

## EMUNI Annual Conference

June 8-9, 2023, Piran, Slovenia

### New Models for Sustainable Universities: Adapting to Change

Throughout history, universities have played a foundational role in the transformation of human societies, economies, and cultures. **Universities confer an identify** upon students, create a space for the pursuit of intellectual curiosity and exploration, and provide for the formation of academic and professional relationships. As such, they play a crucial role in the **incubation of new ideas**, economic prototypes, and informed policy. While the importance of the role of the university remains unchanged, **its ability to fulfill its longstanding role** in modern societies is—today more than ever before—subject to its adaptability.

Higher education underwent major changes in the 19th and 20th centuries to meet the demands of the nations' analog industrial economic development. Today higher education is under pressure to undergo another transformation to meet the demands of the digitized global information economy. Because of rapid technological advances, much of the knowledge and skills we teach and learn is constantly changing. Some of the most intriguing future job opportunities don't even exist yet, in fields we can't even imagine. One of the main concerns about universities is a perceived delay in their ability to adjust and adapt to an ever-changing world. Many experts are of the opinion that there is a bottleneck in the education pipeline.

Namely, universities are facing unprecedented pressures for change, driven by technological, societal, and cultural forces. The so-called 'forth industrial revolution' (Industry 4.0), including the *rise of AI*, has given way to a plethora of debates concerning the innovativeness and appropriateness of universities pedagogic techniques. This has called to question the **relevance of university degrees** in an increasingly dynamic job market monopolized by demand for technological aptitude. These pressures reached a zenith during the Covid-19 Pandemic, where **alternatives** to the university have **demonstrated their rising relevance**. While studies remain nascent, post-pandemic university enrollment is declining rapidly in favor of enrollment in online courses and self-learning, signaling a preference towards alternatives.

Social pressures present in the form of **changing youth cultures and widening generational gaps**, calling to the fore the importance of the active involvement of youth in the formation of curricula, teaching methods, and the overall government of their own education.

The **call for reform** is becoming increasingly heard and can only be answered with a global (and coordinated) effort to craft a multitude of **new models for Sustainable Universities**. In fact, restructuring higher education governance has been one of the priorities identified through the **Public Consultation recently launched by the Union for the Mediterranean**. Institutional support to ensure more effective management and reinforcing the universities' role in an increasingly challenging national, regional, and international environment, is undeniably crucial. We do hope that this call for a collective action to breed new models for sustainable universities will be heard by the ministries and national authorities of the 43 UfM Member States who will be gathering along the **Ministerial Conference in Fez, Morocco, in November 2023**.

While the pathway forward is heavily debated, ‘innovation’ is commonly seen as an indispensable characteristic of ‘the sustainable university’. We have all heard (and perhaps even argued) that 1950s style university curricula are not befitting the 21<sup>st</sup> century or that the skills taught within the classroom are ill-suited for the demands of the job market. Indeed, innovative **content** and **methods** are important, but innovative pedagogy is only one aspect of the sustainable university model.

There is great need for innovation in the **structure** of the university, with the goal being to craft institutions capable of **continuous adaption** to outside forces. Sustainable universities will arise from an **evolution (rather than a revolution)** in the *way* they think about teaching, which involves changes from the institution itself down to the degree. This may include governance structure, business models, personnel, funding/financing schemes, pedagogical methodologies, examination, degree awards, and linkages with society and business.

It is true that all institutions—academic and otherwise—are constantly in a state of flux and evolution; however, when the very rate of change of our socioeconomic reality is rapidly rising, so do the demands on these institutions to reflect reality.

Along 3 panel discussions, a diverse group of experts and stakeholders from academia, policy makers, business sector and the society, will discuss and attempt to provide answers to a variety of questions.

How to attain the goal of **continuous adjustment and adaptation** of universities to the technological, societal and cultural changes?

What must the university do to continue its formidable role in socioeconomic transformation? **What reforms** should be introduced? And How?

What measures will ensure the right sequencing and gradualism of these reforms?

What of the role of **technological interaction**?

And, perhaps most importantly, how can we ensure that **procedural innovation** remains an active tenant of the sustainable university?

## **Draft Agenda of EMUNI Annual Conference**

### **Thursday June 8 2023**

17.00: EMUNI's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Opening of the Conference

19.30: Dinner

### **Friday June 9 2023**

08.30 – 09.00: registration and coffee

09.00 – 09.30: **Welcome Notes**

09.30 – 10.00: **Setting the Scene**

10.00 – 11.30: **Panel 1: Innovative Models for Sustainable Universities**

11.30 – 12.00: Coffee break

12.00 – 13.30: **Panel 2: Structural changes and Reforms**

13.30 – 15.00: Lunch

15.00 – 16.30: **Panel 3: Evolution of the Classroom**

16.30 – 17.00: Wrap up and closure