
RE-DEFINING VIRTUAL CAMPUSES: FROM A “FULLY-FLETCHED” VIRTUAL CAMPUS TO A BLENDED MODEL

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Virtual Campus schemes can offer educational opportunities that are no longer location dependent and allow for collaboration with foreign students and teachers (and thus promote intercultural understanding). Apart from these cross-cultural and mobility aspects, a Virtual Campus has a huge potential to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning: students learn from their homes, after work in the time that is available for them.

This in fact responds to the European Commission's “Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and training systems in Europe”. Key issues that are mentioned to reach the implementation of strategic objective “Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems” are: “Delivering education and training so that adults can effectively participate and combine their participation in learning with other responsibilities and activities” and also “Promoting flexible learning paths for all”.

Throughout the last decade, numerous initiatives have been set up to experiment with the establishment of Virtual Campuses and Virtual Mobility activities. Virtual Campuses have appeared in various forms and structures and also to varying degrees of success. Through these previous experiences, we have noticed a shift of concepts: from the “well-defined” clear, 100% online Virtual Campus to Virtual Mobility, whereby the more traditional universities open their borders and “blended models” gain more and more interest. An example of such a redefinition of virtual campus can be found at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (K.U.Leuven) in Belgium. This traditional university progressively organizes its educational support from a *multicampus* perspective, combining virtual with physical support for collaborative learning initiatives.

While numerous Virtual Campus initiatives in the past decade have gained experience and know-how, there is a striking lack of validation and dissemination of this knowledge. Detailed information on Virtual Campuses appears hard to come by.

To raise awareness and redefine the concept of Virtual Campus in order for it to be applicable to the educational needs of today, the Re.ViCa project has been set-up. Re.ViCa stands for “Reviewing (traces of) European Virtual Campuses”. The project runs from October 2007 to September 2009. It brings together nine partners in the field that will use their privileged strategic positions to collect vital information and open it up for the wider community of the European Higher Education Area. The project can amongst others build upon the partners' experience with and involvement in Virtual Mobility/Virtual Campus projects (e.g. cEVU, e-LERU, VENUS, Victorious...) and initiatives (e.g. Finnish Virtual University, UNINETTUNO, UkeUniversity,...).

The Re.ViCa project is making an inventory and systematic review of cross-institutional Virtual Campus initiatives of the past decade within higher education at European, national and regional levels. In a second stage of the project in-depth discussions are organised to incorporate the input of different interest groups. Finally, a set of action points and guidelines for decision-makers are to be formulated that can be applied to ensure the realisation of successful European Virtual Campus initiatives.

Main results of Re.ViCa will be: a global benchmark overview, knowledge sharing through the organisation of discussion sessions at carefully chosen events and meetings with experts and policy makers and a manual with guidelines, best practices and recommendations. All results and information gathered during the project (manual, desktop research results, outcomes of the workshops, etc.) will be collected on the project wiki <http://revica.europace.org>. It will be a platform where both experts, policy makers, providers, sponsors and key actors can meet and stimulate dialogue.

As such, Re.ViCa's added value lies not in the creation of a new Virtual Campus but in the foundations it will lay for all future or current initiatives which can learn from past and current initiatives.