

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE OPENING SESSIONS

EDC: EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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The fact that the 2011 EAIE conference in Copenhagen catered, in various ways, to the professional needs of more than 4000 participants is strong evidence of the great expertise involved. As the Association has been growing, the number of Professional Sections and Special Interest Groups has also increased. Having followed the activities of many Professional Sections over the years and now having taken part in the work of the EDC Board in Copenhagen, I will be quick to say that the Professional Sections are the very engine of the Association, an internal quality assurance mechanism if you will. The Board's work speaks volumes of the working culture of the EAIE – a passionate, yet humble and welcoming atmosphere where there's plenty of room for discussion and critical thinking.

EDC's agenda invites its members to Engage, Discuss and Criticise on themes often linked to sustainable development or the Millennium Development Goals.

As the name of the Professional Section implies, many of EDC's topics are about collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe and in developing countries, in view of increasing the quality and capacity to provide education in developing countries, and fostering mutual exchange of ideas, experiences, students, teachers and staff between European HEIs and those in developing countries.

I dare to suggest that EDC's importance and role has grown the last few years, proven by the growing number of sessions and workshops in this field. No one will argue anymore that global development and events wouldn't affect Europe just as much as the events within Europe. Education and knowledge, if anything, is a global business. But the crucial aspect often brought forward as the key to successful development cooperation is the ownership of 'the South': the Southern HEIs and partners; the people from and

in the South. Hence, a major task of this Professional Section is to give a voice the South.

Although the number of participants from developing countries was relatively low in Copenhagen, many were, in my view, able to speak from the hearts of their respective continents, enriching the conversation in many ways. A challenge for next year, again, will be to bring forward input, questions or criticism from the Southern participants. It might also be the time for Europeans, if resources allow, to increasingly take part and be active in events like the EAIE annual conference which are held outside of Europe. The African Network for International Education (ANIE), organised their third yearly conference in Nigeria in October this year with a total of six European participants. Despite efforts, the network has experienced a major challenge in attracting Europeans to their conferences and events in Africa.

When speaking about internationalisation, the need for global representation is intercontinental so to speak, and requires, perhaps, more effort and attention. And inevitably, the question arises: might there one day (when most major European cities have proudly acted as hosts) be a possibility to organise the EAIE conference in the South, simply to step outside Europe and approach issues relevant to not only EDC but all the Professional Sections of the EAIE from a truly global perspective? Perhaps this could spice up the dialogue, networking and cooperation and, at best, make it possible to rethink and – where necessary – remake various tools in internationalisation of higher education within Europe.