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Learning Cities, Regions and Learning Communities: Some Characteristics of the Development of the Pécs Learning City-Region Forum and the Messages of the PURE Project

The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD to Promote Quality Human Resources Development with Adult and Lifelong Learning

Since the millennium, many universities of the former socialist countries have renewed the move towards understanding and making use of university adult and continuing education, as well as lifelong and life-wide learning, in order to promote a holistic approach to higher education management and development. The Institute of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs joined The NUCE Network (Thematic Network in University Continuing Education) of EUCEN in the year 2000. Our input and commitment to that networking, in accordance with the Memorandum,¹ was the elaboration and analysis of quality assurance in university adult education so as to develop university lifelong learning with two current case studies. However, the University of Pécs could use current working tools and methodology to help university management handle challenges such as better management, quality assurance, curriculum development, policy issues of LLL, marketing, finance and staff development and partnership building.

Networking through EUCEN has helped the University of Pécs to make use of the international experience of partner universities in such important areas as the management of university lifelong learning, a policy for lifelong learning, regional development, organisational structures, e-learning management for lifelong learning, marketing, staff development, financial management, and future trends.

Also, the Institute of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs hosted the 23rd EUCEN Conference in 2002 with a title that would indicate a challenging aspect of complex university management: *'Teachers, Facilitators, Mentors or Managers? New Roles and Competences for Academics in a Lifelong Learning University.'* This event emphasised the need for networking in university lifelong learning in Hungary and the surrounding regions and the challenge to implement new roles and required competences when managing a higher education institution. Most of the forecasted trends appeared in further projects of EUCEN (<http://www.eucen.eu>), like BEFLEX or BEFLEX+ and Equipe and Equipe + which strongly influence current debates on university lifelong learning.

The Institute and, from 2004, its succeeding Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs placed great emphasis on the quality-development of cooperation with non-university partners, such as cultural organisations, museums, libraries, civic organisations and associations, and local and regional councils. The main driver was embedded in the new vision and practice of university management when trying to change for university lifelong learning. The Grundtvig Programme of the Socrates II. between 2000 and 2006, promoted many lifelong learning initiatives and helped us not to just simply work together with museum experts on how to train museum educators, develop curriculum for such staff mem-

bers, but also how to learn from them by becoming a more learner-centred organisation. Projects such as EUROEDULT (<http://www.euroedult.fefi.pte.hu>), and DILLMULI (<http://www.dillmuli.fek.pte.hu>) added to this process.

However, between 1995 and 2006, the adult and continuing education programme of our Faculty, which had already been involved in a two-way system of a 3+2 level of college-level degree and a university degree for cultural organisation or management/personnel organisation or management, became a single BA level of Adult Education (3 years). At least four MA programmes (2 years) in Adult Education, Adult Education Teacher, Library-Informatics Management and Human Resources Management referred to the Bologna process, underlining the importance and roles of competence-based curriculum development.

In order to be able to follow the main trends in European adult and continuing education in higher education, the Institute of Adult Education, later Faculty, participated in Grundtvig projects such as ALPINE (Adults Learning and Participating in Education) (http://www.qub.ac.uk/alpine/ALPINE/MAIN_PAGE.htm), between 2001 and 2003, TEACH (Teaching Adult Educators in Continuing and Higher Education) between 2003 and 2006.² These projects accelerated a significant change in our curriculum development, teaching and research orientation, methodology and competence development of the teaching staff by making use of project achievements as research and development tools. In this way, the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD has promoted curriculum development, both to respond to competence changes and challenges in local and regional environment and to integrate current academic approaches into a national and international dimension.

In connection with university lifelong learning and management and the development of adult and continuing education from 2003 onwards, the Institute and the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs have been participating in MELLearn (the Hungarian Lifelong Learning Network.) as a founding member. The MELLearn-network has so far organised five national-international conferences to deal with key issues of higher education institutions applying, analysing, researching or developing lifelong education and learning in order to help universities respond to their management issues in relation to lifelong learning and/or local or regional knowledge transfer. Conference themes have reflected APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) in 2004; cooperation with non-educational organisations to develop human resources in 2005; adult education and training functions of higher education; higher education and the economy; training of adult educators; E-learning in adult education in 2006; adult education experiences and opportunities for higher education in 2007; lifelong learning networking and co-operation of higher education institutions as regional knowledge centres in 2008 and, finally, strategies, technologies and methods of learning and knowledge societies in 2009. Researchers of adult education and lifelong learning of the Faculty participated in those conferences and presented their research papers at many occasions in order to have them appearing in the conference follow-up booklets. The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD has constantly been involved in the preparatory management activities of those national conferences and project meetings and, thereby, has potentially influenced Hungarian ways of thinking of university lifelong learning in a wider European and international perspective.

The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD has been involved in other development issues and research to demonstrate its holistic approach to education and learning. First of all, a significant number of Erasmus networking connections has been carried out with scientifically distinguished European and non-European universities in the field of adult education and HRD. A small selection of academic connections includes those from Berlin (Humboldt Universität, Germany) to Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium) and from Torun (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland) to Duisburg-Essen (Germany), or

from Klagenfurt (Alpen-Adria Universität, Austria) to Rovaniemi (Lapin Yllipisto, Finland). Conversely a well-organised teaching, research and development network welcomed participants from the University of Pécs in many activities both as students and teachers and in research. Therefore, the University of Pécs has always tried to bring in quality work, enthusiasm and reliability with openness whilst insisting on analysing reforms and innovation in university lifelong learning focusing on labour market needs, citizenship issues and social inclusion. One particularly relevant project was the aforementioned Framework Programme V research project, RE-ETGACE (http://www.socsci.kun.nl/re-etgace/RE-ETGACE_FinalReport.pdf), between 2003 and 2004, which scrutinised the development and status of citizenship and governance in Romania and Hungary.

Two further projects that sought to demonstrate quality research in the field of higher education's involvement in the development of local and regional learning organisations were LILARA (Learning in Local and Regional Authorities (www.lilaraproject.com)) and PENR3L (www.penr3l.feek.pte.hu). Between 2005 and 2007, LILARA targeted issues which influence and challenge learning in local and regional councils and in companies, associations and networks within their sphere of influence. PENR3L united those European universities researching and developing local and regional communities through the support of the Pascal Observatory, an international research network of local, regional universities, and regional and national governments, in strong relations with OECD. An interesting result of the partnership with PASCAL was that the Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs held the annual international PASCAL conference in Pécs in September 2007³, and the University of Pécs became an official member of the Pascal Observatory in 2008.

By becoming active members of EUCEN, EAEA, PASCAL, and MELLearn, the University of Pécs and its Faculty of Adult Education have been able to follow the main trends and challenges in university lifelong learning, especially in the field of university adult and continuing education and research. Our researchers and experts are regular participants in the European Commission monitoring programmes, such as the Action Plan on Adult Learning⁴ (European Commission, 2007) and, with the Institute of Lifelong Learning of UNESCO, on the CONFINTEA process.⁵

At the same time, we can share our experience with other universities, as in case of the TEMPUS projects (e.g. the TEMPUS 3LUC – Lifelong Learning in University Context : (<http://www.grad.hr/tempus3luc/>) in Croatia between 2006 and 2007 and through the Danube Rectors' conferences (<http://drc.elte.hu>) (e.g. the DRC Conference at Eötvös University in Budapest in September, 2008) and summer schools dealing with University Lifelong Learning (<http://www.drc2007.idresearch.hu/htmls/mainpage.html>).

An important event happened in the fall of 2008 when, eight years after the publication of the *Memorandum*, the EUA (the European University Association) published its *Charter on Lifelong Learning*, making use of EUCEN's BEFLEX and BEFLEX+ recommendations (<http://www.eucen.eu/beflex.html>). We recognise that document as major first step in a complex direction with flexible approaches and tools and regional engagement towards innovation and research. We do believe that an essential part of university lifelong learning is to enable people to understand the main reasons behind the rise of lifelong education and learning and to learn from its almost century-old history and remind higher education that change is the essence of organisational learning when one is trying to recognise the challenges of managing an university of lifelong learning.⁶

The Example of the Learning Region Forum – A Chance to Promote a ‘new learning climate’ by Higher Education through Regional Development

The changing role of Hungarian higher education in local and regional development can be incorporated into recent networking frameworks where there is an opportunity to create new channels of teaching and learning, to stimulate knowledge transfer between stakeholders, economic organisations, and education and training systems. A new learning climate is based and developed through holistic lifelong learning research that covers not only education and training, but also into research and development systems and other corporate responsibilities of higher education institutions in Hungary.

The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD of the University of Pécs has initiated a discussion amongst the City Council of Pécs, the South Transdanubian Regional Labour Center, the Pécs-Baranya Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Pécs Regional Training Centre to develop adult education and training in the frame of a ‘Learning City-Region Forum’.

The Department for Human Affairs of the City Council of Pécs organised the first meeting for leaders of those institutions and organisations in 2008 where delegates discussed major issues in relation to the planned Forum and its structure. The Faculty of Adult Education and HRD plan to host, each quarter, sessions of the Forum to discuss current trends and issues, and to promote public presentations on adult and lifelong learning related to formal, non-formal and informal settings.

The group’s main aim is to develop a better learning climate for adult learners in traditional and new environments, as suggested by Baert⁷ and to help the partners within the consortium to collect and share best practice for quality learning in both economic and social topics within an international, national and regional spectrum. Some other organisations and associations have also joined the initiative, e.g. the County of Baranya, Pécs-Baranya Association for Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge (TIT), the House of Civic Associations/House of Educators, the Pécs Cultural Centre (PKK), Baranya County Cultural and Tourism Centre, Pannon Association for Organising Vocational Training, Multidimensional Association for Development of Pécs and Its Surrounding Settlements, South Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency and the South Transdanubian Regional Development Agency.

The PURE Project and the Participation of the South Transdanubian Region

In the autumn of 2008, the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture decided to finance the participation of the South Transdanubia region in South-western Hungary in the research and development project of the Pascal Observatory entitled PURE (PASCAL Universities in Regional Engagement) Project. From the beginning of 2009, the Pascal Observatory has helped 19 regions from all over the world to participate in the project so as to develop their universities’ higher education management for innovation, research through partnership building and accelerate learning amongst higher education and economic actors (firms, including SMEs), social partners, local councils, etc.

Core research questions of PURE encouraged partners at the University of Pécs, Kaposvár University, representatives of the Regional Innovation Agency and Regional Research Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) to form a Regional Co-ordinating Group to prepare relevant documents and surveys describing the main aspects of South Transdanubian geography, economics, social composition, educational–research–innovation–development potentials, public transportation, etc. together with the key issues and challenges confronting the region. But the essential research questions of PURE simply reflected a group of key issues of regional development:

- “Within universities, how is the ‘third mission’ (i.e. engagement with community and society beyond teaching and research) being developed and implemented?
- In what ways is the globalisation of the economy changing regional economic, social, environmental and cultural policies? What are the implications for university regional engagement activities?
- What role is national and regional policy on the third mission of universities playing in overcoming barriers to university regional engagement activities?
- To what extent and in what ways are national and regional policies on sustainable development, the implementation of lifelong learning, and on innovation and research policy having an impact on university regional engagement activities?
- To what extent and in what ways is regional (and national) governance and administrative behaviour having an impact on university regional engagement activities?”⁸

The Coordinating Group members from Kaposvár and Pécs organised programmes for two regional visits in Spring 2009 and 2010 of a special Consultative Development Group, which tried to cover those, listed issues within the particular Hungarian environment. On the one hand, not only did the two host universities have to collect their major local and regional partners for discussions with whom they work on educational/training, or research and innovation development, but the visiting scholars who were making the survey met several individual stakeholders to assess the economic, social/political and even cultural potentials of the particular region. This Development Group prepared two follow-up reports on the visits to the region, which became a reflective, concrete package of proposals for development and regeneration by pointing out particular strengths and weaknesses of the region and of its two universities. The Pécs Learning City-Region Forum decided to make use of those visiting reports and to invite Kaposvár University to the Forum. At the same time, members of the Forum proposed to simply consider each proposal through a systematic debate on how to generate a more conscious approach by university management to the planning of research and development and to quality education and training programmes.

In April 2010, key findings of the second visiting report emphasised the impact of some aspects of the regions’ social and economic conditions with these conclusions:

- „1. The South Transdanubian Region, like the rest of Hungary, is suffering from economic deterioration; unemployment in the Region is now above 18 % of the workforce.
2. Although the economic situation is less dire than in Greece, Hungarian public finances are not stable enough to ensure predictable funding levels for higher education institutions. This is exacerbated in 2010 since it is an election year.
3. The Region faces important physical barriers to economic and social integration into the broader European framework. The new highway to Budapest (set to open this Spring) will improve physical connections, and the region’s competitiveness for business location. But the lack of commercial air connections remains a problem, especially for attracting multi-national firms and tourists.
4. The Region faces important social barriers for integration. One example is the difficulty of expanding the use of languages other than Magyar. Another is the difficulty of integrating the Region’s large minority of Roma citizens.
5. The Region is being transformed gradually by its political and economic integration into the

European Union. But the process has many contradictions that focus public attention on the negative aspects while understating the benefits. For example, it is ironic that most civic discourse focuses on the negative consequences of the EU, even though most civic initiatives and almost all public improvements in the Region today are financed directly by funds from the EU.

6. On balance, despite the natural frustrations that come with today's very difficult economic context, the CDG find a deeply held optimism about the Region's future. This optimism is shared widely among the growing network of younger civic leaders, many of whom are building strong working relationships with one another.”⁹

On the current status and patterns of university–regional engagement the same visiting report concluded that:

„1. We learned much more about the full range of regional engagements that exist at the two principal institutions of higher education in the Region: the University of Pécs and Kaposvár University. Each University has achieved an impressive set of first-rate examples of engagement. The process for achieving these results has been very different in each place, highlighting the importance of flexibility in university–regional engagement initiatives more generally.

2. In case of Pécs, the term strategic ambiguity characterises the overall character of university–regional engagement. Although parts of University of Pécs are very old, the unified institution is very new. As a result its different components have diverse traditions, and different points of view about engagement. Instead of sparking controversy by insisting on one unified policy for the entire University, its leadership has for several years encouraged a decentralised approach. The result has been a portfolio of the successful examples discussed in this report. The strength of these successes has recently created a new practice of regular meetings between the University and government leaders, and the first generally worded agreement between them to cooperate on several key issues. This model of gradualism may hold promise for other regions.

3. In case of Kaposvár, the model is different. Kaposvár University is also a relatively new institution comprising components that have existed for many years and some new developments. Unlike Pécs, each component has had a tradition of direct engagement with the city. One city official could not imagine not having strong, direct ties to the University. Consequently university–regional engagement in Kaposvár is much more explicit and direct.

4. In both cases, we observed the emergence of a decentralised network of ‘civic entrepreneurs’ including younger leaders from local governments, local higher education, and local non-governmental organisations as well as more experienced individuals who serve in mentoring roles. Individuals in this network share optimism about the Region's future, despite their common experience of difficulties today. This network however appears to be poorly connected to the private sector.

5. The variety of engagement models and practices is evidence of widespread acceptance that higher education will play a vital role in the Region's future development. Local and regional leaders are developing creative initiatives that leverage the assets of HEIs to benefit the Region. The principal constraint is a lack of autonomy over their own affairs. These are often limited by the need to obtain approvals from national funding agencies in Budapest and/or European funders in Brussels.”⁹

It also became apparent by the PURE survey that South Transdanubia should seek to influence the national policy environment through its different channels in the following directions:

- “to support greater flexibility in university curriculum development;
- to ease pathways to accrediting new programmes and elements in response to demonstrated needs, for example by relaxing the course-coding system;
- for effective transparent credit transfer and progression from technical (VET or further) into higher education, also enabling more continuing education and lifelong learning of adults as well as young people;
- to review universities’ governance, allowing greater flexibility to create spin-off companies from research into commercial activities, allowing part of the surplus to be returned to the University and to support non-profit making endeavours.”⁹

It is obvious that the Region should seek to influence EU funding through the national government to raise the quantum of EU funding flowing to rural and remote areas via the Leader Programme, and for balanced social and economic development that builds on traditional knowledge and skills; Also, the Region should ensure that programmes respond to needs and priorities best known locally.

As a summary on the impact of the PURE project on the development of university regional engagement, one must recognize that a region from a country from the former Socialist-block, a country and its society in transition is in a complex learning process or a ‘learning constraint’. To change its habit towards outlining, establishing, and developing partnership amongst relevant stakeholders and to promote regional development through education/training, innovation and research, and to enable quality learning of individual and organisational formations, is a new experience. The learning city–region initiative has started to direct higher education towards this model in the last 3–4 years so that it can develop capacity, and change direction on co-operation in research and innovation for the development of its human and social capital in a flexible way.

The Pascal Observatory, its former projects, LILARA, PENR3L, and current ones, such as PURE, R3L+ and EUROLOCAL, have given a major push to the implementation of the learning region model and, more concretely, have helped universities to recognize its importance, and to initiate issues and projects on local and regional development, focusing mainly on economic and social affairs and challenges. The Pécs Learning City–Region Forum will, on the one hand, act as a platform for PURE-oriented issues, and, on the other, move those objectives to be more in line with networking in the regional dimension of South Transdanubia. For example it will foster deeper partnership with Kaposvár, Szekszárd and their localities, and, also, with Kaposvár University, as the other regional university participating in the PURE visit programmes. One last aspect of PURE is to foster partnership building of higher education with cultural and heritage cluster developments and incorporate them into the Pécs Learning City–Region Forum so that a development model close to the one currently called ‘the Modern Renaissance’ (<http://www.pascalobservatory.org/pumr>) at some British universities can be built.

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