

14.45 – 17.15 World Café Sessions

Session 13. Living your Values: the MCO's Living Values Project

Host: *John Davies, MCO Ambassador*

Rapporteur: Maria Napoli, Professor, Università degli studi del Piemonte Orientale & MCO Ambassador

Presentation

Purpose of the session is to share some experience about the *Living Values Project* and to give an overview of it. The main points of John Davies' presentation are summarized below by using some key-words that correspond to key-issues in the project.

- **Global:** the *Living Values Project* can be defined as a global movement because of the number of institutions involved and the mutual relationship created between the different Universities.
- **Internal vs. external:** although values are internally applied, we should take into account also the 'external dimension'. Since universities are members of the worldwide community, they should try to be as global as the Project itself aims to be. Related questions that the Universities should ask themselves are: do we have a multicultural campus and international policy? Do we show care towards the other Universities? In turbulent times such as the ones we are living, what matters is also solidarity.
- **Actual:** one of the main issues is how values are implemented in actual practise and how much students and staff are content with them. As related to this, a crucial issue is the following: universities should ask themselves to what extent they are using their values to face complexity and uncertainty. To have values explicitly defined and shared might be useful in order to judge the pro and contra in a given situation and to take a difficult decision (for example, in the case of a source of funding implying problems with ethics).
- **Specific:** it is crucial that Universities define the values that are important for themselves. As a matter of fact, some values are more significant in certain societies rather than in others. It is also important to take into account the stakeholders which are relevant to that individual University.
- **Contingent:** some of the values can be regarded as 'eternal', some are more related to contingent issues. In this respect, values should help us solve real problems: they can do it if there is a good balance between eternal and contingent values.
- **Gradual:** the process leading to the definition and implementation of values should be made up of different stages. The existing documentation of a given University should be the starting point of the process; looking at this documentation may turn out to be also an interesting exercise, since it is probable that it already contains some implicit values and describes where you are.

Discussion

The main points raised in the discussion started from the following questions:

- How can we intend some specific values, such as academic freedom, autonomy, responsibility to society (the values of Magna Charta 1998), but also, for instance, the

value of *innovation*, which appears to be a complex one? It is the single University that should start a process of identification of its values, through which the University itself decides which values are appropriate for it and, as a consequence, how these values might be articulated and implemented. This implies that values can be really specific and diverse. The suggestion is to define no more than 5 or 6 values that should be strongly articulated (otherwise they risk to be too general).

- How can these values be applied and how are they related each other? To answer these questions is exactly part of the process that the Universities might decide to start when participating in the project. Values may also be generated because of the circumstances we are living (for instance, the care for the planet).
- What is the reason for Universities who have already implemented values in their documents to join the project? To have values and to speak about them is a different thing: to speak about values, by involving also the staff and the students, can help implement them in real academic life. This has to do also with the extent to which all the members of a given University are fully aware of its values and of their importance for the governance of their University.
- To what extent is the definition of values related to the identity of the Universities? This is a crucial point, since identity is not only a matter of internal issues, but also how you perceive and disseminate your identity externally. Your identity is what you communicate to the world. Also external people can be involved in the definition of values, since identity is something that is perceived externally and internally. At the same time, the impact of your values on the external world influences the way in which your identity is perceived and judged.
- Speaking of methodology, how can we confront with stakeholders? Their role may be crucial in the discussion about values and their implementation. This may also contribute to the 'identity issue'.
- Shall we involve students? Dialogue is fundamental in the process, starting from the definition of values to the stage of experiencing them in practice. Students, in particular, must not be disappointed. A bottom-up process is fundamental.
- Which is the right moment for joining the project? The definition of values is particularly important in moments of changes and when defining new strategies: for instance, the moment in which the University prepares its strategic plan can be a good occasion for working on the definition of values.
- What do values mean in practice? It must be imperative to try to convert values into behaviours: this should apply to all the staff (from the Rector to the students). Values may be also 'converted' into concrete policies (for instance, at an international level). To give an example, the University of Oxford institute for the study of climate change considers a multidisciplinary approach as a basic value: this entails the imperative of doing interdisciplinary research.
- Which is the length of the process? The first stage may be quite quick, maybe a year in total, but it may depend on various factors (for instance, the urgency to do a strategic plan).