

Universities: new challenges, old attitudes



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EQUALITY

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Editorial



Sarah Remsky
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Andreja Koršič
Serbia

The face of Europe's universities is changing fast. These days, more women than ever are in higher education, people from diverse backgrounds come together to study and more and more students decide to move abroad to complete their education. In short: universities are Europe's new melting pot.

These rapid changes also create new challenges for education to solve. For even though education should really be a standard, it still is a privilege for many.

Particularly, people from disadvantaged backgrounds face many hurdles before and at university (pages 6-7). We have talked to education expert Howard Williamson (page 5), who said that treating these students with an "iron fist and the velvet glove" would increase their success in higher education.

The costs of education in terms of tuition fees have become an ever-growing problem for students all over Europe. Some even have to resort to prostitution to be able to fund their studies (page 10). Also, women now outperform men at higher education (page 11). Additionally, we have had a look at the challenges that come with studying abroad in a globalised educational world (page 8).

But even with regards to this rather grave outlook on the state of Europe's educational landscape, we should not forget the positive changes that have been made. There are many initiatives that seek to make Europe's education system better. On page nine, we present three of the best.

What this year's European Forum Alpbach has (in our opinion, sadly) not talked about, however, is how teaching needs to be revolutionised (page 4).

Education is essential to ensure continued advances in society. It is time to rethink its values, logic and morals and, in that process, create more equality.

Sarah Remsky
Andreja Koršič

THE MISSING SUBJECT AT ALPBACH

Whatever happened to teaching?

A burning question faces most universities: how should they best teach and how should students best learn. Yet the subject is missing from this year's Higher Education symposium. Anna Rigas asks why.

Take an ordinary introductory class at any university today: an instructor lectures for two hours and students dutifully take notes. One or two drop off to sleep.

"That is obviously not how we should teach in the future," said the Vice President of the European Forum Alpbach, Sonja Puntischer Riekmann. Here's how she explained why the vision of future was left off this year's Higher Education symposium.

"This year's main theme 'inequality' called upon many different topics. But it is a central question we should always ask ourselves: 'Why do we learn?' and 'how do we teach in the best

way?'" said the vice president and encouraged people to have the talk anyway.

As a board member and social scientist Professor Puntischer Riekmann was among those who chose the topics in this year's symposium.

OLD HABITS DIE HARD

"Questions concerning how we learn are crucial and should be discussed – also here in Alpbach," she said.

"However, being a university person myself, I know that in Austria it is an on-going discussion. My university gives

prizes to those who produce the best lessons and lectures," Prof Puntischer Riekmann said.

Established studies conducted over the past few decades show that it is impossible for students to take in and process all the information presented during a typical lecture, and yet, this remains one of the primary ways students are taught.

Getting professors to stop lecturing can be a hard sell, according to the vice president.

LECTURES REMAIN

"Professors tend to be rewarded for focusing on their research, often at the expense of their teaching. That makes it even more important to always strive to teach in the best way."

Even though teaching methods like group work and interaction have evolved and are now used in a much higher scale at universities, a majority of teaching remains lecture-based, recent data from European University Association, EUA reveals.

"Do we teach the right things with the right methods in the right ways?" asked Prof Puntischer Riekmann – stating that a lot of issues need to be solved.

"The financial crisis in the EU, wars in the Middle East, numerous refugees – you end the list. It shows the great importance of producing problem-solvers instead of the Wikipedia-kind of types," said Sonja Puntischer Riekmann. ■

▼ Sonja Puntischer Riekmann (left), Vice President of Alpbach Forum spoke to Anna Rigas about the future of teaching



Parity of esteem needed

VOCATIONAL VS
UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION



LUIZA PUJU

Universities need to do more to fit into their communities says Howard Williamson, a university professor and youth worker. He spoke to Andrea Korsič.

To Howard Williamson, working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is one of the ways of managing diversity among students in higher education.

“A homogenous student population is ‘the kiss of death’ to social sciences. You need the diversity of people from different backgrounds to gain different perspectives on life – without this, students cannot truly engage in social sciences,” Prof Williamson stated.

“With my students, I tend to relate to them in the same [way] as I used to relate to young people in my youth centre,” the Council of Europe researcher said.

To get a sense of the social situations his students were coming from, Prof Williamson asked them to write stories of their typical week at university.

LOWER GRADES

“Some are mothers, some are carers for ill parents,” he said. “The huge catalogue of external pressures that pulls away from learning is just unbelievable. It should strike us as quite amazing that most of these

students do complete their degrees.”

However, even if they do finish college, the final grade these students get is at a level lower than they could have achieved, and they are twice as disadvantaged in this respect.

A VICIOUS CIRCLE

“They are not usually at the elite universities and then they get levels of degrees that do not do justice to their own potential performance.

“This can spiral to leave them in non-graduate occupations after they finish and then they probably start questioning why they went to university in the first place. So you get this vicious circle.”

Prof Williamson says this issue is not a one-sided story. However, the question is whether the solution to the problem lies solely in getting all the youth to universities.

“Maybe we need to offer parity of esteem around apprenticeships, vocational learning and employment outcomes and earnings in non-graduate type of activities because not all of these young people want to come to university,” Prof Williamson said.

“They are not motivated even if

▲ Howard Williamson: “I can put you in touch with someone”

you expose them to the understanding and the opportunity to do so.”

The ones who do enrol to higher education institution require both additional financial and human support, Prof Williamson stated.

Indeed, human, and individual, support can make all the difference:

They start questioning why they went to university

“I say to my students, I’m your social capital, make demands on me because I can put you in touch with somebody that you can have discussion with, who would never talk to you if you just approached them cold.”

SOFTER TREATMENT

Prof Williamson suggests an “infrastructure between the sort of iron fist and the velvet glove” could be an approach.

“The velvet glove is gently understanding that these students are facing a lot of other pressures that probably they, as university teachers, did not experience when they were students.” ■

THE BACKGROUND BLOCK TO HIGHER EDUCATION

DEGREES NOT THE ONLY WAY

Disputes among generations over university education often divide families. Sarah Remsky and Ariana Perez investigate.

In 2012, the EU saw an estimated 20 million students attending university, a Eurostat report shows. For many, this is the obvious next step after high school in a direction of a brighter future. Yet, for some, particularly those who do not come from an educated background, this is not a feasible option.

According to Dr James Côté, Professor of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario, your upbringing has a great impact on your academic decisions.

“If you grew up in an environment in which your parents didn’t go to university, they might speak against it because they think it’s a waste of time,” he said.

FEES ARE NOT THE ISSUE

“You’re then likely to pick up that attitude and your horizons will be narrow. You wouldn’t want to go far away from where you grew up, you wouldn’t want to go to university for reasons like ‘my friends are going to think I’m better than them.’”

Dr Côté, who was the first one in his family to attend university, added that access to tertiary education for first-generation students is still a major hurdle to overcome.

“I went through that myself,” he said. “That’s one of the reasons why I am so familiar with this situation. And I also see it in my students, who come from a working-class background. It’s still a fairly widespread problem.”

Although US and Canada universities include remedial programmes that offer help for first generation students in order to help tackle this gap, only 20 per cent of the participants who start are actually successful, he said.

Would university fee reductions contribute towards a more equal access? According to Dr Côté, this would not make any difference. “In Canada, research shows it’s not about the money or income,” he said.

“The biggest predictor of whether or not someone will go to university is whether their parents went to university.”

Even though there are bursaries, scholarships, loans and many other ways to fund higher education, the problem with people who come from an uneducated background is that they lack information.

“They simply don’t know how to go about it and how to get the money to do it,” he explained.

But even for those who surpass



the household barriers and decide to go on to higher education, the hurdles do not stop there. Mary Tupan-Wenno, president of the European Access Network, a Non-Governmental Organisation, said there are more challenges to be faced once you are inside a university.

“If you look at the data, many first-generation students have a harder time being successful,” explained Ms Tupan-Wenno.

“The most important factors are, I

▲ Mary Tupan-Wenno: It’s about the lack of sense of belonging and academic self-confidence

Many first-generation students have a harder time being successful

think, the lack of sense of belonging and academic self-confidence. If your confidence is challenged, you are less inclined to take challenges.”

Ms Tupan-Wenno said universities are partly responsible to help these students succeed. According to her, it is not only about having the facilities, but it is also about ensuring they are practical.

“Universities could do more to help students, but do things differently,” she said.

TOO LATE FOR BLAME

“Having these programmes and infrastructures is one thing, but the focus on making it inclusive also asks for mentors, tutors or faculty members to engage with students to learn about the world students come from and be aware of their struggles.”

Dr Côté believes the contrary is true. “It’s too late to put the responsibilities on the universities,” he said.

“They can help out and provide scholarships or bursaries. Believe me, they’ve been trying for 50 years.

▼ Dr James Côté: It’s about your upbringing

But the fundamentals are rooted in early childhood, the psychological mind-set.”

One of his research topics, called “learning horizons”, shows that each person has a sense of being. Whether it is someone who belongs in a university is not a responsibility that he believes should be placed on the institution.

However, both experts agree that creating equal access to university for people from uneducated backgrounds needs to happen as early in life as possible.

Mary Tupan-Wenno’s organisation has initiated a project in the Netherlands – a mock-up of a university for young children. “The preparation for higher education needs to start right away,” she emphasised.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICE

Her project focuses on identity development by bringing young people to universities and letting them express themselves interactively.

Despite the challenges that first-generation students face before and after entering university, both Dr Côté and Ms Tupan-Wenno agreed that tertiary education can open doors to everyone, regardless of their personal and financial background. However, they also stated that university education is not the only path to a successful life.

“The flipside of the increased access to university is that there are many other very valuable, honourable and dignified things to do than to become a professor,” said Dr Côté.

Likewise, Ms Tupan-Wenno added that it should be the individual’s choice to steer which direction they want to go to.

“You should have the possibility to go to university if that’s what you want to do,” she continued. “This shouldn’t depend on how smart you are or which background you come from.” ■





They head west and north

MOBILE STUDENTS IN EUROPE AND FROM EUROPE

How many students in the world study abroad? Why did they leave home and what problems do they encounter? Alexander Solomonov and Taisiia Kutuzova find out.

Martin Unger, a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies, said that almost 46 per cent of mobile students in the world study in Europe, and most of them are from Europe as well.

“Hence, Europe is the destination for mobile students, but that’s because European students are very mobile within Europe.”

“However, if one looks at mobile students from a country as a share of the total student population of that country, we have, on average of the European countries, only three per cent mobile students,” he says.

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Students head abroad depending on their country of origin. The push factor means that students cannot find the course of study or cannot get a plan in one at home.

In their country, the programme which they want to study or they do not get a study place in their preferred programme. This is why small countries have high rates of mobile students. They might also face high fees in their own countries.

Pull factors could be: an especially attractive country, region or uni-

versity or the quality of education, including academic freedom in other countries.

The senior researcher told us that students prefer to study abroad in an English speaking country, a neighbouring state and richer countries. This is why, in Europe, students move from south and east to west and north.

“However, we do not have data from Russia, which also might be a very attractive country for its neighbours,” Mr Unger added.

Yet problems set in once students reach their new foreign university. “Unfortunately, discrimination even among students is increasing in many countries and, therefore, might be a threat that international students are not aware of.

“Social isolation might be another obstacle. Many international students want to have more contact with locals but often stay alone or with other international students,” he said.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Student Irina Sedunova from Russia studied in Canada. Her first problem was the language barrier. “It was difficult for me to start using short English sentences instead of long Russian ones.

The second challenge concerns her specialisation itself. “The Journalism that they taught us often used to be pro-American. They didn’t understand, that many features of it can’t be realised in a Russian reality,” explained Irina.

Alla Zhadova from Ukraine, currently studying in Germany, said that at her university out of 153 German students there were just five foreigners. “I used to feel like a ‘foreign body,’” she said.

Accommodation turned to be the second challenge: many foreign students had to wait weeks or months for a room, Alla stated. She says that the most difficult challenge for her was psychological: she had to cope with homesickness. ■

Top 5 platforms to find your study program

■ WWW.MLADIINFO.EU

Eastern Europe oriented web resource for free applications. The website has a very convenient navigation to choose your grant, study program or internship.

■ WWW.STUDENTCOMPETITIONS.COM

A website for youth competitions.

■ WWW.LETMEKNOW.IN

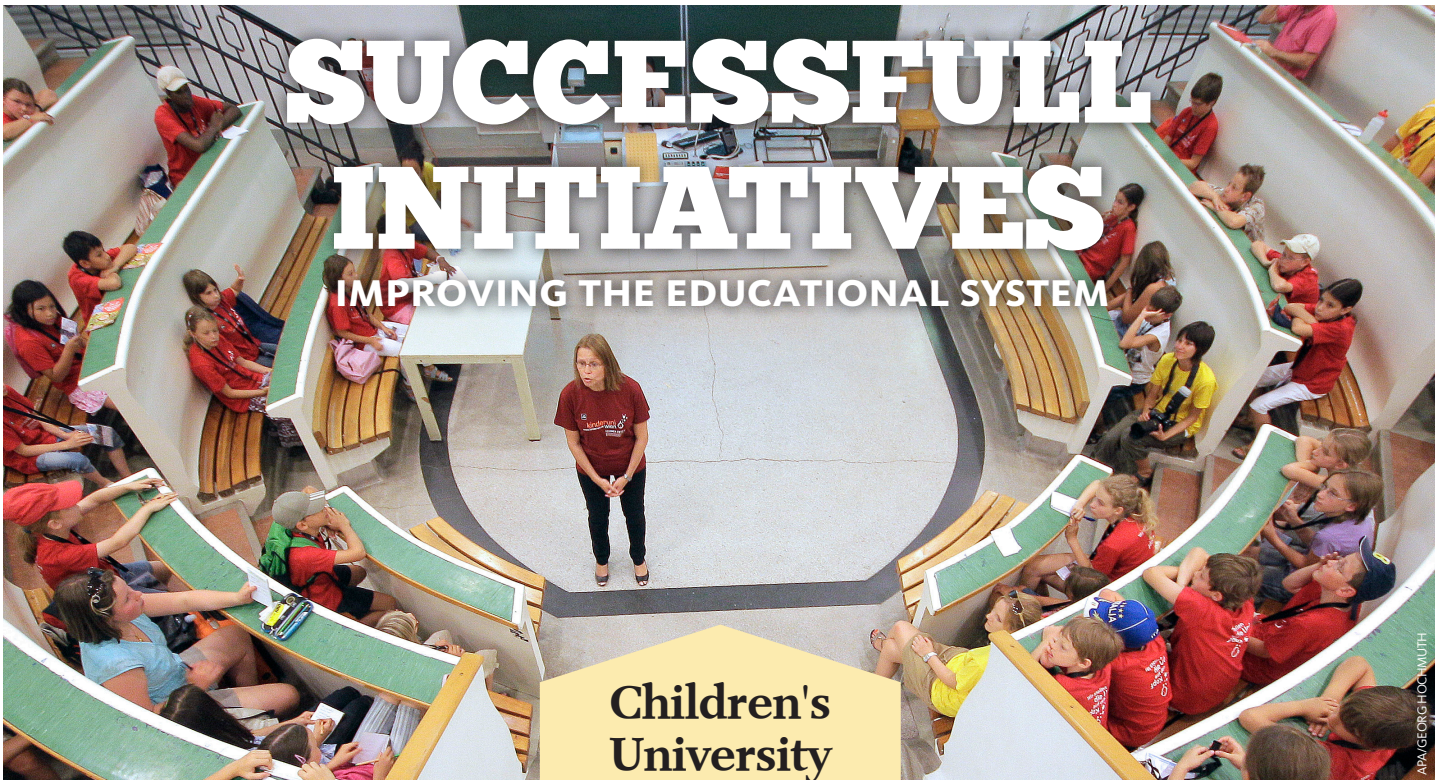
An Indian resource, which navigates all international programs.

■ WWW.EASTCHANCE.COM

Special advice from mladinfo.eu co-founder.

■ WWW.SCHOLARSHIPPORTAL.COM

An international scholarship navigator.



Children's University Vienna

KUganda: challenge of education

KUganda connects the German Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt with the University of Kampala, capital city of Uganda. Students and lecturers from Germany travel to Uganda every year for short or long-term internships. There, they participate in workshops on teaching methods. Trainers are chal-

lenged by different classroom situations such as 100 student class sizes and a greater reliance on the person of the teacher. The project also includes a radio station called Radio Hope Kampala that broadcasts an educational radio programme to families living far away from schools.

A university is only for grown-ups? Not in Vienna. The Children's University in Austria's capital is aimed at children from seven to 12-years-old.

For two weeks during the summer holidays, the children can attend up to ten different courses. Around 4,000 children have attended every year since the project was started in 2003. Around 500 lecturers prepare special seminars, workshops and lectures from different scientific fields. The collaboration of seven universities in Vienna is designed to spark enthusiasm for science from an early age.

100 mentors for Berlin youngsters

She is 10-years-old and would like to learn how to play the guitar. He is 12-years-old and has never visited a zoo. "One hundred mentors for Berlin" is a project by students from three Berlin universities to support children in need whose parents do not have the money or the time to support them adequate-

ly. Their website, www.100-paten-fuer-berlin.de, has information and helps find mentors for the network of child sponsorship in Berlin. The project was awarded the "Academy Pearl" by the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (Foundation for German Science) in 2013.

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Students sell bodies to meet university expenses

The economic crisis and the cost of university fees has led a growing number of female students in several European countries into prostitution, reports Vincenzo Genovese.

A report published by the University of Swansea, "The Student Sex Work Project" found that five per cent of UK students had worked in the sex industry at least once.

Freya, a 22-year-old student, got two "sugar daddies" to afford her career.

"My married partner gave me about £1,000 (€1361) a night. The divorced one gave me between £1,000 and £2,000 (€2,723) as an allowance," she told *BBC.com*.

For her, being a "sugar baby" showed better prospects than her previous job, where she earned £5 (€6.81)-an-hour in a bar, which was taking too much time away from her studies. "I know it's prostitution really, but I think there's such a ridiculous stigma attached to that word."

The need for money drove Sofia,

a 25-year-old girl from Madrid, to become a prostitute. "My father was fired and I could not pay the enrolment and the rent," she confessed to an Italian online magazine, *veinteminutos.es*.

"I worked as a waitress and as a delivery woman, but it was not enough. It is the only job that gives you €3,000 per month, but when I'll end my studies, I'll stop it."

LEFT WITH NO CHOICE

An Italian student, Miranda (not a real name) had the same idea three years ago, when she was at the second year of Economics in the University of Vicenza.

"With the money from first dates I bought drugs and a new phone. At the beginning, I just wanted money for my luxuries, but then I realised that I can pay my rent and other

expenses with this job."

Miranda lives in Vicenza where university fees are not too expensive (about €600 per year). Yet, she does not receive financial help from the state and could not get financial support from her family, because her parents had financial issues.

LOOKING FOR FUN

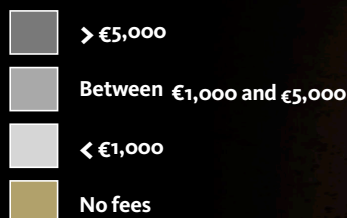
"I just work two days a week and I can earn, on average, €700. I could never reach this sum with another job. It is enough to cover all my expenses. Most of the men I meet are middle-aged. I think they are looking for high jinks with a young girl."

The claim for students on casual hook-up websites is so high that several profiles write "student" in their description, regardless of their occupation.

"I think that many men prefer students to aged professionals," Miranda says. "Firstly, because we are supposed to be cleaner and younger. But for me, it is also a matter of culture. People who pay for you want to have a delightful time." ■

Inequality in tuition costs

One factor that forces students to look for new ways to finance their lives – apart from costs of living – are tuition fees. These vary widely throughout Europe: While in England, most students have to pay more than €5,000 a year to access tertiary education, in Scandinavia, Germany or Austria, most students are exempt from fees. Most countries, however, range in between those extremes.



AP/HELMUT FOHRINGER



► Professor of Physics, Ille Gebeshuber (in the middle) among students at the breakout session, "Women and Technical Studies – a Minority Programme?!"

PHILIPP MADGERER

QUOTAS NEEDED TO BOOST MALE STUDENT NUMBERS IN MALAYSIA

Girls outperform boys

Women on the other side of the world are reversing gender inequality in education. In Malaysia, the number of female students is increasing annually, creating serious competition for males, Ecem Hepçiçekli reports.

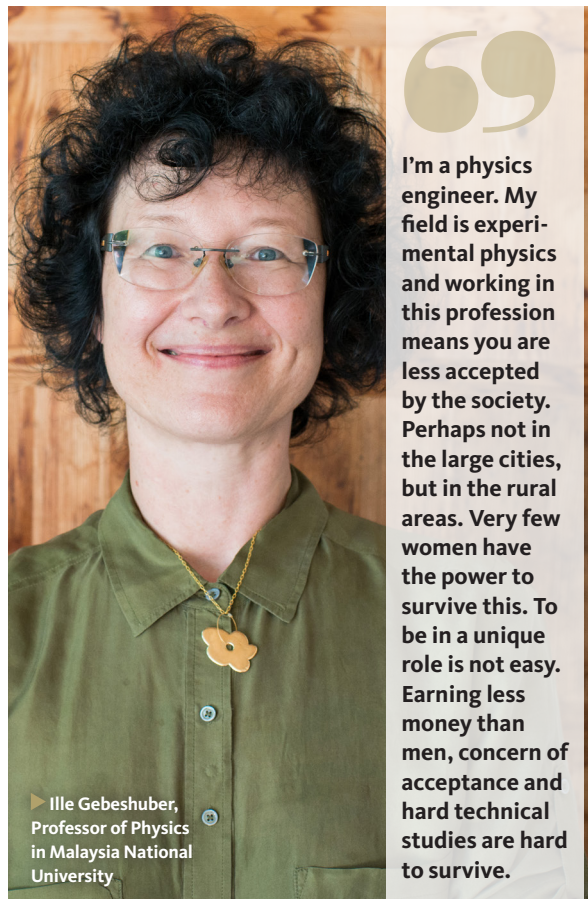
Accessibility to higher education rate is nearly 100 per cent for female students, but a quota system equalises the numbers of men, according to Ille Gebeshuber, Professor of Physics in Malaysia National University.

Female students are performing better than males in secondary school and getting the highest grades more often than men, however not all are accepted by universities.

In the British grading system, which is currently used in Malaysia, the first quarter of the students considered as successful is predominantly female. In this case, there is a quota system not to cause a disparity in the number of male and female students.

MEMORISING HELPS

"If there were not any quota system for genders in our university, student ratio would be 98 per cent females and two per cent males. This is not acceptable," Prof Gebeshuber stated. She thinks that people need role models from both genders for all professions.



► Ille Gebeshuber, Professor of Physics in Malaysia National University

“

I'm a physics engineer. My field is experimental physics and working in this profession means you are less accepted by the society. Perhaps not in the large cities, but in the rural areas. Very few women have the power to survive this. To be in a unique role is not easy. Earning less money than men, concern of acceptance and hard technical studies are hard to survive.

PHILIPP MADGERER

On the other hand, female students might owe their success to their good memories. The Malaysian educational system in secondary school is mostly based on learning by heart and girls perform well in memorising. Conversely, it doesn't provide creativity or problem solving skills.

"When you learn something by heart, you learn something which everybody else knows. There's nothing which discriminates you from the rest of the world," said Prof Gebeshuber.

TEACHING PREFERENCES

The role of teachers in training unique students is essential. Gebeshuber thinks that teachers like students who memorise all the subjects, know all the answers and do not cause any problems.

Nevertheless, they have to leave their comfort zone and challenge problematic kids. Strong will and curiosity must be taught from childhood in the same way for both females and males. Personal curiosity, having a strong will and being determined are the most important characteristics.

Yet a high number of female graduates in various study directions does not mean success all the time. Women, who work in professions that are hard to be accepted by society, sometimes give up. ■

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