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Tanja Reiffenrath works in Student and Academic Services at the University of Göttingen, where she supports academics in all faculties in the (further) development of teaching and learning opportunities with an international or intercultural dimension. She is currently chair of the Expert Community Internationalisation at Home of the EAIE. Tanja has facilitated trainings and published on internationalisation of the curriculum at home, decolonisation of the curriculum, as well as on virtual exchange and curriculum design in international partnerships.

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Anne Sennhenn works in the IRO of the University of Göttingen, supporting the development and implementation of educational projects with partner universities. Earlier she coordinated an international study programme in the Life Sciences and was responsible for curricula development as well as research-oriented teaching concept. Since 2020 she manages the DAAD funded IMKD project liveSciences³` and is engaged in designing open international learning opportunities and facilitating the student international journey with digital services.

CHAHIRA NOUIRA |in
Instructional Designer at
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Chahira Nouira is currently working at the University of Göttingen, Germany as an Instructional Designer. Almost 15 years ago, Chahira has started her career as an educational technologist. While working at the United Nations University (UNU), she contributed to a few European projects about Open Educational Resources for European Universities and Virtual Mobility. The focus of her work is the development and implementation of methods and tools that help teachers and students strengthen their digital competences and enhance collaborative teaching and learning. Since December 2016, Chahira has been a member of the Digital Learning and Teaching team at the University of Göttingen. She first worked for the "Internationalisation of the Curricula" project and helped with the successful implementation of more than 30 digital and collaborative teaching initiatives. Since April 2020, she has been in charge of Digital Teaching and Learning in the DAAD funded IMKD project ´liveSciences³`.

Digitalisation in International Higher Education

Colouring the student international journey in the digital era – A German perspective

Teaching and learning landscapes and environments have truly changed within the last five years. The pandemic has been a veritable catalyst for virtual internationalisation, yet the nexus of internationalisation and digitalisation has been playing a role at all levels in German higher education even before the shift to emergency remote teaching. In a recent working paper on digital internationalisation in German higher education institutions (HEIs), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) surveyed relevant efforts in the field from the policy level to the institutional and course level. At the former, funding for digitalisation projects has resulted in the further development of teaching methodologies as well as infrastructures, even though on-site teaching continues to be the focal point of educational policies. At the same time, internationalisation, instead of an isolated effort, is gradually seen in a social context. At institutional level, digitalisation has been well recognised as a strategic instrument for both international and cross-institutional cooperation, especially within the context of partnerships and alliances. The potential of digital media to realise flexible, diversity-sensitive and environmentally sustainable cooperation formats in which all students can have an international experience is particularly highlighted. However, the paper finds that in German HEIs, the use of digital technologies to support their internationalisation strategies is still limited – digitally supported internationalisation measures tend to remain supplementary and selective. This becomes especially evident at course level, where the paper points that the potential of digital technologies for internationalised teaching has not yet been exploited. Virtual exchange (VE) and virtual mobility (VM) courses have begun to play a more important role during the so-called "Corona semesters", but most efforts are still driven by individual academics.

It is from this trajectory that we would like to share our experiences from the context of a German university, the University of Göttingen, in which a strategic orientation towards internationalisation has long played a significant role. Internationalisation is one of the pillars of the University's mission statement for teaching and learning, where it has been linked to digitalisation, diversity-orientation and research-oriented teaching and learning.

Starting from the colour palette of internationalisation and digitalisation projects, we frame the student journey and provide insights into the colourful global learning instruments and scenarios applied. Along the way, we highlight the role of communities of practice as well as a need for common standards in the context of digital transformation.

THE COLOUR PALETTE: FROM PROJECTS TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Several funding lines at the state, national, and European level have been steering the (further) development of digital teaching and learning and encouraging a more pronounced connection to internationalisation. At our university, a number of projects mirror these developments:

At European level, the Erasmus+ funded European University Alliances are currently pushing innovation and development in the fields of digitalisation and internationalisation, and HEIs organised in these networks are doing sprint marathons to follow the ambitious goals set on (inter)national policy level. The ENLIGHT network is just one example, where learning in international settings is to be up-scaled based on technological development.

On national level, the DAAD has launched a series of digital programmes addressing the implementation of transnational curricula and respective digital infrastructures for teaching and learning across borders. For example, the focus of the Göttingen DAAD project liveSciences³ is to facilitate the international student journey with digital services and enrich it with international teaching and learning opportunities in the life sciences. In the "Change of Perspective" project, global learning and intercultural experiences were supported across faculties.

Such projects can serve as key enablers for the connection of internationalisation and digitalisation and have the potential to involve study programmes in which internationalisation (at Home) has thus far played a subordinate role. A transfer of knowledge and experiences, as well as a long-term institutional vision, however, are vital in order to prevent the momentum of such projects from fading out after the end of the funding period. In this sense, neither of these projects wholly began from scratch but rather built on experiences and needs gathered in the course of curriculum internationalisation projects funded at state level.

Overall, the project environment creates spaces for experimentation: academics and support staff try something new and sometimes risky, and they cherish the freedom to collaborate internationally. Yet, publishing the respective protocols and communicating lessons learnt needs to be an integral part of institutional strategies as well as policy ambitions.

FROM SMOOTHING PATHS TO TEACHING HOW TO HURDLE

Bumpy roads are no news when it comes to international student journeys. Some issues are better known than others, such as recognition of achievements, languages barriers, access to IT infrastructures. In addition, one key question is to ask ourselves how well our courses are actually fit for global, competent and engaged citizens, in the current digital era. As part of their mission to promote international teaching and learning opportunities, institutions are realising they should continuously focus on empowering teaching staff and students in addition to the work dedicated in eliminating as many hurdles as possible. After all, teaching and learning are also about the ability to understand intercultural differences, enabling digital competences, such as media literacy and media production, acquiring skills, such as critical thinking and developing sensitivity towards diversity-oriented matters. While a few bumps can be completely or partially smoothened out by establishing visible and clear procedures, many others require an investment of resources that will allow teaching how to hurdle while being involved in the student international journey.

DIGITALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION IN FULL COLOUR

Sharing perspectives via videos

We are all familiar with the following scenario: a visiting academic is on campus for a week to conduct a series of lectures, seminars and a few meetings with colleagues and students. Regardless of the discipline, chances are that only those present during that week will benefit from the perspective and discussions shared. How can this scenario be enhanced and reach more than one student cohort? At our university and with the support from the State Library Video team, invited teaching staff from abroad spend a small part of their mobility at the recording studio. Jointly with local colleagues, they produce explanatory videos, record lectures and interviews with colleagues and Q&A sessions with students. The videos produced become part of the teaching materials for the collaborating parties and can be implemented in courses, either in the preparatory

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phase, as content for an inverted classroom or as the basis for an interactive video, where students can discuss, comment and address specific questions related to that video and the perspectives presented there.

Establishing the change in perspectives that a visit from abroad can reach a far larger audience requires a few changes before, during and after the mobility period. Preparing the visit would imply looking at additional aspects, such as choosing the themes that are suitable for a video production in advance, clarifying the conditions under which the use of the content could be sustained and the modalities of making it accessible to students.

Students as producers

It is important to note here that teaching staff might not be the exclusive producers of audio-visual materials. Apart from focusing on academics and their contributions to carry out digitally supported internationalisation measures, great opportunities also arise when students are asked to become involved and create multimedia content themselves.

In discussions with academics at our university, in particular from the life sciences faculties, the shift from consumption to creation became clear during the early days of the pandemic. Assignments were developed by students from heavily relying on writing to creating screencasts, video clips and even more elaborated videos, choosing formats from the entertainment industry (Quiz Show setups, parody newsrooms etc.). Looking at the five key areas in the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp), area number 3 is the Digital Content Creation, i.e. "Create and edit digital and multimedia content; integrate and re-elaborate digital content; produce creative expressions and media outputs; program and code; deal with and apply intellectual property rights and licenses." According to this framework, digital content creation is at the foundational level of digital competences. Hence, the innovation may not lie in integrating a basic digital competence but rather into the different applications. The focus is not on developing full digital proficiency like students would in a multimedia course, but on actively engaging with new ways of expressions for all students.

A few examples that reflect how important this is in a global context are such projects, where students can learn about different perspectives: instead of only browsing international databases about plant diseases, advise and let the students film the crops that are native in their home countries, explain the context and what the consequences will be for them and their family

businesses are in relation to plant diseases.

Virtual exchange

Virtual exchange (VE) involves students and facilitators from two or at times three partner institutions. It exposes students to another academic culture and perspectives different from their own in order to foster not only academic but also intercultural exchange between learners and academics alike. Especially "co-designed exchanges" (Helm & Beaven 2020, 3) require close collaboration between the facilitators involved, the negotiation of standards, as well as the growth of mutual trust. They can fill gaps in curricula and make international experiences accessible to a wider group of students, when they are integrated into existing modules.

Well before the pandemic, international teaching collaborations had been mediated by digital media. Initially, at our institution, these took the shape of hybrid joint classrooms, where two in-person classrooms were linked via a web conference. The shift to remote teaching in 2020 due to Covid moved these courses into a fully online setting. While this does not alleviate occasional hick-ups in technology, our academics have come to cherish the virtual joint classroom as a room in which all participants may be seen and inhabit equal space on the screen. Spontaneous breakouts in small groups of course enable a closer contact between the students.

SHARING PAINT BOXES – NURTURING A COM-MUNITY OF PRACTICE

Learning communities or communities of practice (CoP) can be immensely powerful: they support the implementation of internationalisation and digitalisation efforts in the curriculum and keep the momentum going, beyond the limited time span of individual projects. According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice is a group of people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly". Inherent in this definition is the idea that practitioners get together for peer learning, and, in doing so, build a community. Therefore, such groups often focus on sharing good practices and thereby advancing and enhancing each other's work. In late 2017, we created a space to allow academics involved in projects at the intersection of internationalisation and digitalisation to connect with each other across disciplinary divides. The meetings that were organised 2–3 times every semester gave them a shared context for their communication and for sharing their experiences, good and bad, as well as reflecting on their own

curriculum development projects and helping each other out.

Over time, this has grown into a lively CoP that has significantly expanded. While we see a small core group of internationalisation ambassadors attending (almost) every meeting, a large portion of academics involved in digitalisation and internationalisation connect to the CoP regularly and others return to the group at irregular intervals. For the CoP to remain a space of fruitful exchange and a point for productive communication, facilitators need to ensure that a range of topics is covered, from interactive sessions, where initiatives are showcased or world cafés on current practices, to sessions on new developments from experts inside or outside the institution. It takes time, we have learnt, for the CoP to grow organically, but over time, it may develop into a space in which the members also take agency over the content.

In addition, the individual members of the CoP are multipliers in their respective academic bubbles, faculties and departments. This is still undervalued when it comes to encouraging educators to internationally collaborate as well as driving innovation in teaching & learning. At the same time, the CoP has highlighted needs for technical requirements and digital tools often lagging behind the innovation of the implemented scenarios.

COLOURING ON THE SAME PAGE – SETTING STANDARDS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Following the pandemic, the portfolio of digital tools has become quite diverse. Besides videoconferencing equipment, tools for online collaboration are the essential ingredients necessary for implementing VE. In the ecosystem of technical infrastructure and digital tools, diversity is high, in particular, in the context of international cooperation. The lack of compatibility of learning environments as well as national and or institutional legal restrictions in the use of one or the other tool has further challenged educators and students to virtually collaborate across borders. Workarounds and rather pragmatic solutions in the implementation have strongly influenced in the past the engagement toward setting standards for the technical infrastructure as well as access regulations.

The digital transformation of educational processes has made visible improvements, too, and modernised processes generate added value for all user groups, from students and teachers to administrators. For example,

paperless enrolment and digital credentials are widely used and e- or online exams are the new norm. Relevant processes along the student journey are digitally redesigned. This has a strong impact on colouring a flexible and international journey for students, seeking to engage in virtual mobility offers or spending time abroad in short- and long-term programmes.

As one of the coordinators of the PIM project (platform for inter*national student mobility), the University of Göttingen implements the paperless transfer of students' achievements and digital workflows for recognition. PIM has made major contributions to the digitalisation of educational process, associated with international student mobility. This was and remains particularly challenging, as international student mobility follows the student life cycle. Processes require organisational interaction across institutions and countries; standardisation and interoperability efforts need to overcome the zoo of standards available in higher education. The plurality of projects and number of standards promoted is constantly increasing, and it is a challenge to keep track of them (Bacharach et al. 2021). The PIM project, for instance, uses EU standards, in particular EMREX/ELMO for examination results.

Within the project environment, developments can be trialled and constantly improved. Collaboration across different technical as well as legal environments create the different perspectives necessary for successful implementation. International cooperation in higher education is fundamental for these digitalisation processes to move from a project level to widely used application that truly facilitates international student mobility.

THE FULL PICTURE

Looking towards the future, the German HEIs provide a fertile ground to support further developments that link the use of digital technologies to strategic internationalisation. Opportunities in the form of international and national initiatives and projects outlined in this Think Piece have provided a field to experiment and move beyond supplementary or selective internationalisation measures. Such examples aid in imagining and developing new approaches to digital teaching and learning and international cooperation. These approaches are to be piloted, evaluated and finally transferred to sustained, long-term use, where they are integrated into curricula. Efforts to create more sustainable, visible and easy to update processes, results and educational products should be encouraged. This also means that we need to create

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spaces, where different perspectives are encouraged as well as supported and empowered, to acquire the necessary skills and competences to navigate digital and international settings.

When asked what they gain through their projects, educators highlight their increased media-didactic and digital competences. They report encountering a new perspective on teaching and learning and expanding their repertoire of scientific methodologies used in teaching. The change in perspective and the critical reflection the academics describe as taking place during their international cooperation is vital for a critical reflection on the developments currently unfolding at course, institutional and policy level. In this regard, established formats such as communities of practice

may serve to amplify digitalisation and internationalisation processes; they can help communities thrive and HEIs to reach their goals.

Finally, international collaborations in HE have always been diverse and brought challenges on the legal, technical and procedural levels. Hence, the implementation of digital services that obey international standards is key to better facilitate international student mobility.

In painting a picture where we can learn from the projects however small or big, we can contribute to shaping the future and create a culture where internationalisation in the digital era is not just a fancy concept but an experience attainable to all students.