

GUNI

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY  
NETWORK FOR INNOVATION

GUNI founding members:



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization



**United Nations University**  
*"Investing Knowledge for Human Security and Development"*



UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA  
DE CATALUNYA



## Higher education's contribution towards an intercultural connected world

Cristina Escrigas and Yazmin Cruz  
Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)

# Introduction

---

- ▶ **What does the world of today need, to make progress tomorrow's society?**
- ▶ The **main value of HE** should be to **serve the common good**, at a time when what we understand by “good” and by “common” is difficult to define.
- ▶ Understanding the **process of globalization requires an integrated approach**, which include:
  - ▶ Economic
  - ▶ Social
  - ▶ Political
  - ▶ Cultural landscapes
- ▶ **Economic globalization** has been more effective in dominating the policy agenda of HE.

# Introduction

---

- ▶ After many years, during which the priority given to investing in **higher education** was challenged, **nobody today doubts its value and need.**
- ▶ This does not preclude **questioning:**
  - ▶ The interchange of value between universities and society.
- ▶ Thus, **we should ask:**
  - ▶ *What knowledge has to be produced and disseminated to construct what kind of society.*

# Introduction

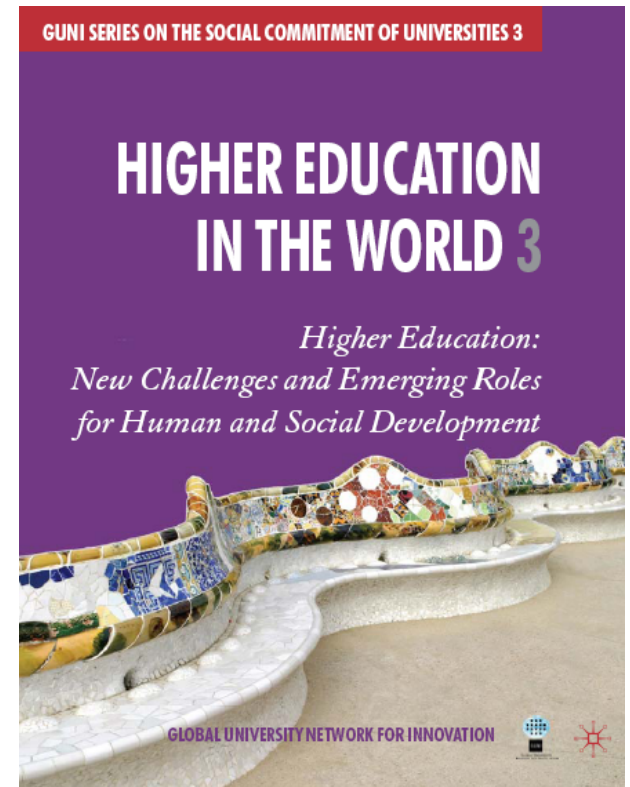
---

## ▶ GUNI's Report:

Offers a **critical and constructive analysis** on the role of HE and its institutions regarding their contribution to human and social development.

Aims to **promote a debate** that could enrich perspectives of the social relevance of HE in the context of globalization.

Discusses **how HE can respond to emerging social needs**, including the human, cultural and political aspects.



# Introduction

---

- ▶ GUNI contributions to this conference follow some of **the main contents of the Report**:
  - ▶ In **points one and two**:
    - ▶ brief synthesis of higher education contribution to human and social development.
  - ▶ In **points three and four**:
    - ▶ main ideas of the various authors of the Report, on the role of higher education for intercultural dialogue and global citizenship.

# Present and future challenges for HEI's: The emerging role of higher education

---

## ▶ Challenges:

### 1. **Understanding the concept of knowledge itself.**

- ▶ The frontiers between disciplines are becoming blurred
- ▶ Need to link up different areas of knowledge in order to understand complex problems.
- ▶ Incorporate a holistic vision of reality, which is possible through transdisciplinarity.
- ▶ Break the hegemony of conformity of thought,
- ▶ Incorporate more and different types of knowledge into academia.

# Present and future challenges for HEI's: The emerging role of higher education

---

## **2. Choosing between adapting to the demands of the labour market and anticipating the demands of society.**

- ▶ Identify where to redirect problems and how to do this; where new knowledge is needed and how to disseminate it.
- ▶ Anticipating and being proactive are ways of responding to social demands, but perhaps not in the manner that society or the market expects.
- ▶ Establish a dialogue with society that creates an effective framework of relations with all sectors.

# Present and future challenges for HEI's: The emerging role of higher education

---

## 3. **Rethink the social value of higher education.**

- ▶ Change of paradigm, from a system that emphasizes the individual and competitiveness to one that emphasizes the social and collectiveness.
- ▶ **In education:**
  - ▶ Train professionals or to educate citizens who will carry out a profession.
  - ▶ Decisions in all of the professions can be made using an approach that focuses on collective common good.
  - ▶ We are not sufficiently aware of the collective implications of our individual decisions.
  - ▶ Higher education plays a fundamental role in terms of the teaching content, values and skills it incorporates.

# Present and future challenges for HEI's: The emerging role of higher education

---

## ▶ In research:

- ▶ Explore the connection between scientific research and social needs in order to give support to political decision-making that have collective implications.
- ▶ Consider the extent to which universities' research agendas coincide with the priority agenda for development in the world, is an exercise of social responsibility.

## ▶ We are therefore faced with the need to:

- ▶ **Reinvent an innovative and socially committed response from higher education, which anticipates and contributes value for social transformation, taking full responsibility for public service.**

# Globalization, higher education and intercultural understanding

---

- ▶ Diversity of **civilizations and cultures** is a basic feature of human society and a **driving force of human progress**.
- ▶ Understand globalization adequately implies taking into account its **cultural dimension**.
- ▶ Globalization describes **an interconnected world**, not a single world.
- ▶ Multicultural coexistence is essential to guarantee **world peace and security**. In this context one of the **main concern** consists in promoting:
  - ▶ Harmonious multicultural coexistence and at making diversity a source of enrichment rather than conflict.

# Globalization, higher education and intercultural understanding

---

- ▶ The **cultural mission of the university** has extended into cosmopolitanism, in the cultivation of post-national kinds of citizenship:
  - ▶ **To give expression to an alternative to corporate global culture**, offering an alternative to market rationality and not acting as exclusive agents of states.
- ▶ The Council of Europe approved a plan of action for developing intercultural dialogue in 2005.
  - ▶ Pilot project, 'Universities as Sites of Citizenship'
  - ▶ Declared 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

# Globalization, higher education and intercultural understanding

---

- ▶ **The Alliance of Civilizations:**
  - ▶ It recommends a practicable programme of action to assist in diminishing hostility and in promoting harmony among the nations and cultures of the world.
- ▶ The Alliance of Civilizations provides an excellent opportunity for **higher education**.
- ▶ **The final report** of the High Level Group highlights that:
  - ▶ Education systems today face the challenge of preparing young people for an interdependent world

# Globalization, higher education and intercultural understanding

---

- ▶ Nevertheless, the contribution of higher education and scientific research to multicultural coexistence **is still absent from the agendas** of the institutional authorities.
- ▶ It is also **absent from higher education** sites in different parts of the world, as it is considered a political issue, rather than a strategic matter for academic debate and research.

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ **Cultural understanding** means *the ability to place ourselves in the role of somebody who has embraced that culture.*
- ▶ **Intercultural communication** means *a motivating interaction in order to find solutions to common problems.*
- ▶ The first challenge is to:
  - ▶ Change the monocultural way of evaluating peoples, cultures and knowledge, as this approach is at odds to the plurality and diversity of the world.

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ **HEIs need to adapt its functions** to the reality of multiculturalism, as new generations of graduates will be operating within this context.
- ▶ There are **experiences and proposals**, which include:
  - ▶ Institutional level
  - ▶ Curriculum contents
  - ▶ Research
  - ▶ Outreach strategies
- ▶ HEIs should enable their students **to gain a critical consciousness of the world they inhabit**, to help them to better **anticipate and articulate alternative processes to common problems**.

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ **Curriculum level:**
  - ▶ Education in shared values,
  - ▶ Education for national and global citizenship and cosmopolitanism.
  - ▶ Education for dialogue that enables students to act as global citizens.
- ▶ A key dynamic is the **local-global relation**; broader understanding arises when the local contexts of interpretation are transformed in light of the encounter with the global.
- ▶ **Seeing things in a different way.** This implies to promote the debate around fundamental issues including the future of society.
- ▶ Emphasis should be placed on including in the curriculum aspects that are currently “marginal” areas of our education programs, such as
  - ▶ Emotional intelligence
  - ▶ Knowledge and opportunity to adapt to and function in unfamiliar contexts, among others (see paper)

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ The development of **global competences and intercultural competences** should become part of university programmes.
- ▶ **Curricula** offer us a great possibility to overcome most of the challenges faced by higher education in a globalized world.
- ▶ **Integrate new areas of knowledge** and practice within the current curricula as a transversal issue.

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ **Cooperative research** is necessary to create tools for:
  - ▶ Understanding multiculturalism
  - ▶ Consolidate a conceptual framework
  - ▶ Explore new analytical methods
  - ▶ Seek new forms of knowledge
  - ▶ Understand values implied
- ▶ The **outreach strategies** could also be focused on facilitating intercultural understanding and coexistence.
- ▶ It is important that **HEIs think different about the social context** of students, not only in terms of
  - ▶ Similar/different experiences
  - ▶ Home/international students
  - ▶ How societies are becoming more interconnected and interdependent

# HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

---

- ▶ Other key factor for **HEIs related to it's social commitment**, which is to become a reference in emerging social issues.
- ▶ It is particularly important for **leaders in academia** to talk openly about:
  - ▶ The need for **diversity in a more interconnected world**.
  - ▶ The need to **build institutional links between HEIs** and other societal actors, to **contribute and promote dialogue** that supports greater understanding and tolerance in society.

## HE role for intercultural understanding: towards a global citizenship

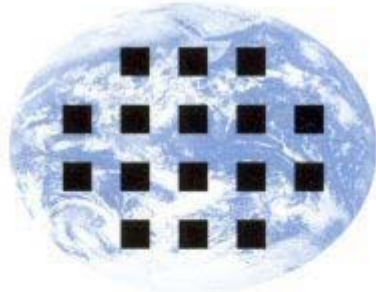
---

- ▶ The **High-level Group Report on the Alliance of Civilizations** provides a **large set of proposals** related to the **specific role of higher education and multicultural understanding**.
- ▶ **HEIs** should decide **which role it could play in terms of its social commitment** to contribute to the application of this wide range of goals and lines of action **to build better societies for all**.

# Final Remarks

---

- ▶ The need for multicultural coexistence enable the academia to contribute to understanding, harmony and peace, to the benefit of the humanity.
- ▶ We need a new idea of the university today, it could be to connect the various kinds of knowledge.
- ▶ Intentional analysts of the major changes that are occurring and of possible initiatives for anticipating, shaping and guiding actions towards another possible world.



**GUNI**

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY  
NETWORK FOR INNOVATION

## **GUNI Secretariat**

Technical University of Catalonia (UPC)

Jordi Girona, 31

TG Building (S1)

E-08034 – Barcelona

Tel: +34 93 401 2586

Fax: +34 93 401 0855

**<http://www.guni-rmies.net/>**