Pathways for Lifelong Learning Universities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALLUME
A lifelong Learning University Model for Europe

1. The required evolution

The overall trend of enhancing lifelong learning (LLL) within universities can be seen in the development of numerous activities, but also in the support of the Conference of European Ministers in Education. In 2009, the Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communique stressed the importance of going further than merely continuing education and adult education, raising the question of how to fully implement LLL in universities towards 2020.

At the same time, the EUCEN Louvain-la-Neuve/Leuven conference recommended the implementation of a "Lifelong Learning University" (LLLU) outlining 10 recommendations for its achievements, and EUA launched a Charter for lifelong learning giving 10 commitments for universities to achieve the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, with a set of matching commitments for governments and regional partners.

Consequently, the objective of the ALLUME project was to help the universities, in a concrete and practical way, to elaborate a vision, mission and action plan dedicated to adapting their own organisation and leadership in order to **become a LLL University**, in short to **develop a lifelong learning strategy within their institution.**

2. ALLUME Main Outputs

- 10 case studies: self-assessment reports from 10 Universities on the content and development of their LLL strategies. The reports are collective ones, internally validated and extended by an Expert visit process.
- A transversal analysis of practice in these 10 Universities, focused on the way they perform their LLL strategy (strategy process or strategizing).
- A transversal analysis of practice in these 10 Universities, focused on the content of their LLL strategy.
- 3 flexible tools designed to assist universities in formulating concrete LLL strategies, built on the experience of the 10 partner universities and 6 visited universities:
  - ⇨ The **Tool for Self-Analysis (Process)** uses the strategy-as-practice approach developed by Whittington and invites universities to analyse in detail their way of '**doing** strategy'; it has a strong internal organisation focus, helping to identify key internal and external actors, steps in making a strategy, methods, communication.
  - ⇨ The **Tool for Self-Analysis (Content)** assists universities in getting a strategic overview of their current LLL-strategy, mission, vision and goals; it invites institutions to select 3 key priorities for the future and to work in detail on them, leading to a revision of the current LLL-strategy and the formulation of an action plan.
  - ⇨ The **Tool for Benchmarking against the European Universities' Charter on LLL** invites universities to benchmark their performance and engagement against the 10 institutional commitments of the European Universities' Charter on LLL and to define its own objectives.
- A highly effective proven methodology including structured peer visits.

3. ALLUME Main Results

Discussion during the whole project and the two scientifically based transversal analyses demonstrated clearly that there are different models of LLL strategies in universities leading to several **pathways** for the implementation of LLLU. The major findings are summed up as follows:

a) Drivers for LLLU strategizing

The most important external drivers for the 10 universities were:

- the society pressure on the universities' duty ("being socially aware and socially active");
- the legislation (national, regional, local policies).

Regarding the context and the drivers of change, the 10 universities can be grouped into two categories:

- universities in countries where national policies exist to create a LLL framework or at least a LLL environment to meet current and future economic and social needs – this seemed to be a pre-condition or at least a strong facilitator.
- universities where the evolution of the economic context has created a favourable climate to open LLL perspectives but these universities are as yet mainly focused on continuing education. The lack of national policies relayed at HE level seems to be a factor limiting the perspective and not facilitating institution-wide initiatives.

b) Internal actors for LLLU strategizing

- Among the influential people in strategizing, globally, the dominant one was the head of the specific LLL structure in 5 universities, while the Rector (or Vice Rector) was also identified as playing an influential role. The commitment of the Rector or of the teaching council/committee (or LLL council) appeared to be important in the decision phase of strategy making.
- There is a relationship between the 'collective' characteristics of LLL strategizing (internally and externally) and the level of development of LLL activities within universities; collective internal strategizing processes seem to lead to more holistic strategies involving internals as well as external actors.

c) Characterisation of LLLU strategizing

Even if some informal elements play a role in the strategizing process, the process seemed dominantly formally organised within universities.

- The most important elements playing a role in the strategizing process within universities were identified as:
  - ⇨ interaction with society, collaboration with external bodies and entities (enterprises, public bodies, etc);
  - ⇨ mobilisation or motivation of the university members, willingness to increase accessibility to LLL;
  - ⇨ correspondence with the global university, part of the university mainstream (in a holistic way).

d) Vision, mission, motivations and values for LLLU strategy

Linking together the missions, motivation and values with the external context and drivers, it was possible to identify 4 types of institutional positioning regarding LLL strategies:

- Universities where LLL strategies are more or less in place, aiming at a coordination or even an integration of initial & continuing education and offering new services to meet the needs of more diversified learners;
- Universities not yet having an explicit strategy but having a vision of the future, showing intentions, exploring different approaches. They demonstrate a real commitment but delegate to a specific internal service the role of convincing people and implementing the process;
- Universities where defining and putting into practice a LLL strategy is still a challenge, a mid-term objective. They are in discussions; some take initiatives but without real impact. For the moment they entrust the Continuing Education Service(s) with this mission asking them to provide the relevant answers;
- Universities reporting only on isolated initiatives taken at faculty level or individual level.

Moreover, a fifth situation of universities (not represented in the ALLUME partnership) exists where LLL may be happening and seen as important in some contexts but where the senior management of the university has decided that it is not an appropriate element of the global strategy of the institution, giving priority to traditional missions of the University, particularly research.

e) Challenges and objectives in LLLU strategies

Despite differences in visions, the common **key challenges** could be identified:

- Meeting the needs of both individuals and society.
- Increasing close relationships with the university environment, elaboration of new policies and providing new services to individuals and society.

The main objectives to master these key challenges will be to:

- Provide new services (lifelong guidance, counselling, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning) and new pedagogical provision.
- Increase diversification and flexibility of programmes, including multi-disciplinarity.
- Embrace a sound quality culture.
- Invest in staff and management development.

f) Discussions about LLLU implementation strategy: paths to change

Universities' key questions for the future concern mainly the way to implement LLL strategies, to measure the chance of success and to evaluate the impacts. These reflections also include:

- The necessary change in the university culture thinking education globally: considering initial education and continuing education as a unique process;
- A new equilibrium to be found between the competing missions, taking into account of the lack of awareness or interest from some colleagues;
- The combination of organisational and individual initiatives;
- The development of sustainable funding models.

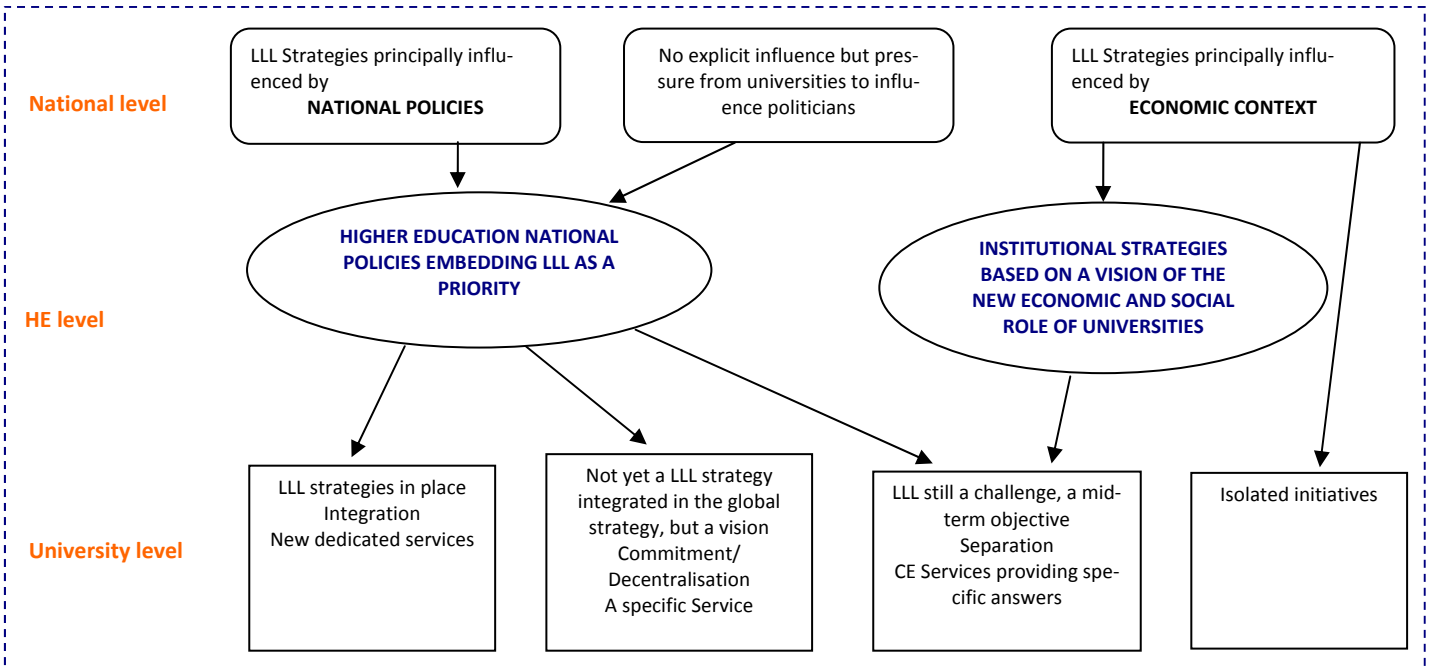
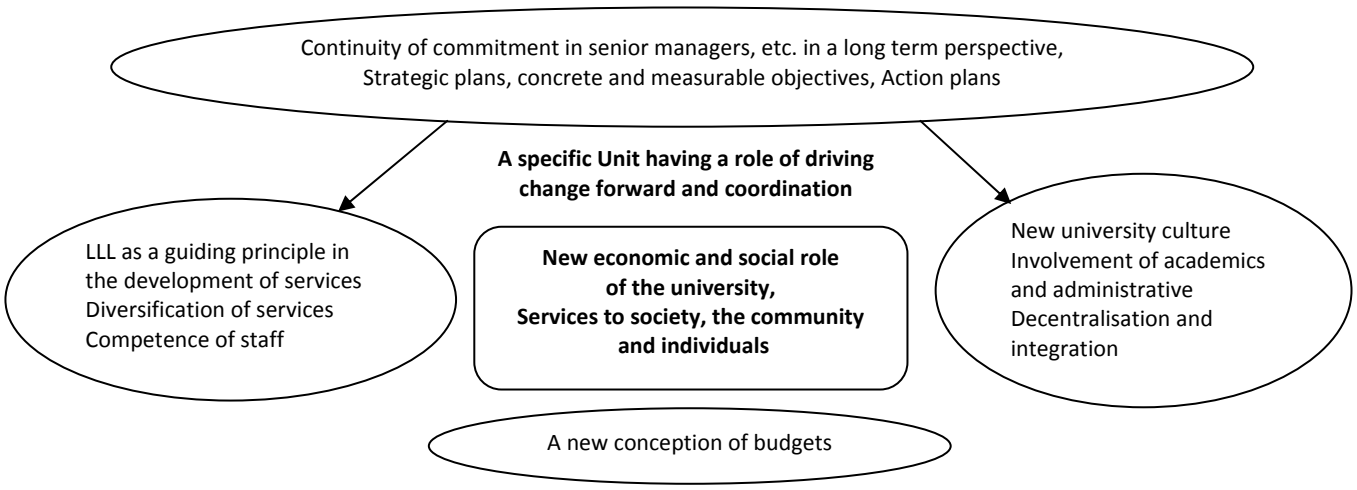


Diagram 1. *KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LLL STRATEGIES IN UNIVERSITIES/IMPACTS ON UNIVERSITIES/ARTICULATION OF THESE KEY FACTORS*

Diagram 2. ***NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A LLLU IMPLEMENTATION***



4. Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerge from the work of this project:

- **From Continuing Education within Universities to Life-long Learning Universities: a major cultural and organisational change**

  The evolution towards a LLL University requires **time** and **awareness**: time to change the mentality and perspective, time to agree on a common vision; awareness because consequences and implications have to be taken into account. Universities should elaborate a new strategy including LLL in their core and seeing it as a part of the educational agenda, the social interaction as well as a tool to link research with the HEI context.

  It means creating a new culture via communication, discussion and debate.

- **The LLLU strategy process: how to become a LLL University**

  As a prerequisite, universities have to know **when** they are ready to develop and/or improve their LLL strategies and when they are ready to **dedicate time** to perform this task as it is a labour-intensive process.

  For developing a LLLU strategy, the strategy-as-practice approach is recommended, viewing strategy as **something that is done** within an organisation – and not something an organisation has.

  i) From a tacit, un-expressed, isolated and un-diffused strategy to an explicit, formulated, shared and communicated strategy

  Independently of the position, role or function of the people involved in the 'strategizing' process, the strategy should be made explicit, well-formulated, and shared as much as possible with colleagues, with other institutional units' representatives, with leaders and rectors, with external actors. It should be communicated effectively internally and externally, in order to develop a shared vision of the future.

  ii) Recurrent and collaborative work within the institution

  The strategy process or 'strategizing' should be a continuous process related to evolution in the internal or external environment: action plans may be revised or adapted, goals may be changed. The strategy process is also a collective task growing around a common vision of what a LLL University is and a common understanding of the challenges.

  This recurrent and collective work can start at different levels of the university's organisation. There is no single 'best way' or 'unique pathway'. Universities have to adapt their LLL strategy process to their specific circumstances, using the available tools and techniques; they have to decide on the approach to be used and on concrete actions.

  Independently of the way of initiating the LLL strategy process (top-down, bottom-up or middle-bottom-top), the LLL strategizing should be undertaken at an institutional level and it should be inscribed, formally registered, in the university structure.

  iii) Leadership to pilot the change

  As complex organisations, universities should identify the diverse leaders, each having different roles in order to involve them in this LLL strategizing process.

  A strong specific unit having a role of driving forward change and coordinating developments has been identified as an advantage to feed the strategizing process.

  iv) Sustainable commitment of senior managers, vice rectors, head of faculties, LLL council, etc

  It is recommended to secure the commitment of (Vice) Rectors, LLL councils, Senior Managers in order to achieve sustainable development. This goes hand in hand with the creation of strategic documents, concrete and measureable objectives and plans making the commitments binding with a shared vision of the future.

v) **Usage of the tools developed by the ALLUME project**

There is no need to begin strategizing by designing new tools. The tools developed as a result of this project provide a tried and tested starting point for this process.

- **The need of guidance and support in LLLU strategy process: an expert network for LLLU strategizing**

It is recommended to universities to initiate or revise their LLL strategy process and to invite support from other external LLLU 'strategisers' at national and international level. EUCEN is a good place where this network of LLLU strategy experts can grow and fertilise.

5. ALLUME strengths

The results and recommendations are underpinned by:

1. Constant interaction with LLL stakeholders and decision-makers at European level through consultation seminars and the testing process.
2. Strong evidence of awareness-rising among end-users (in particular within the partners universities).
3. High adoption of the final tools to end-users' needs.
4. Highly positive feedback from the testing institutions.
5. Confirmation of identified needs.
6. Visibility of impact of the project's results and supportive character of the developed tools, in particular within the visited universities.
7. High impact on the partner institutions who guided the visits as independent experts.
   a. Mutual exchange of different LLL approaches and concepts.
   b. Additional learning experience.
8. Highly valued benefits for both hosts and visitors.

6. Project Publications

- Thematic report "**Pathways and Policies – Recommendations**" (of which this document is a summary). It includes the summarised results of the two transversal analyses of the consortium's case studies and recommendations, based on these results and the feedback of the testing visits and consultation seminars. It is dedicated to the top managers.
- Technical report "**Tools and Results**" which contains the **three flexible tools** developed by the project to help universities in a concrete way to improve their LLL strategies, and the transversal analyses in full lengths as well as background papers about LLL. It is dedicated to the actors.

All ALLUME documents are available for download from the project website: **http://allume.eucen.eu/documents**

7. Project Partners

EUCEN (Coordinator)
University of Sciences and Technologies of Lille 1 (FR)
University of Gent (BE)
Catholic University of Louvain (BE)
University of Tartu (EE)
University of Brest (FR)
University of Malta (MT)
InHolland University (NL)
University of Turku (FI)
Goldsmiths University of London (UK)
University of Aveiro (PT)

8. External Evaluator

Raymond Thomson (UK)

9. Testing universities

University of Stuttgart (DE)
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (GR)
University of Zilina (SK)
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CONTACT
EUCEN
Balmes, 132
08008 Barcelona (ES)
Tel. +34 93 5421825
Fax +34 93 5422975
Email: executive.office@eucen.org
www.eucen.eu

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