



Conference Conversation Starter

Weaving the future of global partnerships

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Edited by Aisha Labi

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Aisha Labi

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Table of Contents

v Foreword

01 Introduction

*Aisha Labi, freelance journalist and Europe correspondent,
the Chronicle of Higher Education*

Diplomacy in education

05 Global higher education as a reflection of international relations

Patti McGill Peterson, American Council on Education

09 Diplomacy in higher education: from ideals to execution

*Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, Albukhary International University and
the International Association of Universities*

13 Global citizenship versus diplomacy: internationalisation
of higher education with a collective consciousness

Ş. İlgü Özler, SUNY Global Engagement Program

Strategies and stakeholders for global partnerships

19 Internationalisation and international networks

Gülsün Sağlamer, Istanbul Technical University

25 A transatlantic perspective on global partnerships

*Karen P. DePauw, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Erich
Thaler, University of Basel*

29 Global partnerships and the challenges for higher education

Andrew J. Coats, Monash–Warwick Alliance; Louise G. Shewan, Monash University

The Balkans: challenges and partnerships

35 The Balkans: from periphery to partnerships

Aleksa Bjeliš, University of Zagreb

41 Internationalisation at the European periphery and academics' geo-
graphic preferences for partnership: focus on the Western Balkans

*Manja Klemenčič and Pavel Zgaga, Centre for Educational Policy Studies,
University of Ljubljana*

The Middle East: challenges and higher education systems

47 Higher education in the Middle East: challenges and opportunities

Amr Ezzat Salama, Former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Egypt

53 The challenges for higher education and international partnerships in shaping the future of the Middle East

Ahmad O. Hasnab, Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development

57 About the authors

Foreword

The 2013 gathering of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) is a momentous occasion for more reasons than one. Of enormous significance is the fact that this will be our 25th Annual Conference. This is a notable milestone for any organisation, and the EAIE takes immense satisfaction in the fact that our Association, and our field, have evolved so dynamically over the last quarter century – and now stand at the cutting edge of so many key 21st century developments and concerns. We have accomplished much, yet a great deal of important and exciting work remains to be done.

Our 2013 Annual Conference is also noteworthy with respect to venue: incomparable Istanbul. Spanning two continents, the city is a complex, living symbol of so much that the EAIE itself stands for – crossing borders, facilitating engagement, honouring the past, embracing the future. These same issues resonate in many corners of the world, demanding serious reflection, sustained analysis, and creative consideration.

With such a fortuitous alignment of time and place, the moment seems especially ripe to delve deeply into conversation around the 2013 EAIE conference theme, ‘Weaving the future of global partnerships’. For international educators across Europe and beyond, this is a most timely and provocative topic. After all, who among us is not grappling regularly with the need to make sense of the opportunities and imperatives to engage with a world (literally) of potential partners? How do we make discerning choices about these kinds of relationships, and best manage the promises and pitfalls that come with each of them? What are our partners – whether situated in our same region or located continents away – looking for from us? What are our rights and responsibilities in partnership with others? What is riding on the partnerships we currently manage, or aspire to create – for our students, our professors, our institutions, our cities and towns, and even our countries?

There is clearly much to discuss. And the small book you hold in your hands our second annual *Conference Conversation Starter* publication – is designed specifically to whet your appetite for conversation about these fascinating issues affecting our rapidly evolving field.

The EAIE is profoundly grateful for the efforts expended by each contributor who has taken the time to set forward his or her vision for the future of global partnerships. This is a rich tapestry of ideas ‘woven’ together with the goal of helping all EAIE members get more out of this very special conference, and look toward the future with a deeper appreciation for its complexity and promise.



Leonard Engel
Executive Director, EAIE

Introduction

— *Aisha Labi*

Freelance journalist and Europe correspondent, the Chronicle of Higher Education, USA

As higher education becomes increasingly internationalised, that process is the subject of more scrutiny, discussion and debate than ever before. Internationalisation is almost universally viewed as a force for good in higher education, with institutions of varying size and reputational profile all aspiring to boost their international standing and forge links abroad. And yet for many, the mechanics of how to achieve their international ambitions remain opaque and elusive.

Gatherings such as this year's EAIE Annual Conference, at which thousands of participants representing universities in dozens of countries will convene over the course of four days in Istanbul, are an increasingly essential component of the process of internationalisation. Against the backdrop of a city that embodies internationalisation, straddling continents and cultures, participants will have the opportunity to forge personal connections and build bridges between institutions that could evolve into long-lasting and meaningful international collaborations.

The theme of this year's conference, 'Weaving the future of global partnerships', highlights the ways in which this process is occurring in higher education systems the world over. This slim volume, intended to help stimulate some of the conversations and discussions that will take place in Istanbul and beyond, includes ten essays on four sub-themes that are among the topics that will be the focus of the conference's sessions:

1. Diplomacy in education
2. Strategies and stakeholders for global partnerships
3. The Balkans: challenges and partnerships
4. The Middle East: challenges and higher education systems

There are three essays each on the first two, broader sub-themes, and two each on the more specific geographically defined sub-themes. Our contributing authors represent a wide range

of backgrounds and expertise in higher education and include former government ministers, university rectors, international programme administrators, faculty deans and academics involved in teaching and research.

The publication begins with an examination of the sub-theme of diplomacy in education.

Patti McGill Peterson of the American Council on Education opens the conversation with a rumination on global higher education as a reflection of the state of international diplomacy. Just as the nature of diplomatic engagement has evolved over the centuries, she observes, so too is the role of higher education in what has come to be known as public diplomacy also changing. Where universities were once viewed as outposts of central government authority in many parts of the world, globalised higher education institutions are increasingly operating beyond the limits of national sovereignty and are developing their own international relations strategies and policies. This development carries risks as well as potential rewards for universities, and transparency and a clear ethical framework must remain a central component of the internationalisation process, she warns.

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, the President of the International Association of Universities and Vice-Chancellor of Albukhary International University in Malaysia, takes up the discussion with a piece that focuses on the role of diplomatic ideals in higher education. He highlights the example of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations, an initiative that originated with an effort by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain to foster global cooperation on cross-cultural issues, as embodying the diplomatic ideals of mutual respect and understanding. The initiative has proved so successful at stimulating dialogue that it was later adopted by the Secretary General of the United Nations and has become a paradigm for the kind of exchanges that higher education should be helping to foster, he says.

Ş. İlgü Özler, Director of the Global Engagement Program for the State University of New York system, concludes the section on education and diplomacy with a piece in which she explores the role of higher education in helping to stimulate a modern notion of global citizenship. The most pressing problems facing the world demand global engagement and coordinated action, and only by educating young people to understand the world from a truly global perspective will we begin to address these challenges, she says. She presents a compelling case for why educators and administrators responsible for setting up international programmes should increasingly be thinking about how to instill certain core values in the students who will be enrolling in their programmes.

The next group of essays, on ‘Strategies and stakeholders for global partnerships’, narrows the discussion from the broader, almost abstract, consideration of diplomacy in education to a more nuts-and-bolts examination of how institutions actually forge connections.

Gülsün Sağlamer, the former Rector of Istanbul Technical University, writes about the importance of international networks such as the EAIE in promoting internationalisation. As universities have responded to the pressure to internationalise they have pursued different paths to greater global engagement with varying degrees of success. International networks, which draw together participating institutions from around the world, offer an invaluable forum in which institutions can compare best practices and strategies, and are an important building block for internationalisation. Smaller regional networks also have the potential to help spur regional development, she says. However, universities seeking to join networks,

whether large or small, should first ask some hard questions about what they expect from membership and what common values and ambitions they share with other network members, she advises.

Karen DePauw and **Erich Thaler** explore a successful bilateral international collaboration in their article on the Global Perspectives Program operated by their respective institutions, Virginia Tech in the US and the University of Basel, in Switzerland. They describe how the programme, which offers an intensive study-abroad experience to early career scientists, came to be set up, the mechanics of how it operates and the factors that have contributed to its success. Among the most crucial elements, they write, was the human factor, a theme that recurs in other articles in this slim collection. Personal investment in the programme, on the part of participating faculty and students and even on the part the presidents of each institution, has been essential.

Stewart J. Coats and **Louise Shewan** also explore a bilateral partnership between two institutions, this time on a much broader, institution-wide scale. The Warwick-Monash Alliance, of which Dr Coats is the first Joint Academic Vice-President, represents a unique partnership between institutions, they write, and could offer a new paradigm for a higher education sector that is still in search of viable models for successful long-term internationalisation. The authors offer the provocative suggestion that the airline industry, which has seen individual companies turn to alliances and mergers in their efforts to remain internationally competitive, could offer the most compelling model for universities as they seek to expand internationally.

The final four essays focus on two regions, the Balkans and the Middle East, that share many of the same challenges, such as a high youth unemployment rate and universities that trail those in other parts of Europe and the West in terms of their level of internationalisation.

Aleksa Bjeliš, the Rector of the University of Zagreb, in Croatia, writes of the many challenges facing higher education in the Balkans, a region that he describes as having once been the birthplace of Western civilisation but which he says is now in search of a new defining identity. Universities are the focus of tremendous expectation in the region, he explains, as hopes for future growth and economic development focus attention on the role of higher education. The region's universities lag behind the rest of Europe in terms of performance and funding levels and such optimistic expectations are largely misplaced, he argues. But regional partnerships are playing an important role in helping individual institutions overcome their limitations. He describes how one such effort, the Novi Sad Initiative, has evolved since its inception in 2005 from a seminar on institutional reform in higher education into a regional process involving more than a dozen universities, regional ministries and an NGO. It is now the main vehicle for the promotion of regional higher education policy, he says, and is expected to become a permanent institution later this year.

Manja Klemenčič, a researcher at Harvard University and the University of Ljubljana, and her colleague **Pavel Zgaga** from the University of Ljubljana also examine the challenges of partnerships in the Balkans, this time using the data they gathered last year in a survey of regional academics. Their findings provide a compelling insight into attitudes about internationalisation at the institutional level. The data they compiled about the preferences academics in different countries have for international partnerships demonstrate the importance

of cultural and linguistic affinity and offer a handy primer of useful information for others seeking potential collaborators in the region.

Amr Ezzat Salama, a former Egyptian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, says that the very process of globalisation is itself one of the main challenges facing higher education in the Middle East, as universities there struggle to keep pace with the demands of a global, knowledge-driven society. **Ahmad O. Hasnah** of the Qatar Foundation picks up the theme, agreeing on the sources of many of the region's challenges but emphasising as well that the Middle East is far from monolithic and that its problems defy broad generalisation.

We hope that the essays in this publication will help to inform, stimulate, and provoke readers on a wide range of topics and contribute to the many substantive discussions that will be taking place in Istanbul.