

FORUM

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education

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“In healthcare, no single discipline can address all aspects of patient care”

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EDITORIAL

In talking of boundaries in international education, our minds generally turn to national borders and the significant focus of international educators and their students on crossing those borders, either literally – through exchange, study abroad or degree-seeking mobility, or figuratively – through Internationalisation at Home activities and the fostering of cross-cultural awareness.

In the Winter 2023 edition of *Forum*, however, we take a different perspective on the crossing of boundaries, narrowing our focus to an important set of boundaries within and between our institutions – the boundaries between disciplines and disciplinary communities. In so doing, we seek to apply a different lens to the work of international educators, enabling us to conceive of our work from new perspectives, just as we did with the Winter 2021 edition of *Forum* focused on distributed leadership in internationalisation.

At the outset, of course, we should acknowledge that the disciplines themselves are a truly international construct, unbounded by the walls of any single institution. As such, it is no surprise that scholars in a particular discipline have more in common with their disciplinary peers in other institutions and countries than with colleagues from other disciplines on their home campus. The pursuit of new knowledge in a global context is the very essence of what ties disciplinary scholars together.

In today's world of higher education, however, interdisciplinarity is increasingly being put forward as the solution to a range of problems. Indeed, many see that innovative, boundary-spanning approaches to education and research are crucial to address the most urgent and complex challenges of our time.

European Universities alliances, for example, are urged to work ambitiously both across countries and across disciplines. The European Commission's 2022 European strategy for universities variously envisions “flexible, interdisciplinary paths” for students, synergies across key European initiatives to stimulate “innovative and interdisciplinary learning, teaching and research” and “flexibility in funding programmes to allow for interdisciplinarity”.

The articles selected for this edition of *Forum* look at interdisciplinarity from a range of angles – through Collaborative Online International Learning, for example, or through mobility programmes or other initiatives that draw on multiple disciplines. In each case, the authors acknowledge that interdisciplinarity generally goes hand-in-hand with internationalisation.

To further our understanding of interdisciplinarity, I am delighted that Professor Georgina Born OBE FBA, Professor of Anthropology and Music at University College London agreed to be interviewed for this issue. In her academic life, Professor Born's work combines ethnographic and theoretical writings on music, sound, television and digital media, and she has also had a professional life as a musician in experimental rock, jazz and free improvisation. Importantly, Professor Born is currently leading a European Research Council funded project looking at the cultural implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on music from an interdisciplinary perspective. In addition to University College London, other partners in the MusAI (Music and Artificial Intelligence) project are the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (Germany) and King's College London.



While the breaking down of traditional boundaries and silos within higher education serves to unleash new creative and intellectual impulses, it also introduces a whole host of questions about how institutions manage complex boundary-crossing initiatives and how we evaluate the quality and impact of this type of work. This is perhaps the next boundary that international educators will need to cross, as our institutions turn to us for guidance on how to ensure the successful replication of interdisciplinary projects and partnerships.

I hope that this edition of *Forum* provides new insights into the importance of disciplinary boundaries in international education, and the opportunities presented by crossing those boundaries. With thanks to the authors and to Arnim Heinemann on the EAIE Publications Committee who joined me in reviewing submissions for this issue.

I hope that you enjoy reading this edition of *Forum*.

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A person is seen from the back, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, painting a large abstract artwork. The artwork is composed of vibrant, textured brushstrokes in shades of blue, red, and yellow. The person's right arm is raised, holding a paintbrush and applying paint to the canvas. The background is a solid dark blue color.

LIVING OUTSIDE THE LINES

The academic disciplines as we know them today represent a fragmentation of knowledge which is in some ways helpful and in others limiting. In an effort to encourage researchers, teachers and learners to venture beyond and between the bounds of those fragments, the European Commission's 2022 Strategy for Universities calls for more interdisciplinary activity in higher education, especially in the form of 'living labs'.

Interdisciplinarity is not a new concept but it has become a buzzword in recent years. The European Commission's 2022 *European Strategy for Universities* calls for greater curricular flexibility to promote "innovative and interdisciplinary learning, teaching and research".¹ And the European Universities Initiative, pivotal in the creation of a European Higher Education Area, requires partner institutions not only to collaborate transnationally but also to "adopt a challenge-based approach according to which students, academics and external partners can cooperate in interdisciplinary teams to tackle the biggest issues facing Europe today".

Recent global crises have shown all too clearly that our most challenging problems, from global health and food safety to climate change and sustainability, can only be truly understood and tackled with an interdisciplinary approach.

Our most challenging problems can only be truly understood and tackled with an interdisciplinary approach

Disciplinary boundaries – in other words, the historical fragmentation of knowledge – lie at the very core of higher education, where curricula have become increasingly specialised in the past 100 years. Academic excellence has often been equated with robust knowledge of core disciplines, and these distinct disciplines affect "students' views about what is known, what is valued and what is capable of investigation".²

However, dealing with complex real-world problems not only involves the ability to apply disciplinary knowledge: it also requires a clear understanding of the limits of one's discipline and of how fields of study relate to each other, as well as the flexibility to adapt to different contexts and challenges. Additionally, it requires willingness to engage with interdisciplinary work by seeking collaboration with others who can provide the expertise and worldview one's own discipline lacks.

DEPTH VS BREADTH

One of the difficulties universities face when trying to promote interdisciplinary approaches is common to any attempt to change the curriculum: in a limited space, adding more of something necessarily implies having less of something else. In this case, having more interdisciplinary practices usually comes at the expense of disciplinary knowledge – creating greater breadth but more limited depth. For this reason, people may be reluctant to provide space for interdisciplinary studies. This fear is not unlike the concerns that some academics have, in some departments more than in others, that a period of study abroad could be disruptive to the academic path of their students.

But crossing geographical borders through physical mobility, far from being detrimental to a student's pursuit of disciplinary knowledge, can provide a window into other forms of knowledge and new contexts of application. In the same way, collaborative online learning or virtual exchange can be the perfect setting for international, interdisciplinary projects. A cursory search on the internet will yield numerous such collaborative projects, combining tourism and

marketing, medical anthropology and podcast production, classics and archaeology, environmental studies and engineering. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, which have been incorporated into the mission of numerous universities worldwide, provide the perfect real-life context to experiment with interdisciplinarity.

LIVING LABS

In the *European Strategy for Universities*, the European Commission remarks that “to achieve excellent and relevant higher education, support is also needed to stimulate pedagogical innovation, focused on the learners, with a variety of learning spaces and flexible, interdisciplinary paths”. To do this, it promotes “the creation of ‘living labs’ [...] as a good example of how students can be trained to work on challenges in a holistic way,

Belgium. LiveLab International is a virtual exchange developed in cooperation with the worldwide network Towards Unity for Health and with European partner universities and universities of applied sciences.

The central principles of LiveLab International are ‘interprofessional’, ‘international’, ‘virtual’ and ‘community service learning’, offering students a meaningful experience of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration within authentic community settings. The lab offers five courses, all linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, in two different tracks: a fully online global track, involving 270 students from 16 universities across the globe; and a European track with a physical and virtual component, involving around 140 students from 13 different universities, all working in interprofessional teams.

the other on sustainable and smart cities – both involving a one-week physical mobility element in which students can share experiences and solutions with their peers in person.

LiveLab International can be an inspiration to other universities and European Universities Initiative alliances wishing to integrate greater interdisciplinarity into the curriculum. But there are many other examples of smaller class-to-class international and interdisciplinary collaborations. Far from undermining depth of disciplinary knowledge, an interdisciplinary approach – particularly when set in an international context – can be the best way to make knowledge and skills meaningful to students and help them imagine their role as future global citizens in challenging times.

— ANA BEAVEN

“To achieve excellent and relevant higher education, support is also needed to stimulate pedagogical innovation, focused on the learners, with a variety of learning spaces and flexible, interdisciplinary paths”

across disciplines, and how to support students' critical thinking, problem-solving, creative and entrepreneurial skills”.

One excellent example of a living lab, where different stakeholders within and outside of universities are encouraged to apply their expertise to solve real societal challenges, is the one recently launched by Vives University of Applied Sciences in

The global track includes three courses, focusing on social determinants of health; innovative and adaptive healthy cities; and communication. All involve community engagement and the exchange of ideas across disciplines and professions. The European track features two Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes – one on positive health and

1. European Commission. (2022). *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/communication-european-strategy-for-universities-graphic-version.pdf>

2. Davies, M., & Devlin, M. (2010). Interdisciplinary higher education. In M. Davies, M. Devlin, and M. Tight (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary higher education: Perspectives and practicalities (International perspectives on higher education research, vol. 5)* (pp. 3–28). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3628\(2010\)0000005004](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3628(2010)0000005004)

BLENDING PERSPECTIVES TO SOLVE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

One increasingly relevant tool for furthering interdisciplinary teaching and learning is blended intensive programmes (BIPs), which draw on innovative pedagogical techniques in a mix of physical and virtual formats. One university of applied sciences in the Netherlands has found that the natural synergies between BIPs and living labs not only lend themselves to permeating disciplinary borders, but also to breaking down barriers within the institution. ▶

Just like other countries, the Netherlands is facing great societal challenges that require innovative and sustainable solutions. Universities of applied sciences can play a crucial role in finding and developing cross-sectoral solutions through practice-based research and education. There is a need for new approaches that can foster collaboration, creativity and problem-solving skills among students and researchers. International collaboration can be a trigger to adopt the boundary-crossing mindset that is necessary to approach these complex challenges.

One new approach is the use of labs in higher education. At Inholland University of Applied Sciences, our 'living labs' take the form of interdisciplinary learning communities where education, research and practice are integrated and enhance each other, so that new cross-domain knowledge and solutions can be developed in an agile and experiential manner. The goal is to cultivate enduring connections with businesses, local authorities and citizens so that we can collectively shape the social and economic fabric of our location. Within this quadruple helix framework, we prioritise authentic and intricate challenges originating from the professional sphere.

The umbrella methodologies used in our labs include design thinking and empathic co-design, but it is international collaboration that really helps students, teachers and researchers to enter the boundary-crossing mindset necessary to design solutions for global

challenges such as climate change, urbanisation, energy transition and food security. Global issues require global solutions: collaboration across borders is key and gives all participants the opportunity to zoom in and out on these complex issues, adopting a local as well as a global perspective. Moreover, cross-cultural collaboration helps all participants to train their empathic co-design skills.

Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) have proven to be hugely beneficial to the goals of our labs. In the following examples, we will describe how two of our labs are using interdisciplinary approaches and BIPs to help solve global challenges.

SOCIAL IMPACT ISLAND

In the middle of the river IJ lies an island that is soon to be transformed into a new urban area, part of the ever-growing city of Amsterdam. Sustainable growth and living, with respect for nature, animals

The overall mindset is to dare to go beyond borders, be they personal or geographic

and humans, will be a huge challenge for this upcoming neighborhood – and that is why the Faculty of Creative Business at Inholland founded the Sluislab in this area. Together with the local community,

our students, researchers and staff are designing prototypes and products using events, media, communication and technology to aid the process of place-making.

Students who participate in this lab come from different programmes and work on three overarching learning goals: personal growth and professionalisation; experimenting through design thinking; and interdisciplinary collaboration. The overall mindset is to dare to go beyond borders, be they personal or geographic. Sometimes this is done through an international field trip; at other times, a temporary international classroom is created through an Erasmus+ BIP.

Games for Goals was a BIP designed to enhance a Horizon 2020 project on how to create more awareness for the Sustainable Development Goals by using gaming in schools and universities. This proved to be an excellent formula for students who, during an intensive five-day period, worked in mixed teams on designing a game for their peers via a process of short, successive iterations and development loops. During the final days of the physical part, teachers, staff and researchers were made part of the co-creation. Afterwards, a Students as Partners 'radar', which is still in the testing phase, was used to evaluate this process.¹

Working in interdisciplinary teams is a challenge, but bringing a group of international students into the mix enhanced the feeling of being equal instead of just different. The students found each other in common problems they found important,

such as gender equality, well-being and climate action. They connected their own local contexts to these global issues and shared and compared with one another.

Designing games to create awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals, using playful, creative methods and design thinking as part of an international BIP, is something that will be adopted structurally throughout our labs.

SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Our Living Lab Sustainable Fashion of the Faculty of Business, Finance and Law contributes to solving challenges in the context of making fashion and textile ecosystems more sustainable. It is continuously expanding its collaboration with stakeholders and working towards an open innovation platform focused on the development of sustainable business models and alternative forms of marketing. The challenges in the fashion and textile world all have an international component, making them global problems. International collaboration and knowledge exchange are therefore essential in this lab.

The lab works with the Sustainable Fashion Community Center in Harlem, New York, whose founder, Andrea Reyes (who also chairs the New York City Fair Trade Coalition), guided students for a week on an awareness campaign around sustainable fashion.

Next to this collaboration, the international setting of this living lab was enhanced by a BIP with educational institutions from Germany, Belgium and

Italy. This involved students from different programmes developing a communication concept for a local frontrunner in sustainable fashion. After a five-week

within traditional frameworks of mobility, largely based on similarities of curricula, we can now form – even temporarily – learning communities based on science- or

Using BIPs as a vehicle to promote interdisciplinary collaboration has proven very useful in the inner workings of our university

online portion, all participants met each other for an intensive week in the Netherlands where the students were challenged to use design thinking methodology in international teams. They realised that an international approach is needed to find workable solutions for such a complex system as the fashion industry.

STRONGER CONNECTIONS

We can see how introducing BIPs in the context of the labs enhances interdisciplinary value creation by connecting the regional network and capacity of the labs to international ideas and contexts, bringing an international dimension to an already boundary-crossing, interdisciplinary setting. The temporary international learning community that is created can significantly boost this mindset, provided all participants are treated equally and with respect and that a safe space is created.

Using BIPs as a vehicle to promote interdisciplinary collaboration has also proven very useful in the inner workings of our university. Instead of having to collaborate

practice-based topics that go beyond our disciplines and professional sectors.

As a university of applied sciences committed to authentic assignments, we are united in our mission to tackle complex challenges in the world around us. Using internationalisation strategies such as BIPs helps us create stronger connections and brings us closer together with the rest of the world.

— PETRA HOGENDOORN-SCHWEIGHOFER
& NYNKE MOENS

1. Based on Healey, M., Flint, A. & Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*.

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO
**HOLISTIC
HEALTHCARE**



No single discipline holds all the answers to human health, and no one culture has a monopoly on the right approach. This is the thinking underpinning one Spanish university's interdisciplinary, multicultural seminar aimed at sowing the seeds of a robust, holistic approach to wellness among the healthcare professionals of tomorrow.

The term 'seminar' derives from 'seed and earth'. In an educational context, a seminar provides the nurturing space and time required to germinate and develop ideas collectively – that is, it serves as a platform to promote teamwork and collaborative learning.

Embracing this philosophy, the International Health Seminar (IHS) at Blanquerna School of Health Sciences at Ramon Llull University in Spain has been designed as an interdisciplinary, multicultural course tailored to incoming international

and facilitator, encouraging the growth and exchange of ideas as well as stimulating a respectful and inclusive dialogue.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The course starts with students defining the concept of health – first individually and then collectively, according to their personal, professional and cultural knowledge. During the semester, popular myths and affirmations are evaluated and researched as students look for the scientific evidence that

A seminar – a term derived from 'seed and earth' – provides the nurturing space and time required to germinate and develop ideas collectively

students enrolled in nursing, physiotherapy, human nutrition and pharmacy programmes.

Within the IHS, students explore a wide variety of health-related concepts, actively integrating and interrelating the biological, psychological, social and transcendental dimensions of well-being. This exploration takes place within a dynamic framework of multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity, given the different countries and health professions represented by the participants in the course.

Consequently, the IHS serves as a catalyst for the construction of shared knowledge, fostering a process that thrives on collaborative work and interaction between students in an environment of equality and cooperation. Guiding this process, the instructor assumes the role of both promoter

supports or negates such beliefs. The participants also work together in community-based projects, analysing how to solve challenges from a multidisciplinary point of view. Finally, they explore professional opportunities and some of the necessary tools to prepare for a global workforce.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the IHS is the creation of a closely knit cohort of international students embarking on a transformative journey together. As they progress through their mobility programme, the participants experience significant personal and professional growth (as documented in their end-of-semester reflections), enriched by the diverse backgrounds and perspectives they have encountered. The bonds formed within the IHS transcend geographical borders and

extend beyond the confines of the classroom, nurturing lifelong friendships and a supportive network that extends well into their future careers.

Participation in this multicultural, interdisciplinary course provides extra benefits and contributes to the holistic development of students. Here are some key reasons why such a course is important.

Cultural sensitivity and global awareness

By bringing together students from different countries, the course fosters an environment where cultural diversity is celebrated. Interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds helps students develop cultural sensitivity, empathy and respect for different perspectives. It also promotes global awareness and prepares the students to work effectively in a multicultural healthcare setting.

Collaboration and teamwork

Working with students from various health-related disciplines cultivates a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. Health issues are often multifaceted, requiring input from different fields. Collaborative assignments in the IHS enable students to appreciate the value of teamwork, learn to communicate across both disciplines and cultures and develop interdisciplinary problem-solving skills.

Comprehensive perspective

In healthcare, no single discipline can address all aspects of patient care. Integrating nursing, physiotherapy, nutrition and pharmacy provides a comprehensive understanding of health. Students learn

to view health challenges from multiple angles, recognising the importance of different disciplines in patient care. This broad perspective also improves critical thinking and decision-making skills at the professional level.

Communication and language skills

Interacting with students from diverse linguistic backgrounds encourages the development of effective communication skills. In a multicultural environment, students are exposed to different languages, communication styles and ways of expression. Engaging in discussions, group projects and presentations helps students improve their language proficiency, adapt to different communication styles and become effective communicators in cross-cultural settings.

In healthcare, no single discipline can address all aspects of patient care

Exposure to global health issues

The IHS exposes students to a wide range of global health issues, such as health disparities, professional challenges, cultural beliefs affecting health practices and the impact of globalisation on health systems. This exposure raises awareness about global health issues and equips students to address them with a broader perspective. It encourages them to think critically, find innovative solutions and contribute meaningfully to the field of healthcare.

Career opportunities

With increasing globalisation and interconnectedness, healthcare professionals are often required to work in multicultural and multidisciplinary teams. More and more, employers value candidates who can navigate diverse environments, collaborate with colleagues from different disciplines and understand the complexities of global health. The IHS provides students with valuable experiences that can give them a competitive edge in the job market.

A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

In summary, the IHS provides a transformative educational experience for international students from diverse health disciplines. By embracing multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity, the course offers a fertile ground for the germination of ideas and the development of collective knowledge. Through teamwork, collaboration, interdisciplinary exchanges and cross-cultural interactions, students cultivate a deep understanding of health that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Moreover, the cohort-based approach fosters lifelong connections and personal growth, nurturing professionals who are not only academically competent but also culturally sensitive, globally aware and well prepared to tackle the complexities of healthcare in a rapidly evolving, interconnected world.

— ALICIA ORTA-RAMIREZ
& LLUÍS COSTA TUTUSAUS



RECONSTITUTING THE RULE OF LAW

Due in large part to the disciplinary and professional silos in which we do our work, scholars and professionals seldom have time for thinking that transcends traditional boundaries. The re:constitution fellowship programme offers one solution in bringing together thinkers and doers from diverse backgrounds to connect and cross-pollinate scholarship and other work being done on democracy and the rule of law in Europe. ▶

Every now and again, moving away from the short-term perspectives ingrained in project cycles – in academia as much as in practice – is crucial in order to see the bigger picture. This is especially true for early-career scholars and professionals, who often lack the time and space to think, reflect and pursue new

interdisciplinarity needs to be embraced just as much as international and intersectoral cooperation.

The ability “to freely move around Europe to study and work at different places across the continent” was the main driver for one participant’s application for a re:constitution fellowship, while another

as government officials, policy advisers, judges, practising lawyers, non-governmental organisation legal or policy experts, or journalists working on legal issues related to the rule of law in Europe.

The interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral exchanges are highly valued by fellows.

A postdoctoral scholar with a background in political science highlighted the benefits of the regular, project-based Fellow Talks as a space to give and receive feedback from other disciplines: “It was wonderful to hear about my cohorts’ research in a similar area as my own but each with their own points of view and backgrounds.” Other fellows, like this socio-legal postdoctoral scholar, are inspired by the research approaches of others, “particularly from those who came from a practical background in journalism, media or civil society. Their resilience and quick thinking inspired not only my project but also how I will engage in the future as an academic in science communication and building bridges between academia and practice.”

Early-career scholars and professionals often lack the time and space to think, reflect and pursue new ideas in international contexts

ideas in international contexts – either by themselves or collectively. Fellowship programmes offer just that.

The re:constitution fellowship scheme is a programme of cross-border exchange, debate and capacity building for scholars and practitioners concerned with the rule of law, democracy and shifting political dynamics in Europe. Based in Berlin but European in outlook, re:constitution awards mobility fellowships, offers topical analysis and is establishing a sustainable transdisciplinary and pan-European network of experts who can develop solutions for reconstituting the rule of law in Europe.

Specifically aimed at scholars and practitioners in the early stages of their careers, the fellowships strengthen their expertise through open exchange and collaboration with partners and institutions from various professional backgrounds throughout Europe. The programme framework is multidimensional by intention: to enable fruitful exchange, debate and research in this highly diverse setting,

valued the participation in a diverse community “of academics and professionals who are independent but connected by trust, shared curiosity, mutual learning and free exchange”.

But how to navigate these dimensions of interdisciplinarity effectively? How to ensure that each fellow completes his or her personal fellowship roadmap successfully?

BUILDING BRIDGES

The programme puts a distinct focus on assembling fellows from different backgrounds, because it was designed as a cross-sectoral initiative and is jointly run by an academic institution, Forum Transregionale Studien, and a civil society organisation, Democracy Reporting International. What unites the diverse fellows is their strong interest and track record in the rule of law. Each fellow adds their insights and experiences from their respective academic disciplines, such as legal studies or political or social sciences, and from practical engagements

LANGUAGE GAP

Bridging those gaps does not always happen naturally. Academics and practitioners, or even scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds, do not necessarily share the same ‘language’ in their debates. In the case of re:constitution, for example, specific questions with great relevance to the work of constitutional law scholars often do not play a huge role for non-governmental organisation policy analysts or political scientists.

The interdisciplinary programme framework allows them to specifically

address this ‘language gap’ by emphasising the potential of having lawyers, social and political scientists, policy analysts or journalists work together on an issue they all understand as a societal challenge, such as safeguarding democracy and the rule of law in Europe. It provides re:constitution fellows with a structured space in which they can adopt a multidisciplinary perspective to address disciplinary differences and potential synergies around concrete examples of successful projects.

This structured space offers two tracks to better accommodate the individual professional requirements and personal circumstances of the fellows. Out of 15 annual fellowships, five are part-time, enabling freelance journalists and practitioners from think tanks, non-governmental organisations and public authorities to better combine their fellowship commitments with other tasks.

CROSSING BORDERS

The fellowship programme is based on a unique concept centred around the interdisciplinary network of fellows and international mobility. Fellows spend three or six months at research institutions and in practical work contexts in Europe, outside the country they reside in. These mobility phases are the core element of their fellowship year and are tailored by the fellows themselves according to the requirements of their personal research projects.

International mobility was of central importance for an attorney at law who wants to pursue a career in academia. As a re:constitution fellow, she was able to collaborate with a high-profile university

and pursue a research stay at the Court of Justice of the European Union. “Both stays have shown me how important it is to get to know other legal systems and to work with people who have a differ-

can only be achieved through personal, often bilateral guidance and support.

There is no single key success factor for designing, implementing and managing bridge-building programmes.

Thriving multidimensional programmes find the right balance between consistency and openness when they nurture their core foundational values

ent educational background. I learned a lot – not only specific answers to specific questions but overall I take away a lot about how other jurisdictions deal with challenges of our time.”

SUCCESS FACTORS

A research and network programme such as re:constitution should seek to align multiple dimensions towards its overall objective by providing a broad and structured framework with integrated open spaces for research, reflection and exchange, thereby striking a balance between structure and flexibility for its participants. On the part of the programme coordinators, this requires consistency in terms of maintaining the general framework. Any planned strategic or programmatic changes need to be preceded by thorough and coherent communication in order to ensure continuous rapport with fellows, partners and donor organisations.

Mutual understanding about the nature of the open spaces available in the framework is also crucial. This is based on detailed and up-to-date guidelines and

re:constitution has been shaped by experiences, feedback and adaptations since its inception, but it has remained true to its core objective: the promotion of multiple cross-border exchanges for early-career professionals working on impactful projects of European concern.

So, perhaps there is one key success factor after all: thriving multidimensional programmes find the right balance between consistency and openness when they nurture their core foundational values.

— DORIT MODERSITZKI
& JULIA TÜRTSCHER

IN CONVERSATION WITH

GEORGINA BORN

JACOB GIBBONS
EAIE

Georgina Born OBE FBA is Professor of Anthropology and Music at University College London. In her academic life, Professor Born's work crosses many traditional disciplinary boundaries, and she has also had a professional life as a musician in experimental rock, jazz and free improvisation. At this stage in what has already been a highly multidisciplinary career, Professor Born is currently leading a European Research Council funded project looking at the cultural implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on music from an interdisciplinary perspective.

To what extent do you believe that your periods of time living and working overseas have influenced your career in academia? Do you see a connection between interdisciplinary research and internationalisation?

GB: Living and working overseas has been a welcome feature of my academic life. I spent a year and lots of visits back and forth to Paris for my PhD research, which became my first and most well-known book, so that was pretty formative for me. Since that time, I've done a lot of visiting in North America and Europe, but much less outside the Global North, except for research in the last decade which involved going to Kenya, Argentina, India, Cuba and other places I had never been before. So I think the short answer is that I've enormously benefited from – and I hope benefited – those places I've visited as an increasingly senior academic, but in my own case I don't think it particularly relates to interdisciplinarity as such.

That being said, my interdisciplinary research is very, very international. The two main computer scientists I collaborate with right now are an engineer based in the States and Canada, and an American engineer and expert in music information retrieval based in Stockholm. I do think that intellectual life and research life these days are profoundly international. The UK just re-signed the international

agreement allowing it to re-enter the European Union Horizon scheme about three weeks ago. We've all been on tenterhooks about this scheme, as it is a principal funding source for many of us. It's just one example of the absolute vitality of our internationalisation. So in terms of research, I would say internationalisation and interdisciplinarity are intrinsically good bedfellows and good partners.

How did you discover the possibilities of interdisciplinarity in your own work? Was this early in your career? Or did your fields of anthropology and music lend themselves more readily to interdisciplinary approaches?

GB: When I left school at 18 I was going to train as a classical musician, but I decided not to and dropped out to work professionally as a musician. After about five years touring a lot in Europe and other places, I decided I needed some space to do some thinking and reading and wanted to do a degree. So I then applied to do anthropology, and took that degree thinking I'd just do it for the sheer interest of it. For some reason it went well, I got a first class degree, and they offered me a PhD grant. But what was interesting was, I immediately took my anthropological focus to music. And so from the very get-go, I was really oriented to using anthropology to address questions in music, and vice-versa.

My first PhD study was about computer music. I was looking at a very famous institute in Paris, called IRCAM, that is probably the world leading centre in computer music, and I was studying it as a kind of social and cultural organisation. By that point, I was mixing anthropology and music with a focus on computing and media. My first job was actually in media studies at a university

GB: The particular scheme that I got my grant from is the European Research Council, which is famous in Europe because it's a stunning opportunity for a leading researcher to have a visionary idea and orchestrate a research project around it. My idea was that there's lots of work on social and ethical aspects of AI, but there's very little work yet on the specifically cultural implications of AI, and

alternative approaches to the normal work in each field, by putting the computer science directly in dialogue with people like me and a few others who come from the social sciences and humanities and who bring completely new perspectives. It's a kind of two-way dialogue, out of which we are trying to forge completely new approaches to the problems at hand – one project is focused on alternative, 'public interest' designs for recommender systems, and the other on new computational approaches to modelling musical genres.

In terms of research, I would say internationalisation and interdisciplinarity are intrinsically good bedfellows and good partners

in Britain, and my second job was also in media studies. And then a very interesting thing happened, which was that I was hired at Cambridge to teach the sociology of media and culture. I've now had academic jobs in media studies, sociology, music, and now finally, I'm back in anthropology, so it's kind of come full circle. I think one thing this shows is that, within the social sciences and humanities, there are so many currents crossing between these disciplines. You know, if you're sitting in media studies, to read some sociology or to absorb some anthropology is perfectly normal.

You currently lead an EU-funded project with interdisciplinarity at the core, looking at music and artificial intelligence. Who are the key partners in this project, and what were the principal drivers behind its formation?

certainly rather little critical work on this. So my project is predicated on developing a set of smaller research projects, which are in dialogue with each other, looking critically at the cultural implications of AI and doing that through music.

The project is built around me and a series of rather senior and mid-career collaborators from Europe and the US and Australia. Together we have ten projects, and each of them addresses a different aspect of this question. Some are more and some are less interdisciplinary, but the most interesting and radical interdisciplinarity is evident in two of the projects which are collaborations with leading figures from computer science and data science. There's a field called 'music information retrieval', or MIR, which is what happens to data science when it engages with music, and in these two projects we're developing radically

Some argue that national quality assurance frameworks, university rankings and research publication practices serve as barriers to interdisciplinary work. Has this been your experience? And, if so, how have you worked around this?

GB: It's a well-aimed criticism that these quality assurance audits are poor at recognising interdisciplinary work. I have to say that, as someone whose work has always been fundamentally across a number of boundaries, I've never felt particularly disadvantaged, and that is because, in the British system, at least, we have the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In my earlier career as a younger and mid-career academic, what used to happen is that my outputs and publications would be put into whichever disciplinary panel it was relevant to: some of my work would go to anthropology, to sociology, to music, to media studies and so on. And I never really found it a problem because those panels would feed a mark back into the central tally of research quality. Now, it's

also the case that in the last ten years or so, the whole design of the REF has been changed to encourage greater interdisciplinarity by making panels that are often themselves composed of interdisciplinary elements. So if you're in the arts these days, you'll send your research outputs to an interdisciplinary creative arts panel,

GB: I now have mixed feelings about advocating an academic career for my young, brilliant colleagues, because of the loss of earnings, tenure and security, but also because of the absolute excess of online monitoring and auditing of the everyday practices of young academics, which has grown out of control and is onerous. I feel

There's lots of work on social and ethical aspects of AI, but there's very little work yet on the specifically cultural implications

which has theatre, dance, music, etc. So interdisciplinary work is now more likely to be judged in a sympathetic way in the UK audits. Of course, some colleagues might criticise that, because they think it inevitably dilutes the specifically musical expertise or the theatre studies expertise that ought to be brought into evaluations. But in my opinion, there's no mechanical issue here, and in fact, at least in the UK, a lot of effort has been expended in trying to recognise how many of us are now doing interdisciplinary work, particularly within the humanities, and between them and the social sciences.

Many EAIE members work in international offices, supporting international student mobility and the broader internationalisation of their campuses. As a senior academic, what boundaries do you believe we need to cross to ensure the most effective collaboration between academic and professional staff in our institutions?

that the pressures on young academics of these multiple kinds are becoming excessive, and causing the rewards, the freedoms, the pleasures, the benefits of the job to be overshadowed.

I think the problem in Britain has been taking the American model of an increasingly professionalised academic administrative staff, because they've faced an escalating avalanche of demands, including their own auditing processes by which everything now has to be triply confirmed and calibrated. Although there are certain benefits to that, there now seems to be a cultural gap between the training of the professional administrative staff and academic values. So there's a cultural problem whereby we academics often feel the administrative staff don't listen enough to what our priorities and needs are.

I feel that administrative staff should be aware that escalating the demands of



online monitoring and grading is not the right way to create the best teaching and learning environment. I don't know if administrative staff are aware quite how much some of these demands are eating

Above all, our students want contact

into not only our well-being, our time for research and intellectual scholarship, but crucially the contacts we can have with students and the quality of the teaching experience. Because above all, our students want contact.

TRANSCENDING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

In thinking about the boundary-crossing work done by higher education when it ventures across the established borders of countries and disciplines, it's helpful to reflect on terminology. A critical look at the phenomenon of 'transdisciplinarity' can help us contextualise our thinking about the academic disciplines and their role in international higher education.

Transdisciplinarity transports us across borders into other domains, taking us beyond our own life experiences and helping us to understand our position in relation to different cultures, disciplines and diverse ways of knowing. This diversity is grounded in more than discipline-based knowledge domains; it draws on other types of knowing, such as experiential, indigenous and spiritual. Transdisciplinarity has become fashionable in the arts, humanities and social and natural sciences. However, when compared with conventional discipline-based teaching curricula and research projects, its contributions are still not mainstream.

Transdisciplinary research is not generously supported by funders of scientific research, despite the increasing number of calls for collaboration across conventional disciplinary boundaries. Transdisciplinary curricula are still rarely supported in higher education, and transdisciplinarity is still not accepted by many academic institutions, where compartmentalised structures and selective funding lack a culture of collaboration for the common good. Indeed, transdisciplinary research is considered by some to be contradictory to the basic principles of the production of scientific knowledge prescribed by discipline-based protocols and methods.

Statistics published by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences show that the volume of publications about transdisciplinarity has increased, especially since 2000.¹ In addition, the diversity and scope of collaborations between and beyond the borders of disciplines has increased. The number of collaborations between 'near neighbour disciplines' (such as different social science disciplines) exceeds by far the number of collaborations between 'distant disciplines' (such as the physical sciences and humanities).²



Image: Shutterstock

DEFINING MOMENT

There is no consensual definition of trans-disciplinary contributions. Confusion and misunderstandings about cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, post-disciplinary and transdisciplinary contributions to scientific research and formal education programmes highlight the need to accept diversity and plurality while agreeing on a common understanding and way forward.

‘Disciplinarity’ refers to the specialisation and fragmentation of academic disciplines, especially since the 19th century. Each discipline has specific concepts, definitions and methodological protocols for the study of its precisely defined domain of competence. Each discipline defines and maintains boundaries to distinguish its knowledge domain from other disciplines.

‘Multidisciplinary’ refers to an additive research agenda in which each participant remains within the domain of their discipline and applies its concepts

and methods. Disciplinary boundaries are not crossed. ‘Interdisciplinary’ contributions are those in which convergence across boundaries for concerted action is accepted by participants in different disciplines to achieve a shared goal.

Transdisciplinary contributions incorporate a combination of concepts and types of knowledge between and beyond disciplinary boundaries

However, disciplinary boundaries are not challenged. The core characteristic of interdisciplinary approaches is their shared goal to creatively collaborate and use concepts, methods and principles from each discipline, thus acknowledging their differences.

In contrast, ‘transdisciplinary’ contributions incorporate a combination of concepts and types of knowledge between

and beyond disciplinary boundaries. They include the knowledge and know-how of individuals, groups and institutions in civic society, including representatives of the private sector, public administrators and minorities. These contributions

enable the cross-fertilisation of different types of knowledge and life experiences from diverse groups of people, thus promoting an enlarged vision of a subject, as well as bold explanations and new understandings. Rather than being an output, transdisciplinary contributions are ways of promoting creative thinking beyond conventional disciplinary borders and achieving innovative goals,

enriched understanding and dialogue about issues and subjects concerning our habitat and our livelihoods in a world of global change.³

Several shared aims of transdisciplinarity can be identified by an analysis of recent publications. Numerous cases of innovative teaching and training, theoretical and applied research and community-led projects are documented in all regions of the world; some are presented in the *Handbook of transdisciplinarity: Global perspectives*.⁴ Transdisciplinary being and thinking has the capacity to bypass disciplinary boundaries.

COMPLEMENTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

It is increasingly accepted that transdisciplinary contributions are not synonymous

with interdisciplinary ones. Without specialised disciplinary studies, there would be no in-depth knowledge and data. Discipline-based competences and skills are taught in the classroom and transported with the traveller when borders are crossed. Although they are not forgotten after crossing disciplinary boundaries, the open mind of the traveller means that intransigent disciplinary confinement can be challenged by convergence and collaboration with others.

Transdisciplinary projects incorporate disciplinary specialisation, interdisciplinary collaboration and transdisciplinary inquiry. Transdisciplinary thinkers are receptive and inclusive thinkers, not closed-minded or restricted by predefined

and sometimes conflicting viewpoints. Trained facilitators are needed to pilot transdisciplinary teaching and research.

Finally, transdisciplinarity provides a global framework for seeing and interpreting the world differently from common norms. Think about how you position yourself in relation to other disciplines, other professions and ways of being, thinking and knowing that coexist and differ from your life experiences. This is key to making progress in our world of divergent opinions, conflicting intentionality and incommensurable values.

— RODERICK J. LAWRENCE

Multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity coexist and are complementary rather than mutually exclusive

with interdisciplinary ones. A recent discussion paper commissioned by the International Science Council aims to help teachers, researchers and practitioners in diverse fields to better understand fundamental differences between interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary contributions.⁵

Multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity coexist and are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching, research and practice require a common conceptual framework and analytical methods based

on shared terminology, mental images and common goals. Without specialised disciplinary studies, there would be no in-depth knowledge and data. Discipline-based concepts, frameworks and methods. Transdisciplinary projects incorporate and enrich our understanding of the world by combining scientific knowledge with other types of knowledge and ways of knowing.

THE RIGHT SCAFFOLDING

Transdisciplinary teaching and research should embrace border crossing and address complexity, diversity, plurality and positionality. This requires scaffolding that facilitates complex interpersonal dialogue between participants with divergent

1. Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. (2023, May 4). *Publication radar*. <https://transdisciplinarity.ch/en/publikationen/publikationsradar/>

2. Rylance, R. (2015). Grant giving: Global funders to focus on interdisciplinarity. *Nature*, 525, 313–315. <https://doi.org/10.1038/525313a>

3. Lawrence, R. J. (2021). *Creating built environments: Bridging knowledge and practice divides*. Routledge.

4. Lawrence, R. J. (Ed.) (2023). *Handbook of transdisciplinarity: Global perspectives*. Edward Elgar.

5. Kaiser, M., & Gluckman, P. (2023). *Looking at the future of transdisciplinary research*. International Science Council. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6422d64442b7c104ae4c1900/t/644920d337a61a6becd56f55/1682514140647/2023-04-26+Future+of+transdisciplinary+research.pdf>

EAIE Community Spotlight: THE 2023 EAIE AWARD WINNERS



EAIE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN INTERNATIONALISATION

Newcastle University, for their multifaceted initiatives connecting internationalisation with sustainability and inclusivity.



EAIE AWARD FOR VISION & LEADERSHIP

Ligia Deca, for her contributions to the Bologna Process and to international education in Romania and in Europe.



EAIE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Hans-Georg van Liempd, for his long history of service to the EAIE as a trainer, author, mentor, and a variety of leadership roles within the Association.



EAIE PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Leonard Engel, for his leadership of the EAIE through substantial growth and change, and his legacy of professionalisation of the Association.

A green vine with several leaves is wrapped around a wooden pencil. The pencil is oriented vertically, with its tip pointing downwards. The background is a solid, vibrant green. The vine's leaves are bright green and have a serrated edge. The pencil is a natural wood color with a black eraser at the top and a sharp black lead tip at the bottom. The overall composition is clean and modern, symbolizing the intersection of nature and education.

ALLYING FOR _____ SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

One of the many European Universities alliances changing the face of higher education in Europe, the nine universities of the CHARM-EU alliance collaborate towards educating the next generation of sustainability professionals. At the core of the alliance's unique approach is a focus on transdisciplinary research methods and applying them to the kind of social innovation the world needs.

A considerable number of European higher education institutions (HEIs) are joining European Universities alliances. In 2023, over 430 institutions are part of 50 alliances, collaborating on mobility, joint degrees, governance structures, academic qualifications, and mutual recognition processes.¹ Developing joint degrees through multiple HEIs across countries is challenging, but it does offer innovative opportunities for crossing boundaries between countries and disciplines. 'Global Challenges for Sustainability' is the first ever joint degree Master's programme as part of a European Universities

capstone, the focus of this article – student teams address sustainability challenges in collaboration with external stakeholders using challenge-based learning. These phases are scaffolded by educational principles, of which transdisciplinarity is at the core.

COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

In the first and second editions of the CHARM-EU capstone (2022–2023 and 2023–2024), 26 interdisciplinary teams of 4–6 students across five universities conducted research and designed pathways to address sustainability challenges together with stakeholders, with field work in five partner countries (Spain, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands and France) as well as in Senegal and South Africa. Academic supervisors from multiple disciplines guided students in analyses and development of solutions together with stakeholders. Supervisors, guest lecturers and external stakeholders organised hybrid working sessions for the students across the five universities. The capstone constituted a joint learning process among students, stakeholders and academic supervisors, with the goal of developing concrete capstone products that stakeholders could use in addressing 'their' sustainability challenge.

The capstone was designed by a knowledge creating team (KCT), responsible for the development of learning outcomes, content and assessments. KCTs are inter-institutional and interdisciplinary collaborative groups of educationalists, students and staff from multiple disciplines across the five universities that design the programme phases and modules. Different methods were used to organise the collaborative

Developing joint degrees through multiple HEIs across countries is challenging, but it does offer innovative opportunities for crossing boundaries.

alliance. It is managed by CHARM-EU, an alliance of now nine European HEIs². This 1.5 year 90 ECTS programme started in 2021 across five CHARM-EU partner universities in Europe. The programme follows an innovative three-phased approach; in the first phase, students complete modules on sustainability, transdisciplinary research, and social innovation. In the second phase, students choose one of three tracks – food, water, and life and health. In the final phase –

design of the capstone, including professional development workshops on trans-disciplinary teambuilding, content creation sessions, a programmatic assessment masterclass, module sharing sessions, peer review of module designs, module advisory boards, intensive 'sprint' development periods, and e-learning modules and interactive working sessions on inclusivity, hybrid classrooms, mobility and emerging technology.³ These helped train and guide teachers in the design and delivery of the Master's programme with its many educational innovations and novel educational principles.

GLOBAL SOLUTIONS IN ACTION

Capstone stakeholders were NGOs, government agencies, research institutions, networks of organisations, and UN agencies. While students were in the lead of their own capstone project, stakeholders were key in guiding students in a way that would also be beneficial to them and in addressing 'their' societal challenges. Some examples include:

- Exploring how to encourage citizens to connect to nature in the city of Utrecht, where students collaborated with Utrecht Natuurlijk to develop a smartphone app for exploring city farms and city gardens in a playful and instructive way.
- In Senegal, students collaborated with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to conduct collaborative field work around circular-shaped agroecological food forests and how they might contribute

to the Great Green Wall initiative to restore degraded land across the Sahel.

- In Spain, a capstone challenge analysed whether an ecolabel for restaurants might foster ocean conservation. Students found that an ecolabel would not influence consumers behaviour but instead developed guidelines with practical steps for restaurants to reduce their impact on oceans.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Capstone students greatly valued group work and learned to collaborate in interdisciplinary teams. Working together to solve a challenge with stakeholders developed students' collaboration and communication competencies. The fact that the capstone was inter-institutional also had clear benefits; most students acknowledged that phase mobility across institutions improved their learning experience. Interestingly, this was also the case for students who stayed in the same university as in their previous phase, indicating the value of combining physical and virtual mobility across HEIs.

However, this inter-institutional nature of the capstone also came with challenges. Given that the capstone was the final phase of the first ever joint degree Master's as part of a European Universities alliance, questions around quality assurance and alignment with the five universities – especially in terms of assessment levels for graduation, graduation rules and regulations – had to be addressed. Cultural and academic differences among supervisors, who each

had their own supervision style and different rules and regulations (eg on ethics) across the five universities, posed challenges to familiarising all supervisors with CHARM-EU educational principles, and aligning and calibrating assessments and feedback across the 13 student teams. Co-ordination in teaching and administrative and logistical arrangements was also challenging, especially related to the student teams' field work across seven countries. However, the use of joint virtual administrative offices, located in each partner university, and dedicated capstone staff, helped to overcome these challenges.

Given the transdisciplinary nature of the Master's and the capstone, students' development in both academic professional skills is key. A novel programmatic assessment approach was used, whereby an integrated approach to feedback and multiple assessment moments fostered students' ability to take charge of their own learning process. This allows assessment not only by supervisors, but also by stakeholders, who guide and assess students on the societal impact of their generated outputs and their ability to communicate their message to the general public. The capstone faced challenges with this assessment methodology, including too detailed and slightly overlapping assessment indicators for learning outcomes, teachers being unfamiliar with non-conventional assessments that test professional rather than only academic skills, as well as aligning grading and feedback across student teams and supervisors from multiple universities and disciplinary backgrounds.

LESSONS LEARNED

A collaborative design process for transdisciplinary education takes time and is an iterative process with continuous adjustments, but is important to cater to the differing needs and perspectives of academic and non-academic actors from different countries, and in turn their distinct backgrounds and cultures. Student involvement in this design process is crucial to address at an early stage concerns and the large differences in

applicable to not only different challenges across different countries, but also relevant for students' diverse future careers. This requires clear indicators for academic and non-academic assessment and clarity on what constitutes which levels of assessment, without making it too complicated for supervisors to assess. It is important not to over-assess by addressing all learning outcomes in all assessments, but keep assessments simple and targeted. This calls for a combination

Crossing boundaries and educational innovation is a long-term iterative process which European Universities alliances must evaluate and improve over time. However, it provides an opportunity for reflection on how the future of higher education can be reimaged in terms of collaboration, pedagogy, internationalisation and transdisciplinary thinking.

—MARJANNEKEJ. VIJGE,
SILVIA GALLAGHER, JAKE BYRNE,
UNNIKRISHNAN BRITJITA MADHAVAN
& JULIA TSCHERSICH

A collaborative design process for transdisciplinary education takes time and is an iterative process with continuous adjustments

disciplinary and cultural backgrounds, levels of independence and (future) learning and career aspirations.

Continuous communication about expectations and requirements is crucial to ensure alignment between the very diverse capstone challenges, stakeholders and supervisors. This also includes a thorough eligibility check and careful expectation management among stakeholders proposing sustainability challenges for transdisciplinary education, to address possible trade-offs between the need for a precise definition of the challenge, possible products by stakeholders, and the need for students to be in the lead of (defining) their own project.

Student learning outcomes should be clear and unambiguous, yet flexible enough to be transversal; making them

of 'conventional' thesis research reports to assess academic skills, as well as outputs that do not fit standard academic outputs to assess professional skills, for example collaborations and interactions, student reflections on personal and professional development, and capstone products such as apps, communication materials, business models, software and prototypes.

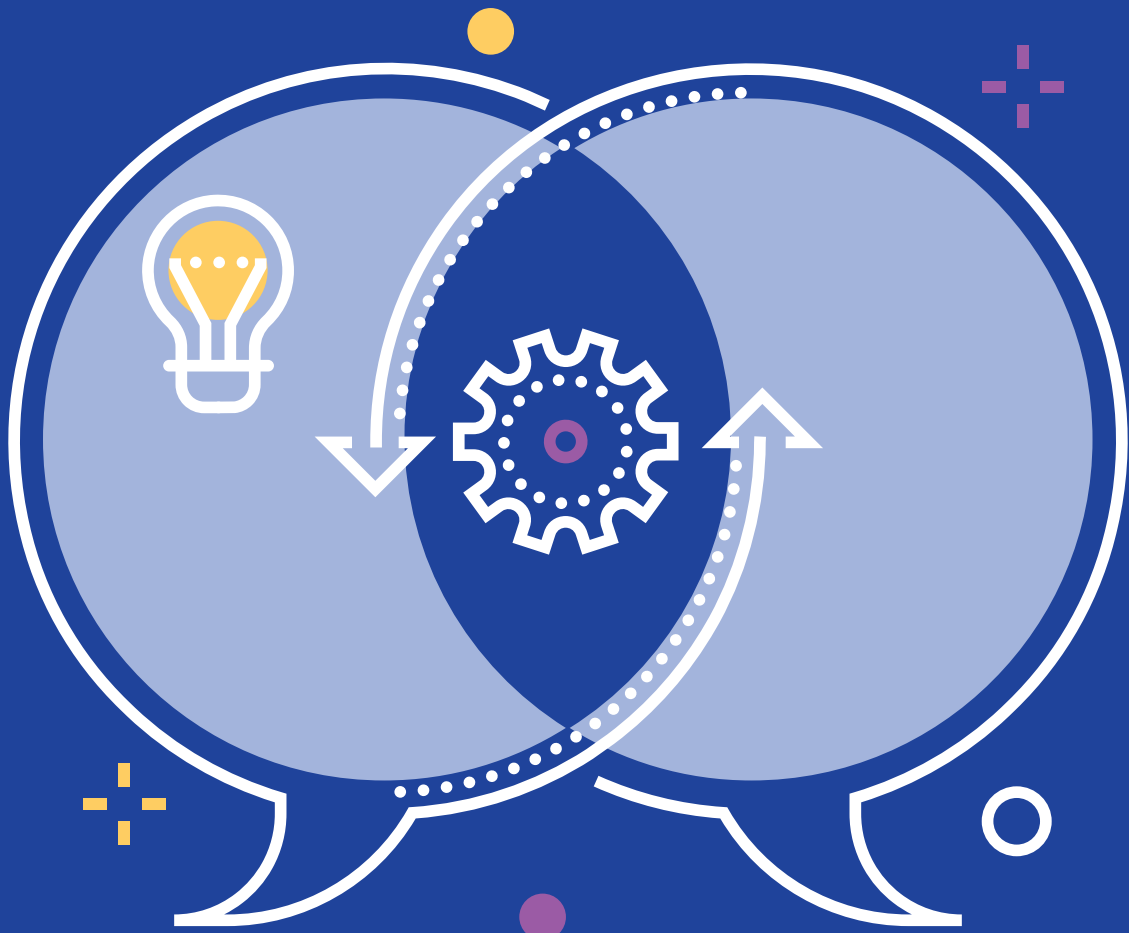
Lastly, professional development training among teachers across the institutions is key. Supervisors from different institutions and countries have different experiences, values, cultures and academic traditions, and inter-institutional transdisciplinary education comes with a variety of educational innovations such as challenge-based learning and programmatic assessment for which many teachers need to build skills and experiences.

1. European Commission. (2023). *European Universities initiative*. Retrieved 19/06/2023 from <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>

2. The Master's was established by the University of Barcelona, Trinity College Dublin, Utrecht University, the University of Montpellier and Eötvös Loránd University Budapest. Partners that later joined are Åbo Akademi University, Julius Maximilians University Würzburg, Ruhr West University of Applied Sciences and the University of Bergen.

3. Van Vugt, S., Gallagher, S. and Vijge, M (2023) *Evaluating perspectives of professional development for academic teachers in an inter-institutional European University Alliance: Recommendations from CHARM-EU*. EUCEN conference 2023, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

CROSS-BOUNDARY COLLABORATION WITH COIL



One of the readiest tools for breaking down barriers in higher education is Collaborative Online International Learning, or COIL. Relying as it does on meaningful interactions between participants from different cultures – be they the cultures of a particular people group or of a specific academic discipline – this form of virtual exchange is perfectly poised to further both interdisciplinarity and internationalisation.

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a teaching and learning method used to internationalise the curriculum and facilitate students' intercultural and curriculum content learning.¹ COIL can be seen as one of the most intensive forms of intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration for both students and educators within higher education.

COIL adds an intercultural dimension to the curriculum, in any course, and should be recognised as an essential form of internationalisation at all levels within universities.² It is a unique form of virtual exchange as it revolves entirely around the collaboration of two or more educators, from different universities located in different countries, co-developing and co-facilitating online collaborative assignments for their students. With its foundations in social constructivism and collaborative learning, COIL in practice is highly interdependent as it relies on social interaction and brings educators and students from multiple diverse backgrounds, cultures and disciplines together, interacting and collaborating on a common goal.

The university alliances created through the European Universities Initiative often use COIL because of its project-based learning approach, which involves connecting various subjects and developing different skills to complete a project. It merges different ways of thinking and behaving, different values, beliefs and norms and different university cultures, and it can also involve collaboration between leaders at different levels.

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

Traditionally, the ultimate goal of COIL – and internationalisation of higher education more broadly – is seen to be facilitating students' intercultural competence development. This is considered to relate to 'soft skills', rather than the 'hard skills' which constitute a specific field of study. But 'intercultural' can also relate to disciplines: if we take a broader view of what constitutes 'culture', we can see it as a collective set of

We are not just aiming to reach a *common goal despite* our differences; we ideally want to reach a *higher goal because* of our differences

beliefs, behaviours, ideas, philosophies and practices shared by any specific group of people. Each discipline actually has its own culture (*eg* the field of medicine versus the field of philosophy). From this perspective, 'intercultural learning' takes on a different meaning, where the cultural boundaries that are being crossed also relate to differences between disciplines.

The interdisciplinary element within COIL is fundamental: the COIL experience is truly transformative when both educators and students leave their comfort zone. We are not just aiming to reach a *common goal despite* our differences; we ideally want to reach a *higher goal because* of our differences.

Going through the COIL experience means challenging our assumptions about the differences between us: both finding differences where they were not expected and realising that presumed differences are often smaller than we think.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

One of the first steps in implementing COIL involves crossing organisational cultures. Educators need to find a suitable COIL partner from a university abroad with whom they can co-develop and co-facilitate the COIL course. This involves the careful consideration of various elements that can differ greatly even between universities in the same country, let alone universities in different countries. It can lead to a lot of surprises that can facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of COIL. When co-designing a COIL course, educators need to consider differences in educational levels, academic calendars, time zones, class size, assessment formats, data protection regulations, technology and so on.

For example, one COIL course brought together physical education (PE) teacher training students from the Netherlands and primary school teacher training students from Ireland to develop an inclusive physical education lesson plan. Teacher training Bachelor's courses are offered at research universities in Ireland, while most teacher training courses are offered at universities of applied sciences (hogescholen) in the Netherlands. In addition, the Irish

students were trained as generalist primary school teachers, teaching an array of different subjects, while the Dutch students were being trained only to specialise in PE at different educational levels.

The students participating in this COIL course therefore had different levels of knowledge and were trained in different ways; the Irish students had more theoretical knowledge, while the Dutch students had more practical, specialised knowledge. At first, the educators thought these differences could be problematic – but as the course progressed, these different levels of knowledge and experience complemented one another and resulted in a well-designed lesson plan that took different perspectives into account.

One Irish student said: “The Dutch were very relaxed and chilled out. They were very good at providing real-life examples for PE practices, while we were good at providing the educational theories behind the practices but not the examples.”

Another Irish student had this to say: “I learned that PE is a more serious subject in the Netherlands than in Ireland. For example, in the Netherlands, to be able to teach PE at primary school level you have to be a certified PE teacher; in Ireland, this is not the case – you just have to be a certified regular teacher with some PE knowledge.”

And a Dutch perspective: “I learned a lot about Irish culture – especially about the Irish school system. In addition, the hurling and Gaelic football

clinic was especially valuable to me as a gym teacher, because I can apply this in my gym lessons. It is nice to learn more about sports that we don't play here in the Netherlands.”

This is just one example of how the differences between two programmes can facilitate students' curriculum content and intercultural learning. There are many more examples of COIL involving students and lecturers from diverse disciplines collaborating and learning from one another.

LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

COIL has so much to offer and its potential is limitless. The COIL method will only become more popular as universities and educators realise its potential and how it can be used as an inclusive teaching and learning method for both curriculum content and intercultural learning across countries and across disciplines. We envisage COIL becoming even more impactful as it is used in a more intentional way for teaching and learning across boundaries of all kinds.

— SIMONE HACKETT & PIET VAN HOVE

1. Hackett, S., Janssen, J., Beach, P. *et al.* The effectiveness of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) on intercultural competence development in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 20, 5 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00373-3>

2. Van Hove, P. (2019). COIL: what's in an acronym? *EAIIE Blog*. <https://www.eaie.org/blog/coil-acronym.html>

EAIE BLOG SPOT

In between *Forum* issues, visit the EAIE blog for news, views and insights, anywhere and at your fingertips. Just grab yourself a comfy seat and start browsing!



Remapping international partnerships

Maps of international partnerships are no neutral representation of reality, but rather something to be carefully reflected upon.
ow.ly/KYK150PZFma



Celebrating community and connection at #EAIE2023

The 33rd Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition came to a close with a celebration of the strong connections in our community.
ow.ly/JxZh50PZFoh



International student tuition fees: reflections from Sweden

What does the case of Sweden reveal about the trend towards tuition fees for non-EU students in the Nordics?
ow.ly/iBTP50PZFoR

EAIE PODCAST



Kelly-anne Watson: Student accommodation: key trends and considerations

How big of an issue is affordability within the international education sector at the moment, especially when it comes to student housing?
ow.ly/H3OU50PZFaq



Daryna Zavorodnia: Unissued Diplomas: The price of war in Ukraine

The Unissued Diplomas project puts the spotlight on Ukrainian students who will never receive their diplomas because their lives were ended too soon by the ongoing war in Ukraine.
ow.ly/RXYg50PZFfw



Sabine Pendl & Wessel Meijer: Managing staff, cultivating talent

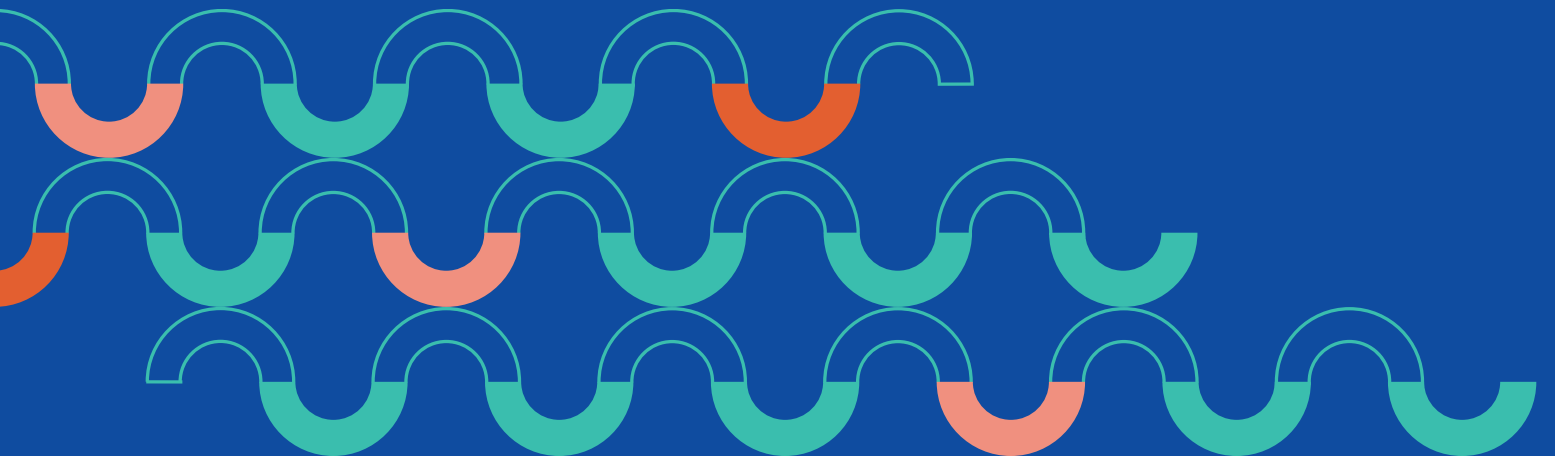
Discover the key skills or competencies that are vital for managing an international higher education office today.
ow.ly/nTmW50PZFtI

“What can I do to see the bigger picture and help others? That’s not possible without connection and holding space for others.”



Photos courtesy of the EAIE & Daniel Vegel

CONNECTING CURRENTS IN ROTTERDAM





As the largest EAIE Conference and Exhibition in history drew to a close, one thing was clear: community is key to doing impactful work in international higher education. If there was one common thread running through #EAIE2023, it was the power of our community to band together and make an impact.

The 33rd Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition made for a busy week of ‘Connecting currents’ in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Kicking off the programme on Tuesday, nine workshops provided an invaluable chance to learn from internationalisation experts and sharpen skills. On topics ranging from content marketing, to strategic internationalisation planning, to blended mobility, expert trainers from around the world offered full-day and half-day interactive workshops designed to help professionals build the skills they need to internationalise their institutions at this year’s Conference.

Speakers Jahkini Bisselink and Hajar Yagkoubi gave us a warm welcome at Wednesday’s Opening Plenary. Wednesday also saw the opening of the Exhibition, a core part of what makes the EAIE Conference a must-attend event for international educators, whether seeking out new partners or just getting the lay of the land and seeing who can help you achieve your future goals.

Of course, the many sessions and campfire discussions on the hottest topics in internationalisation are the bread and butter of any EAIE Conference. One of this year’s can’t miss sessions was on ‘Politics and policies of internationalisation: Ministers’ views’, where education ministers from Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Spain engaged in a moderated discussion about the role of national-level actors in shaping and sustaining countries’ international education landscapes.

As the Conference drew to a close at Friday’s Closing Plenary, EAIE President Piet Van Hove and Vice-President Sara López Selga invited us to reflect on all we learned and experienced together this week. “We can be a compassionate community, lift each other up and work on real progress together,” as Piet summed it up.



6700
participants

250+
sessions &
workshops

240
exhibition
stands

100
countries
represented

17
networking
events

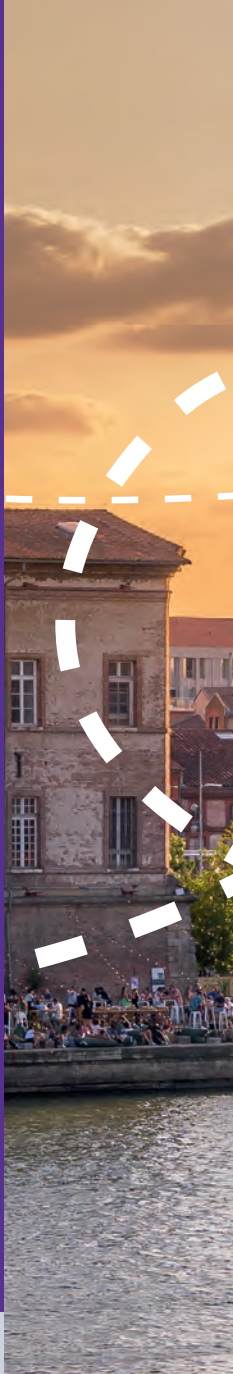
963
organisations
represented

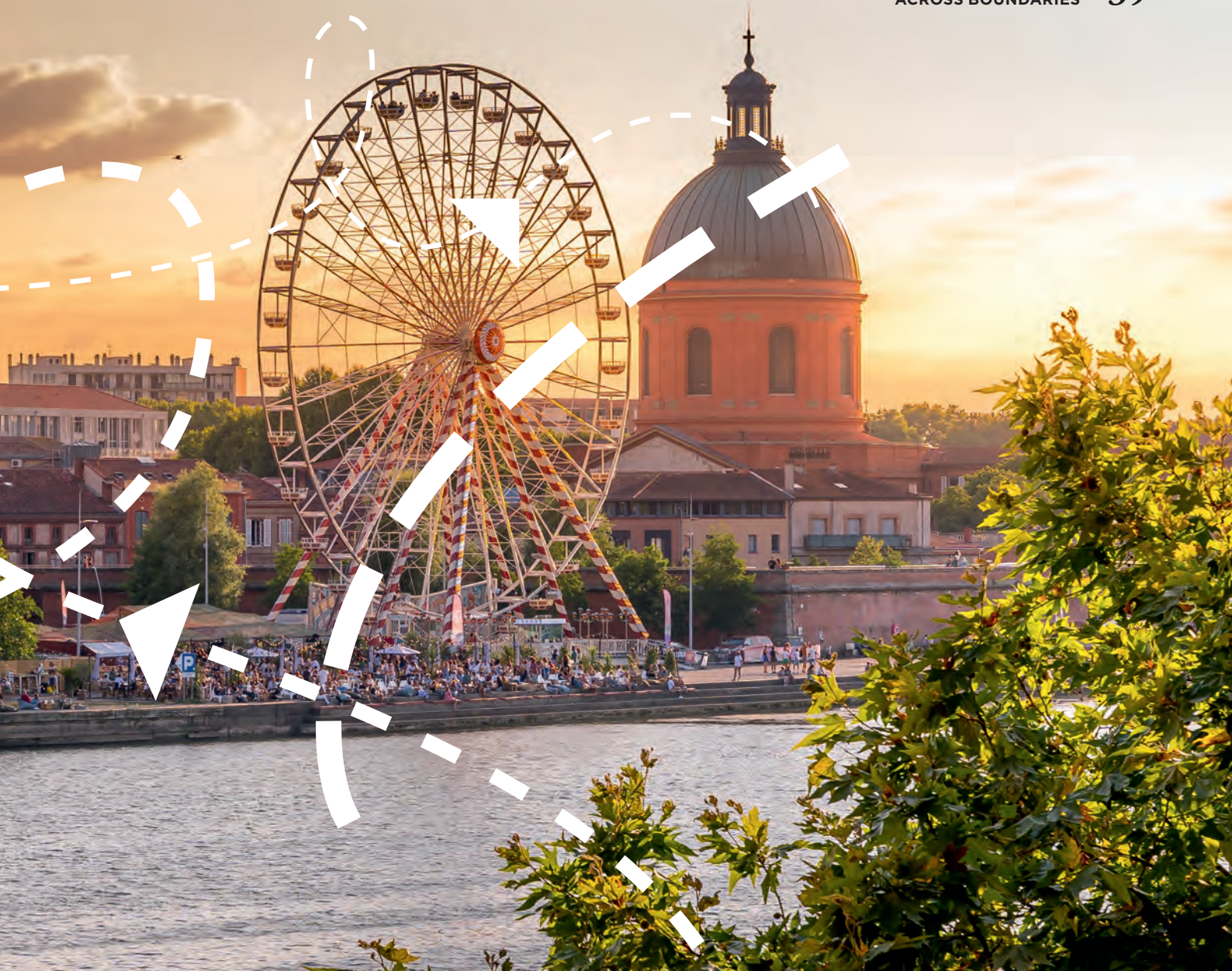


En route!

TO TOULOUSE

The 34th Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition will be held in Toulouse, capital of France's Occitania region. Equally close to the Mediterranean sea and the Pyrenees mountains, in the heart of southwestern France, Toulouse showcases the beauty of its heritage and its wonderful climate alongside its excellent economic performance and status as world capital of the aeronautics and space industries. Often referred to as La Ville Rose, or 'the Pink City', due to its distinctive pink terracotta architecture, the city is no less than the first French metropolis for economic growth, demographic evolution or job creation, and widely regarded as one of France's most beloved student cities. The ideal destination in which to enjoy an adventure for a weekend, a semester or for a whole lifetime!





A RICH BLEND OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

As one of France's oldest cities, Toulouse boasts a history dating back to ancient times, with Roman and medieval influences evident in its architecture and landmarks. The city's historical centre is a hub of activity, with bustling streets, lively markets and charming cafes, creating a vibrant atmosphere that attracts residents, students and visitors.

The city hosts a wide array of cultural events, including festivals such as Le Nouveau Printemps, Rose festival, Rio Loco or Bricks Festival, unique art exhibitions at Les Abattoirs or La Halle de la Machine, theatre performances,

dance shows and more. But Toulouse is particularly known for its love of music and was voted as a UNESCO Creative City of Music on 31 October 2023. With renowned venues such as Bikini, Zénith, Métronum and Théâtre du Capitole, the Pink City has a lively music scene with concerts, gigs and music festivals happening frequently. From classical music with the Orchestre National du Capitole to contemporary, jazz to electronic or rap with brothers Big Flo & Oli, Toulouse offers a diverse range of musical experiences that bring people together, fostering a sense of community and enjoyment.

Whether as amateurs, active practitioners, or fans of its elite-level clubs (such

as the Toulouse Football Club for football or the Stade Toulousain for rugby union), sports are second nature in Occitania. Its territory is a veritable playground for outdoor activities such as skiing, sailing or hiking, and over 40 of its top-tier sporting facilities will be welcoming teams preparing for the Paris Olympic Games.

The people of Toulouse are renowned for their appreciation of culinary delights, encompassing both local and international cuisines. Toulouse benefits from the Occitania region's high-quality agriculture, boasting the world's largest acreage for wines and France's largest acreage for organic production. From traditional French bistros to trendy cafes and gourmet



restaurants, Toulouse is a haven for food enthusiasts. The bustling markets, such as Marché Victor Hugo and Marché Cristal, showcase fresh produce, regional specialties and delightful street food, creating a lively and inviting culinary scene.

A CLEVER CITY

Toulouse has consistently been at the forefront of significant scientific, technological and human endeavours that have reshaped the world and continue to be a source of inspiration. Its university, established in 1229, holds the distinction of being the second oldest in France, after the Sorbonne in Paris.

As the European capital of aeronautics, space and embedded systems, Toulouse and the surrounding region of Occitania bring together a unique ecosystem of companies, universities and research centres that make it a major hub for science and innovation more broadly. As such, the Toulouse metropolitan area aims to showcase its specificity and

develop the number of sites focusing on promoting scientific culture to the local population and visiting tourists.

On the historic runway, once the cradle of civil aviation and the Aeropostale airline in the Montaudran quarter, both adults and children, dreamers and explorers, are warmly invited to embark on the adventure of the pioneering aviators of the twentieth century at L'Envol des Pionniers.

Without leaving the stratosphere, Toulouse provides a unique opportunity to soar! A collection of thirty iconic airplanes including a Concorde, A400M or A380 are featured at the Aeroscopie Museum, while the Airbus factories next door invite you to witness the assembly line of the A350.

Back in the city centre, adjacent to the gardens and old neighbourhood, a burgeoning scientific hub is taking shape. Enthusiasts of life sciences can immerse themselves in the wonders of the Natural History Museum of Toulouse, established

in 1796, which stands as the second largest in the country following Paris's National Museum. Continuing their journey from the museum and situated near the Toulouse University, visitors can encounter the Quai des Savoirs, dedicated to sharing knowledge and scientific culture.

Finally, in Toulouse, aspiring to reach the stars is as simple as exploring the five hectares of the Cité de l'Espace – a truly distinctive site in Europe, dedicated to the exploration of space and astronomy. Visitors, both young and old, can marvel at life-sized replicas of iconic vehicles like the Ariane rocket or the Mir Space Station, and experience what it's like to live and train as an astronaut.

Article and photos courtesy of Agence d'attractivité de Toulouse Métropole



INTRODUCE YOUR COLLEAGUES TO THE BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF THE EAIE COMMUNITY

EAIE group membership, available in packs of 10, 15, 20 and 35. Enjoy all the benefits of EAIE membership for less.

eaie.org/join-us



THE EAIE SPRING ACADEMY

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WRITE FOR SPRING
2024 *FORUM*

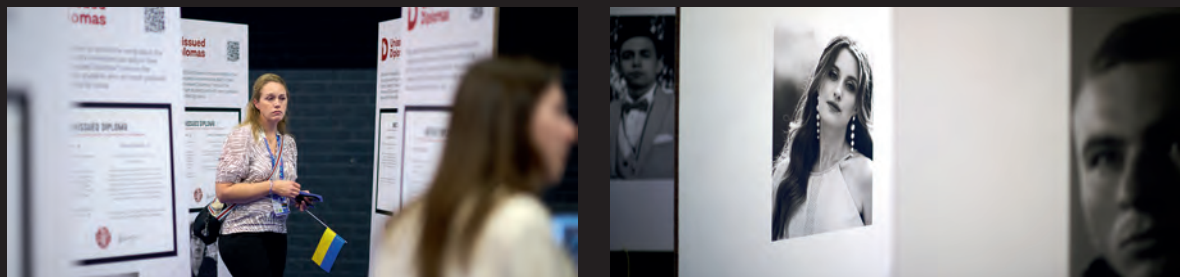
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ARTICLE BY 19 JANUARY
publications@eaie.org



**“When your classroom turns into a
battlefield, your major becomes bravery.”**

In support of the ‘Unissued Diplomas’ initiative, which aims to remind the world about the ongoing war in Ukraine, the EAIE hosted a photographic exhibition at **#EAIE2023**. The exhibition honoured the memory of 36 Ukrainian students who will never graduate because their lives were taken by the Russian invasion.



**Unissued
Diplomas**

www.unissueddiplomas.org

CALENDAR

25–26
JANUARY

What's new in Brussels?
Recent developments in European policies and programmes
<https://aca-secretariat.be/>

30 JANUARY–
01 FEBRUARY

EWP Back to the Future
Student Mobility Summit
<https://uni-foundation.eu/ewp-back-to-the-future-student-mobility-summit/>

18–21
FEBRUARY

2024 AIEA Annual Conference
Leading International Education at a Crossroads
www.aieaworld.org/2024-aiea-annual-conference.html

MARCH AND
APRIL 2024

EAIE Online Academy spring training programme
Visit the EAIE website for course information and dates
www.eaie.org/training

THE EAIE
ACADEMY



04–08
MARCH

2024 APAIE Conference and Exhibition
Collaborating for sustainable impact: partnerships across the Asia Pacific
www.apaieconference.net



17–20
SEPTEMBER

34th Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition in Toulouse
En Route!
www.eaie.org/toulouse

The poster features a scenic view of the Toulouse skyline at dusk, with the illuminated dome of the Basilique Saint-Étienne in the foreground. The sky is a mix of purple, blue, and orange. Overlaid on the image are several graphic elements: a white vertical line, a white dashed circle with a white arrow pointing right, a white dashed arc with the text 'EN ROUTE!' inside it, and two dashed paths. One path is made of blue segments with blue arrowheads pointing right, and the other is made of orange segments with orange arrowheads pointing right. The text 'EAIE 2024' is in a bold, white, sans-serif font, while 'Toulouse' is in a white, cursive script font. The dates '17-20 SEPTEMBER' are in a white, sans-serif font.

EAIE
2024

Toulouse

17-20 SEPTEMBER

EN ROUTE!

Save the date

Europe's leading international higher
education conference & exhibition

www.eaie.org/toulouse