



Mission Report

Type of mission	Study Visit
Subject	Research based teaching / Universities, Entrepreneurship and the Knowledge Triangle
Location	Milan
Date	30-31May 2017
Authors	N. Moghaizel Nasr, Chafic Mokbel

General Context

- N. Moghaizel Nasr and C. Mokbel, two Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) from Lebanon participated in the study visit organised by SPHERE in University of Milan, Italy, on May 30-31, 2017 about building research based teaching, entrepreneurship and the knowledge triangle.
- The choice of the University of Milan is very good since it is one of the 23 members of League of European Research Universities (LERU), a league founded in 2002. This shows the long tradition of research in the University that is the only Italian institution member of the LERU.
- This study visit occurs in a critical period where several questions are arising about the role of higher education and its future development in the context of knowledge societies and globalisation in general, but also with the higher youth unemployment rates especially in countries like Lebanon. Actually, several stakeholders look up to the universities as drivers of innovation and developers of new knowledge, both of which are at the source of the creation of wealth in modern societies. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what reforms and new processes are needed to enhance the efficiency of the higher education institutions and to foster synergies between learning and teaching, research and entrepreneurship.
- Throughout the activities conducted in the past years, the Lebanese HEREs have been able to measure up the crucial need in Lebanon to further develop research activities in connection with teaching and learning. The study visit in Milan offered the chance of observing in situ the organisation of research, teaching and entrepreneurship in a research intensive higher education institution.
- The experience of the University of Milan in this domain is rich and the HEREs have measured up the achievements at the structure, processes and academic activities levels.

Discussions

- The organisation of the study visit was well thought of with a good balance between the presentation of the practices of the University of Milan and groups discussions, mainly under three major themes:
 - Linking research to / inform teaching
 - The dual role of professors as researchers and teachers
 - Partnership with industry for research and teaching

Our contribution

- The HEREs have actively participated in the discussions in both plenary sessions and working groups
- Each HERE has been rapporteur to one of the working groups
- The HEREs have also participated to the social activities and have profited to reinforce their networking

Lessons learned

The major take home ideas relevant, according to the authors, to the Lebanese HE:

- The **governance** of the higher education institution has to be convinced of the importance of both research and teaching, and the synergies that can be created among them. We have witnessed a large number of vice rectors with clear missions and large autonomy working together in a good harmony. Moreover, measurements and actions at the structural level but not only are to be taken in order to support the University strategic goals. One can cite here the significant funding of proposals that have not acquired support from H2020 but were well ranked in order to allow them to develop and submit in the next call;
- The **administrative structure** shall be supportive to both research and teaching and shall be shaped according to the context of the HEI. The structure to support research, and in particular to support writing and management of grants is impressive and is mainly shaped according to the University needs as well as to fit with the expectation of the funding agency, the H2020 and ERC mainly in this particular case;
- The **good organisation of the academic activities**, namely research and learning/teaching is a must. This organisation shall allow good interaction but also must take into account the difference between the two functions (competitiveness, vocation, ...). A balance must be found at all levels including the teaching and research loads in order to nurture a harmonised development;

- The University must be a place where interactions between **research and teaching functions are constantly experimented** in order to create/adapt synergies allowing the development towards more relevant and higher quality research and teaching. Very interesting examples have been provided in this context where novel learning programmes are being developed incorporating research at different levels;
- The rapid scientific progress must appeal to a constant **monitoring of the trends** questioning the evolution of learning/teaching as well as research at universities. We have had excellent presentations and discussions about the interdisciplinary aspects and about the boundaries between disciplines. The advancement of research, mainly the high technologies, makes the boundaries separating the disciplines really blurring. Discussion about time and evolution has also taken place;
- **Entrepreneurship** is a must for transforming the outcomes of the academic activities into real value. A presentation of a joint EU-OECD initiative has been provided. We recommend deepening the study of what is being developed in this direction. An example of cooperation (research wise) with a large industrial group has been presented stressing on the newly adopted open model. Unfortunately, the Lebanese context lacks the presence of big industrial groups. Teaching wise, a programme in computer sciences (Ulisse) has also been presented as an example of a project based learning incorporating the industry as where the project is performed. In this programme each student shall be allocated a project with a specific industry and the learning time of the student is split between the University and the enterprise starting with a full time at the University (1st year) and ending progressively with a full time at the enterprise (3rd year) for the project execution. Throughout the learning years the student has a function of apprenticeship that evolves progressively towards the execution of the project.
- **Quality assurance and indicators**, are necessary at all levels in order to measure up the impact and evolution of the different processes and activities engaged. This can be at the level of an internship or a new education programme adopting research based teaching.

Ideas for exploitation

- Explore the possible implementation of programmes similar to Ulisse within the Lebanese HEIs,
- Explore the possible usage of the European tool HEInnovate within the Lebanese HE,
- Promote the research and teaching interaction within the Lebanese HEIs and with the decision makers,
- Work for a better balance between teaching load and research load,
- Support dual role of professors through several means:
 - a. Human Resources:
 - Make a balance in the workload between teaching and research taking into consideration the capacities and desires of teachers,
 - Take into consideration both teaching and research in renewal of contracts and promotion,

- b. Research:
 - Consider pedagogy as a field of research and encourage researches on innovative teaching,
 - Support teachers: grants, dissemination of results, capacity empowerment, etc.
- c. Pedagogy:
 - Develop research skills that are necessary for work market,
 - Encourage active methods of teaching by developing critical analysis skills, entrepreneurship skills, etc.

More details about the conference (presentations, ...) can be found at <http://supporthere.org/milan2017>. It is also possible to discuss specific points with any of the two HEREs by sending an email to:

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