

Editorial

NIKOS KOKOSALAKIS

This issue focuses on lifelong learning in European universities. It comprises the first set of results of an interdisciplinary European research project whose general aim is to identify and analyse the extent and nature of the involvement of European universities in lifelong learning. The project is carried out by a consortium of experts in higher education research from six EU countries (France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Sweden, UK) and Norway and involves 28 universities, four from each country. It is supported financially by the European Commission as part of the TSER programme of the Directorate-General for Science, Research and Development and is coordinated by the Centre for Social Morphology and Social Policy (KEKMOKOP) of the Department of Social Policy and Social Anthropology of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens.

In recent years, lifelong learning has become a fundamental goal of education policies, both at the national and the international level. It is often advocated as a tool to promote the 'information' or the 'knowledge' society. But going beyond broad policy statements in this area is not easy, as the concept is somewhat elusive and resists operational definition. Certainly, the applied forms of lifelong learning cannot be but multiple and multifaceted and yet its provision cannot be purely on a piecemeal basis. So, if lifelong learning is not to remain a mere slogan submitted to the vagaries of political discourse, education policy analysts face the challenge of making the concept 'operational', i.e. identifying its key dimensions and 'translating' it into concrete initiatives and reform proposals. This is particularly difficult and challenging for the universities which, on the one hand, must retain their conventional status and, on the other, provide and disseminate knowledge in and for contemporary society.

The importance of the concept of lifelong learning lies in the fact that it refers directly both to socio-economic and technological change and to education reform. Especially at university level, its implementation on a significant scale carries with it immediate implications for the whole spectrum of higher education provision and reform. In other words, lifelong learning, as described in the literature in recent years, amounts to a new revolutionary educational philosophy and practice but its implications for existing structures and practices have hardly been thought out. What became obvious from the beginning in this research project is that lifelong learning at university level cannot be just an appendix to what the universities have been always doing. If it is eventually to become part of higher education provision on a substantial scale it will involve the whole system of higher education and will have to affect radically what up to now have been called conventional programmes at both undergraduate and post-graduate level.

In a certain sense, lifelong learning is both a threat and a challenge to the traditional status of the universities. It is a threat because a major aspect involves training and the universities cannot be just training institutions. University education has always implied a certain rigour and quality which many in academia feel is threatened by the generalised character of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning on the other hand is a challenge for the university because it is now perceived as a necessary bridge to what has come to be called the 'knowledge society'. This tension is clear in all the articles in this issue.

The seven case studies are a first attempt to examine the genesis of the concept of lifelong learning in a European context in the seven countries participating in this project, especially as it relates to the university. They focus on its historical development, past achievements, the changing legal and regulative framework and its new dimensions in the context of the 'information' and 'knowledge' society. The studies concentrate on continuing and adult education and certain aspects of training involving the universities. They are desk studies based on the existing literature and various legal documents and policy statements. Within this framework, certain aspects of the implementation of lifelong learning in the universities are presented and certain related issues are highlighted.

The first two articles on Sweden and Norway by Berit Askling and Rita Foss-Fridlitzius and Ellen Brandt trace back the roots of lifelong learning to the Scandinavian tradition of adult education. In Sweden, the 'People's University' in the 1920s, the debate on recurrent education in the late 1960s and the 1977 education reform are the main landmarks that led to an expanding role of higher education provision for adults. In Norway, initiatives by voluntary organisations and popular movements in the early 1930s led to the Adult Education Act of 1976. In the 1980s and 1990s, initiatives focused on employees' continuing education, while new measures were taken to open universities to adults and to make modes of learning more flexible.

In German and French universities, lifelong learning builds on their long tradition in continuing education. The German situation, analysed by Betina Alesi and Barbara Kehm, highlights both some substantial achievements and restrictive conditions that prevent its institutionalisation at the level of the university. The French case, presented by Jean-Pierre Jallade, provides an historical summary of early attempts at adult education provision in universities, stressing its changing objectives over time until the 1971 law on continuing vocational training that triggered its rapid development in universities and elsewhere. The university continuing education scene is then reviewed in some detail.

The Mediterranean situation is illustrated by the two articles on Spain and Greece. Lifelong learning activities in Spanish universities, examined by José-Ginés Mora and Javier Vidal, developed mostly as post-graduate, professionally-oriented courses. They are very much an expression of university autonomy with a strong market orientation. In addition, two open universities contribute to making modes of delivering higher education in the perspective of lifelong learning more flexible. In Greece, where lifelong learning is a newcomer, Nikos Kokosalakis shows that its introduction in the universities has been shaped by central legislation and the government's education policy during the late 1990s. The Open University, which has been functioning since 1997, is a significant opening for lifelong learning in Greece where the demand for higher education is exceedingly high. The Programmes of Elective Studies (PSE), which are under-

graduate programmes offered in parallel to conventional ones, were intended by the government to introduce lifelong learning in the universities and absorb the high and unmet demand for places. These programmes, however, have been met with substantial opposition and their future is uncertain. On the whole, the profile of lifelong learning in Greek universities is developing.

In the UK, lifelong learning has existed for a long time under different names. Part-time study and greater flexibility of modes of learning have been part of the higher education scene for some time, while the OU and the polytechnics may claim that they have been engaged in it from their creation. After reviewing the various government's approaches to lifelong learning and examining the current definitions of the concept, Maurice Kogan concludes that lifelong learning in British universities is in an uncertain position.

In general, the articles seem to show that there is no explicit strategy for lifelong learning adopted by the universities at the national level, let alone at the European level. The universities, however, seem to be responding to socio-economic developments and are very sensitised to the need for developing employment-relevant courses.

The second step of the research, which is more empirical, will describe and analyse lifelong learning educational practices and programmes and their implications for curricula and the organisational structures in the universities selected. It will rest on interviews of key actors in the field in an attempt to search for 'good practice' in an area where rhetoric travels faster than innovations. It is planned to publish the results of this second phase in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal*.