

## Editorial

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The present issue highlights successes and weaknesses, lights and shade, occurring worldwide within the epochal process of reforms investing higher education and its actors and stakeholders.

The epochal paradigm shift, from input-centered to student-centered education, which in the last decades progressively penetrated the sequence of all educational levels from primary school to tertiary education, is experiencing a tumultuous and highly non-linear implementation process at university level. The general process regards huge numbers of people, whether actors or stakeholders, and its duration can hardly be predicted or even envisaged. Nevertheless, several related area processes, both at a macro and at a micro level are steadily in progress. In the present issue we present a number of successful micro-level initiatives and processes as well as the problematic messages which come from a fresh attempt to monitor the extent of the macro-process in the European area.

As to Europe, the macro-process is under debate and scrutiny since 1999, when a group of European Ministers of University and/or Education started the so called Bologna process. This latter soon became not only a process of convergence of several European HE systems, but a great ‘laboratory’ for the overall modernization of HEIs and for the concrete implementation of the educational paradigm shift. Operational activities underlying this specific most important aspect were already present in a limited number of countries, but the novelty here was the internationalization of the process, through a deep and convinced methodological dialogue and the identification of common reference points, in terms of competences and learning outcomes. The Tuning project and its promoters were key actors in such an overall process, at first in Europe but soon also in other world areas. This gave origin to a worldwide Tuning community, whose distinctive character was the dialogue and the common growth around shared concepts and methods,

which could easily be implemented at grass root level. In any case, the Tuning methodology gained universal reputation and can offer by now several concrete tools, which help implementing micro-processes of relevance in the general scenario of the paradigm shift. Moreover, the Tuning communities around the world enjoy the proactive thrust of the Tuning Academy, which promotes projects in several world areas and foster research initiatives, both within projects (e.g. the recent research forum held within the Tempus project Tuning MEDA) and with the DITA (Deusto International Tuning Academy) fellowships program. Do notice that as many as three articles of the present issue are a fruit of those fellowships (see below).

In the frame of this wide and articulated scenario, the first three articles of the present issue deal with the successful application of the Tuning methodological tools in three different and quite concrete, micro-cases, i.e.:

- *Defining the degree profile for a new interdisciplinary degree course.* The article by Ann-Marie Hughes, Chris Freeman, Tom Banks, Hans Savelberg, and Mary Gobbi represents an example of the use of Tuning methodology to construct benchmark learning outcomes and competences in an interdisciplinary area of healthcare practice. The experience described shows a collaborative process of European specialist rehabilitation technologists and educationalists aimed at developing the core competences and learning outcomes required by future Master's graduates in the new discipline of Advanced Rehabilitation Technologies. Future employability needs are determined through an imaginative, technological, and cost conscious entrepreneurial approach to education.
- *Assessing the quality of the degree programme for Teacher Education at Alexandria University in Egypt by means of the Tuning survey tool "relevance vs achievement", applied to the programme generic and subject specific competences.* The research article by Alsaeed Alshamy, based on the survey results in four groups of interested stakeholders plus some semi-structured interviews, evidences the significant gap existing between the deemed importance of the competences and their actual achievement. The author is led to interpret the gap in terms of missing paradigm shift from staff-centered to student oriented programmes and suggests a rich set of appropriate measures to reverse the situation in Alexandria, with an eye to extend the process to other African universities. This article was conceived and prepared with the support of DITA fellowships program.
- *Curriculum design by use of the Tuning methodology at two different institutions: commonalities and differences.* The article by Letícia

Soares de Vasconcelos Sampaio Suñe and Roberto de Armas Urquiza offers insights on competence-based curriculum development through the comparison of models applied at Deusto University (Spain) and at Tiradentes University (Brazil). The analysis deepens several aspects such as educational theories, curriculum design, psycho-pedagogical guidelines, teaching, learning, and evaluation methodologies. Authors present and discuss convergences of the approaches used in both institutions, but also differences and challenges of competence-based education, highlighted for mutual learning and for the purpose of transferability to other contexts. Again, this article is a fruit of the DITA fellowship program.

The remaining articles deal with more general aspects, in a musical ‘*crescendo*’, which rises from a well tuned composition to a modern assemblage of sounds, seemingly out of tune.

The article by Sabina Hodzic “*raises the important and topical subject of developing generic competences in Doctoral students to prepare them better become entrepreneurs*”. It gives substance to the often discussed issue whether doctoral training may have jobs perspectives other than pure research. The research carried out by Hodzic investigates the expectations regarding “entrepreneurial competences”, in a group of entrepreneurs based in Bilbao area, many of them belonging to the University of Deusto’s first Technology Based Business Nursery (TBBN). The 20 most important competences out of a set of 40 competences, selected from the specialized literature, were then assessed by a larger group of doctoral candidates in terms of relevance and achievement, mirroring a well-established Tuning surveying practice and leading to a shared proposal of the set “entrepreneurial competences”. This article, again, was conceived with the support of a DITA fellowship.

The article by Maria Cinque offers an updated systematic overview regarding generic competences. The article is also based on a couple of related European projects. It focuses on the soft skills development in European countries, exploring some classifications and presenting best practices and methods for teaching and learning strategies, which at University level can promote and foster the development of generic competences. The Author offers a cross-institutional analysis and identifies the most important soft skills needed for a successful transition from University to the labour market. Starting from a chronological excursus of relevant studies in the literature on employability skills, she presents quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (focus groups) research from Europe and Third Countries, identifying the range of soft skills relevant for newly graduates.

Finally, the last article in the issue, by Tim Birtwistle, Courtney Brown, and Robert Wagenaar tries to answer the question “Where are we now in Europe in the actual provision of student centered learning opportunities?” The article explores the achieved changes in university education following the start of the Bologna process 15 years ago and the role played by methodologies (not only Tuning) related to the already discussed educational paradigm shift and based on learning outcomes and competences. The authors describe their research tool, based on *ad hoc* surveys and on-site visits at a group of universities. The research was carried out in both Europe and USA. The article describes the EU findings, with some limited hints to US results in the “surveys part” of the study. The report on the “visits part” of the study (visits at 14 universities in Europe) confirms the poor penetration of the learning outcomes-based approach in the European academic world and at varying extent in its several components, which show worrying gaps or “disconnects” in the actual relevance and/or perceived awareness of the macro process. In the optimistic wording of one reviewer, the article “*brings a fresh picture of the situation and some important conclusions, even alerts. The article is open and provocative, and therefore it can be expected to stimulate a debate among researchers in this field*”.

As a conclusion to this editorial, we recall here, as a metaphor, the physical phenomenon of metal melting. A large piece of metal does not become liquid all of a sudden, but the transition from solid to liquid occurs via the formation of many tiny liquid islets around promoting sites. The islets become progressively larger and, when they start overlapping among themselves, that is the time for the metal to become liquid. No macro melting occurs without growing micro islets. In our view, this can represent the processes happening in higher education nowadays and we hope that institutions can learn from each other’s micro practices and build common platforms of reflection and development towards the macro growth of the higher education worldwide area.