

## **EUA MEMBER NETWORKING SESSION**

**Friday, 21 October, 18.00-19.00**

Title of the session: **Creativity: the intellectual funds of universities**

Organising Member Institution: **University of Vienna, Austria**

Presenters:

**Dr. Bernard Wallner**, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria

**Dr Martin Fieder**, Rector's Office, University of Vienna, Austria

Summary of the session:

Today European Universities face a stage of re-organization and strategy formation process. The management is confronted to account for the input and the output capacity of the institution. In order to achieve that, comparable quality systems in teaching and research affairs have to be established. At present, the most familiar formulas of quality assurance are evaluation and benchmarking.

Evaluation concepts are in principle based on *ex post* approach (focusing on the past) resulting into an *ex ante* concept (strategies for the future) which seems to represent a rather one-dimensional process. Most results of evaluations aim at compromises which may favour an institution or work despite individual creativity. Moreover, it can be mentioned that evaluation processes are hampered to bureaucracy and sluggishness.

Here, we suggest that creativity represents the main power, main quality, economically spoken the "intellectual funds" in higher education. Therefore, creativity must be a part of strategic planning of higher education. However, most of the well established academic institutions get into trouble to incorporate creativity into their account. Why? Creativeness - just an empty cliché? We propose the answer to be found in human evolution.

In the field of cognitive archeology it is suggested that technological and scientific creativity is a result of natural selection. It has been argued that the evolutionary process of cognition is based on 3 consecutive developed phases (Mithen 1996) including 4 distinct modules of intelligence. First, the generalized intelligence, which is characterized by general-purpose and associational learning, second, the modular phase, here the modules of social, technical, natural history and linguistic developed, and lastly the cognitively fluid mind. The latter is unique for *Homo sapiens*. The important idea here is that the modules of mind become permeable, fluid, and integrated. For example, man achieves to merge technical ideas with social ideas, from a Darwinian point of view this is the birth of creativity. Because creativity seems to be naturally selected, it can be assumed that modern humans are evolved to display innovation and contemplation. Therefore, higher education should integrate the concept of creativity into strategy planning processes. In order encourage young talented researcher universities have to train them in cognitive fluidity. Analogous to evolutionary processes in cognitive development students, graduates, and post docs have to be supervised to open the divisions between domains of research topics and have to practice integration. Modularity without integration makes connections between domains impossible and creativity is harshly limited. "Thinking outside the box" is trainable and a must to enable new ideas. Moreover, fluidity and integration is as much as conceptual as it is neurological.

Finally, universities have the obligation to incorporate the freedom of creativity into their strategic planning as quality assurance measure to be competitive in the academic market place and to educate competitive people as well.

References:

Mithen S (1996) *The prehistory of the mind: the cognitive origins of art and science*. London: Thames & Hudson.