



# Digital Transformation of LERU Universities during COVID-19 Crisis Times

Preliminary Results

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# Our research

## **Aims**

- We want to monitor and analyze the, probably, *most dramatic transformation* of (LERU) universities in recent times.
- Knowledge sharing between LERU universities (League of European Research Universities)

## **Two steps**

- In April 2020 we sent out the first questionnaire to the LERU universities in which we raised questions about the digital transformation of the university that was triggered by the corona crisis (16 responses out of 23). Open questions.
- In August 2020 we sent out the second questionnaire in order to find how LERU universities start the new academic year and to learn about the future of higher education after the COVID-19 experience. What are the lessons learned? (12 responses out of 23, still running). Open questions.

## **Research team**

- Peter van Baalen (University of Amsterdam), Jan Haarhuis (University of Utrecht), Laura Keustermans (LERU Office), Helle Mathiasen (University of Copenhagen)

# Digital Transformation Framework

-  • *Preparedness.* To what extent were the LERU universities prepared to this crisis (technical, organizational, strategical, educational)?
-  • *Transformation.* How are LERU universities leading this instantaneous digital transformation?
-  • *Impact & Foresight.* To what extent will the decisions that are being made right now impact our future education? Which decisions will be permanent and which ones will be temporal?

# First Questionnaire

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## Preparedness

To what extent were the LERU universities prepared to this crisis (technical, organizational, educational, strategic)?

(1)



## Transformation

How are LERU universities leading this instantaneous digital transformation (w.r.t. making new rules, time horizon, differences between disciplines and between bachelor and masters, and the technology landscape?)

(1)



## Impact & Foresight

To what extent will the decisions that are being made right now impact our future education. Which decisions will be permanent and which ones will be temporal?

(1+2)

## Findings **first** questionnaire - preparedness

- (Infrastructural) Technology - not a big problem
- Organizational - (how is expertise digital education organized?) great variety
- Educational - diverse landscapes. Very diverse landscapes of educational tools and platforms on which the transition to online education takes (took) place
- Strategic - no preparation

# Findings **first** questionnaire - transformation

- New rules - emerging rules for online education
- Time horizon of change: short and long term
- Differences: between disciplines, not between masters and bachelors
- Technology landscape: diverse, emerging and temporary
- Leading DigTrans: variety of combinations

# Findings **first** questionnaire - foresight

- *Concerns*: inequality - study delay - exams (fraud) - vulnerable students - well-being students and staff
- *Lessons*: innovations - pedagogy - communications - support
- *Impact*: academic performance - academic development
- *Challenges*: need for strategic thinking - need to invest in technology and staff - need to think about the role of EdTechs

## Findings **second** questionnaire - new academic year - Campus

- **Campus priority policy:** physical capacity campus 20-30%
  - 0-35% on campus teaching - no big classes
  - Lab/studio sessions deferred to 2<sup>nd</sup> semester
  - priority to first year students and STEM students
  - In clinical fields like medicine a clear priority was given to later year students. Pre-clinical students have small amounts of on-campus teaching with the available capacity devoted to the other cohorts



# Findings **second** questionnaire - new academic year - Social engagement and student well-being

- Online student community building
- Social mentorship programmes
- Buddy systems
- Virtual student houses

# Findings **second** questionnaire - new academic year - Teaching Support

## **Teaching support:**

- Educational advice
- Helpdesk
- Workshops and training on tools
- Educational formats and best practice examples

'digital divides' that have been broken down somewhat -  
colleagues who would have avoided online forms have  
adapted and enjoyed the experience



## Findings **second** questionnaire - new academic year - Blended and Hybrid Learning

- Strong preference from students for synchronous activity
- Hybrid learning courses, programs, and facilities



# Digitization vs Digitalization

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- **Digitization** of Cow Paths: digital technologies are applied in educational processes in order to replace and/or automate paper- or human intensive activities
- “Not the dominant form but there will be a greater presence of digital into the day to day life of the delivery of teaching.
- Digital is alluring. It is NOT cheaper. It is NOT easier.



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# Digitalization

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- “The traditional thinking that students and learners are expected to follow all courses at a single institution should be challenged as the ‘**all-in-one-place approach**’ may well be accompanied (or gradually replaced) by an approach to offer modular programmes in the context of alliances.”



# European collaboration

- Virtual Student Exchange
- Learning from each other:
  - “We duplicate far too much – why create many versions of something like Economics 101...”
- Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027
  - Fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem
  - Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation
- The Rise of EdTechs in the market of higher education

# The EdTech Dependency

- Williamson, B., & Hogan, A. (2020). Commercialisation and privatisation in/of education in the context of Covid-19.
- Smith, M. (2020). Review of Neil Selwyn, Felicitas Macgilchrist, and Ben Williamson (2020). Digital Education after COVID-19. *TECHLASH*, 1. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 1-5.
- Williamson, B. (2016). Digital education governance: data visualization, predictive analytics, and 'real-time' policy instruments. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(2), 123-141.
- Teräs, M. et al 2020 Post-Covid-19 Education and Education Technology 'Solutionism': a Seller's Market, *Postdigital Science and Education*, p. 1-17

# Zooming out

- LERU universities are big, European research universities with high tech infrastructures. We are aware that not every university is in the same position. Other universities may suffer much more from COVID-19

**Table 3.** Synthesis and meta-analysis of higher education response by country.

WESP (2020) category	Country	COVID-19 Cases/1M pop <sup>†</sup>	Extension of semester break	Reported campus closures <sup>‡</sup>	Reported move to online teaching
<i>Developed economies</i>	Australia	166	No	All	All
	Germany	745	No	All	All
	Italy	1,616	No	All	All
	Republic of Ireland	530	No	All	All
	United Kingdom	288	No	All	All
	United States of America	431	No	Some	Some
<i>Developing economies</i>	Brazil	20	No	Some	Some
	China	57	Yes	All	All
	Chile	112	No	All	Some
	Egypt	6	No	All	All
	Hong Kong	86	Yes	All	All
	India	0.8	Yes	All	Some
	Indonesia	5	No	All	Some
	Jordan	25	No	All	Some
	Malaysia	81	No	All	No
	Nigeria	0.5	No	All	Some
	Republic of Korea (South Korea)	188	Yes	All	Some
	Singapore	144	No	Some	Some
	South Africa	22	Yes	All	Some
	United Arab Emirates	58	No	All	Some

<sup>†</sup> 1M pop = 1 million population, <sup>‡</sup> = Worldometer, 2020 (30 March 2020). <sup>††</sup> UNLSCG, 2020 (30 March 2020).

Crawford, J. Et al, (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses.

*Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 3(1), 1-20.



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Thank you!!!

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