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Ethics in Higher Education

A Key Driver for Recovery in a World Living with COVID-19

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Ethics in Higher Education

A Key Driver to Recovery
in a World Living with COVID-19

A Globethics.net Discussion Paper

Globethics.net Texts Series No. 7

Globethics.net Texts

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PREFACE

The Globethics.net Board of Foundation took the decision in the autumn of 2020 to launch the consultation on the role of ethics in higher education as a key driver to recovery in a world living with COVID-19.

This discussion paper is the result of contributions made during the consultation process in 2021 with the Globethics.net network around the world, including Globethics.net staff, associates and regional and national representatives, individual and institutional members of the Globethics.net Consortium on Ethics in Higher Education, members of the Pool of Experts, partners, authors and others.

Following the adoption of the paper by the Board of Foundation, it is published in the Globethics.net Texts Series in the form of a discussion paper for the use of all those concerned about the medium and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, interested in and convinced of the value of values in higher education and in society and of the restorative potential and power of placing ethics at the heart of the educational enterprise. Awareness of, reflection on and subsequent action founded on ethical values by those in the higher education – leaders, teachers, students, administrators – a sector that is a vast and decisive force and presence in society, can bring about the much needed positive changes to help current and future generations to respond, recover and thrive by becoming more attuned and resilient, together, as a common effort.

Thank you for taking the time to read, share and dialogue on this paper, in the trust that our collective experience and wisdom will enlighten and guide us all.

Globethics.net Foundation
Christoph Stückelberger, President of the Board
Obiora Ike, Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Why Ethics in Higher Education Matters

The global pandemic that emerged in the final months of 2019 challenges higher education institutions to listen more carefully to the voices of those whose learning trajectories have been disrupted.

Pupils, students, teachers and researchers face unprecedented hindrances, in terms of international mobility indispensable for student and teachers' exchange programmes and international research projects. It is also a time of deep reflection on altered frameworks for higher education, which undoubtedly will have to be re-arranged. This re-arrangement cannot be restricted to questions of feasibility and technological factors.

Higher education institutions have to engage the reality of a digitally divided world in conjunction with an increased awareness for delivering high quality formation through a blend of modes.

Online education has become *en vogue*. There is probably no higher education institution that is not solicited to at least consider online education systems. Whether online, campus-based or blended learning, at the heart of any educational enterprise remains the mandate of contributing to a holistic formation preparing for professional careers, developing human character and assisting in adopting life-long learning perspectives for the transformation of societies towards becoming more peaceful, just and sustainable communities.

Globethics.net is at the forefront of this preoccupation for a high quality, pedagogically and ethically-oriented education. The organisation perceives this extended period in which the world lives with the

reality and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic as a unique learning opportunity and a propitious moment in its organisational development to actively embrace the opportunity to promote ethics as a comprehensive perspective.

The promotion of ethics in higher education is dependent on three key modes of engagement with a broadened constituency:

- **Listening** to the signs and trends of the times;
- **Reflecting** on the specific and authentic contributions a learning organisation can make in the world of learning; and, last but not least
- **Acting** in a responsible manner and demonstrating an invitational character to all actors in higher education with offers and services that meet their needs.

Listening

The United Nations, UNESCO and other specialised agencies focused on education sounded the alert during the course of 2020 on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education at all levels [1].

"The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries… Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and middle-income countries." [2]

"*We already faced a learning crisis before the pandemic. Now we face a generational catastrophe that could waste untold human poten-*

[1] A selection of reports from a range of agencies can be found in the Sources and Resources at the end of this paper.

[2] https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf**,** pg 2

tial, undermine decades of progress, and exacerbate entrenched inequalities." [3]

Experiences of the impact and resulting challenges and opportunities posed by COVID-19 in the Globethics.net network, are being listened to, including news reports, briefing papers from specialised agencies, reports from our Board of Foundation, our partners, teachers, students and colleagues in exchanges and during events. For example, the Globethics.net International Conference 'Building New Bridges Together: Strengthening Ethics Higher Education after COVID-19' that took place online with a pre-conference programme in June 2020 provided an opportunity for direct exchange with constituents. The conference was organised around four thematic tracks:

Track 1: Creating New Societal Visions in Higher Education: Values for Living Together;
Track 2: Bridging the Gaps: Ethical Foundations of Online Teaching and Learning Pedagogies;
Track 3: Online Education for a Sustainable Future: Quality and Ethical Standards in Higher Education; and
Track 4: Ethics and Skills for a Responsible Global Citizenship.

According to the post-conference evaluation the two tracks that were judged as most relevant by respondents were Track 3 (25%) and Track 2 (22%), with 10% voting for Track 4 followed by 8% for Track 1.

Children and university students continue to be out of classes for extended periods and the tertiary sector is struggling to face reduced student mobility, enrolment and capacity to offer and access quality education as well as closures in the short and medium term.

[3] United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres on the occasion of the launch of the *UN Policy Brief on Education and COVID-19*, UNESCO, 4 August 2020, http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/covid-19-policy-brief-un-secretary-general-warns-education-catastrophe-13475

Travel restrictions, job losses and reduced employment and revenue are resulting in tertiary education being delayed or abandoned altogether as individuals and families concentrate on meeting their immediate needs.

Hope is being placed in adequate protection plans on campus, technological solutions to provide more up to date and robust online platforms for remote and blended learning, upskilling of teachers and assurances that quality education can continue to be delivered. At the same time funding, human resource and digital gaps, work overload and infection rates and other health concerns impede on campus and online learning.

In the longer term, the odds are shortening on today's schoolchildren, youth and those forced to make mid-career changes being able to access higher education in the next two decades or so. This either because their lower school education has been curtailed and/or it is foreseeable that fewer opportunities will exist to pursue academic and vocational formation when their time comes. This will mean fewer choices, greater inequality, less personal and societal growth and development with more people in low paid, low skilled jobs, with a lower standard of living and quality of life, poorer health outcomes and shorter lives.

Education is a human right and a basic need; without education, humans cannot grow or survive. Within education, ethics education is fundamental and integral, it is not a marginal or optional concern, something nice to have, if individuals and society are to flourish and grow. Ethics education is learning that is life-long and foundational in a holistic education, that pays attention to learning that is less compartmentalised and more oriented to understanding the connections and applying methodologies in new contexts.

Reflecting

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular its impact on education and the higher education sector, Globethics.net has been going back to its foundational documents – its vision, mission and values and its strategic commitments. Globethics.net is also going forward, reflecting on new and creative ways to engage with and develop together with regional partners in education and others while facing the challenges of the times. Included in this engagement is looking at how the constant basic needs of constituents have changed and are expected to change and how these current and anticipated future needs can be met effectively.

Globethics.net's vision is ethics in higher education and its mission is ETHICS – to Empower, Transform in a Holistic way with a focus on Integrity, Competence and Sustainability. ETHICS involves developing talents, placing the common good above self-interest, understanding interconnectedness, making values-based decisions and enabling ethical behaviours and innovative and collective proficiency and standing up for one world.

COVID-19 and ETHICS

What does the Globethics.net ETHICS mission as a way to embed ethics in higher education look like in the higher education sector and in a world living with COVID-19?

E Empowerment – developing talents and resilience and creativity

T Transformation – placing the common good and cooperation before self-interest

H Holistic approach– understanding of in-depth correlations across disciplines and networks and institutions

I Integrity – making values-based decisions, inspiring and leading by example

C Competence – focusing on innovative and collective proficiency, on quality and on access

S Sustainability – standing up for one world, for the mutual benefit and survival of humankind, of non-human beings and of the environment

Globethics.net aims to:

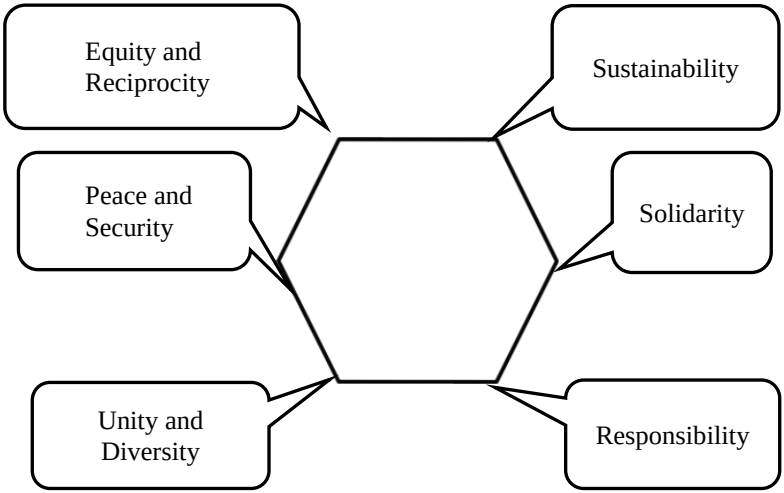
- **Empower teachers** in higher education through teacher training, research, course development and collaborative projects;
- **Support institutions** in their efforts to introduce ethical behaviour in higher education institutions and support the integration of relevant and contextual standards and structures;
- **Provide professions** with educational materials adapted to their profession to grow a deeper understanding of ethics in their context (for them to use to practice ethics);
- **Encourage students** to behave ethically, showing them best practices of individuals, companies and organisations that have become successful by following ethical standards and principles; and
- **Contribute** to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Ethical Frame of Reference

A sound ethical approach within academic institutions cannot be limited to personal honesty and individual responsibility. The point is to expand fairness and consider and integrate the ethical principles that are adhered to, including, equity, diversity within unity, future sustainability, solidarity, peaceful conflict management. To the extent that ethics are holistic, they prove to be effective while interacting intensively.

The ethical dimension needs also to be embedded into institutional structures and organisational procedures; so that its organisational culture and performance are shaped and framed accordingly.

The following hexagonal scheme tries to illustrate the diversity of those key principles and their necessary interaction.



Equity means here equitable treatment: ruling out any bias in favour or disfavour of individual researchers. Academic leaders as well as parties are explicitly advocating that a party might expect from others the same treatment it commits to secure to others.

Sustainability is supposed to keep constantly an eye on consequences and future developments, self-sustainment, balance between outputs and inputs and self-regeneration.

Solidarity inspires a specific concern for those parties who cannot enjoy the same infrastructure or accesses to knowledge; it does not mean necessarily a positive discrimination but at least some kind of compensation for structural disadvantages.

Responsibility is a key in academic interactions, to the extent it follows the principle that everyone is answerable for what has been stated or submitted. The responsibility of Higher Education Institutions towards society at large must also be underscored, in particular when complex issues must be formulated through clear, simple to grasp messages.

Peace and security in academic circles require that submissions be not deemed by the status of their authors but by its intrinsic substance and solidity. It rules out any power game or violent threats.

Unity and diversity management remains a heavy, complex commitment to the extent it keeps diversity as reflecting the rainbow of disciplines, theories, opinions and at the same time the commonality of academic research and its overall consistency.

The key point is to sort out the most optimal and effective trade-offs between those six ethical principles and avoid neglecting or favouring one or some of them. In that sense, ethics appear also like a methodology keen to strike optimal balances within the hexagon and rebuke any overweighting of some principles only, at the expense of others.

Throughout academic research, it is key to highlight the ethical added value and show how ethics can contribute to consistent, high quality, meaningful approaches. Within the ethical hexagon a leading role can keep consistent the whole approach, organise multi-disciplinary plat-

forms, advocate for a clear focus on activating responsibility, sustainability, equity, solidarity, peace and security, unity and diversity - see the "ethical hexagon" given above.

Acting

In practice ethics in higher education means the teaching of teachers, ongoing formation, providing courses, resources and research opportunities, reviewing and guiding ethical practices in institutions of higher learning, as ways to inculcate ethics education across disciplines, sectors, organisational cultures and in wider society.

As Globethics.net works towards the goal that it has set itself to become the leading global online higher education institution specialised in applied ethics complemented by regional centres of competence, it endeavours to be informed by and shaped by the needs and problems of its constituents.

As an example, in this time of uncertainty, upheaval and insecurity, courses on Responsible Leadership and on Cyber Ethics along with knowledge resources are on offer as well as relevant events organised and attended. It is found that the marked absence of leadership and in particular of values-driven, responsible leadership in the political sphere, of trustworthy information and of considered reflection and action impress upon those that pause to think about it the importance of ethics education, of strengthening education as a whole and character formation in particular, of being future-minded and of investing more resources, not less. This is to say that demand is enhanced.

The Globethics.net Strategy 2019-2022 [4] states the following commitments, which are worthwhile revisiting to appreciate the potential of the scope, outreach and impact of ethics education in today's world.

In summary Globethics.net, inter alia

- Concentrates its efforts to meet the needs of higher education institutions by supporting and strengthening teachers, students and the professions with ethical tools and resources for positive behaviour change
- Provides four resources on ethics and ethics-related fields: a digital library, a publishing house, an online network, an academy with on-site and e-learning opportunities and collaborative research
- Focuses on four programmes with four resources that address ethics for institutions with standards, ethics for teachers with training, ethics for students with education and materials and ethics for professionals with contextual educational materials
- Expands and strengthens the network of Regional Programmes and National Contacts
- Strives to be an effective, transparent non-profit foundation with a competent international Board
- Supports joint international research projects on applied ethics for integration in higher education
- Puts a strong emphasis on cooperation with diversified partners on all continents related to the central theme of Ethics in Higher Education

[4] *Globethics.net Strategy 2019-2022 Ethics in Higher Education: Together to the Top*, pg4, https://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13255613/Strategy_2019-2022.pdf/90ea9e90-ff6a-4f47-a5bb-94bf477a72b7

- Strengthens and expands the network of registered participants and individual and institutional membership of the Globethics.net Consortium on Ethics in Higher Education
- Is committed to promoting and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goals 4, 8, 16 and 17.

Concerning the global context and trends, the Globethics.net strategic commitments as stated in the Globethics.net Strategy 2019-2022 [5] are as follows:

- **Higher Educatio**n - Globethics.net is committed to the development of an ethics of education with a focus on ethics in higher education;
- **Identity** - Globethics.net supports the formation and education of all people but gives a particular attention to the younger generation, and to the development of their personal moral compasses through education (knowledge sharing and dialogue) wherever they are;
- **Politics and governance** - Globethics.net is committed to promoting training and dialogue through ethics in higher education for responsible leadership in politics and public administration, serving the common good. Globethics.net advocates for national education policies that support inclusive education and are in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals;
- **Economy** - Globethics.net is committed to fostering ethics in higher education, which promotes transparency and responsibility in the economy and in financial management of future lead-

[5] *Globethics.net Strategy 2019-2022 Ethics in Higher Education: Together to the Top*, pg 7 ff., https://www.globethics.net/documents/4289936/13255613/Strategy_2019-2022.pdf/90ea9e90-ff6a-4f47-a5bb-94bf477a72b7

ers. Ethics in higher education includes advocacy for enough public and private fund for education;

- **Culture and religion** - Globethics.net is committed to promoting ethics in higher education through teaching and training on dialogue among cultures to ensure tolerance among religions and secular society in the search for peace;
- **Environment** - Globethics.net is committed to supporting higher education in addressing ethical challenges and solutions related to climate justice, sustainable development and equitable sharing of resources;
- **Information and communication technologies** - Globethics.net is committed to engaging institutions of higher learning, teachers, students and professionals to develop innovative technologies ethically and to apply and influence the use of technologies ethically for open sharing of resources while respecting and supporting economic sustainability and cyber security always with the aim to improve lives; and
- **World agenda** - Globethics.net is committed to integrating ethics in higher education to address global concerns posed by polarities resulting from inequalities.

Key Markers or Principles of Effective Approaches

The way the challenges posed by COVID-19 were addressed not only by academic communities but by larger constituencies of research and policies related think tanks, has signalled shortcomings and failing approaches and displayed a kind of reverse image of what is badly needed and effective. Key markers of effective approach can be subsequently summarized as follows.

Interdisciplinarity is a key marker of approaches that prove effective. Although the handling of the virus itself was the resort of medical

sciences, its handling cannot ignore all kinds of consequences, economic ones as well as the ones related to societal acceptance. Even philosophers' and ethicists' contributions did prove extremely meaningful to sort out trade-offs, particularly issues related to life and death, life's aspects, pains, -bearable or not -, isolation and proximity, intergenerational understanding and negotiations, short term versus long term perspectives. Listening to practitioners through all levels proved key to develop a balanced, inclusive, and sensible approach. Only an interdisciplinary perspective was able to pay a comprehensive attention to experiences made, learn lessons from experiences made, amend faulty approaches. Interdisciplinarity presupposes that each discipline and domain has developed a sense of its own limitations and renounced the pretence of being alone at the top. Respect of neighbouring disciplines is also a critical factor. Acceptance of one's own limitations and mutual respect cum reciprocal expectations are in that sense bedfellows.

Now, **consistency** is at stake. Gathering the diversity of domains, approaches, and tools cannot as such lead to a consistent, straight, and effective handling. A backbone needs to be set. This is the job of the **academic management** to the extent it might secure a solid level of independent overview and dispel any scattered approach. It is up to the management to frame the debate, give the floor, invite stakeholders to voice their perspective, set timelines, recall the need for and practice of mutual respect. The management should also encourage to a shared assessment of risks, of pros and cons. A scenario-based approach seems in that regards the most appropriate instrument.

Interactivity is as well strongly needed. Interactions, statements, and reactions have flooded the whole academic community as well as the society at large. The huge number of articles published on COVID-19 during the first confinement span – March - August 2020 – has amounted to some 10'000, which clearly reflects the needed push for interactivity. True the backside of it has been a flow of fake information

or disinformation, a jungle through which the job to check and proof was far from easy. Interactivity cannot be furthered without a clear understanding of responsibilities and competition. Issuing statements does not suffice. Interactivity requires responsible statements – answerable ones – as well as reciprocal interactions. A culture of reciprocal listening and due attention has proved necessary to avoid prejudices, misunderstandings, and meaningless arguments. Accepting being questioned by others or questioning others is not so common, although indeed essential. Acknowledging one's own strengths and weaknesses is a prerequisite to effective interactions.

Preparedness might avoid running after information when the crisis occurs. Overreaction can be easily controlled and overstress as well. That is nurtured by a culture of anticipation. Preparedness means that practical steps are taken in advance, and interactive designed systems are tested as well. Plans on paper do not suffice.

Creative competition is critical too, and it is up to the management to organize it and keep the rules of respect and negotiations duly observed. That was not always the case. Still the cases where an initial stand was taken, then disputed, and verified, bring the evidence of a kind of fruitful process. The sequence of a dispute framed by reciprocal respect and curiosity could lead to a state where the initial statement has been checked and enriched. Competition requires also that the so-called mainstream should not be given a kind of infallibility, and that leading universities are not always the best performers. Rigid and monolithic orthodoxy proves paralyzing and should be challenged by a pluralism of interpretations.

Autonomy should also be given a high relevance. Creative competition relies on a solid basis made of initiative, autonomous appreciation of a situation, stand taken on a basis of due consideration, in depth studying, weighting, searching. That should be driven and backed by reason,

proofed analysis, disclosure of sources and methods, out of the box thinking.

Passing **quality information** that is fair, solid, and documented has been far from regular. A lot of political interference as well as economic advantages have spoiled the game. Authoritarian as well as ideological regimes have not performed better than democratic ones, in terms of transparent information. Some tended to control information, even conceal it when it was disturbing. The huge uncertainty about the virus, its characteristics and dynamics has added to the trouble of authorities, oscillating between an anxiogenic language, softening discourse and overall confusion. In authoritarian, top-down institutions, the culture of negotiations[6] is rather weak. Cajoling, rumour milling to rebuke outsiders, collusion and complicity or parochial comfort might be resorted to strike alliances and advance one's edge. Media on their side were not always telling clearly scientific evidence from hypotheses or peer-reviewed and validated papers from research papers and drafts.

In terms of effective communication, cooperation between medical practitioners, communication experts and social scientists is needed to reach a level of communication by authorities that is simple, clear, understandable, having the best chances to be accepted by all corners of population.

Pragmatism proved to be the next marker. The COVID-19's properties were largely ignored and required a thorough study of its characteristics, which is nowadays still a work in progress. Hypotheses made

[6] Negotiation as a "culture" means here a capacity and a style that instead of imposing one's own interpretation of facts is looking actively for debates with dissimilar interpretations and possibly open to concessions. The term may also be used to describe productive interactions between departments as well as levels. A culture of negotiations is often linked to institutional decentralized practice and foreign to monolithic institutions.

have been either confirmed or invalidated. What appears clearly is that research is based on hypotheses followed by practical checks. Reality checks do matter. Ideological statements, although common, are of no use so far as the present handling of hygiene measures as well as a future vaccine is concerned. Ideological statements need to be questioned or even flushed out, not to say unmasked.

Exposure to industry is another key for academic institutions. Solid links and interactions with private sector, industrial actors, be they private think tanks, factories (drugs, medicaments, chemistry, protective equipment, …), economic research centres, surveying organisations and so on proved quite important to feel the pulse, check feasibility, exchange about realistic scenarios. To the contrary, a deep isolation has impoverished academic institutions and kept them out of reality.

Leadership appears finally as a key factor and marker. An academic leader must play two different roles: referee and coach as well. In that sense, it should not side with one department, discipline, or party. It should keep an appropriate level of neutrality and independence. But it should also actively encourage to explore or let explore, search, identify and then mobilize expertise – at home or from outside. The academic leader must constantly remind the famous Kantian principle, *sapere aude*, that means an invitation to dare to think by yourself [7]. Fostering individual and collective autonomy helps in making reason-based decisions.

All these markers that proved relevant, effective to any approach to COVID-19 might be translated to specific academic interactions and processes. They should not be followed as isolated pieces but seen as interacting within a systemic whole, stimulating each other, influencing each other. A whole, as we know, exceeds the total of its constitutive

[7] I. Kant 1784 *What is Enlightenment?*

pieces. A holistic – wholistic – approach proves the most relevant and effective for academic organisational process.

Academic Processes Inspired by Key Markers or Principles

The COVID-19 has challenged academic institutions as regards the analysis of the sanitary dimension but also the shaping of appropriate measures on how to contain its spread as well as the formulation of policy. Academic institutions are invited and even required to develop and enforce processes and methodologies so that an interdisciplinary approach can be carried out, and digital interactions can be boosted.

Academic institutions could take advantage of the event of COVID-19 worldwide spread to improve and strengthen their overall drive, fostering knowledge-based processes, setting and securing quality standards for scientific methodologies, backing interdisciplinary exchanges between hard and soft sciences, nurturing a culture of debate, negotiations and dilemma management, developing strong links to governments, industries[8] and civil society, submitting policy formulation, and finally boosting and framing digital interactions.

Main Thrusts of Strengthening Academic Research

Interdisciplinarity, enhancing cooperation and reciprocal challenges between domains and departments is a must. Comfort zone – such as departments locked on themselves and their field of knowledge – cannot be prolonged any more. That requires not only a new mind set but also

[8] With respect to academic institutions, the term "industries" refers to professionals practising their academic expertise in private companies, public administrations or civil society organisations, think tanks, as well as to those ones. Experiences made by those professionals might be quite meaningful for academicians.

tools and rules of the game. Some are expected to be designed and developed. Holistic approaches, particularly those that prove able to articulate issues raised by hard sciences, life sciences and social sciences, are a prerequisite. A minimum requirement is for departments and academic units to accept their own limitations and make themselves open to outsiders' approaches, ready to question others and be questioned by others.

Interactivity, fostering reciprocal influences among communities of experts, between experts and generalists, between experts of private and public institutions. It appears critical that interactivity be boosted among key stakeholders, between academic units and their respective industry: professionals, and companies. To reach high quality standards of their own intellectual production, academic institutions need to collaborate with outsiders, private researchers, multilateral organisations, think tanks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), specialised media, in other words with partners of another "nature".

Creativity is strongly needed to work on closing the gap between theory and practice, between hard sciences and soft ones, between medics, economists, sociologists, philosophers. Such innovation is far from easy. Interacting on crest lines requires a change of mind sets and uses, cemented over decades of reciprocal ignorance between domains, disciplines, and departments. Experimental research on ridge lines has however stimulated creativity. Task forces, recently created by governments, which comprise of medics, life scientists, economists, sociologists could usefully be completed with experts of social acceptance, behavioural changes, and resistance to change. Counterintuitive perceptions should be encouraged rather than banned. Different vocabularies need to be accepted and listed. New macroeconomic theoretical frameworks might even need to be considered. Additional emphasis on more circular, local economics is also expected.

With respect to overall **management and leadership** some qualities required are conventional ones: instead of an ad hoc, opportunistic, short term tactical management. A strategy made of visionary and long-term perspectives, developing a capacity to consider sustainable consequences, but also to alert on future pros and cons in specific domains as well as in holistic terms, looks more promising. Academic leadership should also move away from legitimising conventional wisdom and justifying parochial views. While demonstrating a capacity to leave one's own zone of comfort and offset short term interests, it will move up to the mark and shape meaningful inputs to short-term oriented politicians and profit-oriented companies.

Academic leaders should as well avoid confining their role in playing only as moderator or facilitator of interdisciplinary processes. They are invited to coach and foster academic players as well as call on outsiders to share knowledge processes. They should remind the parties to reach an optimal balance between the legitimate pride of profiling their research and the acceptance of being questioned as well as enriched by others. Fostering interactive process, calling for peer reviews and double checks, maintaining an independent quality monitoring are necessary for some freedom and for maximising quality. An encouraging call to welcome counter intuitive perceptions and take some distance from mainstream opinions is expected to matter. Academic leaders would certainly remind that the Greek term "symposium" means originally an encounter where a topic is discussed and approached from all scientific and philosophical perspectives.

Changes should be inspired not only by top managers but follow a bottom-up drive.

Last but not least, academic leaders would advantageously call academic staff to consider grassroots' perceptions and expectations, as well as explore how policies could be formulated so that uncertainties are

minimized and their level of understanding and acceptance by society at large maximized. Experts in public communication should be invited on board of those working teams.

Areas of convergence need to be given resolute attention. An ability to develop unitary, consistent, and implementable perspectives out of a diversity of approaches and scattered domains is also at stake. This is far from easy. Assessing within a plurality of reasons which one should be retained could be done while calling to "Reason". Such is the perspective advocated by Joseph Raz. Each party indeed presupposes that its own reason is referred to "Reason" and should accept that this is the case for reasons submitted by others.[9] The issue of overall consistency should be reminded to all, and respective submissions called proactively. Respect against other reasons or values is key. The reality checks, based on social facts rather than theoretical stands, should be given an edge.

A focus on sharing a common terminology, then clarifying methodological options, would be useful. The mix of methodologies appears to be a strong challenge, to reach a sound consistency between quantitative and qualitative methods, measuring dimensions of major social issues, explication and interpretation. Open questions need to be kept as such, so that debated topics are explicitly named and declared as such rather than being hidden under the carpet.

A culture of debate within academic circles should also be instilled and fostered. Debates that go beyond sheer confrontation of opinions. Debates where sources and methods are disclosed as well as main state-

[9] Raz, Joseph. *From Normativity to Responsibility* 2011, ch 5: he deepens the link between rationality and normativity; then considering that debating about reasons presupposes a call to Reason, agreed upon by all the parties. In last chapters, he extends it to a nexus between normative reasons and responsibility. See also his *Practical Reason and Norms* 4th ed. 1999, and *Value, Respect and Attachment* 2009.

ments or considerations lying behind a specific stand. Attention to others' stands, efforts to understand others' background would not blow off the long academic tradition of arguing and debating – see the well-known "disputatio" in medieval universities and inter-religious debate - but to the contrary nurture it and keep it alert.

Dovetailing the fight against COVID-19 and reducing carbon emissions should be given some conscious focus as it is known that a virus living in bats and wild animals did infect humans thanks to man-caused environmental degradation, clearing frontiers between deep forests and human settlements.[10] Reducing carbon emissions and cutting down on environmental footprint, should be linked to sober ways of living and help restoring biological systems' natural capacities to sustain and regenerate.

Keeping research and results within a time frame that fits with the pace of policies' decisions is also critical but uneasy to reach. Reporting in quasi real time is obviously a new challenge.

A solid ethical reference frame belongs to the process, as it will be subsequently developed. Requirements of knowledge sharing and checking have to do with an ethics of invention, based on transparency, but also modesty, liking for debates and welcoming diversity of opinions and theories. Accepting pluralist opinions or diverging theories have solid and good chances to nurture the research once trust has been built among the parties. Trust building belongs to academic leadership and ethics.

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[10] In *The Guardian* 2020 June 17, three prominent experts: Marco Lambertini, director general of WWF International; Elizabeth Maruma Mrema executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and Maria Neira, director of the World Health Organization department of environment, climate change and health highlight that COVID-19, like other viruses such as Zika, Aids, Sars and Ebola, originates from animal populations under conditions of severe environmental pressures, a trend that is compounded by wildlife trade.

Digital Interactions and Higher Education Institutions

To effectively address issues such as pandemics – more specifically to draw the lessons gained through COVID-19 interactions –, interactive processes within Higher Education Institutions need to be enhanced and upgraded in particular in the field of open debates, specific checks, and counterchecks.

Digital interactions do constitute neither a magical solution nor a disaster. A mix of potentials and risks will be advantageously reckoned with.

1 Debate Culture and Academic Interactions

Electronic media and digital platforms are meant to render fluent any exchange of information. However, when the parties cannot be physically present many observers note that emotional, even aggressive arguments might prevail in online processes and social networks. Academic leaders find it harder to keep emotions at low level. Ethics of reciprocity must consequently be reminded, and specific rules based on fair-play philosophy should be set, enforced, and shared.

Digital discussions might face hardships because acoustic, fragrant, and visual dimensions are missing and might render them "dry". Negotiations in presence make it possible to decipher the body language, to mix sounds and tones, visual expressions, with the substance of statements made. Informal authority may be exercised. Formal meetings in presence can usefully be supplemented by informal encountering, such as coffee breaks, sharing meals and drinks. Leaders should therefore encourage opposite parties to develop informal, bilateral exchanges.

Advantageously, digital interactions might process rapidly and even bring results in quasi real time. Quasi immediate interactions do occur. International discussions might proceed without any harm. To remedy

runaway of speedy interactions, some level of patience and tolerance needs even sometimes to be reminded.

Brainstorming might be encouraged and turn creative through such rapid interactions. This appears as a chance of digital discussions and processes. Solid preparation of talks is required but tolerance of "crazy ideas" secured.

When it comes to time allocation in an organised debate, strict rules seem to have better chances to be accepted online as compared with face-to-face discussions or campus-based teaching. This might be considered a useful advantage of online processes.

The risk that digital interactions end up in a bald juxtaposition of diverse stands or purposes should not be underestimated. Without genuine interactivity, the debate might rapidly turn loose and fade. Overall consistency and inclusiveness are at stake and should be stressed and implemented by the academic leaders. Keeping or finding a solid backbone is up to them.

Experience shows that digital interactions alone do not bring the interactions at their expected level. A first stage made through physical presence matters to build some basic trust, shared feelings, and intercultural understanding. Once parties have met in presence, in a first stage but not necessarily as the very initial step, then digital interactions might develop in a beneficial manner. This has been documented through adaptation of seminar rules and introduction of presence / distance learning blend. Strengthening trust throughout negotiation process leads to solid joint implementation.

As regards the widening to larger networks, beyond departmental and even academic boundaries, digital interactions offer an additional chance. Linking to industries, private companies' and civil society' researchers is made much easier. Collaborative and productive networks

that prove essential are there through being actively fostered. Thanks to those, interdepartmental interactions are exposed to companies in their respective industry, as well as to civil society' and communities' organisations. Academic domains might benefit from such kind of public-private partnerships.

There is subsequently a need to specify appropriate rules and keep an atmosphere of attention, close listening, in order to develop holistic research: mapping its key dimensions, the ethical relevance, to promote creative brainstorming, to specify processes and steps. A solid body of experience and analysis needs to be targeted, then documented and disseminated.

When debates exceed the borders of individual disciplines and clusters of domains – for instance medical disciplines and economic ones, social sciences and so on – the need to find a common platform is key. A methodology of academic interactions needs to be first delineated, and then strengthened. It should at least comprise of mapping respective interests and concerns of each domain and department, disclosing unnamed expectations and prejudices [11], stimulating creativity to go beyond comfort zones, uses and rituals. Thanks to the academic leadership, each of those should echo across the domains, so that images of one's own domain and of the other's domain could be confronted. To put oneself in the other's shoes matters. Confronting subjective opinions might lead to 'the constitution of transcendental experience' and 'intersubjectivity', a process which Edmund Husserl considered as the true

[11] See for instance the concept of "doxa", beliefs and values that are taken as self-evident universals, developed by Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. "Structures, Habitus, Practices", pp. 52–79 in *The Logic of Practice*. 1990, R. Nice trans. Cambridge, Polity Press.

name of objectivity [12]. Trust might consequently take roots and creativity be unleashed.

2 Multi-stakeholder Negotiations

One is used to negotiate with similar partners: government' officials with each other, businesspersons with one another and so on. They should not share similar stands but be similar in nature, with respect to professional status, institutional culture, educational background, codes of communication, language. Negotiations between peers are not necessarily easy ones. Peers might not be like-minded. But they at least refer to commonalities of language, background, issues raised, experiences made, problematics, references resorted to.

With respect to multi-stakeholder negotiations, their main feature is that they are processed by partners of dissimilar nature. Academicians, entrepreneurs, officials, community leaders, influencers, average citizen, do not necessarily share the same background. Their high level of complexities of multi-stakeholders' negotiations is harder to manage. Diversity of language, diversity of analytical skills, priority to descriptive or analytical, divergence of opinions, unarticulated meanings, prejudices kept silenced, might be a factor of difficulty with respect to productive interaction online. However, once effectively managed, those diversities could prove a source of enrichment.

Stepwise processes of negotiations are usefully specified and should be followed. The focus needs to be phrased as an open question. When a party submits a statement, that party should be called to stress on the substance and elicit its arguments. Questions from other sides are to be invited. Then areas of possible concessions or innovative cooperation could be identified.

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[12] Edmund Husserl *Cartesian Meditations* (5th meditation) 1931 (D. Cairns, trans. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).

When diverging parties are confronting their stands, they should be invited by moderators to declare as much as possible the underlying background of their stand and to substantiate it as well. They should in addition specify how they would describe their opponent's views and how they imagine the way they are seen by opponents. Such a way, a lot of trouble factors could be ruled out and spared. This kind of mirroring process is expected to be particularly effective in digital interactions.

Realising that future scenarios can possibly entail potentials and opportunities but also risks and threats are also part of any negotiation practice. It helps also to pave the way towards pragmatic compromise instead of perfect solutions. Negotiations as such prove an instrument and guide for pragmatic research.

Negotiation skills, particularly through electronic communication, are to be designed and then their implementation duly monitored. Negotiation methodologies are articulated and taught via training sessions, case studies, and scenario development. Electronic platforms should prove more interactive than conventional massive open online courses (MOOCs), that have been resorted to during past decade.

Dilemma Management and Risk Management

Dilemmas are nothing new. Effective dilemma management has been the weak element throughout the handling of COVID-19 in most of countries. One can list the most striking ones: the dilemmas posed by trying to balance health requirements versus economic productivity, levels of isolation versus levels of social bonding (touching, hugging, kissing), social rituals versus social distancing, short term changes versus semi-permanent ones, solid but complex scientific analysis versus easily and clearly formulated messages leading to a simple implementation.

The solution is neither simply an "and" nor an "or". On the spectrum line of possibilities, the cursor might move.

Managing dilemmas as a skill needs to be further taught and trained in Higher Education Institutions: for instance to acknowledge the hard challenge itself, size the importance of each possibility, bypass usual solutions such as zero-sum games or solution in the middle, reach audacious trade-off for instance between costs and health, social isolation and social bound, hygiene requirements and overcrowded neighbourhoods, requirements of interactions and distance in the workplace, addressing social discrimination (groups, ages). In that respect, higher education institutions need to develop measurement tools, instruments, and skills through education and training in dilemma management, and skills in electronic negotiations based on those key ethical requirements.

1 Measurement Tools and Monitoring

Academic discussions and brainstorming need to be fostered, in order to reach a common, interdisciplinary understanding of the respective values of several scientific approaches. It can prove meaningful and useful, to the extent hard sciences, social sciences, philosophy, and ethics are so far poorly equipped to develop jointly holistic approaches.

An effort to measure the relative importance and the specific dimensions of each approach, to assess the optimal balance of their results and achievements, to design new interactions might help a lot. The purpose of measuring appears to work as a common endeavour and shape a common language.

The project of developing a toolbox, instrumental for measurement, might gather the many questionings and many handlings and cast light on complementarity of approaches. Such toolbox should be comprised mostly of specific cases, analytical tools and methods, checklists, visual display of results.

Communication to a large public requires a solid assessment of social habits, ways to understand or misunderstand political and scientific messages. Academic units could cooperate with scientific journalists, trained in explaining in simple words complex issues and taking average citizen questions as a starting point.

Rituals of communication do matter. Each culture has its own. Digital communication should invent its own, so that all the parties can feel at home.

Monitoring of the process is essential, to allow parties to note discrepancies, failures, semi-successes, and identify how the process can draw lessons from past failures, improve and pave the way for further steps. The principle of setting a monitoring unit should be agreed on by all. Its role should not be undersized. Its mission and objectives should be shared and agreed upon. Monitoring by communities themselves should be given a room, so that understanding at grassroots level can be checked.

2 Instruments and Skills. Methodologies

Enriching and enlarging degrees, better fitting to address those new challenges should be emphasised. Blending subjects that so far belong to distinct bachelors or masters could help promoting more inclusive degrees. Life sciences are in particular expected to be better integrated.

A high priority should be given to methodologies and methodological tools. Methodologies of driving holistic approaches, of moderating debates and negotiation, of communication to a large audience, need to be delineated, checked against reality, and debated on. Such a tool could include as part of the programme of Globethics.net, an open-access academic journal devoted to Ethics in Higher Education. The journal would be an excellent venue for scholars and researchers to disseminate their studies on various ethical issues in higher education drawing inter-

est from various researchers from different universities across the globe considering the wide network of Globethics.net.

Digital processes need to be refined and valued in terms of clarity, two-ways listening, top-down and bottom-up, ability to anticipate further steps, over a lengthy, long-time process. Practical skills are imparted to academic staff, researchers, communication officers.

3 Digital Tools and Processes. Specificities

A solid expertise in digital tools and processes, in particular digital means of communication and interaction should be secured.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are expected to become common practice and lecturers should be trained accordingly.

Tools of videoconference, such as Zoom, vMix, of team working platforms such as Microsoft teams or Webex enriched by additional applications could be taught as well as their implementation critically assessed. New tools could be developed to better address the blend of digital interactions with debates and meetings on campus, in presence.

In summary, the experiences of higher education institutions and related bodies, including government ministries, national commissions and international agencies and umbrella associations in the management of digital discussions during the most intense periods of the COVID-19 pandemic should be assessed, its failures analysed, and its numerous successes interpreted, documented, valued and disseminated.

CONCLUSION

When reviewing what has occurred since 2019 during and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic it is clear that some areas, such as health systems, the economy, security, politics and governance and the use of information and communication technologies have been accorded a higher and more immediate priority in the global and national agenda. The core thesis of this discussion paper, however, is that education in general, and education that is values-driven in particular, hold the key for sustainable adaptation and recovery in a world living with COVID-19 mindful of the great learning that this intense period in human history has brought.

The higher education sector as a whole has been and continues to be challenged to adapt and to ensure that institutions and students are not only able to survive but to continue and to thrive. Ethics in higher education is at the heart of that dynamic process, serving to identify and address inequalities with ethics as the foundation of the effort to find solutions and to continue to envision a world in which responsible leadership with integrity is the norm.

This conclusion is not the final word, by no means. The floor is now given to you, to fellow experts and practitioners to bring further thought and active leadership in the field. The chapter that follows provides questions proposed for discussion, in your institution, with your colleagues, among your partners and networks. Each individual and institution has been tasked, whether we like it or not, with managing the pandemic as it has unfurled, with mourning the loss of life and with bridging the gaps left behind. This is and continues to be an exercise in courage, with the benefit of hindsight and the gift of foresight being called upon for the interests of all and for the common good.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does ethics in higher education mean to you and why, in your view, does it matter?
- How have you and/or your institution listened, reflected and acted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and what have you learnt as a result?
- What are the most critical ethical issues in the higher education sector and how can we go about addressing them?
- What, if anything, inspires or informs you when you read about the approach and mission of Globethics.net?
- How would you describe your or your institution's ethical frame of reference? Which would you say your key principles are?
- What for you is the role/s and function/s of higher education?
- What strikes you as true in your experience when thinking about the key markers or principles of effective approaches to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the higher education sector? What key markers would you add or change?
- In what ways do you think higher education institutions are required to change to meet current and future challenges, for example, in how they are organised, in the methodologies used, their pedagogical practices, in terms of procedures and processes, etc.?
- How has academic research been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how in your view could a values-driven orientation to research efforts and practice support and strengthen research?
- How can academic exploration and debate and multi-stakeholder negotiations benefit from and advance through the use of digital technologies and what are the problems / ethical dilemmas that do or may arise in your opinion?

Call for Participation

If you would like to share your answers to these questions, please feel free to send them by email to Head.Office@globethics.net.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Globethics.net digital repository https://repository.globethics.net/, including dedicated collections, e.g. https://repository.globethics.net/handle/20.500.12424/3948121

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Ethics in Higher Education

A Key Driver for Recovery in a World Living with COVID-19

This short discussion paper on Ethics in Higher Education as a Key Driver for Recovery in a World Living with COVID-19 is the result of a year-long consultation with contributions from experts and practitioners in the field.

The higher education sector as a whole has been and continues to be challenged to adapt and to ensure that institutions and students are not only able to survive but to continue and to thrive. Ethics in higher education is at the heart of that dynamic process, serving to identify and address inequalities with ethics as the foundation of the effort to find solutions and to continue to envision a world in which responsible leadership with integrity is the norm.

The Globethics.net Board of Foundation endorses this discussion paper and invites readers to engage with the critical issues, questions and recommendations made.

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