

Chapter XI

Reviewing Traces of Virtual Campuses: From a Fully Online Virtual Campus to a Blended Model

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ABSTRACT

The chapter first describes the concepts of virtual campus and virtual mobility and refers to several past and present projects and initiatives in the field. Through these previous experiences, a shift of concepts is noticed: from the fully online virtual campus to virtual mobility, whereby the more traditional universities open their borders and “blended models” gain more and more interest. Three cases demonstrate this evolution: the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) is progressively organising its educational support from a multicampus perspective; the Open University of The Netherlands is broadening its tasks towards lifelong learning; and in the GIS case, the virtual campus is used as a strategic means to

ensure a valuable and transdisciplinary approach. To redefine the concept of virtual campus in order for it to be applicable to the changed educational needs of today, the Re.ViCa project has been set up. The project makes an inventory and systematically reviews cross-institutional virtual campuses from the past decade. Outputs will include a set of recommendations that can be applied to ensure the realisation of new successful virtual campus initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The European Commission has set a goal in its Integrated Action Programme in Lifelong Learning that by 2012, three million European students should participate in the Erasmus programme. But what about the remaining 80% of students that do not have the opportunity to participate in Erasmus for social, financial or other reasons? Virtual mobility and virtual campus schemes could offer educational opportunities that are no longer location dependent and allow for collaboration with foreign students and teachers and thus promote intercultural understanding.

Apart from these cross-cultural and mobility aspects, a virtual campus has a huge potential to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning: adult learners are part of the “non-traditional students” universities want to target. They learn from their homes, after work in the time that is available for them. But also on-campus students, due to working life, social conditions and other constraints are demanding more individualised and flexible learning pathways.

This, in fact, responds to the European Commission’s “Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe”. Key issues that are mentioned in reaching the implementation of strategic objective “Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems” are: “Delivering education and training so that adults can effectively participate and combine their participation in learning with other responsibilities and activities” and also “Promoting flexible learning paths

for all”. In many universities nowadays there is indeed a strong desire to open up the campus, to break down the barriers that have traditionally kept out those not directly involved in full-time courses and to invite the citizen to share the academic richness of the modern-day university. It is therefore of the utmost importance that decision makers are aware of the possibilities but also the pitfalls of virtual campuses.

The following section provides some broad definitions of what is understood by and what the benefits are of virtual mobility and virtual campus activities. Through previous experiences of past and present projects and initiatives in the field, a shift of concepts from virtual campus to virtual mobility and more “blended models” is noted. The next section also describes this evolution more in depth with three case studies: the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) which is progressively organising its educational support from a multicampus perspective; the Open University of the Netherlands which is broadening its tasks towards lifelong learning; and the GIS case shows how a virtual campus can be used as a strategic means to ensure a valuable and transdisciplinary approach. The last section presents the Re.ViCa project, which has been set-up with the aim to redefine the concept of virtual campus in order for it to be applicable to the educational needs of today. The project furthermore makes an inventory and systematically reviews cross-institutional virtual campuses from the last decade to identify a set of action points that can be applied to ensure the realisation of new successful virtual campus initiatives.

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