

## **A return to the roots of university**

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Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying that it is a great honor to have been invited to participate in the closing debate of this important Conference EDUCON2020.

In the presentation, I will empathize the necessary changes needed, in terms of higher education institutions and the higher education system, in order to address the challenges of a fast changing reality.

The presentation is divided in 3 parts:

I will briefly address the essence/purpose of Higher Education followed by the discussion of the most important reforms required. I will conclude by enumerating some of the most recent trends in Higher Education.

### **The Higher Education purposes:**

1. **Identity purpose**, which recognizes Higher Education as an asset for the production of knowledge, the humanist and social formation/shaping of the individual and analytical and critical training (The Person)

2. **Functional or operative purpose**, which assumes Higher Education as an asset for the economic growth and well-being of society (The Society)

3. **Strategic purpose**, which views Higher Education as an instrument of social, territorial cohesion and international projection of people, ideas and projects (The Territorial Dimension: Regions, Country and the World)

## **Reforms required in Higher Education**

### **Reforms relative to the Identity Purpose:**

#### Articulation between Higher Education, Science and Innovation

- Better integration of the three edges of the knowledge triangle: Higher Education, Science and Innovation, reflecting an integrated vision.

#### Promotion of quality and adaptation to new challenges

- Subordinate all activities of Higher Education Institutions to quality standards recognized by partners globally.

- Prepare the Institutions for a Changing World, offering flexible academic paths, holistic and multidisciplinary fundamental training, humanistic reflection in all courses, and transversal digital skills.

## **Reforms relative to the Functional or Operational Purpose**

### Diversification of the Higher Education

- Reinforce the attractiveness of higher education, broadening the recruitment base, encouraging mobility, increasing the diversity and flexibility of pathways, creating transition programs between training profiles.

- Increase specific offers of training leading to degrees, for student workers and new audiences.

### Valorization of Knowledge

- Develop the main aspects of social intervention in Higher Education:
  - economic: promoting all phases of the innovation value chain and boosting businesses whose competitiveness results from the incorporation of knowledge in the products and services;
  - public policies: integrating Higher Education and Science institutions in the system of advising public policy makers;
  - cooperation with the community: promoting open science, data and knowledge sharing.

## **Reforms Regarding Strategic Purpose**

### Social Dimension

- Fulfill the social aims inherent to Higher Education:

- guaranteeing access to all, regardless of factors extrinsic to personal merit, positively discriminating students either from underrepresented groups or with excellent academic performance;

- promoting the quality of student life, by increasing the offer of accommodation and the number and amounts of scholarships;

- counteracting school under-performance and early dropout.

### Territorial Cohesion

- Closer proximity and contribute to national equity:

- organizing a network of Higher Education modalities in a balanced and complementary geographical distribution, sensitive to regional specificities;
- reinforcing direct social support for students displaced in territories of low population density;
- encouraging cooperation between Higher Education Institutions, namely through the establishment of consortia at regional or national level.

### Internationalization

- Invest in the internationalization of Higher Education institutions:
  - developing attractiveness strategies for international students;
  - creating the regulatory and logistical environment that facilitates the attraction of international students.

## **New Trends in Higher Education:**

- **Digital literacy skills are core.**

These skills are fundamental for every citizen, for all disciplines and professions.

- **Next Artificial Intelligence revolution will change the way we teach and learn.**

- **The ability to deal with data is crucial in all the fields.** Data related courses should be included in all the degrees in the different fields (from health to environment from social sciences to arts).

For this societal transformation, many more professionals in ICT are needed. Universities have to attract more students for the degrees related to ICT, data and AI. To fulfil the gender gap associated to ICT



needs to be solved. Women are significantly underrepresented in the AI sectors. Only 22% of ICT professionals globally are female. The full potential of women's skills, knowledge and qualifications in the digital, AI and ICT fields will contribute to boost economy.

## **Conclusions**

The Higher Education Institutions are facing enormous challenges: they need to go through the required reforms to fulfil the purposes of Higher Education whilst they adapt to the fast changing world and to the emerging trends of Higher Education.

The Bologna Process brought us many gains, namely in terms of the structure of the degrees, quality certification and international mobility of students and to build the European Higher Education Area.

However, it fell short when it comes to adjusting the offer to the more flexible, practical and holistic approach that is now required. Moreover, it fell short to place EU Universities in the highest-ranking universities in the world.

Universities were invented in Europe.

It is now time for Europe to reinvent the Universities.