Learning and innovating in field labs: addressing wicked problems in collaboration with external stakeholders in higher professional education

Call for abstracts Thematic Track - Cloud 14 EAPRIL

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The world of work is changing. Wicked problems such as the design of smart cities, diversity in education, sustainable development, and social inequality, increasingly require professionals to engage in collaborative, boundary crossing, and non-linear approaches in multiple-stakeholder contexts (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). In Higher Professional Education (HPE), these shifts in the world have led to a greater emphasis on the skills and dispositions needed to deal with wicked problems in society (Neubert et al., 2017). HPE institutions are taking up the challenge to address and translate current wicked societal challenges into curricula as well as in applied research programmes for the sake of this societal relevance (Ćulum et al., 2013; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Neubert et al., 2007). Wickedness is defined here as the combination of complexity, uncertainty, and value divergence between the involved stakeholders (Head, 2008; Veltman et al., 2021).

The mutual learning and collaboration of students, teachers, researchers, and external stakeholders in the regional ecosystem takes many forms, such as Centres of Expertise in which innovative and ambitious collaborations and partnerships in the quadruple helix are realised, and connections are made between societal challenges, higher professional education, and top sectors (Reiner, 2019); field labs; living labs (Veltman, van Keulen & Voogt, 2019); regional learning environments (Gulikers & Oonk, 2019); and other boundary practices.

The challenge to align and integrate these problems in a coherent curriculum design itself also contains a high degree of wickedness and cut across different systems: school, professional fields, and society. Teachers, applied researchers, the involved external stakeholders, and students have diverging values and interests and use different (coping) strategies to guard their interests, to manage risks and reach their goals. Another significant challenge relates to framing of the aimed relation with the main stakeholders, and clarification of their roles, responsibilities and participation in the problem-solving process. This raises important questions about how the expectations and roles of teachers, students, researchers, and external stakeholders, being clients, commissioners, partners or otherwise, can be managed in order to foster participatory and adaptive approaches. It requires continuous mutual learning and close collaboration with external stakeholders. What is needed is a better understanding of how knowledge is created, transferred and intertwined between and within organizations to create value (Brix, 2020).

Submissions can for instance focus on:
- How can a process be fostered that yields value and enhances learning of all parties involved?
- How can the relation with the (external) stakeholders of higher education be managed and made sustainable, to foster participants' learning in participatory and adaptive approaches?
- How to address and translate wicked problems into relevant education and research by HPE institutions?

- What do companies and organizations expect from higher education in order to foster students' competences towards addressing wickedness?
- How can the absorption capacity of HPE institutes for transdisciplinary collaboration and learning be enhanced? What is the role of leadership and management in this respect?
- How can mutual understanding and a shared language be created to support learning and innovation?

Upcoming Cloud Event

Prior to EAPRIL2021, Cloud 5 & 14 organize a Cloud Event which will take place in The Netherlands this Spring. During this event, to which you are cordially invited, we will focus on the complex challenge of shaping the collaboration between HPE programmes, research groups, faculties, support within HPE institutes, and the diversity of external stakeholders in the regional ecosystem (Huxham & Vangen, 2000).

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