Presentation by Ms Olivia PARCZYK, Liaison Officer for Asia, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Olivia was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are higher education internationalisation policies and practices currently, what is the status quo?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?

Olivia began the presentation by defining what inclusivity means. To start with, the dictionary definition of inclusivity is “striving to give people access to the same facilities and wanting to enable them to take part in the same activities”. In line with this dictionary definition, and in Olivia’s own words, “the most important point is that we want them to enjoy the same experiences as anyone else.”

Olivia proceeded to discuss the status quo of inclusion in internationalization activities in higher education. The Status Quo, according to Olivia, is in-between the phase of raising awareness and adapting the structures towards inclusivity and diversity. In this regard, society has developed beyond the first phase: noticing disparity, and yet to reach actual inclusivity, which is the end goal.

Olivia emphasized that raising awareness is a necessary step but it is not the end goal. There is an acknowledgment of the massive work done to raise awareness of inclusivity and internationalization thus far. With regard to adapting the structures of higher education to advance inclusivity and internationalization, there have been developments to a certain extent. However, adapting the structures in higher education needs significant attention. Olivia argues that we [society] must advance beyond the awareness raising stage and actually deliver specific outcomes.

To present the status quo, Olivia shared an interesting case of a supposed ‘awareness raising’ initiative as seen in the photo below:
In this case, a baseball team printed braille on their uniform in an attempt to raise awareness. Olivia argues that, specifically with regard to blindness, the general public is aware of it, and that society is beyond raising awareness on this topic and should move towards meaningful action and adjustments to structures. More so, this case exposes how inappropriate an organization can be, using a legitimate social issue as a publicity stunt. Olivia draws back to the main point that at a certain extent, awareness raising has a threshold, and action and adjustments to structures should develop and take effect.

To expound further on the stage of awareness raising and the stage of adapting structures, Oliva brings to light two cases.

- First, drawing on Google statistics, the frequency of the google search on *autism* has remained consistent in the past 15 years. Thus, Olivia argues, awareness of autism has been established to a certain degree and it is now timely for there to be action and adjustment to structures.

- Second, also based on Google statistics, the frequency of the google search on *Transgender*. In this case, *transgender* was not consistently searched in the past 15 years. Therefore, Olivia argues, that society is in the process of raising awareness and is not yet at the point of advancing to the stage of adjusting structures.

Oliva also provides a wonderful example of awareness raising that has advanced to adjustment in structure: the Erasmus Program.
She presents that the wording of its policies and programs are based on awareness of disparities and social inequalities. Thus, the wording includes as many groups and sectors as possible. However, these were written fully cognizant of the fact that it is impossible to list each and every group.

After presenting these examples capturing the status quo, Olivia proceeded to discuss the **risks that could jeopardize greater inclusion in higher education in the next decade.**

- **No enforced standards**
  Olivia explains that, for example, in her university in Germany, facilities for disabled students were substandard and unmaintained. Despite this state of facilities, the university, among others, used words such as ‘inclusive’ and ‘accessible’ because these are buzz words and project a positive image. But certain universities do the bare minimum in order to qualify for such descriptions.

- **Settling for lower standards – Blended mobility**
  The concern which Olivia brought to the foreground is the risk of hastily declaring hybrid education and mobility as a the standard in the future because of how convenient it has been during the pandemic. While blended learning can be considered a miracle solution to the education woes during the pandemic, Olivia pointed out that it is very convenient solution which does not receive enough critical feedback.

- **COVID Aftermath, elitism and stereotypes**
  The surge of racism against Asians due to the Pandemic poses a serious challenge to inclusivity, mobility, and internationalization.
This was followed by presenting points on opportunities, leverage points to promote inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years.

- **Exponential development**
  There is an opportunity for exponential development because there are now more opportunities for disadvantaged people to reach the same success as others. Olivia sees that, in 10 years, those from disadvantaged groups will be better represented in decision-making bodies and will participate as decision makers.

- **Awareness stage is shorter due to better access to information**
  Generation Z can easily access information which is readily available online. Access to the information will ease the search to find like-minded people who are going to raise awareness for the same causes that you are interested in.

- **Acceptance of digital alternatives**
  The acceptance of digital alternatives surged during the pandemic despite their concerns with the quality of online education. This surge rapidly changed society’s mindset because digital alternatives do work. Olivia shares her thoughts, saying that “digitalization would develop further even without the pandemic.”

- **Shrinking cultural differences**
  Currently, there are more connections around the globe that can be made without ever traveling. Internationalization at home brings together foreign people, and bridges the gap between foreign lands. This also contributes to the acceptance of digital alternatives.

After the presentation of Olivia, the groups broke into breakout sessions. One discussed the opportunities and the other discussed the risks presented by Olivia.

**Comments on Opportunities**

- **Exponential Development**
  - An accelerator of exponential development could be Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) which experts referred to as ‘huge opportunity’ within the Asia and Europe contexts.
  - While there is a positive outlook that physical mobility will return, experts suggest the potential positive impact of collaborating online during the pandemic and post-pandemic.
  - Exponential development sounds logical and there is an acceleration of digital adoption or digital transformation observed today which supports the statement. However, at the same time, exponential development is “essentially a fact of life.”

- **Acceptance of digital alternatives**
  - Experts agree, that as an effect of the pandemic, there is a higher probability of accepting alternative modes of learning. Peoples’ perspective on the modality of internationalization has changed from thinking there is only one modality, people now accept there are alternatives. Experts also agree that alternatives shrink cultural differences.
Experts emphasized the caveat that digital learning is not a direct replacement to physical mobility. However, it has added value and contributes to pre-departure or post-return mechanism in relation to the Pandemic.

- Awareness stage is shorter due to better access to information
  - For instance, in the context of India, there is a gap in communication between the university system, its officials, and the students. There is a lack of including students in the decision-making processes, in the designing courses and curricula, or in planning phase of mobility programs.
  - An expert expanded the earlier statement by saying that inclusion within the university education system of Asian countries is majorly lacking. Additionally, it was said that this understanding of the situation presents a challenge which is transformed into an opportunity.
  - In connection with the two prior points, several experts stated that there is a ‘clear gap between Asia and Europe’ in regard to inclusive processes in higher education institution and systems.

**Comments on Risks**

- No enforced standards
  - Enforcing standards go beyond ‘ticking boxes’ and formal meetings. Experts presented the reminder that inclusion boils down to two essential concepts: Quality and Equity. There is a need for a deeper and more substantive engagement that translates into making inclusion a reality on the ground.
  - In the European context enforcement of standards relates to commitment, it relates to awareness, it relates to resources.
  - Experts suggested that there be a variety of standards for the different types of underrepresented groups, and standards that are adapted specific access needs and contexts. Universities should consider the differences of each community or groups. Standardization can sometimes be very forced.
  - Experts suggest that internationalization should be discussed within the context of inclusion. When this approach is followed, “standards will be understood in a less standardized way”. At the same time, standards have different dimensions which should be discussed. Hence, experts acknowledge that standards are important. However, universities should shed the rigidity of standardization and take into account the differences between target groups for inclusion work.
  - Lastly in relation to standardization, experts present the reminder that, when discussing internationalization and international standards, participants in the discussion should remember the original purpose of internationalizations is inclusion.

Experts also pointed out that inclusion can be visible and invisible. Visible, can also be in a superficial way. For example, an individual from a marginalized sector or group can seem to be included in a process or space. However, the individual can actually feel isolated from the community in the entire process. This is a complicated context that must be openly discussed; how to genuinely be inclusive.

On the other hand, reinforced stereotypes and cause for prejudice is an example invisible exclusion, racism must be addressed. Confirmed by the experts in this session is the shared status quo of Asia and Europe with regard to elitism and reinforcement of stereotypes.

- COVID aftermath
- An expert from Asia expressed an opinion that blended mobility is not the same as physical mobility. If the program is purely online, expectations on cultural exchange and learning might not be satisfactory to the goal of the participant or organizer. Blended mobility ‘is not the real mobility’. Hybrid learning does bring to the table positive results, e.g. hybrid learning has received much acclaim from nursing programs between Mongolian and American universities during the pandemic.

- From a European standpoint, blended mobility being the default option for underrepresented groups was considered to be a ‘big risk’ because the added value of physical mobility for underrepresented groups would be overlooked. The added value of physical mobility has greater impact on underrepresented students as compared to the privileged students.

- Similar to points shared by experts from Asia, “online learning should not become the only option.” The term ‘scandal model’ was introduced in this discussion, and a warning was given that from an institutional point of view, online learning maybe less costly and be a convenient model.

- In summary of this point, the focus of hybrid learning should be quality, with importance to this emphatically expressed experts. Lastly, hybrid learning does come hand in hand with both risks and opportunities for students.

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