

UniCambio XXI: German-Latinamerican cooperation facing the challenge of higher education in the new century.

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Universities are ancient institutions that have persisted through centuries leading changes in society. However, the quick transformation caused by globalization introduces new demands and expectations. Demands for higher education are increasing all over the world as well as the pressure to restructure their institutions.

Universities are considered the first actors in the emerging knowledge society and they are seen as the key to national competitiveness and development. However these important goals have to be performed simultaneously with a dramatical increase in the number of students, shrinking public spending and competition with private institutions. In this context, higher education institutions are compelled to show their ability and readiness to meet with efficiency social demands and safeguard culture and tradition.

The establishment of programmes that facilitated the dialogue between Latin-America and Europe and stimulate the cooperation between higher education institutions is thus very opportune. **UniCambio XXI: an “International Programme on Management of Quality and Change in Higher Education”** is a good example of this kind of cooperation. The programme gives a set of training research and developing modules focusing on individual capacity building, institutional quality development, research approach and regional and international cooperation and competencies through project work. UniCambio XXI is based primarily on the collaboration of six Central-Américan and German Universities (Universidad de Costa Rica; Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, León; Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras; Universität Kassel and Universität Leipzig, Germany) with the support of CSUCA; GTZ and DAAD. 17 Universities from 8 Latin-American countries participate in the programme which collects and evaluates each participants practical experience in a double-loop learning approach. Concepts about equity, accessibility, excellence, university contribution to social transformation, diversity and autonomy have been presented and discussed during the sessions and further applied to each project. Perhaps one of the most striking “lessons learned” was that we were learning together.

European countries and Germany in particular, are jointly working to have a convergence of educational structures facilitating the mutual recognition of degrees and the exchange of students and academics. Latin America is just beginning with the process. New policy instruments are appearing introducing university assessment and quality assurance and reshaping the conditions for teaching and learning. CSUCA is developing a great effort in Central America for the accreditation and convergence of higher education institution and in the South, Argentine, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay are working together in the same direction. However, in some cases, the implementation generates apprehension and anxiety that we have to overcome. The challenge for the future in our institutions seems to be how to balance diversity and autonomy in this global process.

Workshop 4: Global Partnership

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