

European Distance and E-Learning Network

EDEN President's Report

Annual General Meeting, 7 June 2012

Porto

Introduction

The year 2011 was for EDEN a successful and challenging one. The development of the Association remained continuous, its European and international reputation and impact has been raising. In the meantime, we had to manage the consequences of the European and global economic downturn which requested further improvement of the operation and resource awareness.

The above challenges and opportunities emerged in a special year: in 2011, which earmarked the 20th Anniversary of EDEN. The Anniversary Year offered possibilities to highlight our values and achievements but equally, the openness and modernisation of the Association.

Organizational development

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee in its new composition represents an increased leadership, experience and operative capacity. The strategic concept of the Board remained that the Association should be kept developing, in all fields of activities. With preparations provided by the Secretariat, EC meetings have been organised with the usual regularity, in Athens, Leuven and Porto, supplemented by an online videoconference meeting in April.

Antonio Teixeira as Vice-President was re-elected for the next period of mandate.

The network of international relations have been strengthened further by EDEN joining formally as member its strategic partners like ICDE and EUCIS-LLL (European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning).

As usually, many international conferences hosted senior EDEN keynote speakers in Europe and beyond.

About every second year, the EC is organising a special meeting where the position of the Association is evaluated and strategy for the next period developed. The next such meeting will be held in October in Leuven, after the Research Workshop and we shall ask the members' opinion by an online survey

Membership

The EDEN membership during the last year principally remained stable, with several new applications. In May 2012, the membership consists of 186 institutions and 1124 individuals (NAP) in the membership. They are coming from 55 countries. There are over 420 institutions represented in the EDEN membership as institutional or NAP members.

Since the 2011 AGM, 18 institutions (including 4 Affiliated members) joined the Association.

A selection of respected institutions which joined EDEN in the above period includes: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, FAS eCollege Dublin, Linnaeus University, Saint Petersburg University of Management and Economics, Swedish National Police Academy, University College Cork, the French School of Interior Design, The Northern Institute of Business, the University of Burgundy, Deutsche Akademie für Management, Aksaray University and the University of Oslo.

Enhancement of membership services has continuously been considered as priority in our work. The membership fee increase approved by the Annual General Meeting last year did not result measurable number of cancellations, which can be considered as confirmation of value of being member in EDEN.

Anniversary Year

Several activities have been planned and implemented in 2011, the EDEN 20th Anniversary year. The jubileum offered good opportunity to highlight EDEN as active and progressing organisation. The renewal of the web site, the Anniversary Conference with the Fellows' meeting and seminar in Dublin, the Anniversary Certificate for members, the Best of EDEN 2010 Special Issue of EURODL and several more membership service developments serve as examples of related memorable actions.

The EDEN Fellows

The first meeting of the EDEN Fellows was organised in 2011 in Dublin, before the Anniversary Annual Conference. The event was most successful, with a valuable exchange of ideas about how to promote the development of EDEN. The Fellows' group has proven its potential value as a unique think tank of EDEN for the European professional community.

We intend to develop the Fellows' meetings as a sustainable tradition. A special Fellow session is highlighted at the Porto conference, following up online activities prior to the conference.

The Fellows' Award Scheme itself has been discussed and evaluated by the Executive Committee. The assessments confirmed the relevance and value of the EDEN Fellow awards as respected scheme of recognition of professional merit and of support to the evolution of the European professional community. Conceptual elements approved in 2012 by the Board included a transparent annual schedule, with open nomination and application procedures.

Young Scholars

As I wrote last year in the President's report: *"...the future is in the hand of learners, people who were born in the year when EDEN was born"*.

In 2011-12, EDEN worked systematically on the involvement of young researchers. The focus of the 2012 Annual Conference on intergenerational learning, the continuous efforts for inviting early career scholars to join the activities of the Association, the attempts of the Network of Academics and Professionals to identify and represent their interests are good examples of these efforts.

The "Learners in the Driving Seat" theme of the Research Workshop in Leuven in October, with the envisaged strong involvement of students may be another important endeavour in this field.

Network of Academics and Professionals

In 2011, a strong and competent new Steering Committee was elected, with committed members, promoting the organizational development of EDEN. The NAP SC activities last year have represented an asset for the community, by improving operational processes and mobilising the membership. The flexible and efficient functioning is shown by the fact that in support of extension of capacities, the Committee invited two experts who participated in their work. Regular audio conferences helped the operational collaboration within the SC, with the Executive Committee and the Secretariat.

The potential of strengthening the NAP Community by exploiting fully the membership services was one of the emerging themes. Easy access for individuals coming from the institutional members was formulated as a requirement. That possibility, however can be read in the EDEN regulations on membership, was by now not very well communicated.

As a recent result, the easy process of joining to NAP for individuals from EDEN member institutions has been elaborated and the supporting online mechanism implemented.

For the upcoming conferences, ideas have been developed by the SC about EDEN's better visibility on the social web.

Management, Secretariat:

The collaboration with the EDEN Secretariat host Budapest University of Technology and Economics has been correct and continuous. During the autumn, consultations with EDEN's legal advisor, updating the regulatory environment has lead among others to the update of staff contracts.

With the renewal of the EDEN web and the introduction of the NAP Area, the structure of services for members has been re-considered. The increasing demand for open access to resources have also been taken into account. The content, relevance and layout design of the monthly EDEN Newsflashes have been improved. The Newsflash is now available online, as well.

Since April, the full texts of the EDEN conference proceedings and the Books of Abstracts can be read online.

The financial situation of EDEN has been followed closely by the Executive Committee. Whilst for the foreseeable future no liquidity problem is foreseen, very systematic management will be required to maintain a sustainable operation in an economic environment which implies serious cuts for our member and partner organisations, consumer target groups and the educational sphere in general.

Conferences

In terms of professional and academic content, relevance and timeliness, the EDEN conferences have definitely maintained their reputation. They gather efficiently

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 2011 Dublin conference - with its slightly avantgarde and unconventional theme on sustainability – attracted 450 registered delegates and was a great success. The substantial support of the host institution IADT has to gratefully be acknowledged.

The Open Classroom Conference in Athens, with over 200 delegates in October 2011 was a special kind of EDEN event. In a grave period for the host country, both in economic and European political terms, the provoking title: “Don’t waste a crisis” raised considerable interest. Ellinogermaniki Agogi has contributed not only as absolutely professional and generous host but also by greatly mobilising the Greek professional community.

Worth to note that it seems to become a tendency that around 25% of the contributions submitted to our conferences are coming from outside Europe. This shows in our view acknowledgement of reputation of the EDEN events, both from the academic-professional side and as important hub for European networking.

The financial performance of the conferences - mainly because of the economic difficulties all around Europe and the slightly lower attendance – remained relatively modest. The momentum of the events contentwise, including the number and quality of the contributions, the outstanding keynotes, remained high. The modest but maintained interest and presence of corporate partners, sponsors, exhibitors around the conferences also indicate that their interests may be correctly served.

The organisation of the next Research Workshop in Leuven in October 2012 has already started. In 2013, the host of the Annual Conference will be in Oslo the Norwegian Association of Distance Education and the University of Oslo.

The 2012 Annual Conference in Porto has again attracted high number of good submissions and an excellent panel of keynotes. The number of registrations was over 340. We continue highlighting cutting edge themes and developments in open, distance and e-learning. The EDEN NAP has the potential to promote organization building and networking activities.

In support of acknowledgement and enhancement of academic quality the tradition of awarding the **Best research paper** has been maintained, in co-operation with the Ulrich Bernath Foundation.

EURODL

With the European Journal of Open, Distance and E-learning, the main ambition has been to augment its academic value, visibility, and increase the number of publications submitted. The journal is important tool for strengthening EDEN's academic and professional credibility. It has been reassuring to see the recent growing interest towards EURODL.

A themed issue on Creativity and Open Educational Resources (OER) has been published. The "Best of EDEN 2010" special issue has also been prepared: based on the invited contributions from the Valencia and Budapest Annual Conferences' Best Research Paper finalists.

All EDEN members received a complimentary copy on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary. The secretarial support to the journal is provided since November 2011 by the EDEN Secretariat

EDEN's participation in European Projects

The improved visibility and reputation of EDEN have been acknowledged by the increasing number of EU project invitations received and involvements realized. The number of EU project applications in the year 2011 was unprecedentedly high. EDEN received 43 invitations to be partner in projects. A total of 21 proposals were finally submitted (mainly for the Lifelong Learning Programme calls) with EDEN's involvement. We can proudly report that by the beginning of 2012, nine new projects started with EDEN in their consortia, showing a high success rate.

There are three more ongoing projects started earlier and running until 2012-13.

As consequence of developments in the IT and learning field, and the numerous new project involvements, the development of capacities and competences in EDEN is requested, in order to perform properly. Some of the new initiatives represent new requirements, knowledge and competence and has to rely on innovative ways of contributions. In the meantime, the improvement of quality and reliability of our existing project service packages is also necessary, in order to be able to perform properly in complex project environments and wider partnerships.

Regular reports have been presented to the Executive Committee about the progress of EU projects with EDEN's involvement, including management, staffing, resources and organisational elements.

A joint project seminar (FREE, LinksUp and teach.us) was organised in Budapest in September, which offered good opportunity to benefit from the synergies between projects and promote EDEN.

Conclusion

The challenges that were identified in the 2011 President Report, is still valid with small changes for 2012: The next years, will witness new scenarios in the economic, social, cultural, and technological development. This will require continuous efforts and further improvement of services to maintain the momentum of activities and impact of the Association in order to safeguard its leading position in Europe.

Oslo, May 2012

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EDEN President