

ITEM 3: PRESIDENT'S REPORT
Annual General Meeting 2014
FOR INFORMATION

Introduction

Much is changing in the world of education today and most especially in the field of open, distance and eLearning. After 2012, the sudden global impact of massive open education has brought the general attention to our activity more than ever before. In Europe, in particular, the new EU initiative «Opening Up Education» launched this past year has meant a clear indication the way forward is mainstreaming open and eLearning. As a result of these developments occurring not just in our continent but around the world, our field of practice is experiencing a dramatic expansion.

However satisfying this may be to our community, as it represents the culmination of the work carried out by several generations of pioneers, it also signifies a major challenge for us. Massive development of eLearning offering with so many new institutions starting their open digital practices is bound to bring some deregulation to the profession and also an increased difficulty in keeping with today's very high quality standards.

EDEN as the premier European professional organization and one of the world leaders in our field, is quite proud to witness the expansion of open, distance and eLearning practice. With over two decades of continuous support to the community we feel to have contributed to this success story. Nevertheless, we clearly understand as well the present challenges our members face. From some time now we have been preparing to meet them, adjusting and reorganizing our structure and processes.

In fact, EDEN has been steadily increasing its portfolio of activities and developing integrated service packages for members and the community alike. We intend to attract new public targets, different from the traditional ones, and involve them in our activities. The EDEN family is opening up to new forms of participation and collaboration. Its organizational culture is becoming ever more participatory and transparent. But, we also recognize the expansion of open online education in Europe has to be a sustainable transition process. Thus, we aim of helping to preserve our practice's specific standards, know-how, experience and values.

International presence and partnerships

Our organization is being increasingly seen as the European hub in the global network of open, distance and eLearning. This results from the world-wide recognition of our expertise in supporting and disseminating the European know-how in our field, as well as the quality and impact of our initiatives. But, it also results from the special attention we give to knowledge sharing and cooperation with Governments, institutions, academics and professionals from all other regions in the world, thus helping foster innovation and quality.

A good evidence of this may be found in the fact the flagship event in EDEN's international activities last year was certainly the ICDE SCOP conference in Lisbon in November 2013. Universidade Aberta, celebrating their 20th Anniversary and EDEN were the co-organisers of the high level Standing Conference of Presidents. Our role and contribution to the event was remarkable: a selection of our members' innovative projects, further the contributions by EDEN Fellows were highlights in the programme, producing a showcase of EDEN achievements and offering opportunity to expand our extra European contacts as well as upgrading our global visibility. The co-operation has also essentially contributed to further improving the relations with ICDE, leading to a regular participation of EDEN representatives in their events and joint collaboration in several important initiatives.

EDEN has also established strategic partnership and concluded co-operation and reciprocal membership agreement with HETL, the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association. Further alliances with non-European major organizations are being prepared as well.

However, EDEN has also been working with our traditional partners in order to upsize and upgrade our alliances by developing a more extensive and articulated portfolio of joint activities. Apart from the already mentioned example of ICDE, this is notably the case of USDLA and ABED. The results of these efforts will be announced later in 2014.

Many evidences show an increased impact of our international presence last year. A remarkably successful example was realised at the Online Educa Berlin Conference with a block of presentations organised and moderated by EDEN at the EU-EACEA exhibition area.

Another example was the increased number of official invitations received to take part in major events. Keynote speech was delivered by the President at the European Parents Association Conference in May in Lisbon. EDEN will be represented by Antonio Teixeira at the ICDE International Conference, at the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics in September 2014. At the same conference, EDEN Vice-President Alan Bruce will be one of the keynote speakers. Alan Bruce also represented the EDEN President in ICDE's World Conference in China, at the Tianjin Open University, in October 2013. António Teixeira will also deliver a keynote at the 28th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU 2014), later in October 2014.

Additional official participation of the President in international events included delivering the closing keynote at the EFQUEL Innovation Forum 2013, at the UOC, in September, and delivering the opening address at the University of Zagreb's eLearning Day, in December.

EDEN's reputation is also expressed in the way our participation in other organizations is valued. In fact, the Secretary General was elected in 2013 as Steering Committee Member and Vice-President in the European Civil Society Platform for Lifelong Learning (EUCIS LLL) which assignment was renewed for another three years' period in June 2014. This relation has resulted for EDEN involvement in momentous policy development processes and opportunities to represent our professional community at high level events. Andras Szucs was also invited to serve as Advisory Board member in HETL.

Following the invitation from European Research Network for Emerging Technologies, EDEN participates in their Advisory Board with the new Deputy Secretary General.

EDEN's renewed attention to the development of institutional partnerships and alliances is also expressed in our effort to upsize and upgrade collaboration with European partner organizations. As stated before, the challenges our field is facing require a wide collaboration. In this regard, I'm happy to report the meeting with the newly elected EADTU president this Spring may earmark a new kind of partnership between the two important European associations in the field. Most importantly, a plan for collaboration in joint initiatives was agreed upon and soon a concrete pilot action will be announced.

Worth to note that at these meetings strong appreciation of EDEN could be experienced, with the recognition of that we are in a leading position in Europe, which means also expectations, in the meantime offering possibilities for partnership and collaboration.

Secretariat, Management

Acknowledged by the Executive Committee, the EDEN Secretariat has been an important asset of the Association and the Board takes good care of its sustained significant contributions. It has also a lot of potential for supporting new activities and to implement tasks according to new challenges. In the past year, however a significant effort was made to reorganize and modernize its processes. We believe this has been successfully done and much of this is due to the expert leadership of the Secretary General Andras Szucs.

The Secretariat staff remained stable, with few new part time contracts from late 2013, due mainly to the increased requirements in the newly started EU projects.

With the new Presidency, regular information flow and closer effective co-operation, tracking of activities of the Secretariat became operational which was helpful to bring closer the President's/Executive Committee level governance and the management.

The increasing amount and diversity of the tasks in EDEN as a result of the proliferating new challenges, created the need for some division of responsibilities at the management level. This has led to the introduction of an innovation in our organizational structure with the assignment of Ildiko Mazar as Deputy Secretary General from December. It is expected that this will result not only on sharing current responsibilities, but help to expand EDEN's activities, to develop new services, reach new target groups and generations, raise innovative directions for activities, beyond the established association partners. This change resulted from a wide consensus. In fact, the Executive Committee fully supported the President's decision which was also very well received by the Secretariat.

A visit for the President to Budapest was organised to discuss work and activities with Secretariat staff, providing support for their work. It was a good experience and special occasion to discuss extensively how the staff is looking at their contributions to the short and longer term activities and strategy of EDEN.

The WORTH (workflow restructuring and human resource development programme) of the Secretariat was continued and it has contributed to the enhanced efficiency and good working atmosphere in the office.

The traffic at the EDEN website has been analysed and conclusions drawn regarding the online promotion strategies and the development of the EDEN portal. Visitor numbers remained stable whilst amount of time spent on the website increased, showing higher engagement of our target audience. The tendency of visitors arriving from social networks increased considerably. EDEN's core services (membership,

conference, projects) attract the most visitors thanks to the focused communication activities. The potential of the NAP Members' Area should still be exploited on a higher level, supported by dynamic content of the website.

The financial situation of EDEN has principally remained stable, but because of the slow economic recovery in Europe, we have to live with uncertainties. The late start of new projects and delayed payment of running ones have their financial impacts, requiring improvements in internal processes and strict cash flow management.

The EC has followed the regular financial reports closely. Like last year, the aim was increasing incomes, controlling costs, meanwhile maintaining the level and quality of activities and services. Profitability, rationalisation of workflows, efficient use of resources have been the core issues.

In spite of the restrictive economic environment and financial uncertainties, EDEN managed to close the year 2013 with practically zero balance and with fair perspectives for a sustainable operation for next year.

A progress in a technical-financial matter can also be reported: the online card payment to EDEN (conferences, membership fees etc.) has been arranged and would be available for the operations.

The relations with the EDEN Secretariat host Budapest University of Technology and Economics have been correct and the co-operation continuous. At the occasion of the President's visit to Budapest, a meeting was held between EDEN officers and representatives of the University in which it was expressed the great appreciation of the University for EDEN's work and the commitment to continue supporting our organization.

Executive Committee

An important goal and one of the Presidents' core initiatives last year was the strengthening of structured operation in the Executive Committee. Distribution of responsibilities of the EC members was on the agenda of the Board, aiming to develop engaged participation in the activities and to exploit the leadership, experience and operative capacity of the EC

A follow-up has been the setting up task forces and working groups within the EC.

The groups launched included:

- the preparation of the 2014 Oxford Research Workshop including academic support and the communication/promotion of the event as well
- EDEN's communication development – focused on EDEN's virtual presence, development of the web communication, offering also new services, articulation of all communication tools, improvements to ensure bigger visibility, with the perspective of redesigning the website by 2015,
- Identifying new EDEN services
- EDEN membership development

Online meetings became well introduced practice, helping to organise consultations more frequently.

Membership and the Network of Academics and Professionals

In the last year again, there has been a dynamism in the membership development, with 24 institutions (including 11 affiliated members) having joined since the 2013 AGM. There are 187 institutions and 1100 individuals (NAP) in the EDEN membership in June 2014, representing altogether 420 institutions from 61 countries.

A selection of new member institutions is showing the diversity of membership:

University of Pretoria, Arab Open University, Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brasil), University of Gent, International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Technical University of Kosice, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, Accreditation Service for International Colleges - ASIC, Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association – HETL

In the meantime, several institutions' membership affiliation had to be terminated, dominantly because of neglect of payment of the membership fee. Very few explicit leaving of the Association were announced only. One of the important tasks for the near future will be to find out the reasons of the fluctuations in the membership and to try to reach and convince the organisations about the benefits and values of being member in EDEN.

The Executive Committee is considering membership development as strong priority and will formulate a policy accordingly, durably relying on the support of the NAP SC.

In the Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP) the year 2014 was earmarked by the new Steering Committee elections. The NAP SC has approached the Zagreb conference in its new constitution and the lately elected Chair, Steve Wheeler.

The activities at the EDEN NAP members' area are lower than desirable, it should be reconsidered how to "exploit" it better in the future. In fact, the EDEN NAP represents the largest European network of experts in open, distance and eLearning. Refreshing data at the NAP area, better positioning of information on the benefits of being NAP member, how this the tools of the NAP portal can be used in everyday work could contribute to an increased activity as an expression of the NAP's extraordinary potential and value.

A special development in 2013 was the decision about the integrated provision of membership services within EDEN for EuroPACE. As a result, EuroPACE members became affiliate members in EDEN and membership services are being provided accordingly.

The EDEN Fellowship has remained an appreciated scheme of recognising professional excellence by the Association.

EDEN Conferences

EDEN conferences have maintained their reputation, gathering representative groups of delegates and prestigious leading speakers. The conferences have also been serving well the organization building and worked as important meeting places.

The 2013 Annual Conference in Oslo demonstrated again the high importance of the good partnership with the host institutions and the national-regional professional community, thanks to the support of NADE and the Oslo University. Evaluation results by delegates were clearly on the positive side.

With the support of the Ulrich Bernath Foundation, the tradition of awarding the best research paper at the EDEN conferences has continued as an asset for our academic and professional community.

A major successful development in the field of the EDEN events was the growth and consolidation of the Synergy 'movement'.

EDEN and its partners were participating in growing number of projects and already in the previous years, the project related events became valued elements of EDEN's organisational life. Synergy started as a joint seminar of few projects three years ago and developed into a kind of structural and content conferencing innovation by EDEN, providing opportunity for projects and practices, initiatives for networking and branding with a team of EDEN partners and our staff, coordinated in a professional way. With the new format, we have met with real needs and provided added value, helping projects and practices, partners to re-think their opportunities.

The Synergy Workshop in Budapest, October 2013 has proven the relevance of the initiative and it will be continued as an extensive strand at the Zagreb conference.

Regarding future events, the EDEN 2015 Annual Conference is planned to be organised in Barcelona, in partnership with UOC which would be celebrating their 20th anniversary. This will be most surely a very significant and successful event and also one of the absolute highlights of the year for our academic and professional community.

The eighth EDEN Research Workshop will be organised in Oxford, next October in co-operation with the OU UK. The partnership of the OU as emblematic institution in the field in Europe and worldwide and the British professional community's contribution can be a great asset and important momentum for the development of EDEN's research activities which have been a long term priority, positioning them as quality reference for research in Europe. EURODL and Open Learning, the OU UK Journal, are preparing a joint publication on the occasion of the RW8.

We are planning to re-activate the EDEN Open Classroom activities and the conference itself in 2015 with a renewed approach and implementation structure. In fact, the next year autumn conference is planned to be organized by a tender with franchising the EDEN experience and branding, which will be announced soon.

EU projects with EDEN involvement

The EU project work has remained a most important field of activity for the Association in the last year, Involvement in the EU projects has been considered as a tool to accomplish better EDEN's mission: strengthening and enlarging the competent professional community in Europe, serve properly the membership and support the professional development, in synergy with conferences, communication and publication activities.

Being an important budget element, increased awareness was developed regarding the responsibility, accountability and potential problems linked to the implementation of the projects. This had impact on strengthening the systematic resource (human and financial) planning and management, by proper co-ordination and integration of the activities in EDEN's mainstream tasks.

In 2013, six new EU projects started with EDEN involvement (few of them effectively kicked off early 2014 only). The tasks assigned to us fit in the widening spectrum of

competence and experience of EDEN. An unprecedented high number of presently running projects (19) proves the need for and relevance of the services, activities of EDEN.

The Executive Committee received regular, detailed reports about the work in the projects.

EURODL

The Journal has accomplished a successful and productive year. Developments in organisation, secretarial services and infrastructure, tracking system of submissions served as solid basis for the functioning.

After the leaving of Alan Tait as Chief Editor in 2013, to whom EDEN remains in debt for his great leadership, the work with the Acting Chief Editor was continuous and most efficient. A Task Force was set up for the selection of the new Chief Editor of EURODL. The group elaborated the criteria for the selection of the new Head of the Journal. In April 2014, the new Chief Editor: Ulrich Bernath, Chair of the "Foundation for Research in Open and Distance Learning", Senior Fellow of EDEN was assigned. Under his leadership, EURODL will keep its values and consolidate even further its position as the most important European journal in the field.

Continuing the tradition, the EURODL "Best of EDEN 2012" volume was printed and posted to all EDEN members in the beginning of 2014.

An **Agreement** has been signed with **Versita/De Gruyter Open** company. Their service helps to get a sophisticated electronic content hosting and distribution platform with numerous functionalities, like automatic creation of active reference links, delivery of abstracts to abstracting databases, easy integration with library systems and user authentication. With the marketing services granted in the Agreement, EURODL will have increasing visibility, ensure growing citation, impact factor and reference linking, reach more readers and potential authors and further enhance the global availability of the Journal.

A separate report about the Journal will be presented by the Chief Editor.

Looking ahead

The coming years will be decisive for the community of open, distance and eLearning in Europe and globally. The expansion of our field will inevitably bring much change. With it there is the risk of losing the best of our tradition, know-how, standards and values. The challenge is therefore complex and difficult. EDEN is prepared to help its members and the community in general to make this change process a sustainable one.

In the past year, EDEN has focused in reorganizing its internal structure and in laying the foundations for the development of a strategy of expansion in order to help our community meeting the important European societal challenges ahead. Now, it's the time for the EDEN family to engage all its vast network of resources in fulfilling its renew ambition. Our member institutions, academics, professionals and other actors in the field represent the best of the European expertise in the field. By joining hands in this collaborative endeavour, the EDEN community will be able to play a critical role in the coming years, helping reshape the world of open, distance and online education.

Antonio Moreira Teixeira

Lisbon, May 2014