


Transformative Strategies for Universities in the 21st Century: Navigating Challenges and Embracing Innovation

ABDELHAMID EL-ZOHEIRY

Euro-Mediterranean University, Slovenia

zoheiry@emuni.si

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Throughout history, universities have played a foundational role in shaping human societies, economies and cultures. They have performed this transformative role through creating and advancing knowledge, educating and developing the skills of youth, graduating generations of skilled professionals, leaders and critical thinkers that contributed to driving economic growth, fostering innovation and addressing societal challenges. Moreover, universities have been at the forefront of advocating for equal rights, social justice, and societal progress through research, activism, and community engagement. While the importance of the role of the university remains unchanged, *its ability to continue fulfilling its longstanding role* in modern societies is – today more than ever before – debatable.

Recently, universities have been facing unprecedented challenges to adjust and adapt to an ever-changing ecosystem. These challenges stem from a diversity of factors, like globalisation and internationalisation, rapid technological advancements, an increasingly dynamic job market, changing students' attitudes and expectations, and last, but not least, socioeconomic and political pressures facing universities.

To navigate these challenges and remain relevant, universities must embrace innovation, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, establish networks and alliances between them, create stronger partnerships with industries and communities, invest in professional

development for faculty and staff, and cultivate a culture of adaptability, sustainability, and lifelong learning. By addressing these challenges, universities can continue to play a transformative role in society and effectively prepare students for the future.

[6] The Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) plays a significant role in addressing the challenges facing the region. It provides a platform for universities to collaborate, share knowledge, and develop joint solutions to common issues. Through its initiatives, EMUNI contributes to the social, economic, and environmental development of the region, while fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding among its diverse populations.

One of the important tools at EMUNI's disposal to implement its aforementioned role is the *International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies* (IJEMS). The Journal serves as a platform for knowledge exchange among academics, researchers, and experts and therefore, contributes to a better understanding and analysis of the region while providing solutions for the social, economic and political challenges it faces.

On the occasion of its 15th anniversary, and following consultation with its diverse and eminent experts spanning the Mediterranean, EMUNI has decided to address the existential challenges facing universities, globally and regionally, by holding its annual conference under the title 'New Models for Sustainable Universities: Adapting to Change.' In line with the conference theme, the editorial board of IJEMS decided to publish a special issue on 'Innovation and Entrepreneurial University Ecosystems in the Euro-Mediterranean Countries.'

We do hope that the deliberations along our annual conference and the articles of the special issue of IJEMS will contribute to making our institutions more versatile, resilient and sustainable.

