Re.ViCa Newsletter

September 2009

Re ViCa

Reviewing (traces of) Virtual Campuses

In this Newsletter

Welcome to our eighth newsletter of 2009 – which we are sending to an extended circle of researchers, academics and others interested in Virtual Campuses.

To subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please contact nikki.cortoos@atit.be.

Project news

Are European Virtual Campuses Different?

One of the starting points for the Re.ViCa team was to identify whether there were certain core and identifiable characteristics or factors that made European Virtual Campuses somehow different from those in other parts of the world. In this article, Sally Reynolds from the Re.ViCa team summarises some of the main points discussed by the team in their investigations into the Virtual Campus phenomenon in Europe. A more extensive version of this article will be included in the forthcoming Re.ViCa handbook, which will be made public in November.

Sally Reynolds

Our general conclusion is that while certain regional conditions do have an impact and can be important when analysing Virtual Campuses, no clear picture of a distinctly 'European' Virtual Campus has emerged in our research and Virtual Campuses in Europe appear to be subject to many of the same constraints and opportunities as those in other parts of the world. However there is still value in describing certain conditions that we consider to have had, and continue to have a certain influence on the set-up and operation of Virtual Campuses in Europe.

The Impact of Bologna

It is difficult to "overestimate" the importance of the Bologna Process in Europe. Up to the end of the 20th Century, European universities operated on a largely independent basis, with the only real policy impetus coming at national level. This all changed with the introduction of the Bologna Process and it is clear that a policy which favours transparency, cross-border collaboration and a shared credit transfer system is conducive to the development of Virtual Campus initiatives. Accordingly as Bologna becomes more and more entrenched, the barriers to cross-border collaboration amongst European Universities diminish, European initiatives are encouraged and overall European mobility is expected to be further enhanced.

The Role of the European Union

While members of the Higher Education community in Europe differ in terms of when they first remember using the term Virtual Campus, one thing they generally agree upon is that the term really came into vogue when the European Commission started to use it in their funding programmes.

Invitations to submit project proposals as early as 2001 were regularly referring to the 'Virtual Campus' and so consortia anxious to be successful in their bids also used the term. The European Union has played a vital role in encouraging universities to adopt a more international approach, albeit with other institutions within the European Union. From programmes such as Erasmus, encouraging and supporting student mobility, through to the various initiatives aimed at fostering European collaboration in specific research activities, Virtual Campus initiatives in specific content areas involving international cooperation amongst existing HE providers are now very common in Europe. European programmes have also led to increased networking within the European Higher Education community and nowadays it is rare to find any European University faculty that is not involved in some form of cross-border collaboration brought about in effect by European intervention.

Virtual Campuses: "Cooperation between higher education institutions in the field of e-learning, regarding: design of joint curricula development by several universities, including agreements for the evaluation, validation and recognition of acquired competences, subject to national procedures; large-scale experiments of virtual mobility in addition to physical mobility and development of innovative dual mode curricula, based on both traditional and on-line learning methods. This broad definition involves many issues from partnerships between universities and HEI with a view to offering joint certifications (for undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels) and cooperation with learning support services. This might also include collaborative activities in strategic areas of education or research through cooperation involving academics, students, management, administrative and technical campuses should ..."

The Impact of National Initiatives

Europe has had its fair share of national initiatives aimed at promoting the uptake of ICT in Higher Education. These have generally taken one of the following approaches:

- Creation of a single national VC institution by bringing together several existing providers, e.g. Estonian e-University, Dutch Digital Campus, Finnish Virtual University, UKeU

- The creation of a totally new institution supported by a national or regional government, like the case of UOC in Catalonia

- Promotion of ICT through the provision of funding for specific programmes in universities utilising ICT, e.g. the actions funded by SURF, JISC and the Norway Opening Universities (NOU) initiative

- Setting up of a portal which serves up course offerings from existing institutions albeit through what can be seen as a nationally validated service offer, e.g. the Bulgarian Virtual

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University

While many of the national initiatives which aimed towards a single institution have failed to have any major impact, their legacy has been a raising of awareness of the notion of a Virtual Campus and a general acceptance of the value of online learning in the overall palette of options for the Higher Education student.

The Role of Open Universities

A number of European Open Universities have formed the bedrock of the Virtual Campus movement and provided expertise and leadership in this area, providing other institutions with new ideas and in many cases piloting services and processes from which others learn. The impact of open universities varies considerably from country to country and there is some evidence that language has some bearing on this. In the UK for example, there are now centres of excellence and specialised resources aimed at fostering and supporting Virtual Campus activities in large numbers of traditional universities, and these are no longer to be found only in the Open University. However in a country where the national language is spoken by far fewer people, as in the Netherlands or Portugal, the Open Universities in these countries have served as magnets for much of the leading-edge, technology-enhanced learning development in their linguistic sector. Whether this has a positive or negative impact on the growth of Virtual Campuses in a country remains to be seen.

| Open Universities | AIOU (CN) | AIOU (PK) | Anadolu U | AOU | Athabasca U | BAOU | BCOU | BOU | BRAOU | BTVU | COME-UW | CCRTVU | DISC | EBS | EELU | Euro-FH | FernFH | FernUni Hagen | FFHS | HFH | Henan RTV | HCMCOU | HOU (CN) | HOU (GR) | HYCU | Humboldt | IGNOU | Inner Mongolia RTVU | JSTVU | KKHSOU | KNOU | KSOU | FH Lübeck | MPBOU | NOU (IN) | NOU (TW) | NOUN | NSOU | OPENU | OPNZ | Oscail | OUA | OUBS | OUC | OUHK | OUJ | OU Libya | OUM | OUN | OUS | OUSL | OUT | PNU | PSSOU | PUP-OU | QOU | Ramkhamhaeng U | SCRTVU | SHTVU | STOU | SXRTVU | SYTVU | TGOU | TJRTVU | TNOU | Tallinn U | TUT (EE) | UAB (BR) | UAb (PT) | UAPA | UDIMA | UKOU | UNA | UNAD | UNED (CR) | UNED (ES) | UNITAR | UOC | UOU | UPOU | UPRTOU | USOU | U. Tartu | U. Terbuka | VFH | Viadrina | VMOU | WOU | YCMOU | YNTVU | ZOU | ZAOU | ZRTVU |

The Extent to Which Higher Education in Europe is Based on a Public Model

Most researchers would argue that in Europe, the dominant higher education model is a public one with private universities playing a far smaller role than in other parts of the world, e.g. Brazil and USA. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the ratio of private to public European Virtual Campuses is also quite low. Private higher education is often viewed with suspicion in European countries and with only a few notable exceptions, the same is true of private Virtual Campus initiatives. There is some evidence that this is changing and the emergence of successful institutions like Hibernia College in Ireland is certainly raising awareness as to the potential of such models. European Higher Education is also changing a great deal in this respect and the old distinctions between what constitutes private (for-profit) and public (not-for-profit) are often no longer useful when it comes to making distinctions in Europe.

Programmes of Interest

Re.ViCa team members, Paul Bacsich and Bieke Schreurs will present Re.ViCa at the Cambridge International Conference on Open and Distance Learning taking place from 22 to 25 September. In the following short extract from

Prof. Paul Bacsich   Bieke Schreurs

their presentation, they describe the outputs of the Re.ViCa research into programmes of interest – i.e. those Virtual Campus initiatives that are listed in the Re.ViCa wiki as being of specific interest and worthy of note based on the research carried out up to now.

Virtual Campuses – Programmes of Interest

We have identified around 170 Programmes in Europe with some 20 more existing as EU projects past or present. In the Rest of the World there are now more than 300. Thus we now have over 500

500+

Programmes across the world, though the rate of growth is now slowing since we have trawled every major report available and there are few promising countries left to analyse. There are currently 86 countries with one or more Programmes. The first headline conclusion is that this is considerably more than we expected. We hypothesise that the rhetorics of Web 2.0 and multimedia tend to encourage analysts to progressively "raise the bar" on what e-learning is – a classic example (but not the only one) is that constructivist learning over a type of internet-based social network was going on at several European open universities in the mid 1990s.

These large numbers make it likely that a more "quantitative" type of comparative analysis of worldwide e-learning activity can now take place than was possible in the past. This will inevitably stretch beyond the end of the funded phase, thus many conclusions here are interim and tentative.

© CIA World Factbook

Of the Programmes, we identify 52 as "national initiatives" – those Programmes where a country (or state within a country) has aimed to take action across the country (see National initiatives). Typically most countries have only one national initiative extant at any one time – Hanoi Open University, Swedish Net University, Swiss Virtual Campus, etc. However, a surprising number of countries including several in Europe have none – or none currently. In contrast, a few countries such as the UK, seem to have an inexhaustible appetite

for national initiatives, despite several high-profile failures including the Interactive University and UKeU. Thus there are in fact just over 20 different countries with one or more national initiative.

There has been recent discussion in the project and International Advisory Committee on the topic "Europe is tired of national initiatives". While this is true at a headline level, especially in the westerly EU, the truth is more complex. One country retains an enthusiasm for them (the UK), and they continue towards the east end of the EU (e.g. Bulgaria and Estonia) and just south of the EU (e.g. Egypt). The lesson one could draw from the UK until recently was "less is more" – what was working quite well are the more modestly funded but widespread initiatives such as Pathfinder, Gwella and the JISC Curriculum Development Programme – but recent news is that the UK (or at least England) is about to start on the HEFCE Online Learning Innovation Fund which goes at least part-way getting back to the higher funding levels and more targeted projects of a few years ago in the UK (http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Online_Learning_Innovation_Fund).

Project Activities for October

Funding from the Lifelong Learning Programme to Re.ViCa ends in September and the project team are busy finalising one of the main outputs of the project, the Re.ViCa handbook. They are also putting in place an agreement to continue their support of the Virtual Campus wiki. In addition, the monthly Re.ViCa newsletter will continue until December 2009.

Re.ViCa Wiki Resources Growing

The research undertaken by the Re.ViCa project has been publicly available on the virtualcampuses.eu wiki since June 2009 and, much to the pride of the team, has grown to a total of 1,600 content pages. Since opening up the wiki we have welcomed 7,816 unique visitors and can count on 80 community members who have registered for the wiki. With the help of our short video tutorial and with their own expertise and knowledge of e-learning initiatives around the world, they can now contribute to the Re.ViCa research. If you would like to join our online community, fill in the short registration form and start editing or adding!

New People in the Re.ViCa Network

Expert for Belgium/Netherlands: Steven Verjans, OUNL, The Netherlands

Dr. Steven Verjans is currently a Lecturer at the Centre for Learning Sciences and Technologies at the Open University of the Netherlands, where he teaches a distance course on e-learning and participates in multiple internal and external

projects involving educational technology. His current research interests are personal learning environments, social networks and lifelong learning. While senior researcher at the K.U.Leuven between 2004 and 2007, Steven was involved in a number of projects on virtual mobility and virtual campus, including the e-LERU initiative, the REVE, Victorious and VM_Base projects. Steven holds a PhD in Information Systems from the University of Southern Denmark.

Dr. Steven Verjans

Expert for Italy: Raimondo Sepe, International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, Italy

Raimondo Sepe is the ICT Director of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, where he is responsible for the development and delivery of the e-learning platform. He is also active in many research projects carried out at UNINETTUNO, especially in the field of e-learning. Previously he worked in several multinational Information and Communication and Technologies (ICT) companies where he was responsible for IT services. He has been working in European Projects since 1993. He holds a Laureate in Mathematics from the University of Rome and a MS and M.Phil in Computer Science from New York University.

Raimondo Sepe

Expert for Switzerland: Pierre-Yves Burgi, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Dr. Pierre-Yves Burgi is heading the Information, Communication, and Educational Technology Unit, IT department, at the University of Geneva. This unit is in charge of providing the academic community with tools in the fields of digital libraries, multimedia, e-learning, and numerical environments (portal, CMS, etc.). In his e-learning activities, he has recently been involved in two European projects: EUREA in the framework of the eContentplus programme and e-LERU within the e-learning initiative. He currently is the e-learning center's coordinator of the University of Geneva, and is a member of the COIMBRA e-learning task force. His team is participating in the development of the next Dokeos' generation (LCMS), and actively involved in national projects on lecture recording and the management of learning objects with a focus on life cycle and copyright issues.

Pierre-Yves Burgi

Announcements

Online Version of Morten Flate Paulsen's Book Available

A complete online version of Re.ViCa International Advisory Committee member Morten Flate

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Paulsen's book "Online Education and Learning Management Systems" which provides a Scandinavian perspective on international online education is now available with permission from the NKI Publisher here. Book reviews and additional information are available at www.studymentor.com

Prof. Dr. Morten Flate Paulsen

EFQUEL Innovation Forum 2009 in Helsinki 24-25 September

The European Foundation for Quality in e-learning (EFQUEL) is organising the EFQUEL Innovation Forum in collaboration with the Lifelong Learning Institute Dipoli at Helsinki University of Technology (TKK Dipoli) on 24-25 September 2009 in Espoo, Finland. The theme of the Forum is "Fostering Quality through Creative Learnscapes". Learnscapes are described by EFQUEL as the ecosystems for informal learning and are viewed as a major factor for releasing creativity, providing the space for learners to design their own "learning landscape" and thus innovative educational practices and organisations. This forum – in line with the European Year for Creativity and Innovation – will be an interactive event in which examples highlighting the power of creative learning will be presented. For more information about the Forum, visit the web site.

Re.ViCa Presentation at ICL in Austria

Sally Reynolds from the Re.ViCa team will be presenting Re.ViCa at the 12th International Conference on Interactive Computer aided Learning being held in Villach, Austria from 23rd to 25th September.

International Conference Villach/Austria **ICL**
■ Interactive Computer Aided Learning

Re.ViCa Contribution to Discussion on Quality Issues in e-learning in Sweden

Re.ViCa member Paul Bacsich will speak on "UK approaches to quality in e-learning, as seen from the perspective of the HE Academy/JISC benchmarking programmes" at the ENQA workshop on e-learning hosted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE) to be held at Sigtuna, near Stockholm, Sweden, on 7-8 October 2009. His Pick&Mix system, widely used for benchmarking e-learning in the UK, forms one source of the criteria generated for Critical Success Factors in Re.ViCa, along with insights from Megatrends, PBP-VC and other projects. The draft programme PDF is located here.

ENQA
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Bits and Pieces

Swine Flu and Virtual Campuses

There is an increasing amount of attention around the world being put into how to maintain continuity of teaching in schools and universities if a country becomes so seriously affected by Swine Flu that academic institutions have to close. We have set up a dedicated page on the Re.ViCa wiki which provides references to key articles on this topic. Some experts have advised that in the - still unlikely - event that universities have to close (though it has happened in some countries in the southern hemisphere) - those universities will cope best who already have systems (VLEs, podcasting, social networking etc) in place to deliver and support e-learning at scale; but that it is too late to install systems to do this in the next few weeks - if only because of the staff training and support needed. For more information, visit our Swine Flu wiki page.

Report on Critical Characteristics of Virtual Campuses Published

A highly pertinent report entitled "Challenges in Setting Up Cross-Institutional Virtual Campuses" has recently been published by Pierre-Yves Burgi from the University of Geneva in the EDUCAUSE Quarterly. Focusing on the Swiss Virtual Campus experience, this report identifies critical characteristics of such multifaceted projects with the goal of improving their chances for success. You can access the full report here wiki (PDF).

Swiss Virtual Campus
Campus Virtuale Svizzera
Campus Virtuel Suisse
Virtueller Campus Schweiz

Free Online Universities Open in the US

eCampus News this month carries an interesting article about the impact two new "free" universities could have on US academia. In a country which is reported to have more than 4 million students enrolled in accredited online programmes, free universities like University of the People and Peer 2 Peer University - which are not yet accredited themselves - are attracting more and more interest. Read the full article in eCampus News (PDF).

eCAMPUS NEWS
Technology News for Today's higher-Ed Leader

Reminders

We look forward to receiving input from you for our next newsletter which will be published in October. This input can be news items, new RSS feeds, relevant papers or publications by you or others.