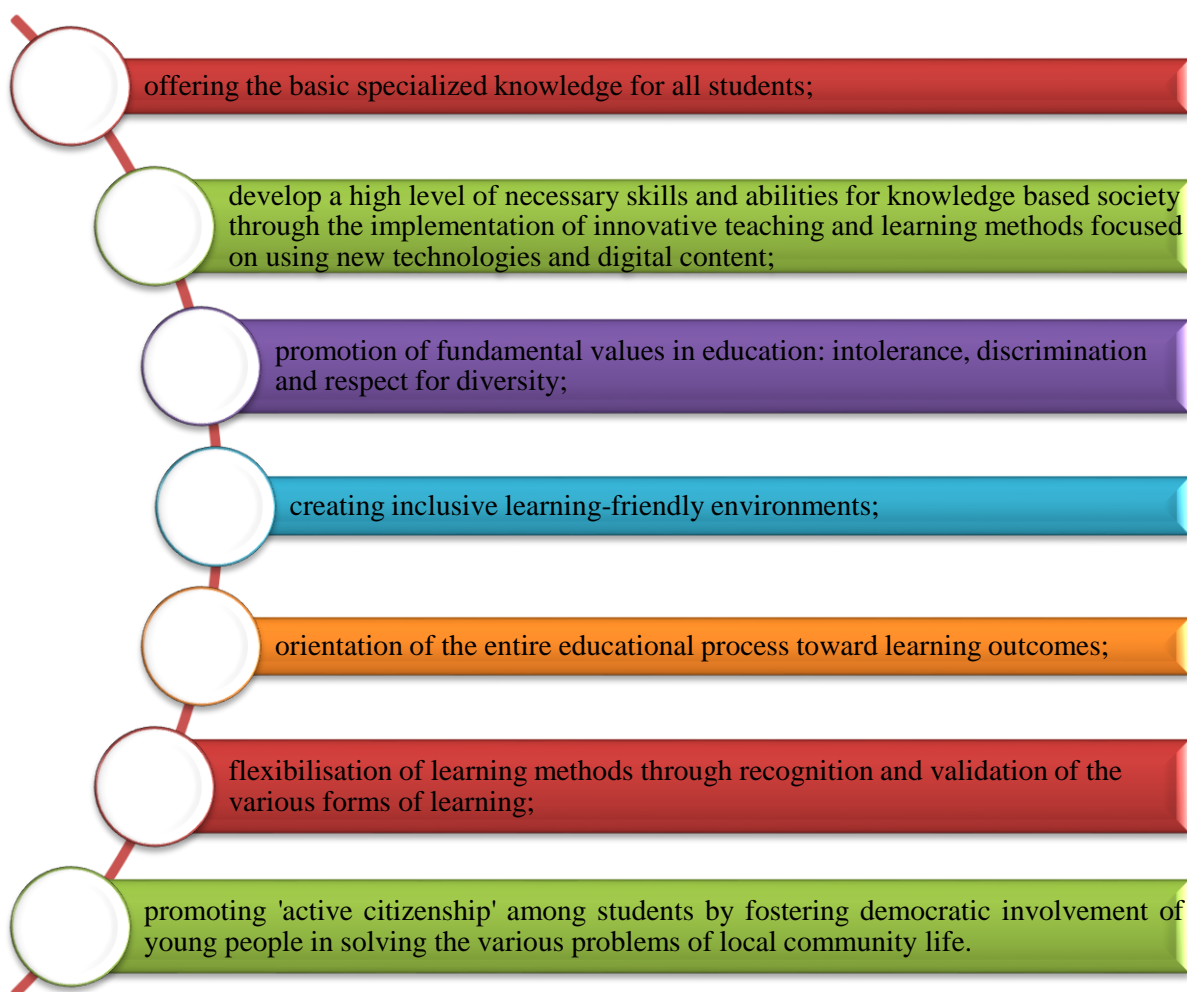


Figure 4. Orientations of HEIs, as a need to revise nowadays society

Undoubtedly, modernization of European society can only occur by **investing in education**. The European higher education institutions (HEIs) require professionals and, in order to attract and retain the high quality academic staff, which European society needs so much, the University should focus its attention on *recognizing and rewarding excellence in teaching and research*.

4. References

- ***(2015). Dezvoltator de e-learning. *E-Mentor: Dezvoltarea de competențe și abilități TIC și Mentorat educațional al persoanelor cu dizabilități, pentru profesori/Developer of e-learning. E-Mentor: Developing skills and ICT skills and education mentoring of persons with disabilities, for teachers*. Romania: Proiectul POSDRU 140877.
- Agencia Executivă pentru Învățământ, Audiovizual și Cultură (2011). *Datele cheie referitoare la învățare și inovare prin intermediul TIC în școlile din Europa 2011/Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at the Schools in Europe 2011*. Brussels: Eurydice. Retrieved from <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>.
- Agencia Executivă pentru Învățământ, Audiovizual și Cultură (2011). *Datele cheie referitoare la învățare și inovare prin intermediul TIC în școlile din Europa – 2011/ Datele cheie referitoare la învățare și inovare prin intermediul TIC în școlile din Europa 2011/*. Brussels: Eurydice.
- Bollaert, L. (2014). *A Manual for Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. Brussels: EURASHE.
- Chaminade, C., & Vang-Lauridsen, J. (2008). Globalisation of knowledge production and regional innovation policy: supporting specialized hubs in the Bangalore software industry. *Research Policy, Vol 37, No 10*, 1684-1696.
- Comenius, J. A. (1970). *Didactica Magna*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
- Comisia Europeană. (2013, September 25). Deschiderea educației: Metode inovatoare de predare și învățare pentru toți, facilitate de noile tehnologii și de resursele educaționale deschise/Opening Education: Innovative methods of teaching and learning for all, facilitated by new technologies and the open educational resources. *COM (2013) 654 final*. Brussels.
- Comisia Europeană (2015). *Educație și formare/Education and Training*. Retrieved December 11, 2015, from http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/quality-relevance_ro.htm.
- Cornett, A. P. (2009). Aims and strategies in regional innovation and growth policy: a Danish perspective. *Entrepreneurship and regional Development, Vol 21, No 4*, 339-420.
- Davidson, J., & Lockwood, M. (2008). Partnerships as instruments of good regional governance: innovation for sustainability in Tasmania? *Regional Studies, Vol 42, No 5*, 641-656.
- Egashira, S. (2014). *Globalism and Regional Economy*. Oxon: Routledge.
- ENQA; ESU; EUA; EURASHE. (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education*. Brussels: EURASHE.
- European Commission. (2013). *Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2015). *Education and Training Monitor 2014 Romania*. Brussels: Education and Training.
- Kitagawa, F. (2013). City-regions, innovation and universities. In P. Cooke, *Re-framing Regional Development* (pp. 341-358). London: Routledge.
- Kwiek, M. (2008). *Tertiary Education and Regional Economic Competitiveness and Innovation from a Central European Perspective*. OECD Thematic Review seminar, Budapest.
- Maier, G., & Trippel, M. (2014). Regional policy in a globalized economy. In S. Egashira, *Globalism and Regional Economy* (pp. 1-15). Oxon: Routledge.
- Voiculescu, F., Bocoș, M., Potolea, D., Cucuș, C., Cozma, T., & Manolescu, M. (POSDRU/87/1.3/S/63709). Elaborarea programului de formare în domeniul didacticii specialității/Developing training program in the field of specialty didactics. *Calitate, inovare, comunicare în sistemul de formare continuă a didacticienilor din învățământul superior/Quality, innovation, communication in continuous training system of higher education academics*. Romania: Ministerului Educației, Cercetării, Tineretului și Sportului.