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Reviews about university from freshmen in social sciences: what to remember for European policies!

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In Europe, traditional missions of university are to produce and transmit knowledge; higher education is free of any professional purpose. But in the early 21st century, the Lisbon and the Bologna process set new goals to ensure on the one hand the competitiveness of European higher education on the global market and on the other hand the sustainable employability of graduates. The freshmen students must adapt to university environment, adopt new patterns, learn how to study at uni, etc. In the same time academic leaders focus on the need to quickly become employable, ie to be mobile, flexible, able to practice foreign languages, etc.

This study which focuses on feelings of first year students in social sciences from 4 European universities was conducted in two steps:

- The first objective was to explore their perceptions on university life and their approach of employability. Ten focus groups were held in France (5 groups, 39 participants) and in Luxembourg (5 groups, 51 participants). It appears that they consider their social student identity as a major determinant of their well-being at university. They are concerned about the reform of curricula in their respective countries and have difficulty making connections between training and the job market.

- The second objective was to assess through an online questionnaire the scores of StUdent Social Identity (SUSI - 12 items) of Belgians (102), Luxembourgers (103) and Romanians (77), and their scores of Employability Skills acquired at University (ESU - 6 items). Our study revealed a highly significant correlation between SUSI and ESU (Spearman's rho = 0.377, p = 0.000). The mean scores (out of 100) are significantly different according to universities. If Luxembourgers get the best score SUSI (67.64 vs. Romanians 40.79, vs. Belgians 63.34), the score ESU is higher in Romania (74.94 vs. Luxembourg 71.26 vs. Belgians 63.03).

These differences suggest that European universities can't develop upon a single model. The university policies must address the national context (historical and socio-economic) and not overlook identity construction of students. As citizens and future leaders of our countries, they have to be heard and their points of view must be incorporated into thinking about missions of universities.

Key words : StUdent's Social Identity – university policy – Bologna process