

The Euro-Mediterranean University Annual Conference 2023

New Models for Sustainable Universities: Adapting to Change

Piran, Slovenia, 8-9 June



From 8-9 June, more than 140 experts and stakeholders from academia, the business sector and society, and policy makers came together to participate in the Euro-Mediterranean University's (EMUNI) 15th Anniversary, which featured a graduation ceremony and the Euro-Mediterranean Innovation Camp (EMIC) Grand Finale, and the Annual Conference, consisting of 3 panel discussions.



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15th Anniversary

The event kicked off with anniversary celebrations at Georgios Pastoral Cultural Centre in Piran, where EMUNI staff took to the stage to host the evening's events, starting with the Conference opening and welcome notes from the following guest speakers: **Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux**, Chairwoman of the EMUNI Management Board, **Meira Hot**, Vice President of the Slovenian National Assembly, **Marko Štucin**, State Secretary, Slovene Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Alvaro Albacete**, Deputy Secretary General, Division of Higher Education and Research, The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), **Jernej Širok**, Acting Director General, Slovene Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, and **Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry**, the EMUNI President.



Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux



The speakers



EMUNI celebrates



EMUNI's Official Poem

The audience then heard for the first time, **EMUNI's official anthemic poem** 'Unity', which was written and read by Sophie Burton, External Relations and Outreach Manager at EMUNI, accompanied by Intercultural Business Communication (IBC) Masters students, Eslam Badawy Mostafa and Elizaveta Byasova.

The **Graduation Ceremony** then took place for students who completed EMUNI's IBC Masters, with 5 MA graduates from the Class of 2020 stepping up on stage to receive their degrees, 2 with distinction. The Graduation Speech was read by Nehal Nabil Nasef on behalf of all graduating students. Thereafter, **Mounir Ghribi**, Director of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy (CoE-SUBE) at EMUNI and Director of the National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics (OGS), accompanied by **Michele Pipan**, Vice-President of OGS, presented the graduating certificates to the 30 students of **Summer School**. This year's Summer School, run jointly by OGS and EMUNI, was on "Innovative and Transformative Capacity Building for Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean".



Following the Annual Conference 'family' photo, the **EMIC Grand Finale** was then live streamed on EMUNI's YouTube Channel, during which the 4 finalists made their final pitch for their 'innovation' to a jury of 3 members before online voters crowned Georgios Paliouras from Greece the winner (below).



**Euro Mediterranean
Innovation Camp**

Annual Conference

Panel 1: Innovative Models for Sustainable Universities - Building Beyond the Curriculum

Panellists:

- Helmy Abouleish, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development and CEO Sekem Holding, EGYPT
- Mostapha Bousmina, President of EuroMed University of Fes, MOROCCO
- Maurizio Fermeglia, former Rector, University of Trieste, ITALY
- Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux, Chairwoman of the EMUNI Management Board and Vice President of the Inter-Academic Group for Development, FRANCE
- Ali Tarabay, Provost -Lebanese International University, LEBANON
- Maja Tomanič-Vidovič, Director of Slovene Enterprise Fund, SLOVENIA

Moderator:

Mounir Ghribi, Director of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Blue Economy (EMUNI)



Recommendations

This Panel discussed innovative and transformative university models that exist today and the development of new models or/and the transformation of existing models to build the university of the future by debating on and describing the good and bad practices of such models. Important recommendations included the need for community involvement and stakeholder engagement, which was greatly encouraged; and the multidisciplinary, innovative ways of teaching and learning by doing. All panellists agreed on the need for change (both the capacity and the speed of change). An important role that the university may play in the future is in building those skills required by the job market and facilitating the circulation of talents to ensure the development of strong student entrepreneurial skills and technological capacities (future leaders). In this manner, the university will act as a technological proponent. Sustainable universities strongly depend on interaction and cooperation with industry, society and governance. Nonetheless, many universities are still not capable of adapting to the dynamic changes that are happening in their ecosystem. This is the change that should drive universities to reconsider their traditional roles, programmes and policies and steer them towards innovative, sustainable structures that contribute to the inevitable transformation of our societies and economies.

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Panel 2: Structural Changes and Reforms in Higher Education – Objectives, Measures and Methods

Panellists:

- Mouin Hamzé, former Secretary General, National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS), Lebanon
- Maria Cristina Pedicchio, Member of Board of Directors and former President, National Institute for Oceanography and Applied Geophysics (OGS), Italy
- Khaled Sartawi, Vice President, Philadelphia University, Jordan
- Barbara Toplak, Secretary General, Alma Mater Europea, Slovenia

Moderator:

Jaka Vadnjak, Head of Academic Affairs, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)



Recommendations

Panel 2 put in the spotlight the role of the university in socioeconomic transformation. The discussion focused on whether universities are putting more emphasis on research and innovation to solve practical issues and enhance knowledge in various sectors, as well as how technology has enabled the expansion of online and blended learning, increasing accessibility and the adaptability of education.

The overall recommendation that emerged from the Panel was the necessity to create a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, where universities should adequately address the future challenges of the labour market.

The real challenge is that nobody is able to forecast how future labour demand will take shape - except for the fact that it is most likely that a multidisciplinary approach will be required more and more in the future.

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Panel 3: Evolution of the Classroom: – From Chalk and Talk to the Learning Space of Tomorrow

Panellists:

- Sophie Burton, External Relations and Outreach Manager, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)
- Hassan Nadir Kheirallah, former President, Alexandria University, French University in Cairo, Egypt
- Dušan Lesjak, International School for Social and Business Studies and EMUNI Senate member – Slovenia
- Dorsaf ben Malek, Virtual University, Tunisia
- Karim Moustaghfir, Assistant Provost, Al Akhawayn University, Morocco

Moderator:

Karen Gladović, Coordinator of Academic Affairs, EMUNI



Recommendations

This Panel discussed ways that can enhance the learning experience for students and teachers alike. The debate was extended on technological evolution and artificial intelligence (AI) and how those tools may shape the future of education. Prominent trends such as blended learning, flipped classroom, open online courses, gamification and game-based learning, virtual and augmented reality that are reshaping the classroom and study environment were discussed.

The debate proved controversial, and the conclusions highlighted how educators should make learning more enjoyable for their students so they can become owners of their own learning. Although AI and digital tools can assist teachers, it cannot replace them since it is the human experience that matters most in teaching and learning. The recommendation is to ensure that these tools are used effectively and responsibly by providing professional development opportunities to empower teachers to contribute effectively. Curriculum and textbook designs should also consider not only what students need to learn, but how they want and desire to learn.

Additionally, the generation gap affects to a high degree the performance of higher education institutes, whether from an administrative or academic point of view. These gaps are not confined to the dynamic between staff members and the students only, but also exist among the staff members themselves. Therefore, it is recommended that research studies should be conducted to assess their effects and accordingly, suggest methods and practices to alleviate them.

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Closing session

Mounir Ghribi and the EMUNI President then closed the Conference with recommendations and observations on the necessity to work together in the long-term to address the challenges faced by universities, how to keep university degrees relevant while incorporating AI where appropriate and finally, to innovate the university structure itself. Evolution rather than revolution is the key.

EMUNI wishes to thank all those who participated and attended to make this event a huge success, and finally, also to the UfM, for their support in EMUNI's mission to carry out its objectives.



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