The Internationalisation of Higher Education
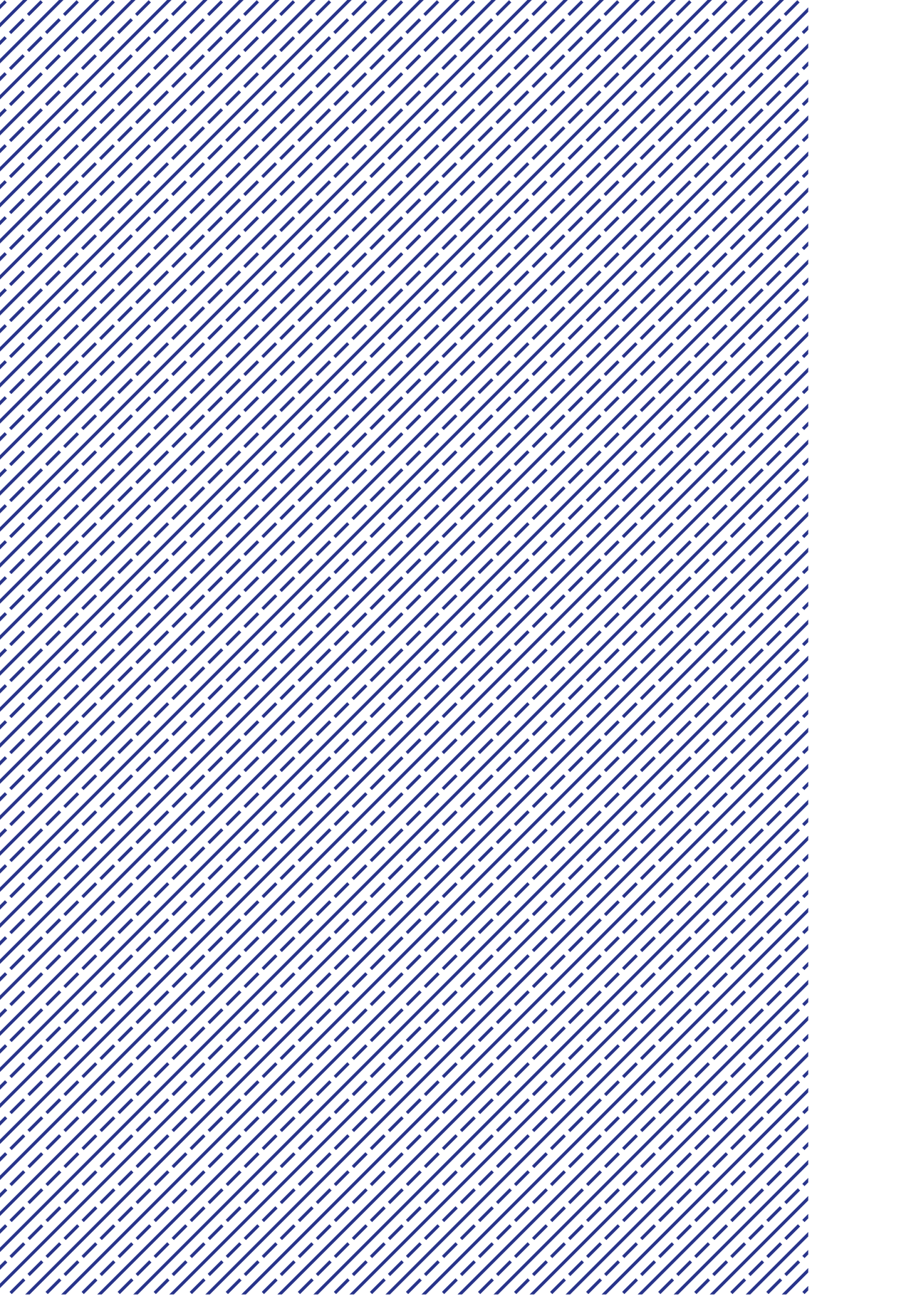
Perspectives from the THEA Ukraine Project and Beyond

Petra Pistor (Ed.)

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Virtual internationalisation – how COIL and other models can support cross-border exchange

Alla Krasulia and Petra Pistor

1. Introduction – internationalisation in Europe and Ukraine

The main goal of the Bologna Process is for Europe to grow closer together by introducing a joint higher education area. Young people should have the opportunity not only to contribute to global labour markets, but also to benefit from the European community of values, characterised by "pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men" (EC, 2008). In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), one of the cornerstones of becoming a European Community is student and staff mobility – usually carried out as physical exchange at another higher education institution (HEI). In the Leuven Communiqué (2009), the European Ministers of Education declared that mobility should be a defining feature of the European Higher Education Area. They agreed that by 2020, about 20% of EHEA students should have completed a study period or internship abroad. However, for various reasons, not all students can physically travel, even though they have an institutionalised opportunity to do so. Not only since the COVID-19 pan-

demic – but certainly accelerated by it – there has been a growing awareness of the possibilities of digital international exchange. Accordingly, the European Ministers of Education in the Rome Communiqué (2020, p. 6) not only reaffirmed the 20% mark for physical mobility, but also committed to

"Enabling all learners to acquire international and intercultural competences through internationalisation of the curricula or participation in innovative international environments in their home institutions, and to experience some form of mobility, whether in physical, digitally enhanced (virtual) or blended formats."

In its 2021–2027 digital education plan, the European Commission defined two lines of action:

1. Fostering the development of high-performing digital education ecosystems
2. Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation (EC, 2021)

In the coming years, these lines of action will be supported by corresponding funding pro-

grammes. Ukraine – a member of the European Higher Education Area since 2005 – also placed a strong focus on internationalisation in higher education, first in its Law on Higher Education (2014), which is compatible with the Bologna Process, and second in the Regulation on Academic Mobility, adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2015). With the introduction of a corresponding performance indicator system, Ukrainian universities have come under great pressure to push ahead with their internationalisation. In addition, Ukraine, like many other European countries, has taken action and developed a Digitalisation Strategy. In February 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a strategy of digital transformation – a transition to modern and transparent rules and regulations. In light of this strategy, 94 digital transformation projects were approved: these included e-notary, e-property, e-urban planning, e-school, e-social protection, e-migration, e-hospital and e-permit. Even in 2010, the Ukrainian research community had begun some successful attempts to implement the concept of virtual internationalisation of higher education, e.g. in the framework of the "E-Internationalisation for Collaborative Learning" project, funded by the European Commission (TEMPUS 2010–2013). Later, in 2018, the "International mobility – opportunity and problem: Proper preparation for studying at a foreign university" project was implemented using Erasmus+ funding through the "Key Action: Cooperation for Innovation" and the exchange of good practices mechanisms . The project was carried out by four universities: three from EU Member

States, and one from Ukraine. The main goal of the project was to better prepare the university for the internationalisation process. Last but not least, the "Digital competence framework for Ukrainian teachers and other citizens (diComFra)" project, coordinated by the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences in Austria, explored the opportunities of using information technologies to nurture university students' and teachers' academic exchange, culminating in a set of best practices. The project consortium ultimately included ten project partners, among which were four Ukrainian HEIs and the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, Youth and Sport. Nonetheless, virtual student mobility in Ukraine currently falls short of expectations.

In their best-practices manual on virtual mobility from 2006, Bijnens et al. noted that although virtual mobility had even then been fostered by a number of European funding projects, the results were not as widely received by the scientific community as would have been desirable. Fifteen years later, virtual mobility has become absolutely crucial for European exchange programmes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has kept the world on tenterhooks since 2020. Unsurprisingly – unlike in 2006 – universities are desperately looking for examples of good practice, manuals and guidelines. Does this mean that in 2021, HEIs in Ukraine and Europe are still facing similar questions and challenges with regard to virtual internationalisation? Thanks to COVID-19, virtual internationalisation has the potential to leave the

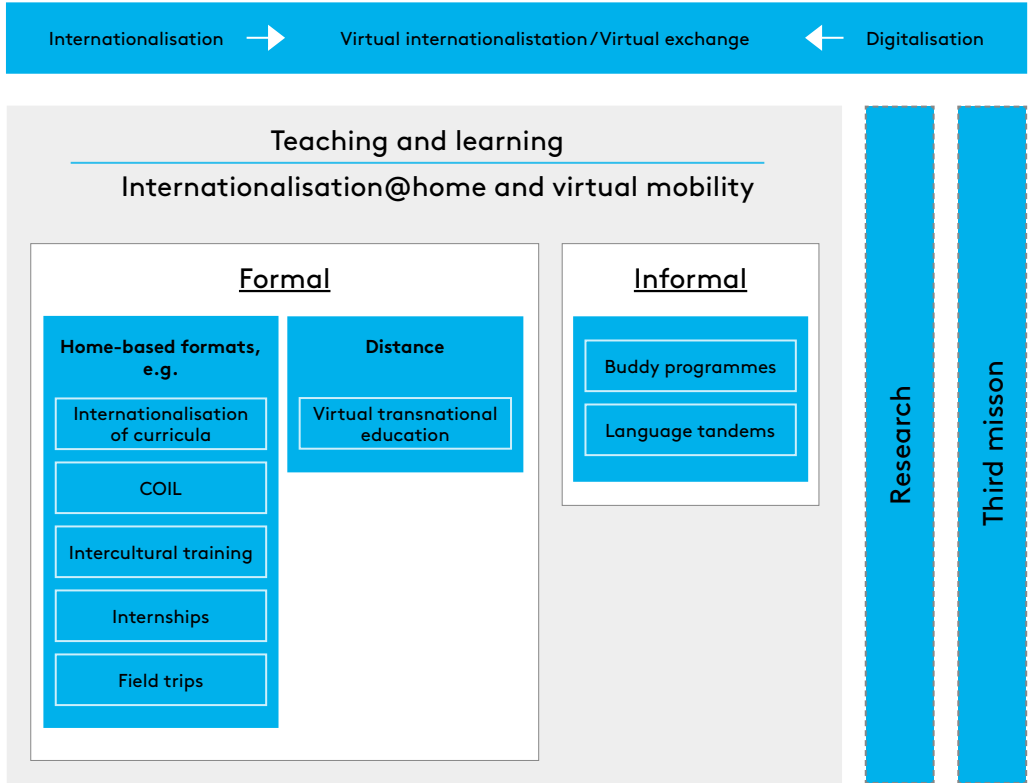status of pilot projects and become mainstream education.

In the following, we will first provide a working definition and classification of various terms from the field of digital internationalisation (Section 2). In Section 3, we will present a special format of virtual internationalisation, a COIL, based on an example at Sumy State University (SumDU), Ukraine, and elaborate on the opportunities and challenges SumDU faced (Section 4). Conclusions are drawn in Section 5.

2. Virtual internationalisation – terminology and classification

As the discussion on virtual formats in the field of internationalisation has gained momentum due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number and definitions of terms from the field of virtual internationalisation has proliferated correspondingly. These terms describe different scopes, levels and formats of virtual internationalisation. In public discourse, these terms have been defined and used in different ways, and their contents overlap. There is no obvious consensus on the classification of such terms, and giving them each a single definition is quite challenging. Figure 1 is an attempt to provide an overview of these terms and classify them.

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Figure 1: A classification system for virtual internationalisation formats.

| Internationalisation | → | Virtual internationalistation / Virtual exchange | ← | Digitalisation |

Teaching and learning
Internationalisation@home and virtual mobility

Formal

Home-based formats, e.g.

Internationalisation of curricula

COIL

Intercultural training

Internships

Field trips

Distance

Virtual transnational education

Informal

Buddy programmes

Language tandems

Research

Third misson

For this article, following Elisa Bruhn, who suggested a framework for virtual internationalisation, we take "virtual internationalisation" as an umbrella term, and conceptualise it as "being more than virtual mobility only, just as internationalization is more than mobility only" (Bruhn 2017, p. 2).

Not only since the coronavirus pandemic, people have begun to harness the potential from the connection between digitalisation and internationalisation more intensely. We understand the term virtual internationalisation as precisely this link. Virtual internationalisation basically refers to the three core areas of HEIs: study and teaching, research, and third mission. For this paper, we will deliberately only go into the area of teaching and learning in more detail. The term virtual exchange is also a superordinate term and is conceptualised here as synonymous with virtual internationalisation.[1] Virtual mobility can be defined as an opportunity for students and teaching staff to learn and to teach for a limited time at another in-

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[1] Under the name "Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange", the European Union also brought together various activities of learner-led exchanges of young people across European borders in 2018–2020. The programme focused more on people-to-people interaction than on learning content: https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual_en (accessed on 22 April 2021).

stitution, without being physically present. The well-known definition by Beelen & Jones goes slightly further, when defining the concept. They refer to internationalisation@home (I@H, IaH) as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). We understand the two terms of "internationalisation@home" and "virtual mobility" as two sides of the same coin. While I@H does not necessarily require any partner universities abroad (e.g. through language courses, intercultural training etc.), the term virtual mobility is based on at least a virtual border crossing in order to visit a foreign partner. Nevertheless, both definitions may entail formal or informal learning. While internationalisation of the curriculum and various collaborative international formats can be assigned to the formal area of internationalisation@home and virtual mobility, we can also find complementary formats such as language tandems, buddy programmes, etc. in the informal area. Focusing on the "formal" aspects of virtual mobility, it is important to note that the formats of I@H can furthermore be implemented as purely distant concepts. In this case, students take courses or study programmes online outside their home country, and receive credits or a degree from the university offering them (O'Mahony, 2014). The term (virtual) transnational education (TNE) has emerged for this type of distance learning across national borders. In contrast, there also are home-based equivalents for formal internationalisation at home. Here we find, for example, various forms of internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC). The internationalisation of curricula can take place virtually, e.g. by including international guest lecturers, or facilitating exchange between students from different countries. But curricula can also be internationalised without using digital media, e.g. through the inclusion of subject content with reference to intercultural or international perspectives (case studies, examples), or the incorporation of international studies. An often cited definition for the internationalisation of curricula was coined by Betty Leask (2015, p. 9), who described it as follows: "The incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study." Other examples of formal I@H include virtual internships and field studies. COIL – collaborative online international learning – is a specific method of internationalising a curriculum. It represents the link between digitisation and internationalisation, and the special potential that lies in this link. For this reason, we will focus on this method of virtual internationalisation in teaching and learning in the following.

2.1. COIL – a special form of virtual internationalisation

The Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) model was developed around 20 years ago at the State University of New York with the establishment of the SUNY COIL Center.[2] Today, the SUNY COIL Center offers services to HEIs, teachers and students worldwide to support them in implementing cooperative online international learning. As mentioned before, the term COIL describes a very specific approach. Therefore, only formats that meet the following criteria deserve the label COIL (see also van Hoeve 2018):

- Collaborative: Teachers of two or more different institutions cooperate in developing the COIL module. This means that they jointly determine the intended learning objectives of their module as well as the teaching/learning, cooperation and assessment methods that are aligned with them. Students in a COIL format have to cooperate with each other across institutional, intercultural and linguistic boundaries in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes (ILOs).
- Online: The interactions in a COIL collaboration take place (almost) exclusively online (synchronous/asynchronous learning).
- International: In a COIL collaboration, teachers and students with different national and cultural backgrounds work together across borders. These different perspectives are a valued, explicit element of COIL.
- Learning: COIL modules are learning activities that encompass both subject learning and the development of general competences such as intercultural awareness and critical thinking, and the ability to change perspectives. In a COIL module, not only do students learn, but also teachers can look at their subject discipline as well as their own teaching competence from a different perspective and further develop these competences through the exchange.

The COIL model can be implemented across an entire degree programme or – and this is more often the case in practice – be a single module of a study programme. COILs can complement physical mobility, and interdisciplinary collaborations work well, too. In the following section, we will introduce a real-life example from Sumy State University (SumDU) in Ukraine.

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[2] https://coil.suny.edu/.

3. Virtual mobility at SumDU

3.1. Overview of SumDU

Sumy State University is a top-tier university in Ukraine. Located in Sumy, it is home to nearly 12,000 students, including 1,900 international students from more than 50 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, Australia and North America. University leadership supports innovative pedagogy by SumDU faculty, including virtual exchanges.

3.2. History of virtual exchange at SumDU

Collaborative online international learning sessions at SumDU began through one of the faculty members, who initiated virtual exchanges with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), USA. Launched in early autumn 2019, the SumDU and UNL Global Virtual Classroom Project included a virtual mobility course (12 online thematic sessions) on "Tourism, Management, and Hospitality" across seven colleges with institutional partners in the USA, Ukraine, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, India, the Netherlands and the UK.[3] I@H and virtual mobility gained great momentum in 2020, when partner universities decided to expand and enhance their COIL course offers. Building on previous best practices, there were two new virtual learning projects for Bachelor's students

in spring and autumn 2020, and one webinar for university lecturers, "Teaching Strategies for Virtual Classrooms."[4] More than 40 educators took advantage of this event. The Spring 2020 "Strategic Management & Leadership" virtual class brought five instructors from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Whitefield Business School, RMIT University, and the Academic and Research Institute of Business, Economics and Management to Sumy State University, as well as 60 students from different countries such as Ukraine, India, Mauritius, Poland and Australia.[5] The Autumn 2020 Virtual Module, entitled "International Business Strategy", part of a long-term series "International Relations and Global Leadership" was conducted by five instructors from Washington State University, USA; Bournemouth University, UK; Whitefield Business School, Mauritius; Sumy State University, Ukraine; and Maharshi Dayanand University, India. The joint programme offered a short-term thematic module for 57 students from the USA, Mauritius and Ukraine (Красуля, Швіндіна, 2020). In spring 2021, Sumy State University and Washington State University organised "Excellence in Teaching and Research", a global, virtual, professional development programme (2.5 ECTS) designed to share best practices in scholarly research and instructional strategies among a new generation of PhD students and university faculty. This would allow them to scale up achievements in academia and unleash oppor-

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[3] https://management.biem.sumdu.edu.ua/en/allcategories-en-gb/14-our-news/125-the-virtual-global-classroom-is-accomplished. (Accessed on 15 May 2021.)

[4] https://management.biem.sumdu.edu.ua/en/allcategories-en-gb/14-our-news/294-academic-exchange-for-teachers-is-launched-online. (Accessed on 15 May 2021.)

[5] https://management.biem.sumdu.edu.ua/en/allcategories-en-gb/14-our-news/275-closing-remarks-for-virtu-al-class-2020-strategic-management-leadership. (Accessed on 15 May 2021.)

tunities for collaborative innovation.[6] All webinar sessions are available on the official website of the Oleg Balatskyi Department of Management, SumDU.[7]

3.3. Outcomes and best practices

Virtual mobility at SumDU started with faculty collaboration. This is significant because faculty truly are the backbone of a university, and their effort is what provides the sustainability for such a type of learning model. The COIL modules/classes were embedded in the curriculum and co-taught by the partner universities' faculty. Students then got credit in the class in which they were enrolled from their home university. The first iteration of COIL at SumDU was in 2019. So, in hindsight and "connecting the dots" now, in 2021, we can confirm that once faculty embrace COIL principles, they tend to do it semester after semester. Therefore, virtual mobility scales very quickly to students. All in all, COIL offers international learning for students because it is experiential and applied, and it supports the 21st century skills of "digital natives". It also aids in fostering intercultural sensitivity and awareness. It is an interdisciplinary, cost-effective and high-impact practice for teaching and learning. The most positive outcomes generated from COIL exchanges are (1) the student impact stories and the role it has played on increasing international perspectives; and (2) the engagement of faculty and

the desire to expand their classrooms/courses to include a COIL or internationalisation component. We have also seen an increase in student interest to participate in physical mobility programmes like studying abroad.

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[6] https://management.biem.sumdu.edu.ua/docs/news/Virtual%20Professional%20Program_Promo_2.pdf. (Accessed on 15 May 2021.)
[7] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDXkogbuNW8P4ZVNF4m6n-g (Accessed on 15 May 2021.)

4. Opportunities and limitations

Education at its best goes beyond the on-campus classroom. International online teaching and learning is already taking place worldwide. Using modern online technology for a global form of delivery helps educators develop a more interactive and collaborative way of transnational cooperation, which becomes an integral part of the internationalisation of university curricula, and thus, of teaching and learning. It provides opportunities for students to have an international teaching and learning experience while staying in their home countries.

Students today are "21st-century learners", which means that they are different from learners before the 21st century in the way that they exploit technological advances to learn. With an array of pedagogical and technological tools, COIL formats and other forms of virtual mobility help bring in activities and awareness that support these kinds of competences, as well as teaching teamwork skills, digital literacy, global awareness, and respect for cultural difference. Thus, the I@H movement makes it possible for the large majority of students to embrace a different way of learning that is both integrated into the learning process and can add an international dimension.

The greatest limitations in developing COIL exchanges are:

• Buy-in from senior university leadership;
• Technological and pedagogical challenges; and
• Logistics and planning.

First, it is difficult to sustain faculty involvement when there are no significant incentives or support from senior management. For a university to prosper internationally, faculty must feel empowered to identify and promote the need for change.

Second, it can also be challenging for partner universities to ensure access to technology and schedule courses according to time zone differences. A designated technology support staffer is also crucial in launching successful virtual exchanges. It is important to review the technology setup with the partner faculty extensively before the course starts and briefly before each lesson to anticipate potential connectivity issues, and develop backup lesson plans. In addition, it is worth mentioning that time differences between the partner countries as well as language barriers can pose an issue in courses. In order to overcome and prepare for potential language barriers, faculty have to set clear expectations before the first virtual exchange and remind students to speak as slowly and clearly as possible. It is also important to encourage students to get to know one another before the main session begins, to help them feel comfortable sharing opinions before moving into deeper conversations. This way, the fear of making a

mistake is alleviated due to comfort with peers. A variety of assignment formats can increase student engagement and encourage asynchronous communication outside of class.

Third, for HEIs considering expanding their COIL offerings, we recommend working with an established partner and allowing for at least six to twelve months of planning before the initial launch stage to satisfy bureaucratic demands and address logistics. Finally but importantly, it is crucial to clearly communicate course objectives and virtual exchange expectations with partner faculty and administration staff before beginning the relationship, preparing contingency plans to overcome potential cultural barriers.

5. Conclusion

There are many trends that higher education is facing these days. In this paper, we have attempted to keep the focus on just a few. First, internationalisation is obviously one of them, so educators need to prepare students for global shifts in employment and the economy. Next, lagging pedagogy, which means that despite all of the tools available, teachers still tend to teach in very traditional ways. Last but not least is the impact of technology. Currently, these three trends all contribute to influencing processes of learning and teaching. From our perspective, if an HEI really wants to be competitive in a global world, it has to introduce global skills to students. And by the time those students graduate, they need to be prepared to deal with cross-cultural and intercultural communications. "Young people today must not only learn to participate in a more interconnected world, but also appreciate and benefit from cultural differences" (OECD, 2019). Despite that, at least in Ukraine, a very low percentage of university students have the opportunity to study abroad. There are all kinds of reasons why students do not go abroad, apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, but educators urgently must prepare students to deal with cross-cultural communications for their future life. Ultimately, the key pedagogical and technological principles of virtual mobility, based on the COIL model, offer significant international experience to students and faculty by facilitating online intercultural exchange, and support the skills development that they will need for the marketplace and society in the 21st century.

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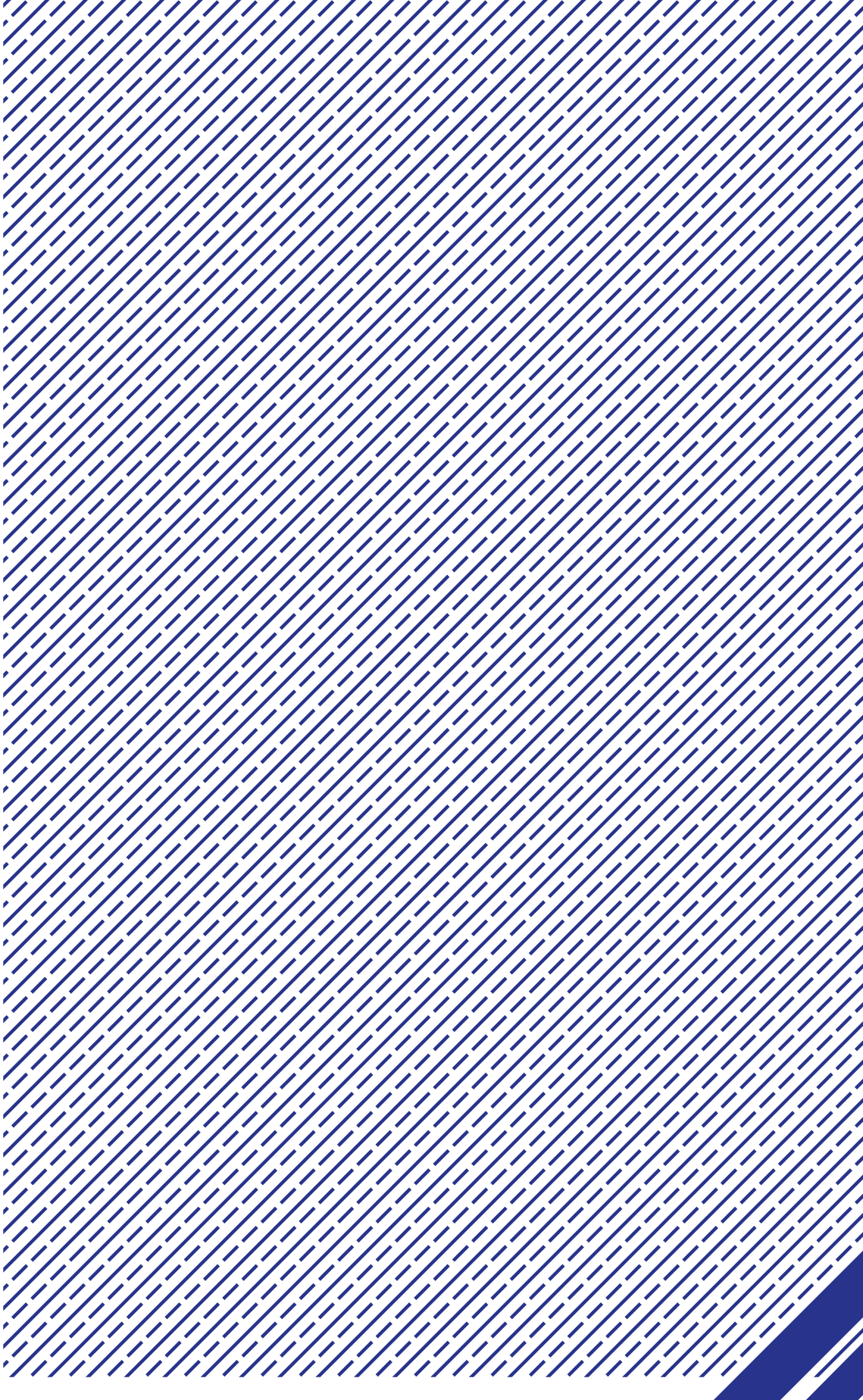*evelyn.stocker@fh-muenster.de*

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The Ukrainian higher education system has undergone a number of developments since Ukraine committed itself to the Bologna Process in 2005. Internationalisation and quality assurance in higher education have thus become two core policy issues to aid Ukraine's efforts in becoming a full member of the European Higher Education Area.

Within the THEA Ukraine project (October 2019 – September 2021), 32 Ukrainian Higher Education Administrators received training in the field of internationalisation in higher education and science management. The participants worked on individual application projects to foster the international orientation of their home institutions, which are located all over Ukraine.

The implementation of this project has provided material for a number of case study descriptions of projects undertaken in the THEA Ukraine framework, as well as general perspectives on internationalisation in higher education; this anthology covers both of these aspects.

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