



Conference Conversation Starter

A MOSAIC OF CULTURES

A mosaic of cultures

Edited by Leasa Weimer

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Edited by
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Foreword

The phrase ‘a mosaic of cultures’ easily evokes images of a diverse, multilingual, multi-ethnic, multinational Europe. At a micro level, Europe’s distinct communities stand out from one another — they are individual ‘tiles’, with distinguishable ‘borders’ between them. From a wider perspective, the many particularities that make up the people, the countries, the religious and linguistic groups, and the regions and societies of Europe present a picture of greater cohesion, if not total ‘unity’.

This metaphor also lends itself nicely to both the physical setting of the 2017 Annual EAIE Conference in Seville, Spain, and to the broader objective of this gathering. Spain prides itself on an historical legacy of cultural and religious tolerance. The Iberian Peninsula was once a crossroads of Jewish, Christian and Islamic communities, while Seville was the primary gateway for trade and travel between Europe and the Americas. The food, language, art and architecture provide ongoing testament to the longstanding tradition of cultural encounters in Southern Spain, where mosaics quite literally dot the landscape.

The idea of the world as a mosaic of cultures unquestionably resonates for the European Association for International Education (EAIE), which is grounded in a belief that effective international engagement through higher education can bring about positive and transformative change. This work requires finding ways to craft cohesive relationships that preserve the identity of the individual actors, while enabling something new, mutually enriching and hopefully both beautiful and strong to emerge. Yet, mosaics can also be fragile, as can the political environments and social and economic ‘moments’ within which we must live and work.

Where have we really come from? What do today’s multicultural environments need most urgently from us? And what does the future hold for the complex societies in which we work as international educators? This year’s EAIE *Conference Conversation Starter* publication pushes us to consider these crucial questions bravely and artfully, while encouraging us to craft a lasting ‘mosaic of cultures’ in which we all have a place.



Laura E. Rumbley

EAIE Publications Committee Chair

Introduction

— *Leasa Weimer*

Every year the field of international education evolves as new challenges arise. Over the past year, the wider political environment has become more ambiguous and volatile. With growing nationalism, stricter border controls, increased anti-immigration discourse and the prospect of the disintegration of the European Union, upholding the core virtues of higher education internationalisation has become even more strategic and important. While there is a lot at stake, there are also opportunities to further shape and develop the field. As practitioners, we have the ability to act locally to advance international education. Now, more than ever before, is the time to proactively come together and make a strong case for higher education internationalisation.

The 29th Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition is set in the picturesque and multicultural city of Seville, Spain. While the conference theme, ‘a mosaic of cultures’, aligns with the colourful and diverse examples of tiled artwork adorning the city, it also speaks to the work we do as international educators. As we work diligently and intentionally to assemble opportunities that bring together a multitude of cultures, it’s also important to engage in a broader and more reflective discussion about what we have learned from the past, what we are currently challenged by and how we can work together to build a better future.

In seven essays, this slim volume aims to provoke critical thinking and expand knowledge about current debates and tensions in international higher education. Our contributing authors represent a mosaic of cultures and expertise. From practitioners to researchers and professors to academic deans, they offer unique perspectives that explore timely issues critical to the field of international higher education.

This year's *Conference Conversation Starter* is organised into three sub-themes that take us through time:

1. Understanding the past
2. Tackling the present
3. Building a more inclusive future

Exploring the past helps us to understand the present, thus preparing us for the future. The publication begins with two essays focusing on the past. The first essay shines a light on the historic Semitic legacies of Europe. The second essay focuses on the shifting drivers of internationalisation at the regional policy level.

Based on earlier research, **Elena Arigita** examines an ongoing debate concerning an inclusive European identity. What and who defines the European identity? Should religion be included in this debate? Elena explores the Jewish and Muslim legacies in today's narrative about Europe and discovers that Semitic roots are often dismissed or even excluded from the description of the European identity. The current challenges that Europe faces, such as the refugee crisis and the potential (de)construction of a cohesive Europe, further impact how we think about Europe. Higher education plays a role in this narrative; for example the Erasmus programme helps to foster a diverse consciousness of Europe. Yet, there is still more work to be done to facilitate discussion and understanding around an inclusive European identity.

In her essay, **Amélia Veiga** explores the development of internationalisation at the regional policy level. She argues that the drivers of internationalisation have shifted from a political rationale focused on cooperation to a more economic rationale focused on competition. In the 1970s, educational cooperation was viewed as a vehicle to encourage European integration. In the 1990s, this approach began to change as higher education became a political tool for the construction of Europe, helping to build a single market. Amélia gives examples of how this economic rationale has shaped the current internationalisation landscape and challenges all practitioners to focus on strategy rather than tactics.

Moving to the present time, the second sub-theme of this volume explores current challenges impacting the internationalisation of higher education. The first essay addresses xenophobic nationalism and how it may change the current international higher education landscape. Continuing with the nationalism theme, the second essay focuses on the perilous future of an international university in Hungary in light of efforts by a far-right political regime to change the national approach to internationalisation.

In their essay, **Philip G. Altbach** and **Hans de Wit** consider whether the contemporary rise of xenophobic nationalism will be the end of internationalisation. Resurgent nationalism is powered by an infusion of growing economic inequality, neoliberalism, globalisation and the emergence of the knowledge economy. Nationalism negatively impacts international higher education through philosophies and discourse espousing anti-immigration sentiments and the denial of global citizenship. At the same time, nationalism may influence the European integration project, which has facilitated regional

internationalisation efforts such as the Erasmus programme and the Bologna Process. In what they describe as a ‘profoundly difficult’ period for internationalisation, Philip and Hans outline possible future scenarios to consider.

The next essay explores how recent approval of legislation targeting the continued operation of an international university in Hungary draws attention to a new political reality threatening academic freedom. **Norbert Sabic** discusses the challenges of upholding core virtues of international higher education in an illiberal political environment. Central European University (CEU), an autonomous and international university located in Budapest, may not have the legal footing to continue operations in 2018. Norbert describes how CEU stands out as a unique institution dedicated to building open and democratic societies, values that may not be shared by the current political regime. This move by the government indicates a shift for internationalisation in Hungary.

Reflecting on the past and present enables us to prepare for a brighter and more inclusive future. The final sub-theme of this volume explores the future of internationalisation and takes us beyond what we may be familiar with. The first essay addresses the future of internationalisation in light of anti-globalisation sentiments. From here, we travel to the Arab region and learn more about the challenges and achievements in international cooperation there. The last essay in this sub-theme encourages us to take lessons from early education, more specifically on how teachers are being educated to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

Marijk van der Wende offers a thought-provoking perspective on the internationalisation of higher education in light of current anti-globalisation rumblings. Globalisation has resulted in paradoxical outcomes: while some have greatly benefitted from it, others have been left behind. This divide brings with it scepticism about internationalisation and open borders, thus challenging the cosmopolitan project. Marijk ponders the current realities, tensions and debates surrounding the international dimension of higher education. In the end she questions where this leaves Europe and the USA, as well as other nations such as China, which is taking steps to drive the next generation of economic globalisation.

Sultan T. Abu-Orabi highlights the realities of internationalisation by taking us on a journey through the past, present and future of Arab higher education. Beginning in the 8th century, an intellectual movement facilitated the creation of several madrasas in Arab nations. Since then, higher education has gradually developed through a history shaped by colonial influence. Current and future challenges in modern Arab higher education include the need for better quality assessment, greater support for scientific research and methods for counteracting brain drain. Yet, at the same time, there are several successful examples of collaborative higher education efforts to increase the region’s involvement in global initiatives.

What can international higher education learn from early education? **Elaine Munthe** offers a glimpse into the challenges and innovations of teacher education for a global future. As the profile of early-education students becomes increasingly more diverse, teachers must adjust their knowledge and skills to teach in intercultural classrooms.

Elaine argues that socially-just teaching practices, along with knowledge about and skills for intercultural classrooms and language learning, are essential. Yet, many teachers report that they are unprepared for teaching in diverse classrooms. Offering more exchange programmes for teachers to teach and learn in an international setting may be a positive way forward.

It is our hope that this publication will stimulate you to think deeply. The aim is to offer food for thought on current and relevant themes within and beyond our field and to prepare you to actively participate in critical dialogue in Seville. Collectively, the essays reveal trends and challenges impacting our daily work. Amongst them all, one question stands out: How will today's challenges impact tomorrow? While some challenges are more daunting than others, we are in a privileged role to use our voice and act. We look forward to coming together in Spain to discuss opportunities to nurture international understanding and co-create a more inclusive mosaic of cultures.