

ABSCHLIESSENDER FESTVORTRAG

LIS EDUCATION IN EUROPE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the last two decades an increasing interest in internationalization has been evident in library and information science (LIS) education in Europe. However, quite recently expansion and intensification of collaborative initiatives can be identified; European LIS schools have started to participate more actively in joint activities to respond to the challenges of globalization, to improve, innovate and strengthen the LIS curricula and courses to serve the changing needs of students and the global employment market, and to meet the international standards of quality in teaching, research and services. This paper examines current trends and developments in higher education and the responses of library and information science education to these changes. The overview is based on literature reviews and personal observations and involvement.

INTRODUCTION

European library and information science (LIS) higher education (HE) is a part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and changes and challenges in European HE influence also LIS education and its community. In the last two decades an increasing interest towards academic collaboration has been evident in LIS education in Europe. However, quite recently expansion and intensification of collaborative initiatives can be identified; European LIS schools have started to participate more actively in joint activities to respond to the challenges of globalization, to improve, innovate and strengthen the LIS curricula and courses to serve the changing needs of students and the global employment market, and to meet the international standards of quality in teaching, research and services.

This paper describes the collaboration in LIS education in Europe. The paper is structured into four parts. The first section provides the context for the European LIS education and examines current trends and developments in European HE in the context of the Bologna Process. The second describes the profile of LIS education

in Europe. The third reviews the collaboration in LIS education in Europe and the fourth highlights the challenges, opportunities, and barriers. The overview is based on literature reviews and personal observations and involvement and presents a selective review.

CONTEXT FOR EUROPEAN LIS EDUCATION

Changes and challenges in European HE refer to what is commonly known as the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process is the product of a series of meetings of ministers responsible for HE at which policy decisions have been taken in order to establish an EHEA by 2010. In June 1999 twenty nine European ministers signed the Bologna Declaration and committed their governments and their countries to create the EHEA by 2010. This declaration became the primary document used by the signatory countries to establish the general framework for the modernisation and reform of European HE; the process of reforms came to be called the Bologna Process (Eurydice, 2007).

The action programme set out in the Declaration is based on a clearly defined common goal, a deadline and a set of specified objectives. The goal is the creation, by the year 2010, of the EHEA in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European HE. A set of specified objectives in the Bologna Declaration includes: a) adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; b) implementation of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate; c) establishment of a system of credits (such as European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)); d) promotion of the mobility of students, teachers and researchers; e) promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance, and f) promotion of European dimension in HE. Thus, the Declaration is a key document which marks a turning point in the development of European HE.

The goals of the Bologna Declaration, through a set of policy measures were later reinforced and expanded[1]; for example, The Prague Communiqué (2001) emphasised three elements of the Bologna Process: a) promotion of lifelong learning, b) involvement of HEIs and students as active partners, and c) enhancement of the attractiveness of the EHEA. The Berlin Communiqué (2003) emphasised certain priorities for the next two years: a) development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European levels, b) the implementation of the two-cycle system, c) recognition of degrees and periods of studies, including the provision of the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge for all graduates as of 2005, d) elaboration of an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA,

e) inclusion of the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process, and f) promotion of closer links between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA). In the Bergen Communiqué (2005) the priorities for 2007 included: a) reinforcing the social dimension and removing obstacles to mobility, b) implementing the standards and guidelines for quality assurance, c) implementing national frameworks of qualifications, d) awarding and recognising joint degrees, and e) creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in HE, including procedures for recognition of prior learning. The Bergen Conference also marked the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (Eurydice, 2007).

Over the next two years the focus will be in particular on the following action lines: mobility of students and staff, social dimension, data collection, employability, stocktaking and EHEA in a global context (London Communiqué, 2007). However, Winckler (2007: 5) points out that the cultural impact of the Bologna Process has often been underestimated and that there remains much work to be done throughout society, and that the EHEA will continue to be “work in progress” well beyond 2010. As the 2010 deadline set for the realisation of the EHEA approaches, there has been enormous change in European HE. *Trends V* report contains significant findings on the implementation of Bologna reforms and also on the attitudinal shift that has taken place across the HE sector (Croisier et al, 2007: 16).

The Bologna Process has influenced as well as supported significantly international collaboration and cooperation at all levels. Clark (2007) notes that there has been also a shift towards collaboration and cooperation in the language used in official Bologna communications and documents; for example, buzz words from early declarations such as ‘competitiveness’ and ‘attraction’ have been replaced in more recent communiqués with terminology such as ‘cooperation,’ ‘partnership’ and ‘exchange’.

However, EU authorities have supported academic collaboration with the help of the EU action programmes long before the Bologna Process started. For the period 2007-2013 many different programmes are all being brought within the common framework of the new Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) (ETUI-REHS, 2007).

The Bologna Process has grown from 29 countries in 1999 to 46 countries today and has extended beyond the geographic borders of Europe. Cooperation with other continents is now very much part of the Bologna agenda and is supported through a series of bilateral programmes (Virkus, 2007).

PROFILE OF LIS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

According to Borup Larsen (2005: 232), there are approximately two hundred institutions of LIS education in Europe. The LIS field is characterized by a great diversity and complexity. The diversity is found in traditions, approaches, models, program structures, levels, placements, the duration of courses, thematic profiles of curricula, the content of courses, ways of teaching and assessment, and other factors (Borup Larsen, 2005).

Most typically LIS schools function as a department within a specific faculty or as a programme within a specific department; few institutions function as an independent faculty/department or as an independent academic institution. LIS educational units most often belong to Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Communication and Media, Business Management, and Computer Science, followed by other disciplinary affiliations. The most typical number of students enrolled is between 51-600 students per school; the larger academic institutions have approximately one thousand students and many LIS schools have less than 200 students enrolled. The number of full time staff members is most typically between 11-20 employees (Borup Larsen, 2005).

European LIS education has gradually moved from vocational education to academic HE. Audunson (2005) distinguishes between the discipline-oriented and profession-oriented approach taken by European LIS schools. However, the institutional affiliation, approach as well as conceptual, theoretical, and methodological perspectives influence the way how teaching and learning is organized. There is also great diversity in the curricula content (Virkus, 2007).

There have been several discussions at European level what is the core of LIS and what the LIS curriculum should include. Wilson (2001) suggests that “information studies” may be seen as resulting from the interactions among four fields: (1) information content; (2) information systems; (3) people; and (4) organizations.

Audunson (2005) summarises the conclusions of the Nordic working group who agreed upon four elements which should be a part of any LIS-education:

- A thorough understanding of knowledge organization and retrieval, and the principles and theories lying behind systems for knowledge organization and retrieval.
- Knowledge of the content to be acquired, organized and mediated (cultural and literary knowledge).
- Epistemology and theory of knowledge in order to be able to critically analyze the epistemological pre-suppositions of different systems.
- Students’ capabilities to understand and analyse LIS-institutions and LIS-practice in a broader social context should be developed.

The project *LIS Education in Europe: Joint Curriculum Development and Bologna Perspectives* [2], supported by the EU Socrates Erasmus programme, was analysing ten curricular themes within LIS curricula in Europe. The Table 1 represents the results of 47 responding LIS schools.

Table1. LIS themes ranked as core subject areas in LIS school curricula (Borup Larsen, 2005: 235)

Curricula Theme	Number of responding schools	%
Information seeking and information retrieval	47	100%
Library management and promotion	38	81%
Knowledge organization	31	66%
Knowledge management	23	49%
Information literacy and learning	21	45%
The information society: Barriers to the free access to information	21	45%
Library and society in a historical perspective	18	38%
Cultural heritage and digitalization of the cultural heritage	9	19%
The library in the multi-cultural information society: International and intercultural communication	6	13%
Mediation of culture in a special European context	3	6%
Total	47	

Differences in the European LIS field arise from historical, cultural, social, economic and political factors as well as from educational traditions, practices and regulatory systems in a country (Kajberg, 2003). This diversity has both positive and negative aspects. Audunson (2005) believes that the pluralism is a strength that future scientific and professional developments should be built upon. Kajberg (2006) also agrees that cultural diversity and the variety of educational traditions in LIS represent a valuable resource in international cooperation.

However, Clyde (1998) and Kajberg (2003) are concerned that the diversity hampers transparency and student mobility, and presents obvious difficulties to intentions of working together and organizing joint programs. The findings of the study of Borup Larsen (2005: 236), however, provide evidence that LIS programmes in Europe are fundamentally on the same academic level and LIS schools fulfil a basic requirement for participation in collaborative activities.

COLLABORATION IN LIS EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Although collaboration has been a quite desirable goal in LIS education for many years, very little is known about the way how European LIS schools are actually collaborating, which attributes contribute to collaborative activities and how it is influencing LIS schools and their activities (Kajberg, 2003).

However, increased attention to collaborative activities in the LIS literature can be noticed during the last five years, mainly in the context of internationalization of HE. Several seminars and workshops on internationalization have been arranged by European LIS educators or with their involvement; for example, in North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2002), Parma (2002), Tallinn (2006) and New Orleans (2006) (Kajberg, 2003; Abdullahi et al, 2007).

Discussions on collaborative activities in European LIS education have focussed on the role of associations and networks, EU projects and support schemes, joint international programmes or courses, including ICT-based courses, and joint doctoral programmes. There are also many institutional case studies and several overviews which cover two or more of these aspects or focus on collaborative activities in the specific region.

In the European LIS literature two arrangements are more frequently mentioned: the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID) and BOBCATSSS, a yearly international symposium arranged under the auspices of EUCLID.

EUCLID, established in 1991, is an independent European non-governmental and non-profit organisation whose purpose is to promote European cooperation within LIS education and research and to provide a body through which it can be represented in matters of European interest. According to its webpage, EUCLID aims to facilitate exchange of students and staff among the members, encourage mutual recognition of curricula or parts of curricula, develop cooperation on research projects and with other international organizations, exchange mutual information about development in curricula and research, arrange meetings about the topics of organization, encourage support from stronger to weaker members, represent the membership in relation to European and international bodies, undertake other activities of interest of the Association, maintain an archive of the Association's documentation, and publish a newsletter. The EUCLID's directory lists seventy one member institutions [3] and it seems that the association is extending beyond European borders; for example, institutions from Australia, Bangladesh and Brazil

are also members. During the last five years, the EUCLID has developed a number of successful initiatives that encourage collaboration.

BOBCATSSS is a symposium organized every year by LIS students of two European universities, one from CEE and one from Western Europe. The initial aim of the BOBCATSSS was to enhance collaboration between students and professionals in CEE and Western Europe. Teams of students plan and realize both the content and the management of the symposium as a part of their studies. The name BOBCATSSS is an acronym, which is composed of the initials of the cities of HEIs that initiated the BOBCATSSS symposium in 1993: Budapest, Oslo, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Tampere, Stuttgart, Szombately, and Sheffield. Other European LIS schools have joined the network later. Since 1993, the symposium has been held in different locations in Eastern Europe. BOBCATSSS is regarded as a successful, innovative and very visible collaborative effort in European LIS education (Abdullahi & Kajberg, 2004).

European LIS educators participate also in other collaborative initiatives and networks in Europe as well as internationally; the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), European Network for Information Literacy (ENIL) and European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) are just few examples. These organisations and networks provide an opportunity for LIS educators for discussions and professional activities as well as for presentations in their seminars, workshops, conferences and meetings.

The EU Socrates Erasmus programme is frequently mentioned in the LIS literature and it seems that many European LIS schools have benefited from the Erasmus grants. Other highlighted programmes are Tempus and NORDPLUS, a scheme for HE institutions in the Nordic countries.

Project *LIS Education in Europe: Joint Curriculum Development and Bologna Perspectives* mentioned earlier [2], is regarded as very successful by many LIS educators in Europe. The idea behind the project goes back to the EUCLID conference *Restructuring and Adapting LIS Education to European Standards* in Thessaloniki in 2002. In Thessaloniki the need to implement the intentions of the Bologna Declaration in the field of LIS education was highlighted. The follow-up conference *Coping with Continual Change – Change Management in Schools of Library and Information Science* was organized in Potsdam in 2003. As a result, a joint project proposal was formulated and applied for funding within the EU Socrates programme. The overall focus of the project was on reflections on LIS curricula in order to stimulate the European debate and collaboration between the LIS schools on the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration (Kajberg, 2006).

The project application was successful and in June 2004 twelve virtual discussion groups were formed focusing on a specific LIS curricular theme. The project steering group invited twelve LIS curricular experts as group leaders. Each group leader nominated four core experts within their curricular theme taking into account geographical representation. Additional experts were invited to the virtual discussion groups. It was envisaged that each virtual discussion groups would have at least 8-10 members. However, in reality some discussion groups had a quite limited number of participants while some groups consisted of twenty members. Each group explored a specific LIS curricular theme from January to August 2005 and submitted a brief report on its work. In August 2005, the core experts of each group, altogether fifty LIS professionals, met in Copenhagen and discussed the possibilities of European LIS curriculum development in a workshop. As a result of the virtual discussions and workshop in Copenhagen the material was generated for the final e-book[4].

In the framework of this project a questionnaire-based survey was carried out by Jeannie Borup Larsen (2005) to gather information on European LIS schools. The survey results provide an overview of organisational affiliations, curriculum contents, a number of staff and student enrolments of fifty European LIS schools. A more detailed overview of the project is provided by Kajberg (2006) and Lørring (2006).

Kajberg (2003) believes that joint curriculum, course or module development is a more ambitious and resource demanding way of collaboration. However, there are several examples of good practice. One of the earliest initiatives seems to be the MSc course on Information Management offered jointly by the University of Sheffield (UK) and the Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia e Tecnologia Industrial (LNETI) in Lisbon (Portugal) (Kajberg, 2003). Kajberg & Pors (1995) report the initiative of the Royal School of Library and Information Science to deliver a three-month course on *Access to Information* during the autumn term 1994 together with the Technological Educational Institution of Thessaloniki in Greece and Loughborough University, University of Sheffield, and the Robert Gordon University in UK.

Other examples include collaboration between Oulu University (Finland) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA), the Tallinn University (Estonia) and Gjøvik College (Norway), Parma University (Italy) and Northumbria University (UK) (Iivonen et al, 2001, Virkus & Sponberg, 1999, Dixon & Tammaro, 2003).

More recently a joint master programme on Digital Library Learning (DILL) between Oslo University College (Norway), Parma University (Italy) and Tallinn University (Estonia) has got support in the framework of the EU Erasmus Mundus programme. The first semester is offered in Oslo, the second semester in Tallinn

and the third semester in Parma. Students can choose to write their Master Thesis at either of the three partner institutions. The students will acquire a joint Master Degree (120 ECTS), recognised by the Consortium partners. The DILL will start this August with a summer school in Oslo.

Joint research is also an important way of collaboration. The results of the survey carried out by Kajberg (2003) showed that joint research is fairly common in European LIS schools.

One more field in the LIS literature where collaboration and cooperation is highlighted is quality assurance. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance is also an important objective of the Bologna Declaration. Audunson (2005) believes that the Bologna-process opens up for real and substantial quality improvements in LIS. There are no institutionalized and recognized European level accreditation and quality assurance procedures in LIS education; the process normally relies on national level accreditation bodies and mechanisms (Kajberg, 2006).

Kajberg (2003) concludes that in general European LIS schools have been very slow in arranging cross-country partnerships and there are no convincing results of collaboration. There are few initiatives that go beyond the small-scale student mobility and examples of European LIS schools' projects concerned with the development of joint degree programmes, joint modules, intensive courses and e-learning activities are scarce. It should be said, however, that the Bologna Process as well as EC collaborative support schemes create a very favourable framework for collaboration. LIS institutions respond to the particular challenges and opportunities presented by the changing context in a range of ways; for example, some have put more emphasis on mobility or research, others on curriculum or joint course development, and others on ICT-based learning or arrangement of workshops, seminars and conferences (Virkus, 2007).

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

Globalization presents many challenges and opportunities for HE institutions around the world. Collaboration itself is a challenge and also an opportunity. Beerkens (2004: 73) indicates that universities operate in a specific regulatory, social and cultural context which is influenced by many factors: at the national level, by public and regulatory pressures and sector-wide norms; at the university level, by organisational culture, climate and politics; and at the individual level by norms, values and professional and academic standards and routines. In successful

collaboration, partners need to be complementary in their resource bases, but they also need compatible backgrounds.

Existing literature points to many benefits of collaboration. Beerkens, (2004: 94) believes that international collaboration and cooperation affects the quality of teaching, research, organisation and management, the socio-economic development of the region, the competencies of the graduates, the reputation of the university, the enrolment of students, and the university's access to funding. Thus, it is a growing imperative to collaborate in order to meet international standards of quality in teaching, research and services. European HE institutions are facing common challenges related to the growth and diversification of HE, the growing demand for education and training in a lifelong learning perspective, the shortage of skills in many key areas, the employability of graduates as well as the expansion of private and transnational education. However, these challenges might also be the opportunities and sometimes also barriers.

In the European LIS literature the diversity, complexity and incompatibility of institutional structures and regulatory systems are often highlighted as obstacles as well as challenges to collaboration. Several authors point to the administrative and legal problems in collaborative activities (Johnson, 2000; Berger, 2002; Dixon & Tammaro, 2003). Declining public funding and scarcity of funds is an issue that is frequently mentioned. Kajberg (2002) notes that lack of financial resources makes LIS institutions moderate their international aspirations and may stop many initiatives. Linguistic and didactic problems are presenting also obstacles to collaboration (Berger, 2002). Berger (2002), Dixon & Tammaro (2003) also draw attention to cultural issues, different traditions, mentalities and interests.

An important challenge for European LIS education is to prepare students to the global employment market. Employers need employees with deep professional as well as international competencies and experiences. Audunson (2005) suggests that profound ICT-competency and a profound understanding of the librarians' role in a multicultural context is the sine qua non of every educational program in LIS today. Thus, globalization has implications for the content of curricula, teaching, learning and delivery methods, staff competences and quality.

The use of ICT for collaboration as well as for enhancement of educational processes presents challenge to LIS educators as well. Kajberg (2003: 40) notes that a few schools use the possibilities of modern ICT for collaboration, and LIS-specific e-learning across geographical boundaries is more than difficult to spot in Europe. In order to survive in our post-modern society these possibilities can not just be ignored

by LIS educators. There are many tools for collaboration, course delivery or just for making teaching and learning more exciting; Skype, Citeulike or Second Life are just few examples.

Terminology is also an obstacle to collaboration. Many authors have expressed a concern about the way the LIS educators in Europe use the terms. The same terms do not always relate to the same things or curricular content (Borup Larsen, 2005) and “such a loose use of scientific terms is not healthy from a scientific and educational point of view” (Broughton et al, 2005: 141). Widén Wulff et al (2005: 126) find it extremely important to use as coherent terminology as possible in our field, because it is suffering from too many vague definitions and connections to adjacent areas. Borup Larsen (2005: 240) propose the way to cope with this dilemma in encouraging further work on the profile and contents of European LIS programmes and developing a disciplinary framework that seeks to identify the common understanding of terms.

Several authors have noted (Kajberg, 2003; Borup Larsen, 2005) that the manner in which LIS schools are visible on the Web presents another problem for collaboration. Some schools have quite impressive homepages with all information needed for students’ exchange or collaboration. However, other institutions’ Websites present curricular information in a very confusing way; it makes it extremely difficult to advise students about the planning of study periods in other countries. Borup Larsen (2005: 233) notes: “... many [homepages] were not translated into English, updated or containing correct contact information. Of the 154 homepages, where the national language was not English, only 75 were in some degree translated into English”.

New partnerships outside the LIS field, outside the university and Europe present challenges as well. There are many opportunities for joint working, learning, teaching and research (Virkus, 2007)

CONCLUSIONS

In our modern society, hardly any field can make progress without international collaboration. Collaborative activities in Europe have increased enormously over the last decades. This increase has been stimulated by the Bologna Process as well as by EC collaborative support schemes that have created a very favourable framework for collaboration. The legal, political, social and cultural differences, however, between countries and organisations raise significant obstacles in collaboration and cooperation. Some observers believe that LIS schools in Europe have been very slow to form cross-country partnerships. However, LIS schools have responded to

the particular challenges in a range of ways; for example, some schools put more emphasis on mobility or research, others on curriculum or joint course development, and others on ICT-based learning or arrangement of workshops, seminars and conferences.

European LIS schools are facing common challenges related to the growth and diversification of HE, the growing importance of lifelong learning, the shortage of skills in many areas, the employability of graduates and the expansion of private and transnational education. Other challenges include the innovative use of ICT in education, coherent use of terminology, visibility on the Web, and forming new partnerships. To collaborate successfully we need a favourable collaborative framework and a highly collaborative culture.

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REMARKS

- 1 Every second year the Ministers meet to measure progress and set priorities for action. After Bologna (1999) they met in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005) and London (17-18 May 2007). They will meet again in Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve (May 2009).
- 2 Project homepage: <http://www.db.dk/LIS-EU/index.asp>
- 3 <http://euclid.hio.no>
- 4 The e-book "European Curriculum Reflections on Library and Information Science Education" is accessible at <http://biblis.db.dk/Archimages/423.12.05.pdf>

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