21 e-Venture: The Making of 21st Century European Learning Regions

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Abstract

Within the context of the evolution of 'Europe of the regions' this paper examines the role of higher education in the information age. It contrasts two perspectives on contemporary society in relation to higher education. Ritzer's (1998: 151-163) Post modern perspective which positions McUniversity in the Consumer Society of mega-malls, fast food restaurants, television shopping networks and infomercials. And Postman's (1999) perspective, derived from the eighteenth century, which re-examines our values and calls for a 'future connected to traditions that provide sane authority and meaningful purpose.'

Paradoxically, the world-wide information explosion and increasing global competition has resulted in the most enduring competitive advantage being created on the local level within the 'triple helix' (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2001), that is the emerging clustering of inter-connected firms, institutions of higher education and government (Porter 1998).

A new feature of the triple helix is the increased need for higher education to connect and relate with industries and the government and exchange knowledge for funding. It requires the fostering of new partnerships and the adoption of new and better higher education strategies to identify potential 'complementors' with whom to co-evolve towards a value net, that generates a relation rent.

The operation of the resulting system is e-Venture designed to support the rapidly emerging field of event management, a medium which responds to the needs of the consumer society and the values that provide meaningful purpose and contribute to the creation of cosmopolitan citizenship.

The focus of the e-Venture project is on the critical linkage of both e-content in higher education and relationship management that enables the Triple Helix to support and realise 'The Making of European Learning Regions'.

1. Introduction

Trends such as the world wide information explosion, increasing international competition and shifts toward inter-organisational alliances are affecting society and by extension institutions of higher education. We present an analysis of higher education in the information age by contrasting two perspectives: Ritzer's (1998: 151-163) McUniversity in the Postmodern Consumer Society and Postman's (1999) who re-examines our values by revisiting the Enlightenment.

Postman derives (1999) his perspective from the eighteenth century, which re-examines our values and calls for a 'future connected to traditions that provide sane authority and meaningful purpose.' He views the present era as the second 'age of the information', pointing to the eighteenth century when 'a tumult of information was created, along with new 'media' through which the information was communicated (Postman, 1999:82)

At that time, most cities in Europe had their own periodical. 'Their purpose, in general, was to create cosmopolitan citizenship, informed about the best and most recent knowledge of the time.' The same purpose was pursued, initially in France and later in Germany, Austria and England, 'through the creation of salons - gatherings of aristocratic and middle class people who shared ideas and new information in social settings.' (Postman, 1999:82). During the 19th century the focus shifted to the problem of how to get more information to more people, faster and in more diverse forms.' (Postman, 1999:89)

The advancement of computer technology in the 20th century allowed for even faster distribution of even more information and in more versions to more people, at least to those who electronically connected, anytime, anyplace.

In the mid 1990s, 'a shift in emphasis occurred from the computer as desk top tool to the computer as the communications gateway to colleagues and 'content' (database, image, and text libraries, video, and more) made increasingly accessible via computer networks. Courses can be beamed from a central studio, some other university, or even some other country to satellite locations' (Ritzer 1998:158)

Presently, 'some universities exist entirely in cyberspace: the California Institute of Integral Studies, the teacher's University, the National Universities Degree Consortium and the Mind Extension University ' (Ritzer 1998:159) In traditional universities like Northern Arizona higher education is dominated by 'computerised, televised images. These images will be drculating in hyper space side by side with similar images from commercial sources such as MTV, CNN,

the Disney Channel, the latter will come to be important competitors of' traditional higher education. (Ritzer, 1998:159).

In future higher education is likely to retain many of its traditional components but also integrate appropriate elements of the new means of consumption and tourism into existing structures (Ritzer 1998:160). 'Many of the new approaches involve a one-way flow of information, with the result that there is no give-and-take; no possibility of Baudrillard's (1993) symbolic exchange between those who teach and those who learn.'

'Perhaps no term captures the nature of the universities of the future better than 'implosion'. … higher education is imploding 'into the locations of their satellites , the media (especially television), the computer and cyberspace, entertainment, consumption' and tourism. In fact, they are imploding into so many things and so extensively that one is left to wonder: what, if anything, will be left? The image that comes to mind is a Baudrillardian black hole where it is hard to distinguish the university from everything else'. (Ritzer, 1998:159)

Ritzer's (1998: 156) believes that the goal of higher education will continue to be the facilitation of access to its various services, which under conditions of intense competition implies a strategy of decentralisation through small educational satellites. Such satellites may be found in pre-existing sites such as 'community colleges', high schools, work places and' shopping malls. He cites Barker (1994-5) who asserts that 'courses will be available on TV, videotape, via computer', enabling students to access virtually all course related materials from their home computer or via video conferencing, instead of having to go to educational satellites (Ritzer, 1998:157).

Postman believes higher education to be in the 'business' of transforming information or 'statements about the facts of the world,' (1999:91) into knowledge, defined as 'organized information' (Postman, 1999:95). 'Knowledge is embedded in social networks and probably to a great extent tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). It implies that effective knowledge development in higher education depends on social interaction. It raises issues such as how to relate higher education 'more directly to the realities of contemporary life. […] how institutional diversity can be strengthened'. (Boyer, 1990:13)

The goal of all societies is to move from present production levels, through a growth process, to higher production levels in the future. Typically this is accomplished through a process of knowledge development, transfer and application.

The 'Europe of the regions', provides a rich 'tapestry' of cultural diversity that can and should be maintained because, it is the source for the cross-fertilisation of ideas that can lead to both exploration and innovation. This can be achieved by paying attention to the unique differences between various cultural communities. However, it needs to be recognised that beside their unique differences the various cultures in the European Union also share a joint heritage, future and organisational processes that require a concerted approach.

The simultaneous emergence of 'Europe of the regions' and a transnational knowledge infrastructure causes higher education to interact with the complex international environment. It implies that higher education must come to terms with the 'exploitation' and 'exploration' paradox. 'Exploitation requires the maintenance of identity, knowledge and practices with a certain amount of control and coordination in a dominant design [....] Exploration requires their change, with a loosening of control and co-ordination' (Nooteboom, 2000:8)

The e-Venture project addresses such dilemma in that it allows for exploitation of diverse themes that are inextricably tied to the 'Europe of the regions' in the 21st Century. What relevance does the e-Venture project have to higher education?

It can be used in higher education as an experiential learning tool. It uses innovative techniques such as a portal of European cultural events to provide students access to multilingual and multicultural communities across the European Union.

Within the context of 'internationalisation', it enables higher education to 'exploit' the latent potential of European culture and allows students to become aware of Europe's diversity and obtain knowledge through a combination of a modern brand of instructional delivery (Ritzer, 1998) and the 'exploration' of 'traditions, that provide sane authority and meaningful purpose.' (Postman, 1999)

2. Triple Helix

The 21st Century shall place higher expectations on higher education. This 'clarion to arms' is echoed in the Carnegie Report:

'If institutions of higher education are unable to assist students and citizens to enhance their view of an interdependent world and practice their conciliatory and communicative skills, then each new generation will remain ignorant and its capacity to live competently and responsibly will be dangerously diminished.' (1991:42)

It calls for nothing less than 'The Making of European Learning Regions', that is regions that are able to create learning opportunities for all its members and transform themselves as a whole'. Such project aims to foster a structured collaboration between higher education, business and government and should result in 'cosmopolitan citizenship, informed about the best and most recent knowledge of the time.' (Postman, 1999:82).

Since the 1990s the Communication School has advocated the view that individual and organisational learning are significant components of the innovation process (Nonaka and Takeuchi

1995). In this context innovation is considered a process revolving around the generation of new knowledge and the application of such knowledge. It is assumed, that communication of information and knowledge between the various parties involved in the acquiring, generation, and application of knowledge process plays an essential role.

The e-Venture project seeks to simultaneously borrow from the past and adapt to the future. It places higher education central stage in the explication and transfer of social interaction and knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) within social networks. The project challenge is to build a semblance of coherence and power from a diversity of cultures that can be found in the countries and higher education systems within the European Union.

It implies that users of the system must be aware of the reasons that cause miscommunication to occur in international project. These are the gaps caused by physical distance, language barriers, psychological distance (mental models), and cultural barriers (different styles and behaviour).

The building of critical mass through a European cultural events calendar portal is a means to bring together a network of 'communities' across the European Union, under a 'collective brand'. Such collective brand should be interpreted as a vehicle enabling brand value transfer between multilingual and multicultural communities, including potentially higher education.

A major challenge in brand building and content fuelling is to seek identification with the collective brand amongst the multiple identities of multicultural suppliers of higher education. Visual identity is more than a logo representing a system of higher education, large corporation or a regional community. Instead it represents 'a community of values, convergence, assimilation, diversity, hierarchy, a respect for particularity; of what makes a region more than simply a collection of government departments' (Floch, 2000:7).

Higher education institutions typically serve a particular region and to be successful need to create feelings of belonging and influence student motivation. At the same time the emerging knowledge infrastructure demands that they be internationally connected.

In future the process of European integration is likely to give impetus to the convergence on the level of higher education development, structure and information exchange. At the same time it needs to be remembered that the European Union does not represent a homogeneous region because it lacks the definition of a set of objective, internal similarities. In that sense there is a divergence between member states of the EU. This divergence is amongst others expressed in the regime of knowledge construction involving beside higher education, industries and the government. Therefore, despite the information age higher education is likely to become 'more physically embedded in, and intellectually intertwined with, the community. Another way of saying this is that [higher] education will become more local.' (Ritzer 1998:158).

Various other authors provide diverging, but complementary explanations for the intertwining of higher education with industries and the government that Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff (2001) refer to as the 'triple helix'. For example:

Sutz (2001) offers a logical and well-known explanation for the closer co-operation between higher education, business and government:

'The increasing demand for funds from universities and research institutes gets a similar response world-wide: support yourselves! That is to say, connect yourselves with industries and the government, offer your knowledge and your capacity to generate new knowledge, and charge for it. Only in this way will you be able to extend your laboratories, hire young people, and increase your salaries. (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 2001:5)

Porter (1998) believes clusters of inter-connected firms, institutions of higher education and government to represent 'a new and complementary way of understanding an economy, organising economic development, and setting public policy. Understanding the state of clusters in a location provides important insights into the productive potential of its economy and the constraints on its future development. Paradoxically, then, the most enduring competitive advantages in a global economy will often be local' (Porter 1998:266).

Wim de Ridder (1999) points to the significance of regions as the driving forces behind economic development. Successful cities such as Barcelona, Dublin and Glasgow have capitalised on their function as meeting point, liaison centre and stages of action.

The regime of communication that emerges as a result of the differentiation in society and the effects of information technology, implies that the needed integration can no longer be solely community based. Therefore integration needs to be considered as the result of translations between otherwise differentiated spheres. The changing codes of communication require a mutually exchanging systems both at the 'salon' level that capitalises on territorial proximity and allows the gatherings of people from different backgrounds to share ideas and new information in social settings. (Postman 1999) and at the information technology level. The application of information technology to support the exchanging of information within linked higher education networks on the global level.

International developments place pressure on higher education to join the information society and extend education and training throughout life. At the same time higher education must create and maintain relationships with students, businesses and other stakeholders who have increasingly different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Stakeholders with different domestic and foreign backgrounds can learn from each other. However, international contacts have been often limited because attitudes, orientations,

emotions, and expressions tend to diverge strongly.

Europe's cultural diversity may be considered to represent a potential differential edge. But Europe's higher education sector needs to institutionalise the game rules to overcome the constraints that shape human interaction. In the last two decades the number and variety of inter-organisational relations and networks such as strategic alliances have accelerated. The network process is aimed at the development of partnerships that deliver 'relational rent'. The latter is defined as 'a supernormal profit jointly generated in an exchange relationship that cannot be generated by either firm in isolation and can only be created through the joint idiosyncratic contributions of the specific alliance partners' (Dyer and Singh 1998:662).

3. e-Venture

The e-Venture project seeks to bring about the development of partnerships that deliver 'relational rent' using events marketing and organisation in combination with the application of innovative information technology within the 'triple helix' context. The operation of the resulting system is e-Venture designed to support the rapidly emerging field of event management, focusing on the critical linkage of both e-content in higher education and client relationship management needed for the 'Making of European Learning Regions'.

Event management depends on a regime of 'face-to-face' communication. It helps to foster new partnerships through the incorporation of age-old 'nomadic values: every guest is in the beginning a stranger, the 'right to visit' and the creation of symmetry between host and guest by serving and accepting the other at least temporarily (Ciborra 1999).

The 'high-tech' virtual dimension provides world-wide access to the identification of potential complementors with whom to co-evolve towards a value net, that generates a relation rent.

Observation shows that experiential learning, that is learning that occurs from experience, is on the rise within the European Union. For example, there is growing interest amongst students attending the Community of European Management Schools to gain 'hands-on' experience abroad for instance through internships, projects and excursions. The e-Venture project could support such experiential learning in a substantial manner.

The overall learning process may be defined in terms of four modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Effective higher education incorporates all four learning styles. The most difficult to incorporate into the traditional class room is concrete experience; the aim of the e-venture project is to provide an opportunity for some concrete experience learning beyond the classroom, across boundaries involving multicultural and multilingual e-learning.

Our experience shows that a critical success factor in multicultural and multilingual e-Learning depends on one partner who takes the lead in formulating and communicating the opportunity, identifying compatible partners, setting the agenda, and facilitating the process of formulating the strategy and operational plans.

We will refer to this role as the e-Venture cyber-mediary, which is the engine behind the dynamics that can result from a partnership between higher education, business and government partnership. Presently, complex and comprehensive modelling, remains largely confined to knowledge institutions. The core technology of the project will be to apply e-learning to the system dynamics technique. It has been widely applied, for example, in engineering and social studies.

The e-Venture application demonstrates that it is feasible to provide multicultural and multilingual personalised access to fragmented content and introduce a method of leadership that bridges time, space, digital and cultural divides in European regions and contributes to disseminating knowledge so that it results in experiential learning that in turn would contribute to economic development.

4. Information technology

Advances in information technology allow for the tracking and tracing of demand patterns in an almost real time way. There has been an explosion in the number of distribution channels, products and services and the boundaries between them are disappearing.

We anticipate a transformation from the industrial economy to the information society. The effects of the resulting ambient 'intelligence revolution' are profound in that they are spreading fast and change not only the methods of production but what is being produced as well. The intelligent revolution and subsequent international restructuring race will have a big impact on Europe's higher education sector.

The major innovation in this project lies within the overlap between three knowledge and planning fields that have, hitherto, developed largely independently of each other. These are:

- an approach whereby higher education integrates its efforts with those of business and government intervention to pool knowledge and resources;
- e-learning and interactive presentation of academic provision that is accessible to multicultural and multilingual learners, who are
- the cultural sector which connects to higher education through an electronic site under the umbrella brand of a Calendar of Events aimed at multicultural and multilingual students and publics.

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By involving students in an experiential learning context, for example a cybermediary incubator, they should be able to leverage their learning process through interaction with students in other countries on the net. For example, it is anticipated that through practice they would learn some of the following principles.

First, that users feel and assert their individuality and expect this to be recognised. Put differently, users want to be listened to and respected and look for both stimulating sensations and safe and familiar environments.

Second, that advances in information technology allow for the tracking and tracing of demand patterns in an almost real time way.

Third, with the emergence of the 'civil society', the public authorities remain unable to decide and control which services are likely to sustain.

Last but not least, the effects of intense competition on distribution channels, products and services and the blurring of boundaries between them.

Learning about these developments would trigger students to understand the position of various actors in the chancing 'landscape' and how to create and maintain relationships of value. Within the European market this would increasingly imply the need for bridging linguistic and cultural differences.

In order to maximise the learning process the following pressing questions could be posed in the e-Venture incubator context:

How to ***converge*** the fragmented content industry, which is dependent upon a dispersed market?

How to ***match*** supply and demand efficiently?

How to ***use content as a means*** to give expression to local identity within a global system?

How to create more unity and alliances ***within a market characterized by increasing fragmentation and flexibility***?

The E-venture project intends to develop a European calendar of events, rooted in the arts and culture and founded on a system of integrated and user-friendly services according to user patterns that would be accessible through one-user-interface (e.g. a cultural or tourist portal on the web) to a multicultural and multilingual audience.

This value-added brokerage would combine unity and diversity to derive:

(1) scale economies in the production of online content and services through digital infrastructure and

(2) scope economies in the front-office, by addressing the needs of different target groups for specific linguistic and thematic areas such as the relation between international business the arts and cultural heritage.

These developments are forcing most organisations, including higher education, to create and maintain relationships of value and bridge the gaps in linguistic and cultural differences that are characteristic of the European market.

Europe's cultural amenities tend to be a non-profit and public, foundational asset for learning and innovation in an international context. Europe's cultural amenities are extremely varied and include art manifestations, museums, monuments, theatre productions, literature, films, videos, historic inner cities, archeological sites and landscapes. Culture has a tremendous potential to build both prosperous business. Due to hyper-textuality and digitalisation the cultural realm is increasingly linked.

The e-Venture incubator could play an ongoing role in higher education and develop co-operation through fostering understanding within the 'Triple Helix' context. The project would be aimed at both building employment and life skills, and rekindling pride and belief in a region. The e-Venture project may be viewed as an incubator blueprint for integrated virtual entrepreneurial and community development in the cultural amenity context.

Following our own experience, the lack of Cultural Entrepreneurs is a limiting vector to business growth, and wealth and job creation. The proposed service renders the knowledge, methods and tools to develop co-evolution, where the divergent worlds of entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, tourism, and urban governance can converge.

Therefore, we propose to involve students in an experiential learning process designed to learn how enterprises should capitalise on e-commerce and cultural institutions in regions and industrial districts. Students should assume the role of the 'Cultural Entrepreneur' whose aim would be to create value, through a combination of 'collective branding' and the cross-fertilisation of the complementary strengths found in the 'Triple Helix'.

Historical evidence indicates that Cultural Entrepreneurs exist. They understand the differences and the interplay between the value-adding processes of the 'cultural world' and the 'business world', see clearly the strategic issues of global competition and internal conflict, and the effects they pose on organisations.

However, the e-Venture project is innovative in that it

systematically poses students the question 'how to exploit the link between virtual communities and culture to create value'. For example students at the Erasmus University may capture and organise the comments from higher education students elsewhere in Europe on Rotterdam or the Netherlands received over the internet.

Following the business model of e.g. Amazon.com, this service will only store and present customer comments and will not assume any liability for the accuracy of the customer information. In the long run, the e-Venture project will produce more adequate information and have beneficial effects for both students and entrepreneurs. Particularly, it will result in better insight on the matching of supply and demand.

In response, we expect marketing practice to shift from the search for ideas that can be copied without modifications from a successful destination to the strengthening of unique features that can be developed into a regional identity and a resource base for the development of events that fit such identity.

5. Project objectives

The project intends to implement a market-driven business model, including an unprecedented integrated software design, that enables the matching of multicultural and multilingual user needs to the value-added dimensions of e-content products and services.

The project will ensure the wider availability of e-content across markets and communities. It is both know-how and process-oriented and uses a system of integrated and user-friendly services.

Main goals of the project are:

1 Enhancing e-content production amongst suppliers within global networks and in a multicultural environment

2 Promoting multilingual diversity in the information society

3 Stimulating economic activity

4 Lowering barriers for the entry of new actors

5 Developing a globalisation strategy for dynamic network organisations across Europe

6 Development of an innovative supplier strategy

7 Development of effective public-private partnerships (cf. relationship customer - industry - environment)

8 Stimulating the expression of identity of all involved regional layers within the global networks

9 Creating a bearing surface for the production of high quality through the integration, where appropriate, of local, global and virtual knowledge, focusing in turn upon group synergy and organisational learning, leading to economic vitality and sustainable regional development.

Hitherto, little systematic knowledge, methods and hardly any tools are available to turn the marketing of events into a veritable profession. The lack of brand identity in the cultural and entertainment sectors is a limiting factor to providing better market opportunities to the individual suppliers of events and enhancement of Europe's presence within global networks.

6. Europe's potential: content and technology

The European Union has a large variety of cultural layers. The market for value-added content products has grown with the spread of the Internet. Therefore, as well on the supply as on the demand side the choice between sheer 'volume' as opposed to 'value' becomes more and more pressing.

The modern consumer of entertainment is in need of a multi-channel system in order to create a number of value-added experiences. Three components are relevant: (1) the 'bricks' (i.e. the existence of an event), (2) the 'clicks' (e.g. the visits on the web with respect to the given event) and (3) the 'cultural content' (i.e. the psychological experience). In this process-driven scenario the experiential level is of great importance for the user.

7. Rating & ranking: an added value in the decision making process

The major added value for the supplier, however, lies in the information gained by means of a rating system. The knowledge of to which extent the event - and its components - has pleased or displeased the consumer is a valuable asset and a major criterion in the supplier's ensuing decision making process (e.g. programming, price structure).

Currently, especially in the case of publicly owned and operated events little consideration tends to be given to the 'return on investment of events. However, due to the 'withdrawal' of government and public budget cut backs, it has become eminent to make some 'hard choices.' A support system is required to facilitate the decision making process. In this regard a rating and ranking methodology - by means of a computer-based information system - can provide a systematic framework to guide and improve decision making, especially in the public and private partnership context.

8. Linking events and sales

From a regional development perspective, events can be viewed as a relevant component of higher education. The knowledge and skills needed for the marketing and management of urban events is sizeable and has been only partially 'mined'. In order to 'capitalise on the potential revenues the development of further integration between the events industry and involved vendors is needed. However,

practice demonstrates that only few cities are able to organise effectively new routes, products and services that are designed for visitors and generate a significant impact on the composition and spending pattern of visitors.

9. Potential of public-private partnerships

Public-private partnerships have been used to achieve greater organising capacity within the public sector. The complex environment of culture and events management requires a configuration that facilitates the co-operation between, cultural content providers, the private sector, educational institutions and local administrators. The development of public-private partnerships will be applied in this project as a tool to bring about modern governance. It implies a pro-active and entrepreneurial attitude by the public sector, based on leadership designed to effectively and efficiently steer developmental processes that contribute to the collective well-being. At the same time, businesses that become involved in a public-private partnership tend to develop a greater sense of social responsibility and acknowledge the strategic importance to contribute to the quality of life, which is a precondition for the continuity of industry.

Students may be challenged to apply a management tool, that support investment decisions in cultural product development. This management DSS is a software tool that calculates the value of a portfolio of projects using estimates of the cash flows during the life cycle of the project, including the development, implementation and commercialisation phases. The tool is based upon a recently developed method, named Dynamic Business Modelling (see Janszen, 2000). Such tool improves the decision process because:

1. it helps to analyse the critical success factors in a systematic and disciplinary way,
2. helps to integrate the knowledge of a large diversity of actors
3. it makes the decision process much more transparent, so that discussions can focus upon the important aspects and additional soft factors that are hard to quantify
4. it helps to decide what to include in the project what to postpone or outsource
5. it helps to communicate decisions to other parties.

Although the tool so far has not been used in the service industry, there are no main reasons why to apply it only to hardware product development.

The e-Venture project helps to address five key issues in 'The Making of 21st Century European Learning Regions' - participation, physical improvements, economic opportunities, cultural opportunities, and quality and safety.

1. Participation. Effective regional regeneration requires that local actors be the primary author of the empowerment strategy, inspired by the needs of 'outside' clients, for instance virtual communities. Question: How to facilitate interactive consumer decision making that results in a 'seamless' cultural experience with the support of the e-Venture project;
2. Physical Assets/Liabilities. A strategy for addressing physical and virtual assets, may include anything that establishes the region's identity, enhances liveability, tourism and employment. Conversely such plans should be reviewed from the perspective of adverse impacts. Question: How to develop appropriate and effective mechanisms for decision making that is based on vision and consensus;
3. Economic Opportunities. Job-based growth is an important driver of economic growth. But unguided growth can have negative impacts. Question: How to meet the challenges of development that is inclusive of the needs and wishes of visitors, entrepreneurs, cultural institutions, and tourist offices, that enables achieving a balance between economic and social goals;
4. Cultural Opportunities. Monuments, museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions should not simply be thought of as heritage repositories, but resources that can raise a region's self-esteem and provide the power it needs to influence its future. Question: How to develop collaboration between diverse actors to capitalise on cultural capital?
5. Quality, environmental health and safety. Regions that create quality, environmental health and safety are attractive to residents and visitors alike. Question: How to develop an adaptive system that updates effectively the new information provided by customers?

The major innovation of the project is the aggregation of fragmented research on dynamic change to create a unique new tool to the conventional process of information search and evaluation of alternatives. In the conventional system, customers have to rely heavily on information provided by suppliers for evaluating destinations and travel options.

This information is incomplete and inevitably coloured by the commercial source. It is well known that independent information sources are considered much more effective in influencing choices of customers (e.g., word-of-mouth of fellow travellers).

Rather than stop here to draw conclusions, the project moves on to develop an understanding of what barriers keep actors in cultural tourism from working together effectively on needs linking. And the processes that affect collaboration between different actors.

It develops the implications that these findings will have on higher education marketing, new course development and developing the extended higher education through e-Venture.

10. Concluding Remarks

In the 21st century higher education is drawn increasingly into the complex international context, causing a tension between convergence and divergence and postmodernism and traditional values. Postman pointed out (1999:98) that "The problem to be solved in the twenty-first century is not how to move information, not the engineering of information. We solved that problem long ago. The problem is how to transform information into knowledge, and how to transform knowledge into wisdom".

It implies higher expextations from higher education, that it must work 'smarter' that is recognise that knowledge creation is its core competency and the challenge is the sharing of information within an extended higher education configuration which has been referred to as the 'triple helix' and across national borders.

Our argument is that the co-evolution of different types of organisation for purposes of knowledge creation does not occur routinely but is based on 'needs-linking'- and difficult to achieve. The e-Venture project could be used by higher education to combine the application of information technology and link it to special events that take place on campus and in the region as a means to build trust amongst divergent players and enhance relational rent. It would position higher education as a potential incubator which contributes to 'The Making of European Learning Regions'.

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