

11. A Force for Growth: International Education in Ticino

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In some ways all of Higher Education is arguably international. Any university in Switzerland, and most universities around the world, will include students from varied international backgrounds. Higher education has become global, and certainly there are few courses of any kind that will not touch upon issues that are either international or multicultural. Lugano is blessed with three universities, all quite different in their scope and mission. The first classes of the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) were initiated in 1996, and the institution has grown rapidly, first under President Marco Baggiolini, then President Pietro Martinoli, and now under its dynamic first Rector, Boas Erez. USI's faculties are Architecture; Communication, Culture and Society; Economics; Informatics, and now Biomedical Sciences. One year later, 1997, saw the establishment of SUPSI (Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera italiana), which offered its first diplomas in 2000. As a school of professional and applied studies, it does not offer a doctorate but does have a wide array of Master (13) and Bachelor (20) programs. Lugano's third university is Franklin University Switzerland, now fifty years old. It is much smaller, with only about three hundred students, and it offers Bachelor and Master programs in the Anglo-American liberal arts tradition and has a mission that emphasizes experiential learning and multicultural competencies. The student body is international; about 60% of the students are from the US, and significant cohorts come from Europe, the Middle East, and Eurasia. Franklin is accredited in both the US and Switzerland and changed its name from Franklin College to Franklin University Switzerland in 2014 after achieving Swiss recognition.

The presence of three universities of different but complementary nature is a singular achievement for a city the size of Lugano which can now justly claim to be a city of education. The proximity of Lugano to Italy means that all the universities are international in their student make-up, and the pivotal location of the city in the Milan-Zurich corridor also offers distinct advantages in terms of research and general connectivity. Ticino is by definition Switzerland's window on the Mediterranean, and USI has taken a commanding position in connecting the region not only to the Mediterranean but also the Middle East through innovative programs. Firstly, the Istituto studi mediterranei founded by Vittorio Dan Segre in 1997, then the Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Freethinking Platform (www.usi.ch/en/mem) and the Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Summer Summit (www.mem-summer summit.ch). The Platform offers lectures and seminars for both Bachelor and Master students at USI, as well as conferences open to general audience with the aim of advancing public understanding of main challenges in the Middle East Mediterranean region. It is led by a renowned scholar, Prof. Gilles Kepel, a French political scientist and arabist, specialized in the contemporary Middle East and Muslims in the West. Prof. Kepel teaches regularly in Lugano and is part of the Project Committee behind the concept of the MEM Summer Summit that has now taken place twice, in August 2018 and 2019. The Summit is in my opinion the truly innovative part of this enterprise. Its premise is that our traditional definitions of the

historical geography of the two regions is misguided, that the Mediterranean and the Middle East are not two separate regions as they have been traditionally defined from Eurocentric perspectives, but rather a dynamic and coherent area. Every year more than a hundred young "change-makers" from over thirty different countries converge on Lugano along with over a hundred speakers and guests. These future leaders work together on specific MEM topics during an eight-day Seminar and then present their findings at the two-day Forum where they take part in public panel discussions that include distinguished experts and invited speakers. This kind of enterprise is not without challenges, but its mission is to create the kind of civil dialogue among future leaders that will produce long-term betterment for the region and the globe. A new summit has been planned for August 2020.

Franklin University has also been a leader in international education. With its small classes—almost every class has fifteen students or fewer—and close faculty supervision, almost all interactions will involve professors and students from all corners of the globe who will often have vastly different points of view. The Anglo-American liberal arts model also means that the curriculum is based on flexibility and multicultural interaction. The four-year Bachelor program allows, even requires, students to take courses in a wide variety of subjects, and students are only required to declare a major field of study in their second year. Some of the expected outcomes are intercultural competencies, critical thinking, language competencies, and international engagement. The major fields of specialization are by their nature international, for instance key programs in International Relations and International Management, or interdisciplinary, for instance Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies. And then there is Academic Travel which represents the single most distinctive element of the Franklin curriculum. Travel is used as an experiential learning tool completely integrated as a series of course offerings in disciplines applicable to the entire curriculum. Every semester, Franklin students travel for two weeks to study on location, as part of a full semester-long course. Each class is taught by a faculty member in a field related to the academic expertise of the individual professor, and the students travel to a location with which the professor has a particular academic interest or personal connection. As an integral part of the curriculum, Academic Travel is designed to increase opportunities for experiential learning as well as to connect and immerse students in cultures different from their own. It has been part of the Franklin liberal arts experience for fifty years, and through it students have undertaken thoughtful cultural interactions all over the world.

In order to maximize international connections Franklin has also consciously built partnerships with other Higher Education institutions globally. In the United States a very close partnership has been created with Emerson College in Boston that allows students from both institutions to enroll in joint programs. Other close partnerships have been formed with the University of Southern California, SMU in Dallas, the College of Charleston, Chapman University, and others. In-

ternationally, new partnerships have been inaugurated with Sophia University in Japan and aSSIST in South Korea. A new office of Executive Education and Global Outreach has been established under the direction of Dean Carlo Giardinetti. This has led not only to the establishment of new graduate and executive programs with South Korea but also to a series of Future of Work events geared to a larger community and open to the general public. The topics have dealt with the societal and technological changes that are transforming the global workplace.

Dean Giardinetti has also spearheaded a series of international master classes, bringing together inspiring thought-leaders from around the world to address topics of pertinence to the rapidly changing social and economic environment. The participants range from teenagers to retired professionals. Two outstanding examples were “Leadership and the Golden Rule” with Paul Polman and “Doughnut Economics: A deep dive into new economics and long term thinking” with Kate Raworth. The latter was hosted by the city of Lugano, was co-sponsored with SUPSI, and had over three hundred participants, including students from USI, SUPSI, and Franklin, thus from all over the world.

A partnership with the Lugano Living Lab (LLL) offers a particularly important and apposite model of international education that is closely linked to the urban fabric and to the social and economic challenges of Lugano and Ticino. The LLL uses a platform approach to seek innovative solutions to urban issues. Students enrolled in Franklin’s Master of Science in International Management (MSIM), for instance, undertook a Design Thinking exercise, advised by experts from Deloitte and Touche, which looked at the needs of the city of Lugano. They interviewed citizens, politicians, and administrators and constructed a feasibility plan, a deliverable that could then possibly be implemented by one of the LLL partners if deemed feasible and doable. The Franklin MSIM students are an internationally diverse group who undertake a one-year graduate program with two tracks, Climate Action and Digital Transformation. The former leads to an internship with the United Nations; the latter with an international experience in South Korea. Both of these experiential components unfortunately had to be canceled this year because of COVID19, including a highly-anticipated presentation of the students’ research at the United Nations in Geneva at the end of April 2020.

Another interesting enterprise undertaken by the Lugano Living Lab in collaboration with other institutions is a series of videos on “Inglesismi” (<https://inglesismi.ch/>), English words and concepts that have become integral parts of the local linguistic currency, words like “Privacy,” “Smart City,” or “Data Driven.” The explanatory videos, undertaken by a series of experts within and without the academy, are geared to three audiences (children, adults, and seniors). A set of videos on “Circular Economy” is currently being created by Dean Giardinetti (Franklin).

It should be pointed out that Franklin is not alone in engaging and working with the broader community of Ticino. USI and SUPSI are also engaged in projects that bring innovation and add to the intellectual ferment of the area. Higher education is also not limited just to the cloistered halls of academe. Important cultural institutions like Lugano Arte e Cultura (LAC) and the Museo delle Culture (MUSEC) work with the Luganese universities to add value in a broader learning environment and provide internships and opportunities for students. The MUSEC has worked closely with Franklin professors and students; its broad mission that defines culture in a variety of ways fits very well with the liberal arts mission of that

particular institution. The LAC will be receiving a grant for a particularly innovative project that will create art, in this case original dance performance, with choreographers from North America and Europe. This project is designed to have community impact and also to provide educational/experiential opportunities for students from Franklin and other institutions. A great deal is happening in Lugano and Ticino that promises to create the kind of intellectual and cultural gestation that will produce value for the community in many different ways.

About the author:

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