

Cross-Border Education: The Experience of a Lifetime!



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Abstract

Drawing on their personal experiences – going back to the 1960s – as cross-border students, managers in higher education and officials in intergovernmental organisations, Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić and John Daniel will present cross-border education as a vehicle for individual and institutional empowerment. Their focus is on strengthening education in developing countries and advancing the interests of students. Discussion of some of the key practices, policies and models in the global market and proposals for action against degree mills and in favour of open educational resources will be nourished by reflections on global CBHE initiatives that they have been involved in.

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Introduction:

It is a pleasure to be here with you at this conference of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

Sir John Daniel and I are going to talk about cross-border higher education in a personal way. Our own experiences of borderless education go back to the 1960s.

We have been international students in both face-to-face and distance learning programmes and we have had diverse experiences of managing higher education in institutions and inter-university organisations. Early in the last decade, when we worked together at UNESCO, we made cross-border higher education part of its agenda for giving globalisation a human face.

I will begin with my early experience as a student, as Secretary-General of the Association of Universities of Yugoslavia and as a programme specialist at CEPES, UNESCO's European Centre for Higher

Education. Until 1990 this was one of the few places in a divided Europe where representatives of higher education from East and West could meet in a neutral setting.

I moved to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in 1999 and after describing how UNESCO became increasingly involved in cross-border higher education I shall end with some of the responses of the international community to the impact of CBHE.

Sir John will then distil his own experience as an international student and describe his involvement in setting up cross-border programmes during his 17 years as a university president in Canada and the UK. He will conclude by picking up on an important new manifestation of cross-border higher education, namely open educational resources.

Personal Experiences:

When you invited me to talk about my personal experiences of cross-border education, I thought I would have little to say until I re-read this definition of CBHE in the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines:

‘the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders’

It reminded me that cross-border education was around long before it started attracting the attention of credential evaluators or quality assurance specialists.

Indeed, I was first engaged in cross-border education in my secondary schooldays and obtained a GCE diploma from the University of London from the 1960s. I was living in New Delhi and sat my exams in the British Council offices there. Wolsey Hall provided the coursework and tutorial support from Oxford. I still remember the blue sheets of paper with assignments and courses, neatly folded in yellow envelopes that would reach my New Delhi home every Monday. It was a new experience, and one that gave me more personal support than I had ever had in a classroom setting.

In the 1970s, I continued my studies in Paris because, long before programmes like ERASMUS were set up, international mobility was considered to be a ‘must’ in small countries like mine. France was a preferred destination and a family tradition. Studying at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, I spent hours reading in the Bibliothèque Sainte Genevieve, mixing with international students during seminars and refreshing my knowledge of French.

Alas, this is when I was to discover the intricacy of equivalences and diploma recognition when I found that the University of Belgrade did not recognise the doctorat de troisième cycle even from a prestigious university such as the Sorbonne!

In the eighties, I had the privilege of being the Secretary-General of the Association of Universities of Yugoslavia, a very stimulating period in my professional life. We worked on the strategy for the scientific and technological development of Yugoslavia and strived to bring Yugoslav universities into the mainstream of European cooperation and integration. We became signatories of the Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988 and got involved with the newly launched TEMPUS programme, the first EU mobility programme open to Central and Eastern Europe.

Internationalization was high on the agenda of Yugoslav universities in the late eighties and gave a new focus to the seminar ‘University Today’. This traditional seminar had, for over thirty years, brought together scholars from all over the world around lively academic issues. It was organised every year in the last week of August, in Dubrovnik, at the Inter-University Centre for Post-Graduate Studies (IUC). The event gave Dubrovnik an intellectual buzz as summer ended and was an excellent example of the positive contribution of cross-border activities to capacity-building.

The end of the decade brought the Fall of Berlin Wall, a transformational event for the integration of Europe.

UNESCO and CBHE

I then began my international career as Programme Specialist at CEPES, UNESCO’s European Centre for Higher Education, a few months after the Romanian revolution and the fall of Ceausescu. It was an exciting time of change, of new beginnings and European integration. It was also the time of new divisions, civil wars and the disintegration of my country, Yugoslavia.

I had the privilege of working in one of the most beautiful palaces in Bucharest, in which the Centre was located, my main focus being the UNESCO European Convention on the recognition of degrees and how to bring it more in tune with European developments in which the Council of Europe and the European Commission were taking the lead.

UNESCO’s Europe Region consisted of 50 countries. It included the U.S, Canada and Israel, as well as the successor states of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. This brought a special flavour to the more restricted club of the 12 EU Member States or the larger 26 Member States of the Council of Europe.

These developments coincided with the elaboration and subsequent adoption of a new joint instrument bringing the Council of Europe and UNESCO together: the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention which addressed the issue of cross-border higher education from the exporters’ perspective through a Code of good practice.

In 1999 I moved to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. When I arrived there I had asked my bosses: “what do you want me to do now?” The answer was “Go global!”

The Business of Borderless Education had just been published. I met Robin Middlehurst and worked with John Daniel as my boss. I remember him particularly for a statement that was revolutionary for UNESCO: “new need not be bad!”

In fact UNESCO’s involvement in the regulation of CBHE went back quite a long way. It had worked with the International Council for Correspondence Education to develop some guidelines for regulation and legislation in that business back in the 1970s.

The key development that stimulated UNESCO’s renewed interest in cross-border education was the GATS, the General Agreement on Trade in Services and its extension to education.

Things heated up in 2002 when the US and the OECD held a forum in Washington on Trade in Educational Services. I attended for UNESCO and reported back that a speech by Pierre Sauvé had the academic community up in arms, although it was probably intended to reassure!

Our first response to this was to promote dialogue between all parties by creating the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, which held its first meeting in October 2002. We counted the first meeting a success because it brought together institutions that were not accustomed to being in same room, such as Education International, representing teachers' unions, and for-profit HE providers such as the University of Phoenix. Sir John's opening speech to the forum was entitled, provocatively: Automobiles, Bananas, Courses, Degrees....: an ABC of Higher Education and Globalisation.

This meeting led to programme of work that spawned a number of further meetings and reports.

One of the most significant consequences was that UNESCO and the OECD decided to work together on the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education.

These guidelines were adopted and published by both organisations in 2005. Through its global outreach UNESCO has made the Guidelines available in all six UN languages. They help in the regulation of quality by encouraging the involvement of six groups of stakeholders (governments, student bodies, HEIs, recognition bodies, quality assurance bodies and professional bodies)

Branch campuses have proliferated over the past several years. There are now some 162 of them, mainly in the Middle East and Asia, and the numbers have grown by 43% in the past three years alone.

Cross-border Higher Education, if regulated properly, as it is in China for instance, offers great opportunities for capacity building at institutional level both in teaching and learning. This example from China is the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, a cross-border provider representing a partnership between the University of Nottingham in the UK and the Zhejiang Wanli Education Group – University, the first Sino-Foreign University in China approved by the Ministry of Education of China. Indeed, the Government of China seems so satisfied with the Nottingham University that it is now encouraging it to expand into research activity.

Partnering with local institutions to strengthen them, while leaving them with considerable academic autonomy, may well be a better approach than the creation of branch campuses. A report to an OECD Conference last year labelled many foreign branch campuses as 'empty shells', claiming that faculty do not follow the programmes of the parent institutions and that the quality of teaching and learning is low.

Some institutions are responding to this criticism by developing stronger strategies for staffing of off-shore campuses and a greater focus on research in these establishments, as demonstrated by a study of the Leadership Foundation in the U.K.

Others, such as New York University, which has opened branch-campus in Abu- Dhabi and Shanghai, provide very generous financial packages for its faculty to move to Abu-Dhabi and therefore operate at very high unit costs per student.

Many criticize cross-border higher education as a profit-making venture, claiming that developed countries use distance education to establish international ventures for financial gain - for profit.

However, at a recent Conference in Cambridge, the Arab Open University stated that implementing programmes from UKOU was enriching their own experience.

There is, of course, a more serious downside of cross-border higher education than poor teaching or commercial gain. CBHE can easily lend itself to fraud and low quality provision, the most striking example being degree mills that sell diplomas for money.

The internet is an attractive tool for these bogus providers. One used Blenheim Palace, Winston Churchill's birthplace, on their website claiming it as their campus. Others misuse UNESCO's name to appear legitimate

In response to some of these concerns in UNESCO we developed an interactive Web Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions to guide learners through the maze of learning opportunities and protect them against degree mills.

In addition, UNESCO and CHEA developed a Statement on combatting degree mills by making it easier to recognize legitimate higher education.

All this is part of the internationalisation of quality assurance, another example of which is GIQAC, a Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity. This partnership between UNESCO and the World Bank was launched in 2007, to promote capacity-building in quality assurance in developing and transition countries. Although the World Bank grant is now ending, GIQAC helped significantly to strengthen five regional networks of quality assurance bodies and INQAAHE.

UNESCO brings these new developments together at the global level. Its standard-setting instruments, which include six UNESCO Regional Conventions for the Recognition of Degrees in Higher Education, are being revised to meet the challenges of globalisation.

I have just returned from Tokyo where the revised Asia Pacific Convention was adopted and discussions have begun on a Global Convention, an idea for which the time may finally be ripe.

At the global level, participants in the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education included references to cross-border higher education in the Communiqué. They picked up on the main principles of the Guidelines, namely a call for quality assurance, the importance of local relevance, affirmation of the principles of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual recognition and respect for diversity and national sovereignty.

One positive example of implementing these principles is the good cooperation in QA between the US and the UAE.

Last summer, I bid farewell to UNESCO but have continued my professional involvement with different forms of cross-border higher education where Sir John and I continue to work together, particularly in the project for *Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally* that he will describe.

So let me hand over to him.

Personal Experiences: John Daniel

Thank you, Stamenka.

Like Stamenka, I shall begin with my own, somewhat more limited involvement in cross-border education as a student, then talk about my experience of initiating and managing cross-border programmes and conclude with some comments on Open Educational Resources - OER. OER are a relatively new and potentially important manifestation of cross-border higher education.

My personal experience of CBHE began when I graduated from Oxford and decided to do a doctorate somewhere else. My mother told me bluntly that if I was going to leave Oxford I should at least do something interesting.

In the event it was very interesting because I wound up at the University of Paris completing my doctoral research just as the events of May 1968 broke out.

It could have all gone dreadfully wrong, because this was long before Erasmus programmes and organised student exchanges, but after four stimulating years I came out with a doctorate, reasonable fluency in French and two children.

I took three lessons from this experience. First, study in another country is immensely worthwhile quite apart from its academic benefits. In my subsequent career in Canada and UNESCO, being able to work in French was a greater long-term asset than a doctorate in nuclear metallurgy.

Second, an experimental research laboratory is a great place to learn a language because there is so much informal conversation of the 'can I borrow a screwdriver' type.

Third, it is best to immerse oneself thoroughly in the other culture, rather than sticking around with one's own nationals. The posters and graffiti generated by the events in May 1968 were a cultural experience in themselves.

My next experience of cross-border had a transformative influence on my career. During my first academic appointment at the University of Montreal I enrolled in a part-time Masters programme in Educational Technology at the nearby Sir George Williams University – now Concordia – with the aim of improving my teaching skills.

The programme required a three-month internship for which I went to the UK Open University, then just beginning but already with 40,000 students. I had a revelation of the coming revolution in higher education, returned to Canada no longer at ease in the old dispensation and re-oriented my career towards distance learning by joining the infant Télé-université in Québec City.

Overseas Programmes

Fifteen years later I got involved in CBHE again as president of Laurentian University, a bilingual university in northern Ontario.

We had the opportunity to create a campus in the South of France in a stunning location on the Côte d'Azur. Rather than using it simply for a year abroad programme for our own students, our ideal was to open the programme to students from across Canada and do our bit for Canadian unity.

We were successful as far as English-speaking Canada was concerned but never got many francophone students because they had plenty of other opportunities to study in France. The programme continued for about ten years before the steadily increasing value of the French Franc against the Canadian dollar gradually put the programme out of reach for ordinary students.

However, it was a great venture and when I joined the Commonwealth of Learning one of my staff, who was an alumna of the programme, said she considered it by far her most enjoyable and stimulating year at university.

I took two lessons from this experience: first, do not be timid in presenting such a proposition to a university board; and second, do not expect the programme to last forever. Situations change. As a graduate of Oxford and the Sorbonne I used to expect universities to measure their longevity in centuries, but that is not today's reality.

In 1990 I took over the leadership of the UK Open University. Eighteen years earlier I had been an unpaid intern, now I had the top job. University heads in Britain don't have to compete with the football coach for the highest salary!

That decade saw the number of students taking the Open University's distance learning courses overseas grow rapidly. There are now over 60,000 people taking Open University awards outside the UK – the equivalent of a large university in its own right. A further one million students around the world are studying for local awards that include Open University courses.

John Robert Seeley famously remarked that Britain acquired its empire in a fit of absence of mind. I used to say that about the Open University's overseas operations. They began when UK students who had moved to continental Europe wanted to continue studying, so we made special arrangements for supporting them in Brussels and other places. After operating in this ad hoc manner for a while we simply declared that the University operated throughout the European Union.

The next pull overseas came with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Hungary, anticipating this, had sent a team around Europe to get ideas for tackling the vast task of retraining for a changed world. They came back saying that the Open University offered the best model.

Within a year we were approached by groups in Hungary, Russia, Czechoslovakia (as it then was) Bulgaria and Romania – all either private or non-governmental bodies asking us to offer our business courses.

They said they wanted the MBA, but we could see that only a minority of their people had enough English for graduate-level study at a distance. So we translated our certificate and diploma courses into the language of each country and helped each partner put in place a tutorial and student support infrastructure. That was 20 years ago and today there are still some 10,000 students in these programmes. I doubt that any western educational institution had a bigger role in bringing East and West together in the 1990s.

In the rest of the world we were drawn into partnerships not only to the usual places like Hong Kong and Singapore, but also in Ethiopia, where the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, and most of his cabinet did the OU's MBA programme. A lasting memory is holding a special degree ceremony in the Cabinet Chamber in Addis Ababa to give awards to this special group.

The last, least successful but very interesting partnership we attempted was the creation of an OU subsidiary here called the US Open University. The rise and fall of USOU is a talk in itself and scholars have written about it.

We had an excellent Chancellor in Richard Jarvis and worked closely with diverse US institutions, notably Florida State, California State and particularly the Western Governors University, which was then starting up.

USOU functioned for a few years but was closed, some years after I had moved on to UNESCO, basically because the projected time to break-even was longer than a UK public university was able to accept. What were the lessons from that experience?

First, we were too early with an eLearning programme. That was a time when major US universities like Yale, Columbia and Stanford lost serious money in eLearning start ups.

Second, we didn't find the right partner. We worked with the public sector and discovered the hard way that enthusiastic presidents couldn't deliver collaboration with their institutions.

Third, I think we could have succeeded had we worked with the for-profit sector, but that was culturally alien at the time for the rather left-leaning Open University.

However, the venture has left a useful trace. The UK Open University is today the biggest player on iTunesU, it is accredited by Middle States, and its new Australian-American president no doubt has ideas for further ventures here.

What lessons do I draw from the UKOU's overseas operations more generally?

First it is very difficult to come up with a unified international policy for the disparate programmes that a complex world requires.

I tried, my South African successor Brenda Gourley tried, and Martin Bean, the Australian-American who took over as Vice-Chancellor two years ago, immediately put policy development for international programmes on his list of priorities. As a former Microsoft executive he may succeed where we failed.

Second, I believe that the background aim of overseas distance learning programmes should be institutional and individual capacity building in the other countries. I am proud that several of our partners, such as the Singapore Institute of Management, have now become universities in their own right.

The aim should be to make your institution dispensable – or to institute a genuine two-way partnership. Sometimes you may have to push for this against a culture of dependency

Third, partnerships are right in principle and effective in practice.

In the mid-1990s the UK Open University partnered with the Open University of Hong Kong to offer the MBA programme and took 40% of the market in the first year against close to a hundred other providers. The combination of an international brand and a credible local partner is very powerful.

In my current work at the Commonwealth of Learning I continue to take a close interest in cross-border issues.

The *Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth* (we call it the VUSSC) is not a new degree-awarding institution but a collaborative mechanism for course development and training for 32 small counties. It promotes the benefits of good cross-border education and has developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework so that people can check how the courses fit into local frameworks across the globe.

You could say that the VUSSC is the latest and most international expression of the Open Educational Resources movement that began with MIT's OpenCourseware and continued with the Open University's OpenLearn site that now makes 18,000 hours-worth of self-instructional materials freely available. OER are now a major manifestation of cross-border education in the broadest sense.

Open Educational Resources

So I shall conclude with some remarks about OER. They are so obviously helpful in expanding and improving education that they ought to become a sustainable and normal part of educational ecosystems. But this has not yet occurred. OER have yet to enter the mainstream of education.

To make that happen, OER must feature in the policies of governments and institutions.

UNESCO and COL took up this challenge with our project *Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity for Developing Countries*.

We organised workshops on OER for senior educational decision makers in Africa and Asia and have prepared two documents to support the campaign.

The first is a *Basic Guide to OER* written by South Africa's Neil Butcher and edited by Asha Kanwar and Stamenka.

The second is *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education* similar to the *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* that Stamenka mentioned. Like them, the OER Guidelines address six

stakeholder groups in higher education: governments; institutions; academic staff; student bodies; and quality assurance, accreditation and academic recognition bodies.

In the current phase of the project, which is supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, we are cultivating government support for OER. Some governments have policies on OER but most do not. Stamenka is the principal consultant to this project.

UNESCO is holding a World Congress on OER next June. By then we shall have done an inventory of government practices and policies on OER. We shall invite governments to agree to a declaration that will, at the very least, express their support for the principle that when educationally useful material is developed with public funds it should be made freely available to everyone.

To conclude, Stamenka and I have given examples of the international, local and personal impacts of CBHE from our own experiences. We have noted some good practices, models and policies. Cross-border higher education, like most human endeavours, has both positive and negative sides. Stamenka evoked the scourge of degree mills while I noted the hopeful development of Open Educational Resources.

We hope that some of this resonates with your work at the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.