

University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation (URGE)

URGE is a multidisciplinary programme of knowledge exchange, examining how processes of regionalization and globalization are redefining the nature and scope of universities.

Who is involved?

The partners are:

Department of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark (Project Coordinator Professor Sue Wright)
Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK (Coordinator Professor Susan Robertson)
European Institute, Auckland University (Coordinator Professor Cris Shore).

Starting in January 2010 and lasting for four years, URGE involves 19 staff from the three universities in a programme of visits, workshops and publications designed to combine senior and junior researchers in research training, sharing existing knowledge and developing future research. The long-term aim is to create enduring partnerships between three established research centres specialising on different aspects of university reform.

URGE is funded by the European Union's FP7 (PEOPLE) Marie Curie 'International Research Staff Exchange Scheme' and Erasmus mobility scheme, and by the New Zealand Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MORST).

URGE's Objectives

Denmark, Britain and New Zealand have extensively reformed their universities with the aim of increasing their competitiveness in the knowledge economy. A comparison between them will ask, What is *actually* going on in apparently similar processes of university reform? Are processes of creating a European Higher Education Area not only preparing Europe for global competition but also acting as a model and motor for globalisation in other regions? For example, how does New Zealand position itself between several competing strategies for regional and global advantage in the trade in higher education and in the development of knowledge economies? How do academics engage with such processes of university reform? How are these processes affecting their conduct, their work, and their ideas of the very purpose of universities?

Work programme

URGE's programme is organised in 6 paired Work Packages:

Theory and Methodology The aim of Work Packages 1 & 2 is to develop a new conceptual framework and associated research strategies to gain deeper theoretical and empirical understandings of how university practices interact with processes of globalisation.

Policies Work Package 3 compares how higher education is being 'coordinated' across Europe and in other global regions and Work Package 4 explores how universities are being reshaped as knowledge organisations.

Impact The last two work packages develop extended case studies to examine how all of the above processes are reshaping academics' research practices and conduct (Work Package 5) and the mission and social purpose of the university (Work Package 6).

Achievements so far

The first three work packages have been carried out through highly successful visits, numerous research seminars and three major workshops. They have already yielded scientific achievements:

1. The summative working paper from Work Package 1 has succeeded in developing a new framework for conceptualising how universities are being transformed in the process of participating in strategies for regional and global competitiveness. This includes new ways of mapping the higher education sector; new ways of analysing the creation of higher education regions; and three takes on processes of globalisation, by studying down, studying up, and studying through.

2. A workshop on how to turn this conceptual framework into research methodologies has explored combining the strengths of political economy perspectives with ethnographic and interpretive approaches to empirical data. These ideas will be set out in a summative working paper.

3. A Symposium: 'Globalisation, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: Refiguring Subjects and Spaces in the Neoliberal University' and Working papers on 'University: the European Particularity' and 'Academic Autonomy and the Bologna Process'.

Expected benefits

Knowledge generated will benefit policy makers concerned with building research capacity and understanding the challenges posed by the regionalization and globalization of tertiary education.

Visits between the three universities' research support staff is further assisting the long term aim of developing joint projects and long-term collaboration, and will assist in promoting knowledge transfer between EU and Third Countries.

Contacts

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