

THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: CAN ONLINE EDUCATION CONTRIBUTE TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS?

Laura Ricci, Sergio Rios Perez, Krista Di Eleuterio

The VI International GUIDE Conference, organized under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of Greece, will be held this year on October 3-4 in Athens, a much premeditated locale for the discussion of the poignant topic, “The Global Economic Crisis and its consequences on national educational systems: Can online education contribute to overcome the crisis?”

The event will provide a comparative analysis of the effects and results of new educational and governmental policies adopted after the global finance system collapse. In particular, the conference will highlight the role of digital technologies in providing cost-effective, equal learning opportunities while maintaining high-quality secondary education. Moreover, Greece’s most historical and prestigious universities, including the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Athens University of Economics and Business and the Hellenic Open University (the only distance education university in Greece), will share their experiences of how the national higher education system is utilizing technology-enhanced education to surpass the profound economic crisis.

New digital technologies are now an essential part of education all over the world, but their impact on teaching and learning varies greatly from country to country. The conference will thus provide a general overview on how the participating educational institutions from over 50 countries are utilizing new technologies in a time of economic crisis.

The program of the conference will revolve around four main themes, each dealing with a specific perspective of online learning: reforming national higher education agendas, social implications of distance learning, pedagogical innovation in course design and delivery and the role of higher education in time of economic crisis. Topics will focus on the importance of quality, social networking

tools, OERs, the future of university management, adult learning, and new models for virtual mobility.

The GUIDE Conference will confront the effect of MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) on traditional and online education. Established in North America in 2008 amid the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement, these courses only just became prominent in 2012 when several top US universities began associating with MOOC providers. Within a few months, MOOCs rapidly attracted millions of students worldwide. This trend is now arriving in Europe and the European Commission has supported the launch the first pan-European MOOC initiative, with partners from 11 countries. Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, has regarded MOOCs as a key part of the “Opening Up Education” strategy to be launched by the Commission this summer.

In the meantime, the US-based Georgia Institute of Technology College of Computing announced in May 2013 the launch of the first computer science degree at a major university that can be earned completely through the massive online format. Thus far MOOCs have been generally free-of-charge but rarely leveraged for accredited degrees. In this case, Georgia Tech offers a full degree for approximately one-sixth of the tuition cost for the on-campus program.

This issue will be part of the opening session with Dr. Arthur F. Kirk Jr., president of Saint Leo University (USA), in his reflection on whether MOOCs are a disruptive force or a disorienting distraction. Sir John Daniel and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, senior advisors of Academic Partnerships (USA), will tackle this phenomena from a different perspective, analyzing the “new emphasis of MOOCs on extending the open content available for learning to match steadily changing contemporary needs for acquiring skills and knowledge” after the initial and primary aim of “widening access”.