

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 4th Arab-Euro Conference on Higher Education „AECHE 4“: RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES – THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

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The main goal of AECHE 4 conference had been exchange of research ideas, knowledge and possible ways of collaboration in research projects. In that extend, President of host University Mohamed V in Rabat (Morocco) stressed that university is one of the main pillars to disseminate knowledge and to provide sustainable societies. He also stressed that university is needed by society and can contribute in all social fields and he believes that this conference was organized in the atmosphere of consolidated position of universities around the World. And all other keynote speakers expressed need of cooperation and highlight that science, technology and research shouldn't have boundaries and that HE institutions have to reflect situation in their societies, to provide framework for future development. In that aim AECHE has been established in 2013 and it is not too long ago, but as organisation they have results in organisation of four annual conferences and exchange which had happened in the meantime through UNICA, UNIMED etc. Ramon Torrent from University of Barcelona pointed that idea of AECHE is to connect government and individual universities. The opening session was opportunity for Arab universities to express achievements in research field and in influence to the societies. Director for International Cooperation in EC Department for Science and Innovation stressed the goal of European Commission to cooperate with the best scientists in the World and through cooperation to create research strategy, instruments to achieve strategy, follow-up of implications of strategy and in general to create scientific environment without boundaries.

In the opposite of opening keynote presentations, at the conference several presenters stressed that science policy in the Arab Region is in a state of dementia, due to incompatibility, instability, and most importantly an absence of the political will to capitalize on R&D for development and self-reliance. Most of the presented topics were related to water sustains life, the environment and development. Human rights to water, as water is becoming a commodity, threatens the poor. Global water crisis in term of quantity and quality is a man-made disaster linked to environmental imbalance and degradation of the life-support ecosystem. It is a crisis of water management, fragmented institutions, inadequate policies and legal systems, lack of political will, and a widening gap between science and policy at the national, regional and global levels. Already one third of the world population is living in water-scarce areas. Climate change will accelerate the figure to one-half. 12% of the world's population uses 85% of its fresh water. And water supply resources are being stretched

to their limits. By 2050 an additional three billion people will be born mostly in countries already suffering from water shortage. As recommendations to improve research in Arab Region, most of presenters stressed: investment in quality higher education (HE); invest in scientific research; HE should be flexible to react quickly to demands, and create new demands; to graduate vehicles of development: entrepreneurs; HE should deliver quality and relevance; HE builds brain-intensive knowledge capital and stimulate growth. As a possible link for cooperation between EU and Arab Region universities, at the conference had been presented European Platform of Universities in Energy Research and Education (EUA-EPUE): Contributing to Energy Research and Education in Europe.

The third conference day was mostly devoted to issue of Open Access and Open Science. Open Access can be boon for research for sustainable development, overcomes unequal access to knowledge (justice), increases exchange between science and society (participation), promotes creativity and rapid response (innovation + solution-orientation), enables young scientists to publish and network early (promotion of careers). Open Access can be burden for institutions and individuals, requires new legal arrangements: publishing companies are multinationals, requires new and costly IT platforms where universities resist open source, is expensive for journals and authors: from reader-pays to author-pays model, requires new quality criteria, maybe also new review process. But also, Open Access can be trap for young researchers, especially in the South, "Predatory" publishers and journals, very high costs (usually not included in project budgets), OA journals often lack disciplinary and thematic profile, Often low impact factor, especially for interdisciplinary journals.

Several presenters has been more focused on Open Science and stressed that open science is more than open access to publications or data. It includes many aspects and stages of research processes. Open science should be understood as a concept that also includes the interoperability of scientific infrastructure, open and shared research methodologies (such as open applications and informatics code), and machine-friendly tools allowing, for example, text and data mining. Open science can improve efficiency in science, increase transparency and quality, speed the transfer of knowledge and increase knowledge in general, address global challenges more effectively, promote citizens' engagement in science etc. Researchers can use open practices to gain more citations, increasing transparency, communication and participation on research projects thus improving their scientific outcomes, job opportunities and funding opportunities. Open science can also contribute to reducing the costs of data collection and facilitating the exploitation of dormant or inaccessible data at low cost, increasing the opportunities for collaboration in research and innovation, as well as, advance science's contribution to solving global challenges by enhancing access to data on a global scale. Open science is a mean and not an end, so policy makers need to promote openness in science while at the same time preserving

competition. Competition is a key aspect of the scientific enterprise: pushing for open access and open data too early may be contraproductive in some cases. Presenters also reminded on the Amsterdam Conference (2016) and Call for Action on „Open Science – From Vision to Action“.