

Welcome Remarks Dr. Dorothea Rüländ

Conference Bologna Goes Digital

26th September 2018, Berlin

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished guests,

Thank you all for joining us today at the conference “Bologna Goes Digital”. I would like to thank the Hochschulforum Digitalisierung for inviting the DAAD to host this event during the topic week “Shaping the digital turn”, and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany for the financial support.

I.

This conference brings together representatives of all levels of higher education institutions, representing teaching, research, and administration, not only as speakers, but also in the audience. Therefore, I am looking forward not only to the contributions of the distinguished speakers we invited, but also to those from the audience. I have to admit that I have been extremely impressed by the overwhelming interest into this conference. And I am pleased to welcome so many attendees coming from countries all over Europe.

That being said, I am truly sorry that we were not able to admit everybody interested in this event, and I hope that many will follow the discussion via the live stream today. Having the opportunity to follow the keynote and panel discussions from your homes or offices is not the only benefit of using digital media. We can also follow up on the discussions after the conference by using the communication platform – you find the link on the screen and on the programme leaflet – so that we stay connected afterwards and are able to include those who could not join us here today. These are opportunities of digital media most higher education institutions already are making use of to increase accessibility, flexibility and sustainability of their study programmes.

On the other hand, digital measures have their limits. Many of you took on a long journey to be with us today. And there is a reason for this. Even in times when we have the technological capacity to communicate online in videoconferences or to take part in virtual reality simulations – personal encounters and communicating face to face have and will keep their own value. This is of course not the only argument for academic mobility - and I am speaking of physical mobility here. I would go even further and underline, as Thomas Bieger, Rector of the University St. Gallen, did four weeks ago in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, that the value of being present at a specific campus, and of being part of a specific local community, will even increase due to the digital transformation of our societies. Yes, our graduates will need digital skills. But they will also need human competences, and intercultural and communication skills will be of eminent importance. Those skills are best acquired through immersion into another culture. Personal contact with a country and its higher education institutions will remain the focal point

of mobility, and so any fears that virtual mobility may replace physical mobility are somewhat unfounded.

We at the DAAD actively encourage and support universities to introduce international curricula that combine virtual and blended learning opportunities with physical mobility. As far as Germany is concerned, it can be assumed that virtual degree programmes with attendance phases will also become widely established. Particularly for shorter stays, preparatory courses and working together in project teams online can deepen the experience abroad and make it also more sustainable.

Furthermore, by using digital formats, we can open up international experiences for students who cannot, for whatever reason, go abroad for longer periods or take part in a study program abroad at all. We know from our surveys that there will always be a certain percentage of students for whom going abroad is not an option. Thanks to digital learning formats, those students can take part in learning activities offered by higher education institutions worldwide, and they can acquire intercultural and language skills in the virtual classroom. Moreover, every student nowadays requires the ability to work in globally distributed teams in the virtual world. All students need to be trained accordingly – virtual mobility windows should thus become the norm in every course offered. We are currently working on developing new funding formats for measures like this.

At our conference today, the first panel discussion and most of our workshops and sessions will address the impact of digital transformation on student mobility, teaching and learning. With more than 300 projects funded at German universities by DAAD programmes alone, I know there is a lot going on, and I am really looking forward to the upcoming panels and sessions, to get to know more good practices and learn more about developments in Europe.

II.

Internationalisation and digitalisation both are of greatest relevance for higher education institutions all over the world, but especially so in Europe. Whereas internationalisation already is of great strategic importance for most Higher Education Institutions in Europe, digitalisation offers ways to further promote and shape internationalisation. Both processes are cross-cutting in the truest sense and deeply connected, and both will bring about lasting changes in the way higher education institutions will operate and cooperate in the future.

We chose the topic “Bologna Goes Digital” for this event, because we see efforts towards further integration of the European Higher Education Area as a pacemaker for internationalising curricula, for mutual recognition of degrees and credits, and for cooperation in research and teaching at European higher education institutions. In addition, with projects undertaken under the umbrella of the Erasmus+ programme such as the European Student Card or the Erasmus App, that are aiming at making administrative processes more efficient by using digital technologies, we see that these projects also have a direct impact on the administration of mobility in Europe, and often also beyond.

In 2016, the working group on internationalisation at the German Forum for Higher Education in the Digital Age, or Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, that I had the pleasure to chair, published the following recommendation: “Much of the potential [of digitalisation...] can be implemented more effectively in cooperation with other [Higher Education Institutions]. Given that many challenges cannot be solved by individual [Higher Education Institutions] alone it makes sense to form higher education networks. Such networks can assist their members, among other activities, in mutual recognition of courses, certifying courses, joint production activities and exchanging teaching content. [...] In addition, digital media used in inter-[university] cooperation offer new ways to cater for minor subjects or internationalisation of academic programmes.” Today, I could not stress the need for such networks more. Let me just point to the potential of sharing data, not only for research, but also for administrative processes, for instance the use of algorithms and databases to enable smoother administration, easier credit recognition and quality assurance processes. I am certain that the creation of European

University Networks will have an accelerating effect on working together to enable a student journey that makes the most of all that European higher education has to offer. We will come back to these issues in the upcoming panels and concurrent sessions.

III.

In order to use the potential offered by digitalisation for the purposes of internationalisation, it is essential to think of digitalisation and internationalisation as inextricably linked and to conceive both processes as overriding strategic goals that concern all levels of higher education institutions. But higher education institutions are of course not single actors in the Bologna Process, and they need support on the national and European level to successfully cooperate in Europe and to reach the full potential in connecting internationalisation and digital transformation. Our last panel will therefore look at the linkages between internationalisation and digitalisation from a policy perspective and will discuss which support structures and political are needed for successful cooperation in the digital age.

Coming to a close, I would like to quote Theodor Heuss, the first president of the federal republic of Germany, who said: "One day, machines will perhaps not only be able to compute, but to think. However, they will never have an imagination."

Today, sixty years later, we cannot be too sure about that anymore. What is certain, however, is that we will need all of our imaginative capacities to conceive how deeply our world will change in the coming years and decades due to new technologies, artificial intelligence and not least digital transformation.

With this in mind, I am looking forward to a day of joint efforts in imagination, to challenging discussions and many ideas to take home. I wish you a great and fruitful conference and much inspiration for your work.

Thank you very much.