

## **ICDE STANDING CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENT (SCOP) AND THE ODE GLOBAL FORUM**

*THE FUTURE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION AND THE BUILDING OF THE LEARNING CITY: NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND NEW STRATEGIES*

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The *ICDE Standing Conference Of President (SCOP)* and the ODE Global Forum hosted by the Shanghai TV University from 18th to 21st October 2008, have been two events for policy-level decision makers and the academic and institutional e-learning community from all over the world.

The ICDE International Council on Distance Education recognized by the United Nations (UNESCO) serves as a global umbrella membership organization in online, flexible and blended learning, devoted to the promotion of intercultural co-operation and understanding throughout the world. The two events held in Shanghai have been focused on items of relevance in the field of e-learning teaching, providing very informative sessions and quality contents concerning the future of open and distance education and the building of the learning city.

The President of ICDE, Frits Pannekoek, the President of Shanghai TV University, Zhang Deming, and the vice-director of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, Mr. Zhang Minxuan, have opened the ICDE Standing Conference of President reflecting on the possibility to construct a new learning society based on a flexible education system.

Since the internationalization of higher education has provided historic opportunities for individuals, groups, communities and societies, open and distance education in different countries is shouldering an important mission and plays a key role in improving social and economic development. The rapid urbanization and the widening gaps between and within nations, are showing the need to build a learning society based on a great advancement of education. Dr. Abdul Waheed Khan, Assistant General Director of UNESCO and other open university presidents and top experts, presented keynote speeches on new developments from the different continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania. For international metropolis like Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, distance education and lifelong learning are the most urgent needs to provide equal education opportunities to all citizens, to develop more flexible knowledge, skills and

understanding and to improve the general living standards.

The ODE Global Forum following the ICDE conference of President was approved by Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, and co-organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, Shanghai Municipal Educational Commission, UNESCO UNITWIN Network/Chair in ODL for East Asia as well as Shanghai Distance Education Group (SDEG)/Shanghai TV University (STVU).

It also received support and cooperation from the most important e-learning organizations like the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Association of Global Universities in Distance Education (GUIDE), the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) and the National Modern Distance Education Society of Chinese Universities.

The forum provided a fruitful occasion for discussions and exchange of information and ideas about key developments, challenges, and opportunities in the field of open and distance learning. The presentation of case history from different regions of the world has confirmed the need to move towards a creative and flexible use of digital technologies and quality standards distance education and lifelong learning systems. An important space in the debate was dedicated to the Shanghai TV University as an example of excellence in reaching the ambitious objective of building a new learning city.

The use and integration of the most up-dated technological tools, has enabled the Chinese institution to move from the radio and TV channel to the virtual environment education system.

The cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations like GUIDE reaffirms the need to support, at the global level, the convergence of resources and competences in order to improve the quality of the educational system and promote the development of the learning cities.