

Final Report of the Invitational Forum on “Converging Competences: Diversity, Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy, organized jointly by the Council of Europe and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg on October 2 – 3, 2008

by Manja Klemenčič

Preface

The purpose of this report is to provide an analytical note and a personal reflection on the theme of converging competences for diversity and sustainable democracy, and the role of higher education in developing these competences. As such, the report does not provide a comprehensive description of the presentations and discussions in the Forum, but is rather a reflection of these through highlighting some of the key issues, and occasionally adding points that were raised but left unanswered in the Forum.

Introduction

Our societies are undergoing profound social and economic changes. Through processes of globalisation they are becoming more interconnected, but also more interdependent with other societies around the world. Populations in our societies are becoming more diverse, be that according to nationality, ethnicity and race, socio-economic standing, religion or age. Diversity provides each of us with better opportunities for expression of ourselves but also makes our societies more fragmented and thus poses new challenges for the maintenance and development of a sustainable democratic order and culture. These challenges affect also our higher education institutions. Given their role as the ‘main source of development and prosperity’¹ in our societies, augmented attention is given to the role and capacity of higher education for providing a service to society in terms of fostering democracy, human rights, civic engagement and managing the increasing diversity of our societies.

For some time now, the main public demand on higher education institutions has been to cater for the needs of the knowledge economy. This demand was justified in many ways. Employers complained that graduates entering the labour market were poorly prepared. There was also insufficient attention given to ensure cooperation and knowledge transfer between higher education and industry. However, these concerns somewhat overshadowed other purposes. In particular, the discourse on competences has tended to focus primarily on the workplace and not enough on their importance for citizenship and enriching personal life. Although the public expectation that higher education be an agent of societal development has never been completely absent, it has in many instances been marginalised by efforts to make universities cost-effective and responsive to the needs of the economy. This imbalance in the agenda for higher education has to end if we are, as we should be, genuinely concerned about sustainable democracy in our societies.

In accord with discussions at the Forum as well as with the established policy of the Council of

¹ Derek Bok's key-note address at the Forum

Europe², this report argues that the multiple purposes of higher education – teaching, research and public service for the knowledge-economy and society at large – are not conflicting, but in fact converging. Equally converging are the objectives of higher education institutions to prepare students for employability and successful performance in the labour market, for continuous personal development, and for active, responsible, ethically sensitive citizenship in democratic and increasingly diverse societies. Furthermore, fulfilling these purposes and objectives should not mean taxing more resources of (often already economically-strained) higher education institutions, but rather finding ways to develop an integrated agenda and use and reuse existing resources to reach the goals set by that agenda.

Within the plethora of objectives of higher education, this report focuses on higher education institutions' role in the development of student competences for democracy and diversity. Participants of the Forum were in wide agreement that active, responsible and ethically sensitive citizenship does not come automatically, but requires competences. That is, it requires knowledge and understanding – *know what* – of the social and political concepts and structures; skills – *knowing how to act* – to effectively participate in the social and political systems; and the values associated with and commitment to – *knowing how to be* – active citizenship in diverse, democratic societies³. In addition, one should possess a whole range of other so-called “transferable competences” that are seen as ‘needed for personal fulfilment, social inclusion and employment in a knowledge society’⁴. And, higher education is only one, but important, stage in a lifelong trajectory of acquiring these competences. As Henry Teune argued in his speech at the Forum, higher education is a particularly important stage since ‘competences for democratic citizenship of judgement, wisdom and long-term perspectives develop more rapidly in young adults of university age than among younger [and perhaps also older] students’⁵.

Finally, the objective of educating students for active and responsible citizenship in diverse, democratic societies is necessarily part of other aspects of higher education missions: that of research into questions of democracy and diversity, and that of the civic engagement of higher education institutions. Crucially, however, higher education institutions themselves need to apply the principles of democracy and diversity in their structures, processes and daily life.

In the remainder of the report, I will first discuss different conceptions of competences for democracy and diversity. Then, I will elaborate on teaching and learning practices and how these are interlinked with other aspects of the higher education mission. Finally, I will describe some differences between the US and European conceptions of and practices towards development of student competences for democracy and diversity.

Competences for active and responsible citizenship in democratic, diverse, interconnected societies: what they are and what do they entail?

There is no widely accepted definition of what competences for democratic citizenship and diversity are or entail. In fact even the use of term ‘competences’ is often disputed.⁶ The most widely-accepted definition of competences is that they represent a set of knowledge, skills and

² Recommendation Rec (2007) 6 by the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research. See also Sjur Bergan: “Higher education as a “public good and a public responsibility” – what does it mean?”, in Weber, L and Bergan, S: The Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing. Council of Europe Higher Education Series No. 2).

³ Official Journal of the European Communities (2006) RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC).

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Henry Teune’s speech “Expanding the Responsibilities of Universities for Democratic Citizenship – The Challenge of Diversity” at the Forum.

⁶ Other terms used (often interchangeably) are “skills”, “graduate attributes”, “abilities”, etc.

attitudes that are developed as an outcome of a learning process (i.e. they describe the learning outcomes of an educational programme) and that can be divided into discipline- specific (specific to a field of study or discipline) or transferable (common to any degree course and applicable in a range of contexts).⁷ Defined and described in the learning outcomes, competence should be something that can be assessed and continuously evaluated for relevance and impact, that has a clearly-developed teaching and learning methodology associated with its acquisition, and that is referred to in the qualifications frameworks.⁸ While discipline-specific competences are relatively less disputed, it has proven rather challenging to identify the most important and desirable transferable competences. This challenge is present particularly when we speak about competences for democratic citizenship and diversity.

Those who have tried to identify and define competences for democracy and diversity – or so-called social and civic competences – have mentioned some of the following examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes.⁹ Core knowledge includes understanding of concepts such as democracy, human rights, justice, equality, citizenship and how these are applied in various contexts at the local, regional, national and international level. Furthermore, civic competences should also include the understanding of rules, norms and values permeating political systems in the local, national and international environment and how they relate to historical and contemporary events and developments both nationally and internationally. Given the increasing interconnectedness of our societies through mechanisms of globalisation, the understanding not only of the society we belong to, but of societies around the world, and how diverse cultures, identities and histories shape various political systems and influence relations between societies and global trends is becoming an essential component of knowledge within civic competences. Also, knowledge of ethics and moral reasoning, as pointed out by Derek Bok at his speech in the Forum, is critical for students' ability to judge the ethical consequences of actions they may take in their professional and personal lives.

In terms of the skills' component of civic competences, a core skill can be defined as the ability to interface effectively with members of the community and institutions in the public domain. These skills are inevitably convergent - and overlap - with other transferable skills, such as critical thinking, the capacity for analysis and synthesis, the capacity for applying knowledge in practice, problem solving, etc. For example, the critical reception of information by the mass media, which reflects the capacity for analysis, helps students in making appropriate judgments to guide their actions. Intercultural skills, such as intercultural communication, negotiation and conflict resolution are also highlighted as those that are increasingly needed to prepare individuals for effective participation in any community to which they belong, and especially in increasingly multicultural and multilingual communities.

⁷ González, J. and Wagenaar, R. (eds.) (2003) *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe: Final Report - Phase One*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto: 255 and 261. Transferable competences are also called "generic", "key" or "transitive". For a detailed discussion on the concept and identification of key competences see Eurydice (2002) *Key competences. A developing concept in general compulsory education*. Brussels: Eurydice: 12-16. For a useful description of different practices of assessment of learning outcomes see OECD Working Paper by Nusche, D. (2008), "Assessment of learning outcomes in higher education: a comparative review of selected practices", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 15, OECD Publishing.

⁸ Learning outcomes are defined as statements of 'what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning' (González, J. and Wagenaar, R. (eds.) (2003): 261). In the European context there are two overarching frameworks: the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area EHEA-QF; (adopted by the Ministers of the (then) 46 countries of the Bologna Process in 2005) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL; adopted within the framework of the European Union in 2008). Countries are in the process of developing their national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching frameworks.

⁹ Official Journal of the European Communities (2006) *RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)*. Also, see The President and Fellows of Harvard College (2007) *Report of the Task Force on General Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

While knowledge and skills are considered cognitive outcomes of learning, there is also a third category – the non-cognitive development of students referring to development of (or changes to) beliefs, attitudes and values, and identity in general.¹⁰ It is particularly difficult to judge which attitudes and values should be developed. Some of the values and attitudes highlighted by the aforementioned references include a sense of social responsibility, ethical sensitivity, tolerance, and respect for human rights. This is by no means an exclusive list.

Developing a commitment to civic participation and a concern for the public good might be particularly difficult, as Derek Bok suggested, in times when due to diversity in our societies common bonds are weakened, when students are preoccupied with making money and more suspicious of authority, especially of government and politicians. It is also disputable to what extent classroom learning, or higher education learning as such, contributes to the development of these non-cognitive elements of competences.

In the area of competences for democracy and diversity in general, and especially in the non-cognitive element of these, traditional classroom teaching might not be the most effective method of propagation. The next section will explore some common principles and practices to teaching and learning of these competences.

Some common principles for teaching and learning of competences for democratic citizenship and diversity

There exist different perspectives among academics on whether and to what extent responsibility for the development of competences for democratic citizenship and diversity as described above (and indeed other transferable competences) lies in classroom teaching.¹¹ Some see them as central, while others do not think they belong in the classroom at all but are part of the general higher education experience or even natural processes of social maturation.¹² Arguably, however, higher education institutions cannot rely solely on informal and independent academic effort to find ways to incorporate social and civic competences into their usual teaching. Hence, an institution-wide policy that articulates mechanisms and instruments for the development of the social and civic competences of students needs to be in place if concrete results are to be expected. As is the case with transferable competences in general, practice has shown that competences for democracy and diversity, as defined above, cannot effectively be developed if this is attempted to be done only within formal course learning. Rather, an integrated effort needs to be made in the broader context of student learning experiences of participating in the intellectual and social community of higher education institutions.¹³¹³ In other words, developing competences for democracy and diversity should be integrated into the teaching, research and public-service functions of higher education institutions. It is the university leadership that has a unique ability to initiate such a policy and develop it in full collaboration with academics, student representatives, and other internal constituencies and external stakeholders. The following presents some important aspects of a higher education institution policy that aims at developing student competences for democracy and diversity.

Even though it is not a sufficient condition, teaching nevertheless remains an essential aspect of institutional policy. Social and civic competences can be part of learning outcomes integrated in the curricula – be that through introducing new mandatory or elective courses, new themes within existing courses, and/or new teaching and learning methodologies. Each of these aspects would lead to inclusion of these competences in course learning outcomes, and, as such, provide ground

¹⁰ Nusche, D. (2008).

¹¹ Barrie, Simon C. (2007) 'A conceptual framework for the teaching and learning of generic graduate attributes', *Studies in Higher Education*, 32:4, 439 – 458.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Kuh, G.D. (2001) *Assessing What Really Matters to Student Learning*, *Change*, Vol.33, No.3.

for assessment of the level or degree of a students' competence as well as for continuous evaluation of the relevance and impact of these competences.

The crucial question here is what the most appropriate way of teaching civic and social competences at higher education level is. We know that "civics courses" offered within mandatory schooling tend to prioritise knowledge of democratic institutions, but pay less attention to questions of democratic culture and social and civic competences in general. In the liberal arts and sciences tradition, specifically designed "general education courses" on these themes can be offered in the curriculum. There should be some system of ensuring that students take at least some courses falling broadly into the category of learning for democracy and diversity. Within European universities, adding new courses on civic themes, as discussed in the next section, might be more difficult and even counterproductive. There is a danger that civic courses, if made mandatory, would be resented or not taken seriously (or both) by students already pressed with discipline-specific (i.e. employment-relevant) courses. Adding new themes to the existing courses, as well as experimenting with new teaching and learning practices, including and especially activity-based learning and real-world problem-solving, might be more appropriate.

While arts, social sciences and humanities students will be exposed to some of the social and civic competence development necessarily through the discipline-specific courses, it is particularly important that students in natural sciences and engineering do not remain unaffected by these questions. In my personal experience as a student, I have far too often encountered science and engineering students (but of course not students from these disciplines exclusively!) who were utterly disinterested in topics concerning our society, poorly equipped to deliberate on themes concerning our society, and even holding dogmatic and rigid views on some of the key – and certainly debatable – concepts concerning justice, morality, religion or politics. Derek Bok in his address at the Forum also mentioned that recent research in the US showed that some popular courses of study – business, engineering – actually weakened civic responsibility. It is, I believe, of the utmost importance that also these students are challenged to think and deliberate about issues that concern the societies that we live in, about the contemporary and historical events that shape our societies, about the value and belief structures in our populations and how these affect our societies, etc. Certainly, these students also need to be exposed to deliberations of ethical and broader social consequences of work and research within their own disciplines.

Finally, as Derek Bok reminded us at the Forum, there is a need for change in attitude toward education and the ways they teach. This is especially the case when it comes to teaching for democracy and diversity which are complex themes in themselves, and which, as discussed earlier, contain an important and arguably non-cognitive dimension of developing values and attitudes. More attention needs to be given, as Derek Bok pointed out at the Forum, to educate the educators how to teach, to develop new and better ways of teaching to help meet a more difficult set of educational responsibilities, and to enable a continuous process of evaluation of how much and what students are learning, in order to build a culture of continuous self-scrutiny, experimentation, and improvement. We must remember that teaching in our higher education institutions is no longer offered primarily to a homogenous cohort of 18-24 years old students. The students entering into undergraduate programmes (and indeed graduate and continuous education) are an increasingly diverse body of students according to age, ethnic background, socio-economic status or beliefs. These students bring with them richness and variety of life experiences and a different set of expectations.

Given this diversity in the student body, and given the difficulty in teaching of themes such as democratic culture, teachers have to take advantage of numerous methods that are particularly suitable for such learning, especially activity-based learning through community service, internships and other service learning, as well as experiment with different learning environments and teaching methodologies. In fact, a report from Association of American Colleges and

Universities' initiative Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) suggests that 'students who engage in learning communities, internships, service learning programs and undergraduate research projects perform at higher levels than their peers who do not'.¹⁴ It is crucial, however, to link activity-based learning to classroom learning, i.e. provide space for reflection within formal teaching, in order to help students to develop the knowledge and understanding next to skills and attitudes. Furthermore, students also develop competences through engagement in extracurricular activities within the institution and outside of it¹⁵. These activities, especially those offered by student organisations and groups within the institution, need to be acknowledged and supported.

We should not forget the importance of research in view of developing basic and applicative knowledge on sustainable democracy in our societies. Catering for demands of the knowledge-economy, much pressure has been exerted on higher education institutions to bring natural sciences and engineering closer to industry, to accelerate transfer of knowledge and to develop competences based on the needs and expectations of the employers. Consequently, the funding base has also increased in the areas that are seen as directly benefiting the economy. The importance of advancing knowledge in humanities and social sciences for the sustainable development of our democratic societies has to be reaffirmed, and accordingly encouraged through funding. Furthermore, within these fields, academics and researchers should be encouraged to address also complex societal questions rather than purely scientific ones. There tends to be a certain bias in the scientific community towards the purely scientific questions which bring more prestige and tend to attract also more funding.¹⁶

The public-service role of higher education, as the third mission next to teaching and research, is usually the least developed and elaborated in university policies and strategy plans. This is especially the case for an institution's community engagement. The teaching of student competences for democracy and diversity should be accompanied by programmes of civic engagement and social responsibility in the framework of its public service mission. This means that mechanisms need to be in place to encourage, support and reward practices of public service by academics, students, and staff. Public service expectations and requirements within the institution have to be as clearly defined as are those of teaching and research.

Furthermore, principles of democracy and diversity have to be embedded in the institutional policies, practices and structures. One major aspect of applying such principles is the transparency of, and student participation in, institutional decision-making. Students especially have to be seen as partners within the higher education community. Another aspect is to widen the access to higher education to provide equal opportunities and to help making the student body reflective of the diversity of the overall population. Derek Bok at the Forum suggested that higher education institutions need to actively recruit students from minority and working class communities if their student populations are to reflect the diversity of our societies. Such recruitment may include admissions that are not strictly on merit, with the precondition that once accepted, their grades and academic degrees will be merit-based. This also means that additional educational support may have to be offered to students to ensure their successful performance. Furthermore, diversity has to permeate the entire institutional life and be modelled by making faculty and staff also diverse.

Finally, higher education institutions make an ideal forum for even the most contentious debates within their local communities and society at large. Academic space is per definition free of ideological choices and built on freedom of inquiry and search for truth based on dialogue and

¹⁴ Kuh, G. D. (2008) High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter. AAC&U LEAP Report.

¹⁵ See National Survey for Student Engagement at <http://nsse.iub.edu/html/origins.cfm> for survey of student participation in programs and activities that higher education institutions provide for students learning and personal development.

¹⁶ Weber, L. (2007) in Huber, J. and Harkavy, I. (eds.) (2007) Higher Education and Democratic Culture. Citizenship, human rights and civic responsibility. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing Council of Europe Higher Education Series No.8: 32.

rigorous scientific research. Academics have a reputation for independence and credibility and sharing their expert knowledge and perspectives with the public. Higher education institutions should carefully guard this space and continue to provide a forum for critical and intellectually honest discussion about even the most contentious and emotionally- charged issues in our societies. There is some evidences of the emergence of taboo topics even in academic surroundings. This is a dangerous development.

In conclusion, the development of student competences for democracy and diversity cannot be seen simply as the consequence of an institution's educational quality or an automatic by- product of higher education experience. Good education does not prepare students automatically for citizenship and civic and ethical responsibility. Development of these competences is rather a function of an institution's systematic and strategic effort to present students with learning opportunities of these competences within teaching, research and public service, and to facilitate students' active engagement with the various curricular and extracurricular learning opportunities. These three core functions should incorporate mechanisms for preparing students for life after higher education as active, responsible, and ethically sensitive citizens. Through which concrete measures and initiative this objective will be achieved depends on the particular higher education institution. It will be a reflection of how the institution sees its contribution to the society, as well as of the particular environment – local, regional and national – in which the institution is embedded. It is a task of each individual institution, as Nancy Cantor pointed out at the Forum, to develop an authentic institutional practice fitting the particular context that institution belongs to.

Differences between Europe and the US in conceptions of and practices towards student development of competences for democracy and diversity

The discourses on the development of competences for democracy and diversity in Europe and the US are strikingly different. In the US context, we rarely find higher education institutions that do not have civic and social involvement mentioned in their mission statement. This attitude reflects the historical development of American Land-Grant universities where the traditional role of teaching and research has been modified by including close social ties and service to the community in which they were established. The Community Colleges, as a distinct sector of higher education in the US, are particularly vocal in highlighting the purpose of offering services to and catering for the educational needs of their local communities.

Compared to Europe, it can be noted that US higher education has a particularly well- developed practice of service learning, especially community service which has a relatively high rate of participation by students.¹⁷ Such learning is also widely considered as a particularly effective way of education for democracy. Less clear is whether and to what extent individual students actually develop civic and social competences within formal courses. A liberal arts and sciences education is particularly well suited for providing general education courses including courses that explore civic and social concepts, and should as such help students to develop such competences. However, as Derek Bok noted at the Forum, many students do not take courses that are essential to every informed citizen. In many higher education institutions there certainly is a scope for strengthening institutional policies on the provision of general education which would – complementing the rest of the curriculum – ensure that students are prepared also for active, responsible, ethically sensitive citizenship.

Judging from the European angle, US higher education institutions do not appear to fully (or even sufficiently) apply democratic principles within their structures and procedures. In particular, the governance mechanisms seem not to encourage full participation from faculty and especially students and their influence on actual decisions appears to be limited. The key institutional

¹⁷ Kuh, G. D. (2008)

decisions tend to be taken by a relatively small group of people, usually close to the President's circle. Given the rather strong "presidential system of governance", decisions concerning the development of student competences and other aspects of institutional civic mission will also typically be decided by the President and her/his circle. At the level of individual higher education institutions there might be, hence, a scope to reconsider whether and how democratic principles could be better modelled within the governance mechanism.

Unlike the US, European higher education is not typically considered to be responsible for the general education of students who have opted for higher-level professional training or academic education in a specific discipline.¹⁸ The absence of liberal arts and sciences higher education makes it more challenging to find a "space" for the development of competences such as those for democracy and diversity in disciplines other than social sciences and humanities where such topics fall within discipline-specific teaching. Curricular reforms initiated by the Bologna Process have often proven battle fields within faculties on which course will be offered within a particular programme, and with what credit. Individual academics have been understandably eager to retain their own courses. In such circumstances, the incentive to add new courses on citizenship and democracy among higher education leaders and academics into the curricula has been rather absent.

As Gabriele Mazza noted at the Forum, another reason for the low incentives for "democracy and citizenship" education across European universities lies in a particular discourse highlighting "graduate employability" and "serving knowledge economy" as the main purposes of higher education.¹⁹ This discourse has been especially reflected in a number of formal documents coming from the European Union institutions but also individual European governments, and has as such permeated the "public space" of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). To be fair, the Bologna Declaration and subsequent Communiqués signed by the Education Ministers within EHEA express appreciation for the multiple purposes of higher education, including 'preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society' and for 'the important influence higher education institutions exert on developing our societies, based on their traditions as centres of learning, research, creativity and knowledge transfer as well as their key role in defining and transmitting the values on which our societies are built'.²⁰ The problem is that there has been little effort made to articulate how the objective of preparing students for life as active citizens should/can be implemented. It is as if this is expected to happen automatically as a by-product of quality higher education learning.

The most vocal proponent of education for democracy and diversity within Europe has been Council of Europe.²¹ It has developed a long standing programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights²², and in 2006 the Council of Europe and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy organized a Forum on the responsibility of higher education for democratic culture²³. One visible step towards concretising education for democracy and diversity has been made also by

¹⁸ Weber, L. (2007): 31-32.

¹⁹ Gabriele Mazza (2008) Welcome Speech at the Invitational Forum on "Converging Competences: Diversity, Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy, organized jointly by the Council of Europe and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg on October 2 – 3, 2008. See also Bergan, S: "Higher education as a "public good and a public responsibility" – what does it mean?", in Weber, L and Bergan, S: *The Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research* as well as the same author's "Promoting New Approaches to Learning", article B 1.1-1 in Eric Froment, Jürgen Kohler, Lewis Purser and Lesley Wilson (eds): *EUA Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work* (Berlin 2006: Raabe Verlag).

²⁰ Bologna Process (2007) London Communiqué. Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world. 18 May 2007.

²¹ See Huber, J. and Harkavy, I. (eds.) (2007) *Higher education and democratic Culture. Citizenship, human rights and civic responsibility*. Council of Europe Higher Education Series No.8.

²² <http://www.coe.int/edc>

²³ <http://www.coe.int/highereducation>

European Union institutions through the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework developed in 2006.²⁴ This framework defines and explains also ‘social and civic competences’ which ‘include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation’²⁵. Preceding this recommendation, the Council of the European Union in 2004 declared in a report that ‘education contributes to preserving and renewing the common cultural background in society and to learning essential social and civic values such as citizenship, equality, tolerance and respect, and is particularly important at a time when all Member States [of the EU] are challenged by the question of how to deal with increasing social and cultural diversity’²⁶. While it is commendable that this Reference Framework has been established, and that it includes social and civic competences, a major step still needs to be taken to include these into the overarching European qualifications frameworks (EHA-QF and EQF-LLL). Even more pressing, but also more challenging, is the quest to include the acquisition of transferable competences - including competences for citizenship and democracy – in curricula and institutional policies across European higher education institutions.

The key question here is whether European higher education leaders are motivated and able to develop and identify clear actions on how to achieve this. The Tuning Report that researched the state of transferable competences across European higher education institutions has made a comprehensive list of those competences that have been most frequently mentioned in various literatures, and surveyed students, academics and employers across Europe to assess their importance and to what extent they are achieved within their respective institutions²⁷. Their results show that the understanding of cultures and customs of other countries, appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism, ability to work in an international context, even knowledge of a second language, tended to be concentrated in the lower part of the scale with respect to importance and achievement as perceived by all three main stakeholders²⁸. Competences for democratic citizenship were not even included in the survey. It appears that European academics (including perhaps the deans and the rectors) do not consider education for democracy and diversity to belong to the objective of higher education and is as such outside their responsibility. It would, thus, take a strong message from the public authorities (in most cases still the primary funding body) and the students to achieve a change in attitude and proceed to concrete action.

Other aspects of the civic mission of higher education, for example collaboration with local schools and enterprises, creating student volunteer programmes, are much more common. As the role of governments in terms of funding diminishes and higher education institutions seek additional external sources of funding, their openness towards society and relationships with the community and region increases. This development too will inevitably force European higher education institutions to reconsider their public service role and civic mission in general.

Finally, it should be added that cultural differences between the US and Europe also play a role here. European higher education students are often resistant to overt attempts to “shape” them or to “instil” particular values in them. European administrators and academics are less likely than their American counterparts to be comfortable with the idea that they are societal “leaders” who have broad responsibilities for helping students become informed, tolerant and ethically responsible citizens. Talk of higher education providing competences for “democracy and diversity” can easily

²⁴ Official Journal of the European Communities (2006) RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC).

²⁵ *Ibid.*:17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 1.

²⁷ González, J. and Wagenaar, R. (eds.) (2003): 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

be misunderstood in Europe as patronizing to students and as an effort at propagating political correctness. These remarks are, of course, generalizations that disregard nuances and exceptions (there are, for example, relevant differences in these areas between north and south Europe and between old and new Europe). However, they do highlight the necessity of proceeding with the task at hand with sensitivity to such cultural differences.

Conclusion

While we are becoming increasingly ambitious in terms of what we expect higher education institutions to do and accomplish, and while demands by students, employers, governments and other societal actors are becoming ever more vocal and more precise in their formulations, this does not mean that we should be taxing ever more resources from the institutions to meet these increasingly expanding goals. Henry Teune made the point at the Forum that *expanding* goals of higher education should really mean *integrating* goals. In other words, the task of higher education leadership is to find ways to employ and reemploy existing resources to meet these multiple goals. Furthermore, as the scope of relationships between higher education institution and societal actors widens – due to diversifying funding, recruitment of students or otherwise – so too the institutions need to reconsider their priorities in terms of the way in which they will be serving their immediate communities and society at large. This will increase the diversity of what higher education provides in terms of programmes, faculty and public service initiatives. There will be institutions, like the Community Colleges in the United States, which will prioritise the mission of social inclusion and service to the community. Other institutions will seek to facilitate the economic development of regions where they are placed. Other again will continue to be concerned with reaching internationally recognised research excellence. Regardless of the particular role an institution seeks to achieve for itself, and the priorities it has in its mission, there should be a space in each of them for preparing students for active, responsible, ethically sensitive citizenship in democratic and increasingly diverse societies next to and in convergence with the objective of preparing them for the labour market and personal development. It is only through combination of these competences that higher education fully prepares students for life after college.

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