Higher Education Summit and Tertiary Tech Leaders' Summit.

Post traditional Higher Education: Challenges of diversity and quality

by

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić & Sir John Daniel

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Introduction

Sir John and I are delighted to be back in Australia for this great national congress.

We shall share this presentation and the title of our address is *Post traditional Higher Education: Challenges of diversity and quality.* In a minute we shall explain what we mean by 'post-traditional higher education' but let us start in a more personal way to make this seem less abstract.

Between us we have participated in the diversifying reality of higher education in recent decades in a variety of ways. A few words on our own involvement in traditional, non-traditional and post-traditional approaches may help to root these developments in real life.

My own secondary education exposed me to non-traditional methods. I was living in New Delhi, where I obtained a GCE diploma from the University of London through correspondence courses provided by Wolsey Hall from Oxford. It was a revealing experience, and I found that my tutor in Oxford gave me more personal support than I had ever had in a classroom setting.

My university education was more traditional. In the 1970s, after my first degree at the University of Belgrade, I continued my studies in Paris. Long before programmes like ERASMUS were set up, international mobility was considered to be a 'must' in small countries like mine. France was a preferred destination and a family tradition. I spent hours reading in the Bibliothèque Sainte Genevieve, mixing with international students and refreshing my knowledge of French.

In the eighties, I had the privilege of being the Secretary-General of the Association of Universities of Yugoslavia, a very stimulating period in my professional life. We worked on the strategy for the scientific and technological development of Yugoslavia and strived to bring Yugoslav universities into the mainstream of European integration. We organized yearly international seminars at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik adding an academic buzz at the end of the tourist season in this lovely city.

The end of the decade brought the fall of the Berlin Wall, a transformational event for the integration of Europe.

I then began my international career at CEPES, UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education in Bucharest, a few months after the Romanian revolution and the fall of Ceausescu. It was an exciting time of change, of new beginnings and European integration. It was also the time of new divisions, civil wars and the disintegration of my country, Yugoslavia.

I had the privilege of working in one of the most beautiful palaces in Bucharest, my main focus being the Council of Europe and UNESCO European Convention on the recognition of degrees The Diplomatic Conference, which adopted the Convention, was held in Lisbon, hence it is known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention. A distinguished compatriot of yours, Professor Colin Power, chaired the Conference and Australia was the only non-European country to be an active participant in the process.

In 1999 I moved to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. When I arrived there I asked my bosses: "what do you want me to do now?" The answer was "Go global!" John Daniel was my boss. I remember him particularly for a statement that was revolutionary for UNESCO: "new need not be bad!"

The General Agreement on Trade in Services stimulated UNESCO's interest in cross-border education. Things soon heated up when the US and the OECD held a forum in Washington on *Trade in Educational Services*. I attended for UNESCO and reported back that a speech by Pierre Sauvé that was probably intended to reassure had the academic community up in arms.

One result was that UNESCO and the OECD agreed to develop guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education. For this partnership, tribute goes to another Australian, Professor Barry McGaw who was then head of Education at OECD. Furthermore, William Thorn, then representing the Australian government, played a significant role in the drafting process. One strong recommendation called for better dialogue and collaboration between exporting and importing countries.

UNESCO held a major world conference on higher education in 2009. Top of the agenda was the huge unmet demand for higher education in developing countries. Cross-border higher education was put forward as one of the remedies to this problem and although branch campuses have continued to develop, online cross-border higher education is now increasing and diversifying even more rapidly. We shall return to this.

Sir John's early higher education was very traditional – even medieval – in Oxford and Paris. But while working in his first academic post at the University of Montreal he became a non-traditional, part-time student in another university. This was a Master's programme in Educational Technology and he showed his commitment to lifelong learning by taking 25 years to graduate. However, it was a life-changing experience.

Students had to do a three-month internship, which he did in 1972 at the UK Open University, then only in its second year of operation but with 40,000 students already. He was so inspired by seeing multi-media distance learning at scale that when he returned to Montreal he reoriented his career. This took him to Quebec's Télé-université and Alberta's Athabasca University, which are both distance-teaching institutions.

In 1980 he became vice-rector of Montreal's Concordia University, which focuses mainly on adult, part-time students – what we sometimes call non-traditional students. Next, as president of Laurentian University, a regional university in northeastern Ontario he gained experience of a dual-mode university that offers programmes both on campus and at a distance.

Eighteen years after his life-changing internship at the Open University, he became its vice-chancellor in 1990. It was there, at his wife's urging, that he re-enrolled in the part-time Master's programme in Educational Technology that he had started in the early 1970s. He managed to complete the necessary thesis, which became his book *Mega-universities,* and finally graduated after 25 years. A few years later, when the Open University offered its first entirely online course, he enrolled as a student – which the vice-chancellor of a distance-teaching university can do without attracting attention!

After eleven years at the Open University he joined UNESCO, which is where we first worked together, and then completed his career as president of the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver.

During that period we both became deeply involved in Open Educational Resources, an important aspect of what we call post-traditional higher education. He will talk about that in a moment.

As well as noting these aspects of our backgrounds we should also declare our current interests. We are both Senior Advisors to Academic Partnerships a company that helps universities take some of their regular programmes online, and also members of the DeTao Masters Academy in China. Finally, as I shall explain later, I am the Senior Advisor on International Affairs to the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation, CHEA.

So, having presented our credentials, let me outline what we intend to cover in this address:

Plan

First, we shall explain what we mean by post-traditional higher education. How is it different from traditional higher education and non-traditional higher education? What are the drivers of its development and what are the ideals that inspire it?

Having set the scene we shall then explore some of the components of post-traditional higher education and their implications. This will include open access to research results and data, open educational resources, MOOCs and open badges.

Finally, we shall look at the challenges facing institutions in engaging with post-traditional higher education. These include governance, the awarding of credentials and quality assurance.

To help you get your minds around all this we are making available at this session a recently published *Guide to Quality in Post-Traditional Online Higher Education* commissioned by Academic Partnerships.

What is post-traditional higher education?

So what do we mean by post-traditional higher education?

Let me start with traditional higher education. We once had an image of a higher education institution as a place where people went once in their lives, usually between 18 and 22 years old, to move through it in a linear fashion over four years.

That image has long been out of date. Several decades ago the term 'non-traditional students' came into use to designate students who were older than 22, often in employment, and usually studying part-time. Today this term 'non-traditional students' sounds odd because in many institutions, and even in some whole jurisdictions, these so-called non-traditional students make up the majority of students and are establishing a new tradition in higher education. Very importantly, both traditional and non-traditional students were almost always studying with the aim of getting a degree or some formal attestation of their achievement.

By post-traditional higher education we mean something different. It refers to a series of developments aimed at opening up higher education to more students through more flexible and individualised learning opportunities.

Post-traditional higher education: drivers

There are three main practical drivers of post-traditional higher education. The first is the global employment crisis, particularly the levels of youth unemployment. This is less of an issue in a fortunate country like Australia. Your overall unemployment rate of 5.8% and your youth unemployment rate of 12.5% are some of the lowest in the world. A cover of the *The Economist* newspaper last year, which proclaimed 'Generation Jobless', may not resonate much here – but it is a big issue in much of the world. It has created a general belief that higher education is not doing a very good job of preparing young people for employment or self-employment in the 21st century.

The second driver is the potential for innovation inherent in new forms of technology that create open networks for the sharing of digital content. Educators are increasingly leveraging the Internet, digital content, open licensing, and social networking to create new approaches to education. Usually web-based or offered online, these initiatives aim to increase access to higher education and to make its content more relevant to contemporary needs.

A third driver, which is particularly salient in the United States but is also being felt elsewhere, is the challenge facing mainstream higher education institutions as they experience diminishing financial support from governments and resistance from parents and students to ever-higher tuition and residence fees.

These are three pragmatic drivers of the trend to greater openness, but it has idealistic underpinnings too. Inspired by the core value of education as a human right and ideas of emancipation through education for all, there is a steady move towards 'openness' that is sparking innovation and could create a new paradigm in higher education.

Let me now hand you over to Sir John to unpack this further.

Sir John Daniel

Manifestations of openness

Openness is an increasing feature of education, expressed in concepts such as open source software, open data, open access to research results, open content, open educational resources (OER) and open badges. These all promote the notions of transparency and easy access to information.

Open source software

I won't say much about the open source software movement. Some of our most widely used Learning Management System tools such as Moodle, Claroline, Dokeos, Sokai and .LRN are open source software. Each now has a level of popularity that rivals their commercial counterparts. There are also open source platforms for MOOCs, such as Open edX and OpenMooc.

Open data

Likewise, I shall say little about open data, except to compliment the Government of Australia on being a world leader in making data publicly available and adopting policies for maximum transparency and citizen engagement.

Open access

The next manifestation of openness, which is very important to higher education, is open access. Confusingly, this term usually refers only to open access to research results. But the open access movement has the wind in its sails for several reasons.

First, rising prices of learned journals have increased subscription costs beyond the reach of many universities – and not only in developing countries. Libraries have rebelled.

Second, governments, foundations and research funding agencies dislike seeing the results of the research that they have funded copyrighted by publishers and locked away in expensive journals. Increasingly they are insisting on open access publishing, which is perfectly compatible with peer-review and the normal refereeing and editorial processes.

Third, academics are also rebelling at contributing their research articles for nothing, doing *pro bono* peer-review, and then having restrictions imposed on the dissemination of their work.

As a result there are now close to 10,000 open access journals that have published well over a million papers. Experience shows that publications in open access journals are more widely cited and usually appear more quickly.

<u>Open Educational Resources</u>

The most important manifestation of openness in teaching has been the steady multiplication of open educational resources or OER. In 2012 UNESCO convened a World Congress on OER, which reviewed over a decade of development of this concept.

It had originated in MIT's decision, in the late 1990s, to make the lecture notes of its faculty freely available on the Web. Believing this to be an important development, UNESCO held a forum on the impact of open courseware on higher education in developing countries in 2002. The forum coined the term 'Open Educational Resources and gave a definition of them. OER are materials designed for use in teaching and learning that are openly available for use by educators and students without the need to pay royalties or license fees.

UNESCO marked the tenth anniversary of its first OER forum with a World Congress on OER. In the run up to the Congress Stamenka and I were charged with organising policy forums in the six UNESCO regions and using them to develop a draft Declaration on OER that could presented to the Congress.

We were pleased that the long process of consultation and iteration led the Congress to approve the Paris Declaration by acclamation. The most significant recommendation in the Declaration was: 'to encourage the open licensing of educational material produced with public funds'. This recommendation – hardly revolutionary when you think about it – is having an impact.

That same year my home province of British Columbia followed up quickly by offering free, online open textbooks for the 40 most popular postsecondary courses. This saved each of the students about $140 a session and the programme is now being extended.

Australia is also a leader in OER. AUSGOAL, your nationally endorsed Australian Government's Open Access and Licensing Framework, recommends a suite of Creative Commons licenses for copyrighted material and the Creative Commons Public Domain Mark for non-copyrighted material. As governments move towards open policies, hundreds of billions of dollars of educational and research resources will become freely and legally available to the public that paid for them.

<u>MOOCs</u>

However, while Open Educational Resources are probably the most important aspect of post-traditional higher education for the teaching function, it is MOOCs that have captured the headlines and made universities everywhere sit up and pay attention to these new manifestations of openness.

The MOOCs phenomenon is a nice example of how fast things move these days. Although the first course called a MOOC was offered in Canada in 2008, the MOOCs media frenzy began in 2012 when some elite US universities started offering them.

Later that year I had to prepare a research paper as a visiting fellow at the Korea National Open University and MOOCs seemed an attractive topic. My paper 'Making Sense of MOOCs: Musings in a Maze of Myth, Paradox and Possibility' was the result. At that time I could hardly find any academic research on MOOCs – even on the first generation of Canadian MOOCs – so I worked from blogs and press articles.

Yet now only 18 months later, we have just seen the publication of a major report on MOOCs in North America from researchers at Columbia University, which, in the words of *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* "weighs in at a hefty 211 pages". It looks at the goals that institutions hope to achieve through MOOC initiatives, but finds no clear indication that they will see a return on their investment in these free online courses.

The Columbia authors note that: "Some institutions are unclear as to why they are embarking on MOOC initiatives and until they can agree internally on suitable and realistic goals, they will struggle to justify the expense and effort." However, the Columbia team found that, when pressed, institutions offered various reasons for offering MOOCs. Let's look at three of them.

THIS LIST

• Improving economics by lowering costs or increasing revenues;

• Building and maintaining brand;

• Extending the reach of the institution and access to education.

MOOCs: financial issues

Let's look first at the financial aspect. Although there has been a desperate search for ways to find a financial return for offering courses free online we are only aware of one institution that has convincing evidence of a positive return on investment. That institution is the UK Open University – and we think it is really the exception that proves the rule.

Why is that? First the UKOU has a charter obligation to 'promote the educational well-being of the community generally' by offering some free learning opportunities.

Second, the Open University has always operated a technology-based multi-media teaching and learning system. Therefore it is very easy for the OU to adapt its teaching materials to a variety of distribution media. For example, the OU is one of the most visited sites on iTunesU. But it found that most viewers of iTunesU are Ivy League undergraduates in the US, who are not the OU's target audience. So the OU simply loaded up the iTunesU material onto YouTube and thus reached millions of new learners many of whom are its target audience. Each of these channels of open media reaches different groups of learners.

The OU's Open Media Unit has tracked the numbers of people who enrol as fee-paying students after their only previous contact with the University had been through one or other of these free media channels. The calculations show that based on these numbers the OU gets an 8% financial return on its investment in open media – including its MOOCs offerings through FutureLearn.

But few other universities can emulate the OU's situation.

Building the brand

So, second, let's look at building the brand. There's clearly a contradiction here. As the Columbia Report puts it: "selective institutions must balance the apparently contradictory goals of increasing access to their offerings with building and maintaining brand."

That has always been the contradiction in the 2012 wave of MOOCs. It seemed odd that universities with scarcity – highly selective admissions – at the heart of their business model should suddenly embrace openness. The trick for these universities was to use MOOCs to show off their teaching openly, but to keep their degrees scarce by giving no recognition to learners who successfully completed the MOOCs.

Extending the reach

This contradiction also runs through the final objective that we shall look at, namely 'extending the reach of the institution and access to education'. To quote the Columbia report again: "MOOCs are currently falling far short of 'democratising' education and may for now be doing more to increase gaps in access to education rather than to diminish them."

But it is easy to criticise MOOCs and we have often done that in the last two years.

The initial rush to offer them was a copycat phenomenon among elite institutions. Then the larger flock of institutions joined in, although given the acronym MOOC, a herd of cattle may be a better analogy. The huge drop out rates in MOOCs have been called a 'Passchendaele approach' to learning after the World War 1 battle where thousands were thrown at the front but few made it through.

But, despite all this MOOCs are having a significant influence on the evolution of higher education in general and post-traditional higher education in particular. Andrew Kelly, author of another recent report on MOOCs sums it up by saying: “it seems clear that MOOCs are neither the cataclysmic disruptor that advocates predicted nor the flash in pan their critics were hoping for”.

But one universal impact of MOOCs is clear. The intense publicity about MOOCs has nudged almost every university towards developing an Internet strategy. This is taking institutions in diverse directions. As one commentator put it: ‘the meaning of every letter in the acronym MOOCs is now negotiable’.

The common factor in all this is that online teaching is now respectable. If Harvard is doing it, it must be OK.

The Gartner Hype Cycle is a nice metaphor that heightens the colours of what is happening. Sometime last year MOOCs hit the peak of inflated expectations in North America. Then has come some disillusionment as people have realised that the return on investment in MOOCs is doubtful. Now we can perhaps climb the slope of enlightenment towards the online teaching of regular programmes as institutions realise that this can solve both the major problems of MOOCs at a stroke. Students will get credentials and institutions will get income.

The challenges facing MOOCs are similar to those facing post-traditional higher education generally.

Stamenka will conclude our presentation by exploring three of them: governance, the awarding of credentials and quality assurance.

Stamenka

<u>MOOCs in Europe</u>

Sir John suggested that the keen interest in MOOCs had peaked in North America but this is certainly not the case in Europe. Earlier this year I attended the European MOOCs Forum in Lausanne where I witnessed almost Euro-euphoria for MOOCs. The number of European MOOCs is increasing steadily. MOOCs have also become a research topic. Matthieu Cisel, a PhD student at France’s Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan notes that there is a general lack of innovation and coordination in the European MOOCs space.

Governments and institutions are grappling with the development of strategies to integrate MOOCs into the wider development of higher education. For example, France’s Ministry of Higher Education supports MOOCs within a wider policy of getting universities to go online. But elsewhere governments are not so proactive and institutions themselves need to decide whether they will engage with post-traditional education, especially OER and MOOCs. Strategies for this purpose are best developed by a combination of top-down and bottom-up planning involving an alliance of a critical mass of faculty and governance bodies.

These strategies must address the key question of whether study of OER and MOOCs will be formally recognised and if so how?

Recognition of learning from post-traditional offerings

We must remember that higher education is not just about teaching and learning. The most important power that societies give to their universities is the power to award credentials.

The challenge is to recognise learning acquired through processes that, in the spirit of the paradigm of openness, are inherently flexible and changeable. In this context we are following with interest the development of the Open Educational Resource University, a global consortium of institutions for which your compatriot Professor James Taylor provided the intellectual underpinnings.

But we do not wish to imply that all post-traditional learners must get degrees. New types of awards are emerging.

One example is Open badges, which are placed on the Web, and carry more information about what was studied and how it was assessed than the usual university transcript. They allow learners to get recognition for short-cycle studies on economically relevant topics. Open badges are being adopted in other parts of the world and a private company, the DeTao Masters Academy in Beijing, is developing its own Open Badges as a credential for its various offerings.

Which brings us to another trend - partnerships between the public and private sectors. One example of a private company active in such linkages is Academic Partnerships. It helps universities to take high-demand programmes online and is offering 'specialisations' as a new global qualification. Specialisations are short online programmes leading to credentials closely aligned to labour market needs. The specialisations are developed by well-known institutions and can be offered locally by partner universities around the world.

Quality in post-traditional higher education

Obviously this process of diversification in higher education poses challenges for quality assurance. How can students be sure that the services they are paying for are reputable and effective?

For instance, a recent statement by the UK Quality Assurance Agency notes that since MOOCs are typically non-credit bearing and have no admission requirements, they are not formally scrutinized during the Agency's reviews. However, the Agency exhorts institutions to ensure that their MOOCs are of appropriate quality and to this end recommends the use of its own Quality Code for higher education.

I should also mention a development at the international level. As I said earlier, I am the Senior Advisor on International Affairs to the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation. In this capacity I have helped CHEA launch an International Quality Group. It has a global outreach and is open to membership to higher education stakeholders worldwide.

The International Quality Group is trying to address the quality assurance post-traditional higher education, believing that both new course formats and new qualifications require fresh approaches to quality assurance.

For this purpose it is developing a "quality platform" to review the quality of post-traditional provision.

The overall aim is to facilitate judgements on the performance and effectiveness of post-traditional higher education. Such provision has diverse aims so these reviews would begin by judging the provision against its primary purposes: what is it offering to the student? Is the aim the award of degrees or not? Is the learning experience at the appropriate level?

The Platform could use standards to judge the provider's success with regard to student learning and might benchmark the capacity of the provider and its performance in relation to comparable providers. Peers with expertise in this post-traditional sector would conduct the reviews.

Let me end by mentioning again the *Guide to Quality in Post-Traditional Online Higher Education* that is available here. The Guide stresses that quality assurance for Post-Traditional Higher Education – like its various manifestations – is a work in progress. It is too early for hard and fast rules. Nonetheless, hope that you find it a stimulating introduction to the whole field of post-traditional higher education.