



HECSOs

community engagement

Policy Recommendation

to promote the active participation of local communities within the decision-making process and advocate for the values of participatory democracy.

Greece, June 27th 2024



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Partners



Results from local multi-stakeholder policy workshops that took place in Volos, Greece on the 27th of June 2024.

Two policy workshops were held for each national context as part of the HECSOs project. The purpose of these workshops was to collect proposals and encourage public discussion on the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes and the preservation of participatory democracy ideals. The local seminars aimed to gather suggestions for submission to local authorities in each specific setting via consultation procedures, focus groups, and roundtables. Afterwards, they created a report with policy recommendations that will be sent to European institutions. The workshops in Greece were coordinated by the University of Thessaly, the local partner. They convened delegates from municipal authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), associations, and professionals residing in the Volos area of the Thessaly Region. Within this area, there is already a strong network that is actively working to solve the issue of integrating and including migrants. This network is focused on enhancing the services provided to people and families that need assistance and support. Finally, the workshops took place in Volos on June 27, 2024.

1)

It is essential to improve and make cross-border cooperation in higher education more effective in Europe. This will help promote Union values, identity, and democracy, as well as build the resilience of European society and economy, and promote a sustainable future. Resilient and linked higher education institutions are essential in tackling the problems related to the green and digital transitions, as well as an aging population and other key socio-economic concerns. They do this by enabling the transfer of information and working together to create innovative solutions. In addition, they can guarantee that Europe has the capacity to improve its competitiveness via technology-driven methods.

2)

Building bridges facilitating the establishment of long-lasting and successful international partnerships at the institutional level is a vital method of collaboratively enhancing higher education institutions and preparing students, lifelong learners, researchers, and staff for a global future. European higher education institutions are adapting to the dynamic changes occurring worldwide, such as the development

of new areas of study and educational environments, especially in response to the concurrent green and digital revolutions. This requires new viewpoints, inventive approaches, and original frameworks for cooperation and mobility (with physical mobility being the primary mode) of students, staff, and researchers across different disciplines and international borders. The digital transformation will usher in a new paradigm in education, providing a wide array of appealing learning options and forms. This will facilitate cross-border collaboration and movement, both physically and digitally, for all those seeking education, even those residing in rural regions and facing restricted access. Additionally, it will foster diversity among academics, researchers, and professional personnel.

3)

Enhanced collaboration among diverse higher education institutions, including universities, research universities, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, higher vocational education and training institutions, and higher arts institutions, across the entire European Union, is a fundamental principle that underpins and is intrinsic to the European Education Area and the European Research Area. Increased cross-border cooperation among different and complementary institutions throughout Europe fosters fair and equal opportunities for high-quality and inclusive education, training, and research. It promotes the creation and sharing of information, allows the flow of resources and infrastructure, and enhances the liveliness of their specific areas and communities. This partnership also serves to mitigate inequality and rectify regional discrepancies. Moreover, it may enhance the process of merging with the research, innovation, and industrial ecosystems. Transnational collaboration is crucial in maximizing the potential of the higher education sector to enhance skills, capabilities, and knowledge. This is especially pertinent for the digital and green transformations, and also contributes to the attainment of the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

4)

The potential to offer higher education alliances advantages is present in voluntary collaboration mechanisms, such as the establishment of a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. In addition to services, this would facilitate the efficient sharing of shared financial,

human, digital, and physical resources. Additionally, they could establish virtual inter-university campuses and interoperable platforms to facilitate collaborative digital or blended activities. It is essential to encourage the development of interdisciplinary modules and the establishment of joint degrees that comply with the European criteria established through the Bologna Process in order to effectively address the simultaneous ecological and digital transformations. This will improve international collaboration. This facilitation should occur at the national, regional, and institutional levels. The opportunities for students, scholars, scientists, and personnel could be enhanced by facilitating flexible and comprehensive mobility and increasing the utilization of the European Student Card program. The achievement of the desired level of collaboration across borders and the development of the necessary skills are contingent upon the availability of consistent and adequate financing.

5)

Transnational cooperation across European institutions at the institutional level is a potent tool for facilitating and advancing the transformation of higher education institutions into exceptional, inclusive, competitive, sustainable, and attractive ones. These institutions must successfully achieve all of their purposes, which include teaching, research, innovation, and service to society. This plan offers benefits that extend beyond the higher education sector, making a valuable contribution to Europe's promotion of knowledge, resilience, and democracy, while also embodying our European way of life and values. In order to promote collaboration across different countries, it is essential to enact a set of consistent policies at both the European and national levels. This involves efficiently using current European programs, instruments, and tools, such as the European Universities initiative, the Bologna Process instruments, and the European Student Card project. Furthermore, it is crucial to investigate possible novel tools. A methodical and cooperative approach might be used to create these innovative tools, allowing higher education institutions to improve international collaboration and foster a more unified higher education system. Enacting this measure would provide a beneficial outcome for the whole higher education community and amplify social worth.

6)

Facilitate the examination of the necessity, benefits, limitations, and feasibility of establishing formal collaborative mechanisms in higher education institutions, such as a potential legal framework for alliances of

higher education institutions, such as "European Universities," through a collaborative development process. The goal is to improve cooperation by sharing human resources, technical expertise, data, educational resources, research findings, and innovative capabilities, as considered appropriate. Enable them to explore the many potentialities for more collaboration and evaluate the current European procedures on a voluntary basis.

7)

Develop enterprise zones (UEZs) inside every institution. Urban enterprise zones (UEZs) are enabling the establishment of physical spaces for new businesses, promoting collaboration in research initiatives, strengthening the connections between universities and companies, creating job opportunities, addressing specific skill requirements, and providing apprenticeship programs. Universities in devolved settings provide a comparable purpose but operate under a specific policy and financing framework. Universities play a crucial role in the establishment of Innovation Centres and the progress of Tech Scalars in Greece. We suggest that the government support and promote the growth of institutions in this field. To promote the growth of these projects, it is advised that Urban Enterprise Zones (UEZs) be formed at all universities in Greece. The government must provide assistance to institutions in decentralized settings.

8)

Enhance the proliferation of entrepreneurship and opportunity centers to foster cohesion among local communities. Enterprise and opportunity centers provide a wide range of activities that are created in collaboration with local communities and companies to address the specific needs of each town. The fact that they are physically present in certain places is evidence of their strong dedication and ambitions. We need to significantly increase these initiatives, broaden our efforts, and raise our goal. We advise the government to establish supplementary entrepreneurship and opportunity centers around the United Kingdom. It is important for all higher education institutions to actively engage with communal areas, reaching out to cities and communities that have been overlooked, and working together with them to provide opportunities, investment, and optimism to the community.

9)

Attain a dominant position as worldwide frontrunners in university-employer partnerships. A sector agreement is a strategic plan that arises from discussions with business leaders. Sector agreements should prioritize and encourage the cooperation between universities and other sectors to tackle skills demands, promote economic growth, improve efficiency, and include local communities. We propose that the government support universities' involvement in a wide range of sector partnerships to share information, develop collaborative strategies to meet skills and talent needs, protect the workforce from future difficulties, and improve opportunities across Greece.

10)

Make universities the primary focal point of policymaking in all areas of Greece. Universities should actively engage in working with local initiatives and policies, including offering targeted support to local projects in regions without a university presence. Universities has the knowledge and skill to effectively develop, distribute, and, with support, implement successful initiatives.

11)

State authorities are not allowed to exclude certain persons, groups, or organizations from taking part in public decision-making processes. Associations should be protected against discrimination based on many reasons, such as: (i) if they are transnational associations (including international non-governmental organizations, (ii) and either their local chapters or national organizations, (iii) irrespective of whether their acts are carried out globally, nationally, or locally, (iv) the many money sources, which may include public, local, foreign, or international sources.

12)

States should establish clear and binding regulations that guarantee equal participation in public decision-making processes for all associations and individuals who are interested in the subject matter, regardless of whether they are considered "representative" or actually represent a significant number of individuals, or their relationships with the government or governing parties.

13)

Proactive measures should be implemented by states to ensure that women and men are equally represented in public affairs. This may

involve providing support to organizations that advocate for gender equality in public decision-making.

14)

States should create enforceable and consistent criteria in conformity with international norms that specify the prerequisites for successful public engagement and consultation in public decision-making processes.

- The scope of this policy includes the involvement and input of third parties in any public initiative that may have an impact, regardless of whether it is undertaken by government bodies, parliament, individual Members of Parliament, or other public institutions.
- Information accessibility: The general public should have unrestricted and prompt access to any document, draft law, or legislation being developed, together with relevant background information. The authorities responsible should promptly reply to any requests for further information.
- States must provide enough resources to ensure inclusivity in public decision-making processes and prevent participants from facing excessive financial burdens.
- Timeliness: setting a definitive and rational minimum timeframe for public involvement/consultation that engages associations at the earliest stage of the process and enables them to prepare, debate, and provide comments on preliminary policies and legislative drafts.
- Feedback mechanism: a mandatory requirement and a system through which decision-makers are obligated to provide substantial and qualitative feedback on the result of each public consultation. This includes providing clear explanations for the inclusion or exclusion of specific comments or proposals to all participants, including the general public, within a reasonable timeframe.
- Penalties for noncompliance with regulations mandating the organizing of public consultations on drafts of policies, legislation, or other decisions.
- Public authorities must regularly report to the public on the outcomes of their self-assessment of their adherence to the mandatory requirements for effective public engagement and consultation.



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