

# *Global Connections -- Local Impacts: Best Practices, Models and Policies for Cross-Border Higher Education*

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## **Description**

Drawing on their personal experiences – going back to the 1960s – as cross-border students, managers in higher education and officials in intergovernmental organisations, John Daniel and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić 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 will be nourished by reflections on global CBHE initiatives that they have been involved in.

## **Introduction**

It is a pleasure to be here and to celebrate the great work of the Observatory for Borderless Higher Education. The OBHE is an invaluable point of reference in global higher education whose importance goes well beyond issues of borderless provision *per se*.

In this session Stamenka and I will address the Forum title in a somewhat personal way. Our own experiences of borderless education, going back to the 1960s, contribute to our perspectives on *Global Impacts, Local Connections: Best Practices, Models and Policies for Cross-Border Higher Education*.

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. Our paths joined early this decade when we worked together at UNESCO and arranged for it to engage with cross-border higher education as part of its wider agenda of giving globalisation a human face.

We shall share the presentation. Stamenka will begin with her 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 which, until 1990, 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. She moved to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in 1999 and will explain how UNESCO became increasingly involved in cross-border higher education. Having explained some of UNESCO's activities she will relate them to the concrete problem of degree mills.

I shall then distil my own experience as an international student and describe my involvement in setting up cross-border programmes, both face-to-face and at a distance, during my years as a university president in Canada and the UK. I shall conclude the presentation by picking up on the story of degree mills where Stamenka left it and suggest practical steps that we can take to fight this serious impediment to the expansion of cross-border higher education.

So I hand over to Stamenka.

## Personal Experiences: Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

When John invited me to talk about my personal experiences of cross-border education, I thought I would have little to say, but then 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.

Vivid too, are the elaborate comments by my tutor, a certain Mr. Morley, in black ink on the essays that I had to send back to England. It was a new experience, and one which gave me more personal support than I had ever had in a classroom setting. Indeed, it was many years before I felt able to throw away the coursework on English and French literature from Wolsey Hall, because I reverted to it often in the course of my later more advanced studies.

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 in the mainstream of European cooperation and integration trends. 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). This independent international institution, created in the early seventies, offered post-graduate studies delivered by a multitude of international partners ranging from European and US universities to universities from Ethiopia, China or Iran. 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.

Within this framework a US initiative GATE, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education, aimed at providing US accreditation to universities operating outside the USA. It was a controversial undertaking that caused mixed reactions and soon lost momentum. However, it highlighted an emerging trend: the growth of transnational education.

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. As part of the debate within the ENIC network, one of the implementation arms of the Lisbon Convention, Israel raised the issue of ‘extensions’ of U.K. universities delivering courses and diplomas in Israel and asked UNESCO to address the issue.

Bringing together expertise from the UK, Australia and the USA, which each had developed QA mechanisms for operations crossing borders, a UNESCO-Council of Europe Code of Good Practice on Transnational Education was adopted by a Working Group in Jerusalem in 1999, defining terms, setting out principles and giving recommendations to sending and receiving institutions. It was subsequently adopted by the Lisbon Convention Committee in Riga 2001.

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. In 2001 an OECD colleague and I suggested that both UNESCO and the OECD should take a greater interest in the impact of globalisation on higher education and in that year we convened an expert meeting to advise on the ‘Impact of Globalisation on Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education’.

Things heated up the following year 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 that was probably intended to reassure had the academic community up in arms.

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 and has convened twice since then. 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. 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. In 2004 the OECD published a report on *The Cross-Border Challenge* and at that point UNESCO and the OECD decided to work together on the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education.

These guidelines were adopted by both organisations in 2005 and published by both. The texts are identical but some say that they are implementing 'the OECD guidelines, not the UNESCO ones!'. We believe in giving people a choice!

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). One strong recommendation is better dialogue and collaboration between sending and receiving countries.

Today, four years later, cross-border higher education is an essential element of discussions in Europe because it is seen as aspect of the *International Openness* that is integral to the Bologna Process.

At the global level, participants of this year's 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.

The WCHE Communiqué also draws attention to degree mills, as a negative manifestation of cross-border higher education. I shall begin our comments on this phenomenon and John will come back to the story later after he has told you about CBHE in his life.

Degree mills are a major obstacle to the development of CBHE. However, the instruments that I have discussed give us some defence against them. What can be done to minimise this menace?

The degrees and diplomas associated with higher education are the passports to the knowledge society. Some crooks sell fake passports to illegal immigrants and others counterfeit money. Other crooks have seen the opportunity to market fake passports for knowledge workers in the form of counterfeit or valueless diploma and degree certificates. The organisations that sell these bogus credentials are usually called degree mills. Closely linked are accreditation mills that operators of degree mills create to give a spurious cover of legitimacy.

Degree mills are an urgent problem for three reasons.

First, legitimate higher education institutions are not expanding fast enough to satisfy the growing demand in the developing world. Desperate students turn to degree mills either because they believe them to be legitimate or because, although they know them to be fraudulent, they believe they can pass off their phoney diplomas to employers and universities without being found out.

Second, more students are studying at a distance with foreign providers while remaining at home. Degree mills try to present themselves as legitimate cross-border providers.

Third, the Internet is increasingly accessible in all corners of the globe. It gives degree mills the opportunity to present themselves impressively, at little cost, to a worldwide audience. This cartoon comes close to home because you may have seen the recent publicity about a man who got an MBA for his dog.

More grandly, one degree mill reproduced a photo of Blenheim Palace, Winston Churchill's birthplace, on its website, implying that this was its campus.

I shall comment on what is the global higher education community doing, through its intergovernmental organisations, to make life harder for degree mills.

John will ask what we can do to clip the wings of degree mills. There is no magic bullet, but by acting on a number of fronts simultaneously we can make this criminal activity less attractive.

Part of the response of the global HE community is the internationalisation of quality assurance. Older international networks for quality assurance such as INQAAHE are repositioning themselves and regional QA networks, including some new ones, are being strengthened to provide more capacity and expertise in quality assurance at institutional and system level: ANQAHE, AfriQAN, APQN, CANQATE, RIACES...

Through its different functions UNESCO brings these new developments together at the global level. Its standard-setting instruments, which include six UNESCO Conventions for the Recognition of Degrees and Qualifications in Higher Education, are being revised to meet the challenges of globalisation. The 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education that I described address quality issues when higher education crosses national borders.

As one of the spin-offs of UNESCO's Global Forum on Quality Assurance was GIQAC, a Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity. This is a new partnership between UNESCO and the World Bank, launched in 2007, to promote capacity-building in quality assurance in developing and transition countries. It helps a wide range of institutions by funding training, information dissemination and staff exchanges through five regional networks of quality assurance bodies and INQAAHE. It covers networks in Africa, the Arab states, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Finally from me, two important strands of activity are especially designed to help students. They are the

publication 'Study Abroad' and the newly launched Portal on recognized higher education institutions. Our involvement in developing effective international practices to combat Degree Mills builds on this previous work.

Last year UNESCO launched a Portal on recognized higher education institutions. It is a logical follow up to the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education. Presently it includes information from some 30 countries online while as many more are now in the process of being uploaded.

The portal aims to help students, employers, and other interested parties (e.g. credential evaluators) by giving them access to authoritative and up-to-date information on the status of HEIs and QA in participating countries. It is a 'white list' of recognized institutions.

What about degree mills? How do they operate? How does quality assurance relate to them?

A particular concern for me is that some degree mills misuse UNESCO's name by making claims that range from 100% false to not quite untrue. They use various tricks to create a false connection or misrepresent a real link with UNESCO in order to give the impression that their outfit is internationally recognised. One institution may use several different tricks. These institutions mutate rapidly. Let me give you some examples.

This degree mill invited you to verify its bona fides by corresponding with the Embassy of Liberia in Washington. Or you can call a phone number which happens to be that of my boss, the Director of Higher Education at UNESCO. They assume that you won't!

This body calling itself the Educational Accreditation Association says that its accredited institutions accept and adopt "The Recommendations of the World Conference on Higher Education, sponsored by UNESCO", and the applicable sections of the "UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education". You will also notice web links to UNESCO and WHO.

So how do we advance? I shall let John continue the story after giving an account of his own background in CBHE.

## Personal Experiences: John Daniel

My own involvement in 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 proved 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 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. The first is that study in another country is immensely worthwhile quite apart from its academic benefits. In my subsequent career in Canada, being able to work in French was a greater long-term asset than having a doctorate in nuclear metallurgy.

The second is that an experimental laboratory is a great place to learn a language because there is so much informal conversation.

The third is that it is best to immerse oneself as thoroughly as possible 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.

## Overseas Programmes

Fifteen years elapsed before I was next involved in CBHE. I was then president of Laurentian University, in northern Ontario, one of Canada's two bilingual universities.

We had the opportunity to create a campus in the South of France – in a stunning location overlooking Cap Ferrat for those who know the Côte d'Azur. However, rather than simply use it for a year abroad programme for our own Laurentian students, our ideal was to contribute to Canadian unity by opening the programme to students across Canada.

In this we were reasonably 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 it fell victim to the steadily increasing value of the French Franc against the Canadian dollar, which gradually put the programme out of reach of most ordinary students. But it was a great venture while it lasted, and when I joined the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver in 2004 I was delighted to find that one of my staff was an alumna of the programme and considered it by far her most enjoyable and stimulating year at university.

The lessons I took from this experience were not to be timid in presenting such a proposition to a university board – and not to expect the programme to last for ever. One cannot predict how situations will change. I understand, for example, that numbers in US study abroad programmes are way down this year because of the recession.

In 1990 I moved to the UK Open University and the next decade saw a brisk growth in the number of students taking the Open University's distance learning courses overseas. They now number over 60,000 taking Open University awards, which is 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, and I



used to say the same thing about the Open University's overseas operations. They began when current students who had moved to continental Europe wanted to continue studying, so we made special arrangements for supporting them in Brussels and then other places. After operating in this ad hoc manner for a while we simply declared that the University operated throughout the European Union. Today there are some 5,000 OU students in mainland Europe and many are not UK expatriates.

The next pull overseas came as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Hungary, seeing this coming, had sent a team around Europe to get ideas on how they might tackle the vast task of retraining a nation for a different economy and polity. They came back and said that the Open University offered the best model.

In the space of 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.

At first they wanted the MBA, but it was clear that only a minority of their talented people had enough English to study at a distance in that language. So we translated our certificate and diploma courses into the languages of each of those countries and helped them put a tutorial and student support infrastructure in place. That was over 15 years ago and today there are still some 10,000 students in these programmes. Some of the partner institutions, as in Russia, are now officially recognised by the state. I doubt that any western educational input had a bigger impact on bringing East and West together than this one.

Then there was the rest of the world. Here again we drawn into partnerships, not only to the usual places like Hong Kong and Singapore, but also to Ethiopia, where the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, and most of his cabinet did the OU's MBA programme. One of my lasting memories is of holding a special degree ceremony in the Cabinet Chamber in Addis Ababa to give the awards to this special group. Not surprisingly Ethiopia has since become fertile ground for distance learning.

That is a very short summary of large and complex operations but what were and are the lessons?

First it is very difficult to come up with a unified policy for such disparate programmes. I tried, my successor Brenda Gourley tried, and Martin Bean, who took over as Vice-Chancellor a month ago, already has policy development for international programmes on his list of priorities.

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

Your aim should be to make yourself dispensable – or to institute a genuinely 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.

I remember that in the mid-1990s when the UK Open University partnered with the Open University of

Hong Kong to offer the MBA programme we 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.

Today, in my work at the Commonwealth of Learning I continue to take a close interest in these issues, not least because 32 small states make up two-thirds of Commonwealth Membership. More than other countries small states can be significant beneficiaries of good cross-border education and seriously damaged by fraudulent operations.

I shall talk tomorrow about the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth which promotes the benefits of good cross-border education and has contributed to the battle against degree mills by developing a Transnational Qualifications Framework.

## Fighting Degree Mills

Let me conclude this presentation by coming back to the scourge of degree mills.

Last year The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and UNESCO set up an expert group to develop suggestions for international effective practice on degree mills. UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning are alerting their Member States to the threat of degree mills and the ruses they employ to deceive. But what can we do to address the issue more directly? How do we move into attack mode and close down degree mills?

First you have to recognise a degree mill when you see it. There is no watertight definition but there are various warning signals. If several of these criteria are met you most likely have a degree mill. So what do you do?

Not long ago the Nigerian riot police moved in on a slew of bogus operations simultaneously, but you may not have enough clout to send in the boys in blue.

We recommend seven steps against degree mills for different stakeholders to take.

**Step one** is to help the buyer beware. We have described what UNESCO is doing to help students become savvy consumers.

**Step two** is to make governments want to protect the integrity of their higher education systems. International higher education is now big business (it is Australia's third most valuable export after coal and iron ore), so countries want to protect the legitimacy of their systems. An important step is to protect, through legislation, the use of terms like 'university' and 'accreditation'.

Governments should be more active in prosecuting degree mill operators. All fraudulent credentials are a danger to the public, yet authorities do not yet treat the issuing of phoney degree certificates as seriously

as they would the counterfeiting of currency or passports.

**Step three** is for governments to set up transparent structures and processes in support of their legitimate higher education networks.

First, the country should have a list of its accredited/recognised degree awarding bodies and a mechanism for updating it. We hope there will be a snowball effect whereby more and more countries contribute these lists to the UNESCO portal. If an institution's degrees are not recognised or accepted in its home country it is probably a degree mill.

Second, a quality assurance agency can be very helpful in raising the general level of performance of institutions.

**Step four** is to avoid giving public funds to institutions that are not recognised – or to the students that enrol in them.

**Step five** is for everyone to check credentials presented to them. In recent years passport technology and verification has become more sophisticated and similar sophistication needs to be brought academic credentials. A colleague estimates that some 200,000 phoney diplomas are sold each year in the US alone, including both documents issued by degree mills and counterfeit certificates with the names of reputable institutions.

The most effective deterrent to crime is the certainty of being discovered and brought to justice. If the checking of credentials by employers, admissions officers, immigration officials, etc. became the norm, degree mills would soon be out of business.

Public-key cryptography, the mechanism for conducting secure financial transactions over non-secure communications networks, can provide a technical solution to the challenge of authenticating academic documents such as transcripts and diplomas.

**Step six** is for international organisations, particularly UNESCO and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to take more assertive action against those who misuse their names or logos.

The web is a tool of choice for degree mills. Obviously, to take the real example we gave earlier, it is easier to put on your website a picture of Blenheim Palace, Winston Churchill's birthplace, and imply that it is your campus, than it is to build a real one. But the Web can also be used to combat degree mills through blogs and so on.

**Step seven** is for the international HE community to set up an informal system of alerts and black lists. An informal system is better for two reasons. First, degree mill operators use the threat of litigation to scare off investigators and suppress unfavourable publicity. Second, the Internet has made it very easy, if investigators are in hot pursuit, to close a degree mill and restart it with a new name in a different jurisdiction.

## Conclusion

We hope you agree that degree mills are a real threat to the integrity of higher education and we urge you to join the fight against them.

So, to conclude, in speaking to the Forum title, *Global Connections -- Local Impacts: Best Practices, Models and Policies for Cross-Border Higher Education* we have tried to give examples of international, local and personal impacts of CBHE from our own experiences. Along the way we have flagged some good practices, models and policies. However, by examining the plague of degree mills we have reminded you that all is not rosy. Cross-border higher education, like most human endeavours, has both its positive and negative sides.