

# Reviewing Traces, Trends, and Success Factors of Virtual Campuses

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## Introduction

Higher education institutions have a new, unique, and valuable role in educating the populace to participate in an increasingly global economy. ICT makes it possible to create flexible learning paths and to open the borders of the university to off-campus students and to support on-campus students in their regular learning experiences. Virtual Campus schemes could offer educational opportunities that are no longer location dependent and allow for collaboration with foreign students and teachers (and thus promote intercultural understanding). Apart from these cross-cultural and mobility aspects, a Virtual Campus has a huge potential to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning: students learn from their homes, after work in the time that is available for them.

Throughout the last decade, numerous initiatives have been set up to experiment with the establishment of Virtual Campus activities in various structures and to varying degrees of success. While numerous Virtual Campus initiatives in the past decade have gained experience and know-how, there is a striking lack of validation and dissemination of this knowledge. Detailed and consolidated information on Virtual Campuses is hard to come by.

In this context the Re.ViCa project has been set up. Re.ViCa stands for “Reviewing (traces of) European Virtual Campuses”. The project brings together nine partners and international experts in the field that use their privileged strategic positions to collect vital information and open it up for the wider community of the European Higher Education Area. The project can amongst others build upon the partners’ experience with and involvement in numerous Virtual Campus projects and initiatives. The Re.ViCa community is creating an inventory and reviewing institution-wide and cross-institution Virtual Campus initiatives of the past decade within higher education at global, national and regional levels.

The results of the Re.ViCa research are published on a wiki (<http://www.virtualcampuses.eu>) which was officially launched and opened for the public in June 2009. The Re.ViCa wiki is probably one of the largest repositories on the topic of Virtual Campus available today and contains information about interesting programmes, initiatives, projects and leading institutions as well as a rapidly growing series of country reports describing Virtual Campuses around the world.

On the wiki, we focus on a broad spectrum of higher education institutions, from the traditional research universities to distance education institutions and fully Virtual Universities. You will have a glimpse on the history of Virtual Campuses, based on stories of International experts; we will guide you through the web of definitions and terms. By promoting the best cases of Virtual Campus and by comparing European and Non-European initiatives, guidelines and critical success factors are created that enable European Virtual Campuses or institutions interested to setting up a Virtual Campus to maximise their performance.

The project will conclude in September 2009 with the publication of a Re.ViCa handbook on Virtual Campuses including guidelines, best practices and recommendations and aimed at decision makers, government, education authorities, e-learning industry, research community and Virtual Campus management

## 1. What is a Virtual Campus Nowadays?

Defining the Virtual Campus is a challenging and complex task. The primary reason for this challenge is the lack of uniformity in existing models. Virtual Campuses have appeared in various forms and structures and also to varying degrees of success: Finnish Virtual University, Swiss Virtual Campus, FernUniversität in Hagen, Open University of Catalonia, African Virtual University, Universidade Virtual Publica do Brasil... are just a few of the many examples. But what is actually a Virtual Campus or a Virtual University?

Through the experience of past and present projects that have been exploring and refining the concepts of Virtual Campus a gradual shift of concepts is noticed: from the "well-defined" clear, 100% online Virtual Campus to Virtual Mobility, whereby the more traditional universities open their borders, collaborate supra/intra institutionally and often (inter)nationally, and/or involve non-traditional students through e-learning. Actually, there is no strict definition of Virtual Campus anymore. Every campus becomes a Virtual Campus and "Blended models" gain more and more interest and attention.

Although the phrase 'Virtual Campus' is an important concept in the field of education, there is no theoretical framework for it. This section focuses on the development of such a theoretical framework. Similar to the work Stoof, Martens, Van Merriënboer & Bastiaens (2002) did for the concept of competence, we propose the boundary approach for Virtual Campuses, an aid to support stakeholders in the field of e-learning in thinking about the concept 'Virtual Campus'. Here the concept of the 'Virtual Campus' is being explored by focusing on

its dimensions. This implies that the quest for one absolute definition of 'Virtual Campus' is abandoned and that instead definitions are being valued against their degree of viability.

Depending on the context, the target group, the different goals and the technology involved a definition of 'Virtual Campus' can be formulated. The partners in the project group of Re.ViCa do not want to give one single definition of the concept of the Virtual Campus. Since there will never be one right answer on the question what a Virtual Campus is, we suggest to use a conceptual representation aid to discuss the concept of the Virtual Campus. Figure 1 shows the concept as an amoeba-like form.

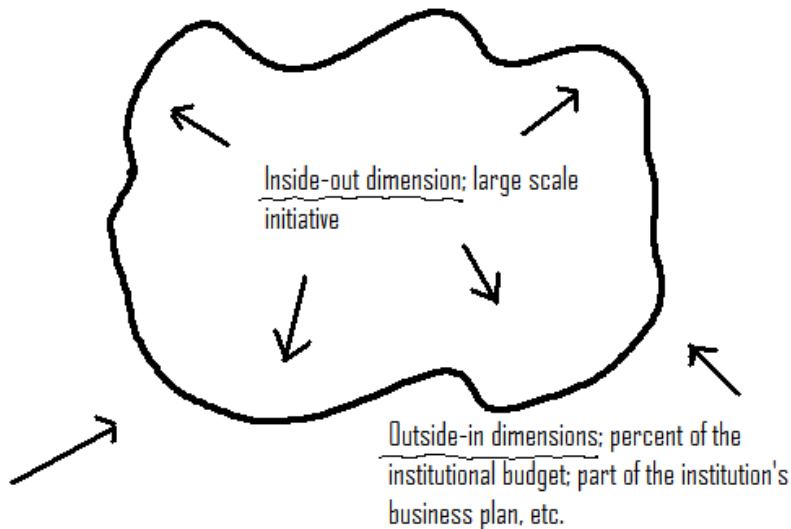


Fig. 1 Concept of a virtual campus as an amoeba-like form

The amoeba represents the Virtual Campus as a limited and demarcated concept, which is expressed by drawing its boundary. The boundary is being shaped by two opposing forces, being visualized as arrows (based on the work of Stoof, Martens, Van Merriënboer & Bastiaens, 2002, p 352). From inside the figure, forces expand the boundary. This process is labeled as the 'inside-out approach' of the concept of the Virtual Campus.

These are dimensions that define and construct the concept. In Re.ViCa we aim to take *Virtual Campus* as synonymous with *large-scale e-learning initiative*. This 'large-scale e-learning initiative' is the inside-out dimension.

The amoeba represents the Virtual Campus as a limited and demarcated concept, which is expressed by drawing its boundary. The

On the other hand, the forces from outside the figure reduce the boundary. This outside-in approach focuses on the selection of terms that best express the intended meaning of the Virtual Campus (so it clarifies the relationships). In Re.ViCa we avoid the issue of giving distance e-learning a privileged position over campus-based e-learning but this begs the question of what is large-scale? Here we suggest some indicators, these are all outside-in dimensions, which suggest large-scale - note that not all of them need to be satisfied. An e-learning initiative in a university - or consortium of universities - is *major* if it has many (but not necessarily all) of the following characteristics:

- - It requires at least one per cent of the institutional budget (this is a rule of thumb taken from Activity Based Costing theory that it is pointless to track from the top any initiatives below that level of expenditure).
- - The person responsible (as the majority proportion of his/her job) for leading that initiative has a rank and salary at least equivalent to that of a university full professor at Head of Department level, or equivalent rank of administrative or technical staff (usually an Assistant Director) - and ideally that of Dean or full Director.
- - There is a specific department to manage and deliver the initiative with a degree of autonomy from mainstream IT, library, pedagogic or quality structures.
- - Progress of the initiative is overseen by a Steering Group chaired by one of the most senior managers in the institution (in UK terms, a Pro-Vice Chancellor).
- - The initiative is part of the institution's business plan and is not totally dependent on any particular externally funded project
- - There are strategy, planning and operational documents defining the initiative and regularly updated
- - The head of the institution (Vice-Chancellor, Rector, President, etc) will from time to time in senior meetings be notified of progress and problems with the initiative
- - The head of the institution is able to discuss the initiative in general terms with equivalent heads of other institutions - in the way that he/she would be able to discuss a new library, laboratory or similar large-scale development

As said before as a project group we do not want to take the arrogant view to present one final definition of the Virtual Campus. Time will catch up on us when we do that and our work will become obsolete. For the time being we present a working definition, that involves large-scale initiatives (an inside-out dimension) which are recognizable on the list of characteristics above. The boundary approach makes it easier to change the definition in the future and discuss new opinions. Because as a result of our research in the frame of the Re.ViCa project we have to conclude that there is no common understanding about the term "Virtual Campus" or even "Virtual University". Even within one HEI often no single "Virtual Campus" model is used. Different names are given to similar activities in different countries and in some countries it has fallen out of use altogether or has never been really used. Often terms such as e-learning, distance learning, blended learning and open learning are more commonly used to indicate (smaller) Virtual Campus projects, programmes or activities within a HEI or also courses offered made in the context of on-the-job or professional training offered.

## 2. Virtual Campuses: Trends in the world

Although many forms exist and there is no common understanding about the term “Virtual Campus” or even “Virtual University” anymore, the Re.ViCa project aimed to discover trends in the world in the frame of grand-scale or notable e-learning initiatives. This section presents the main lessons that the Re.ViCa partners learned from the reports on Higher Education and Virtual Campus initiatives that were made for numerous countries throughout the world. To this end, the following countries have been reviewed: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. We conducted the research on Virtual Campuses along a broad range of parameters. These parameters included: environmental parameters (legislation, financing, educational structures, etc.); pedagogical approach; technology assessment, quality procedures, content production and relation to research activities; business models; organizational embedding: student and teacher support; accreditation procedures; language and culture. The desktop research was validated by discussion sessions organised with different stakeholder groups throughout the project. The Re.ViCa Consortium made an inventory and carried out a systematic review of Virtual Campus initiatives of the past decade within higher education at European, national and regional levels. We looked not only at currently operational Virtual Campuses, but also at the legacy and impact within higher education generally of those Virtual Campus initiatives that have ceased activities. The wiki currently has a list of more than 400 grand-scale and notable e-learning initiatives throughout the world. We also have a representative country report on Brazil, available on our research wiki (<http://www.virtualcampuses.eu>)

### 2.1 Cultural Issues

Language is a key issue in the development of Virtual Campus initiatives within a country as it is important both in terms of being able to give access to a public outside the boundaries of a country and in relation to the number of possibilities for cooperation with other institutions and initiatives. Virtual campuses delivering content in major European languages such as English and French obviously have an advantage of expanding their market over languages such as Danish or Czech (see for example a successful VC initiative like Hibernia College in a relatively small country such as Ireland). Smaller countries or regions can offer ‘Open University education’ by working together with other countries with open universities (e.g. cooperation agreement between Austria and the German FernUniversität in Hagen). Having the same language facilitates and improves here the cooperation. A different language strategy for overcoming the linguistic and cultural bonds is to deliver courses in a multilingual format (e.g. the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, produces and supplies courses in 4 languages)

### 2.2 Demographical Issues

Virtual initiatives have been a response to the rapidly rising number of students and the demand for even more university places. This is being experienced in some European countries but much more in the developing world (Mexico, Kenya, South Africa, etc...) where the lack of physical infrastructure has forced universities to turn more and more to VC type strategies. However, this orientation also implies the need to invest in ICT infrastructure and to enhance connectivity, otherwise domestic students tend to go abroad further adding to the devastating ‘brain drain’ phenomenon in developing countries.

While in developing countries one could say that the rising number of students have had an influence on the number of virtual initiatives, in the developed world the declining number of students is too having an impact on the level of ‘Virtual Campus’ type activities.

## 2.3 Policy issues

At the beginning of the century, several European governments provided generous state funding to set up large national programmes and initiatives. National information policy agendas were set up and encouraged the development of many Virtual Campus initiatives, however its long-term impact and sustainability is now questionable. This has been the case in for example Denmark, France, Finland, UK and Sweden. Most of these initiatives have been closed down, and the activities related to organizations for distance education and flexible learning are decentralized to the responsibility of HEIs. However, there are in most of these countries support structures which are responsible for e.g. infrastructure support for HEIs and running development projects. In some cases the experience has also brought about the creation of thematic or regional networks or virtual type initiatives.

In Europe, thanks in part to the Bologna Process, the HEI sector is focusing more on inclusion, lifelong learning and adult learning which has contributed towards an increase of virtual learning at HEIs. Traditional HEIs widen their course offer more and more towards the lifelong learners (and the changed needs of adult learners), who often are not located on campus and have to be reached from a distance, with flexible ICT-supported learning or blended learning ;methods. Virtual Campus solutions allow for reaching segments of the population who, for different reasons, otherwise would not be able to access HE. Countries are addressing this need to provide opportunities for lifelong learning in their policies (such as the Czech Higher Education Act and the key values lifelong learning and equity in Denmark) which enables and pushes the HEI sector towards a broader and more open attitude towards learners. For example in Sweden, the concept of Lifelong Learning became the primary argument for opening up Swedish higher education to a widened target group and the forming of the Swedish Net University. The British OU also serves lifelong learners. In developing countries however, the link between lifelong learning and university education seems not to be as clear-cut as there are a lot of people involved in e-learning initiatives of one kind or another many of which are not linked to HEIs.

Internationalisation is a driving force for change and innovation. In this context, special importance is attached to the various efforts for Quality Assurance and quality development in the school sector (e.g. introduction of national educational standards), teacher training and the higher education sector.

## 2.4 Organisational Issues on an Institutional level

Higher Education institutions which operate on the basis of a multi-campus and which are often (but not solely) to be found in large countries (with scattered populations) are more likely to adopt Virtual Campus/University type strategies than those located in a single location. These are often implemented more as a result of improving or enhancing their service offer to their own students located on these campuses. In our surveys this can be seen to be true in the case of multi-campus providers like the Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico and K.U.Leuven in Belgium or Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa.

The boundary between classical distance education and e-learning blurs. The lines between what constitutes 'Virtual Campus' and more traditional campus activities is becoming increasingly blurred according as more and more universities offer varying degrees of blended learning opportunities for on and off campus students. This has come about both as a result of the pressure universities are under to offer more and more flexible learning opportunities as well as the increased availability of technology enhanced learning opportunities brought about by changes in the way citizens live and learn generally.

Many of these activities begin as pilots or projects or through the establishment of specific programmes or institution specific initiatives and most existing HEIs seem to follow a similar evolutionary path – there is no shortcut. The evolution of “traditional HEIs” goes from Single Mode (traditional university with students and teachers on campus ) to Dual Mode (students can choose between local or distant learning process): 1) Single-Mode; 2) Isolated Exploratory Activities; 3) “Special Event” Activity; 4) Dual-Mode Development, within department(s); 5) Dual-Mode into the Mainstream; 6) Dual-Mode. Some traditional HEIs are further than others. For example in Russia, most universities seem to be in phase 2 – 3, whereas in Estonia, Finland, Sweden or the UK, the dual-mode is already becoming mainstream. Fully dual-mode universities, however, are still a rarity.

## 2.5 Strategic Issues on an Institutional level

There has been an increase in the amount of collaboration being undertaken by universities in the area of digital provision of courses forming new alliances allowing for increased economies of scale. This has come about both as a direct result of government policy as well as the institutions' desire for increased efficiency. See for example the collaboration of HE institutions like those in France located in the same region Nancy-Université federation of three HEIs in the city of Nancy.

It is not enough to have a consistent e-learning offer and for the moment be advanced and experienced. One has to look at what is going on out of the country for strategic adaptation. As an example, Australian country policy makers seriously considered the Bologna process happening in Europe, learned lessons and adapted their national strategy.

HEIs in Europe are more focused on developing content and service provision which contributes to enhancing collaboration and the overall quality in teaching, rather than on designing new technological facilities and platforms. This has come about due to the increased availability of a rich variety of technologies and services including those based on Open Source principles. The availability of relatively low-cost technologies has had an impact by allowing HEIs focus more on content and service delivery rather than on technological development.

Quality Assurance of higher education is one of the key development areas in efforts to construct a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Most countries or even the HEIs themselves have their own quality control and Quality Assurance systems in place. It is only until recently that attention is being paid to setting up Quality Assurance systems expressly looking at virtual initiatives (thanks to for example European projects such as Excellence+ and UNIQUE). Before, Quality Assurance systems within HEIs were still mainly focused on traditional learning and in charge of traditional Universities Quality Assurance bodies, and the ICT component was often still forgotten.

For-Profit Virtual Campus initiatives tend to opt for content areas where there is a ready-market for online courses. Some fields of study are not covered by Virtual Campus initiatives and the virtual offer in HE therefore is often oriented on limited number of fields of knowledge such as administration, management, economics and information technologies (those disciplines where the demand is high and thus brings money). These initiatives may be resented by other players in the region who have a broader offer of courses and online learning opportunities.

### 3. Critical Success Factors

If e-learning and Virtual Campuses initiatives are to be sustainable and cost-effective, it is of the utmost importance to identify the factors that contribute to that sustainability. As the current trend is that online education is shifting from small-scale experiments to large-scale, mainstream operation this is growing to be even more important. Online education initiatives that are not robust and sustainable might be acceptable in small scale experiments, but not any longer in large-scale mainstream operations (Arneberg et al., 2007, 5). In the final book of the Megatrends project for example, the authors present important success factors identified by the in-depth analyses of both the megaproviders of e-learning in Europe and the discontinued initiatives identified in the project. The hypothesis of the project was that it is possible to detect specific conditions that increase the possibility of success and sustainability of e-learning programmes; sustainability being defined as programmes offered on a continuous basis and not phased out after a defined project period or after specific subsidies are terminated. (Arneberg et al., 2007, 127 -143).

Further investments in research and development in this area are however indispensable. The added value of a project such as Re.ViCa presented above therefore lies not in the creation of a new Virtual Campus but in the foundations it will lay for all future or current initiatives which can learn from past and ongoing initiatives. Trustworthy research results are needed, in which feedback from all stakeholder groups has been incorporated and which can be used as standard literature. Re.ViCa helped to make the most out of the knowledge gained by each initiative, to foresee hidden traps and to find ways of incorporating successful features of the initiative in the university structure itself, should the Virtual Campus in its original form have to be discontinued. The aim is to avoid a situation whereby every new Virtual Campus proponent has to start from the beginning, and to provide stakeholders instead with a validated and comprehensive view of the Virtual Campus landscape in Europe as evidenced in the last decade. Roadmaps for establishing Virtual Campuses should be promoted, exchange of information, expert validation and sharing of good-practice should be a key objective. Therefore we looked at the past of Virtual Campus initiatives to enhance their future. To help new initiatives to set-up a VC the Re.ViCa project designed a list of critical success factors.

There have been many projects which have been looking for CSF's. In this project we first carried out desktop research and learned from other projects (for an overview and download of the reports and literature, see the project website) and came to a list of 99 CSF's. In spring 2008 the first International Advisory Committee Meeting took place at the EDEN Annual Conference in Lisbon, Portugal. In this meeting the experts worked in teams on this list, bringing it back to 29 essential factors.

In a second meeting, at the ONLINE EDUCA Annual Conference in Berlin, December 2008, we let the International Advisory Committee (N= 17) vote on the 29 CSF's, using an electronic voting system in which they could give an opinion about the factors whether they must be kept or removed from the list of. The categories to answer on were: 1. must be removed, 2. should be removed, 3. no view, 4. should be kept and 5. must be kept. After each voting there was the possibility to have a discussion on that criterion. The data collection resulted in a quantitative part (the voting) and a qualitative part (the discussion).

This resulted in an emerging set of Critical Success Factors which were then checked against case studies and 4 other related schemes:

1. *Megatrends* is the main study on large-scale virtual campuses done before Re.ViCa. Its final list of factors is quiteshort. It has several lessons for us.



2. *PBP-VC* is the main study on consortia-based virtual campuses done before Re.ViCa. It has a strong focus on quality issues and on good practice for managing consortia but among the details there are a few lessons for CSFs in the consortial area.

3. *UNIQUE* is a scheme for quality/accreditation in e-learning developed by a consortium involving EuroPACE. In some ways it is parallel to E-xcellence though possibly more oriented to on-campus and blended uses of e-learning. Despite many of the criteria being more focussed on quality, there are some lessons to be learned, including on rewriting certain Critical Success Factors.

4. *E-xcellence* is a scheme of benchmarking/quality for e-learning developed in 2005-2006 by a consortium led by EADTU. It is often felt to still be most relevant to distance teaching organisations. It has earlier been taken into consideration for our CSF work but this work was rechecked.

Third, related activity on benchmarking/quality of e-learning in the UK had generated some comments on criterion wording and some new criteria, which were taken into consideration.

These pieces of work led to 19 criteria (potential CSFs) that got more serious attention – of which 8 were potential new criteria altogether. In particular there were three criteria to do with collaboration that needed more detailed attention – drawing on the experience of PBP-VC.

Acting on earlier feedback and intense debate on whether some Critical Success Factors were indeed critical for all types of Virtual Campus, it was finally decided to split the list of Critical Success Factors into two parts:

1. a list of 17 Critical Success Factors relevant to success of e-learning in *all types of Virtual Campus*.
2. a list of 14 Key Success Factors - these are Critical Success Factors relevant to success of e-learning in one or more *subsets* (categories) of Virtual Campus - such as private for-profit providers, consortia, etc.

It should be remembered that the Critical Success Factors are drawn from a much larger scheme of benchmarking/quality for e-learning, which makes it easy to promote or demote Critical Success Factors and Key Success Factors as further case study and country report information becomes available. The larger spreadsheet is available on request.

### Critical Success Factors

<b>R16 Technical Support to Staff</b>
All staff engaged in the e-learning process have "nearby" fast-response technical support.
<b>R19 Decisions on Programmes</b>
There is effective decision-making for e-learning programmes across the whole institution, including variations when justified.
<b>R22 Leadership in e-Learning</b>
The capability of leaders to make decisions regarding e-learning is fully developed at departmental and institutional level.
<b>R29 Management Style</b>
The overall institutional management style is appropriate to manage its mix of educational and business activities.
<b>R35 Relationship Management Upwards</b>



The institution has effective processes designed to achieve high formal and informal credibility with relevant government and public agencies overseeing it.
<b>R53 Reliability</b>
The e-learning system is as reliable as the main systems students and staff are used to from their wider experience as students and citizens.
<b>R58 Market Research</b>
Market research done centrally and in or on behalf of all departments, and aware of e-learning aspects; updated annually or prior to major programme planning.
<b>R60 Security</b>
A system where security breaches are known not to occur yet which allows staff and students to carry out their authorised duties easily and efficiently.
<b>R91 Student Understanding of System</b>
Students have good understanding of the rules governing assignment submission, feedback, plagiarism, costs, attendance, etc and always act on them.
<b>R92 Student Help Desk</b>
Help Desk is deemed as best practice.
<b>R94 Student Satisfaction</b>
Frequent (ideally annual) Student Satisfaction survey which explicitly addresses the main e-learning issues of relevance to students.

**Key Success Factors**  
(Critical Success Factors for subsets of Virtual Campuses)

<b>R24 Collaboration for e-Learning</b>
The institution has a reasoned approach to collaboration at various levels to gain additional benefit from sharing elearning material, methodologies and systems.
<i>Applies to: Consortia, National initiatives.</i>
<b>R25 Brand Management</b>
The institution has a reasoned approach to managing its brand.
<i>Applies to: Private for-profit providers.</i>
<b>R32 Worldware for Students</b>
Students can on the whole make use of widely-used hardware and software thus minimising cost and support issues.
<i>Applies to: Evolution of existing institutions, National initiatives.</i>
<b>R34 Recruitment of Staff</b>
The institution has effective processes designed to attract, for appropriate roles, employees enthusiastic

about elearning.
<i>Applies to: Newly created institutions.</i>
<b>R36 Pricing</b>
The institution has effective processes which ensure that the price of its courses are competitive yet sustainable.
<i>Applies to: Private for-profit providers, but maybe other groupings also (e.g. public institutions in countries where they compete).</i>
<b>R37 Innovation Management</b>
The institution has a balanced approach to encouraging innovation and innovators within the constraints of delivering effective services attractive to students.
<i>Applies to: Evolution of existing institutions.</i>
<b>R41 Consortia No-Compete</b>
The consortium has taken steps to ensure that issues of competing with its members are resolved.
<i>Applies to: Consortia.</i>
<b>R42 Consortia Roles Definition</b>
Each member of the consortium has a reasoned, evidenced and documented approach to collaboration with partners.
<i>Applies to: Consortia.</i>
<b>R43 Consortia Role Implementation</b>
Each member of the consortium implements the collaboration role it agreed with its partners.
<i>Applies to: Consortia.</i>
<b>R55 Foresight</b>
Both look-ahead and lab, working in concert.
<i>Applies to: Public institutions.</i>
<b>R56 Selling</b>
Widespread skill in selling e-learning and the theory to support the skills.
<i>Applies to: Private for-profit providers, maybe others (see R36).</i>
<b>R59 Competitor Research</b>
The institution has processes to carefully analyse the relationship of each proposed e-learning offering to existing providers and stakeholders.
<i>Applies to: Private for-profit providers, maybe others (see R36).</i>
<b>R82 Dissemination Internal</b>
A systematic managed process of internal dissemination of good practice in e-learning aspects of courses is in place.
<i>Applies to: Evolution of existing institutions.</i>

<b>R99 Organisational Learning</b>
Institution is a learning organisation on all core aspects of e-learning.
<i>Applies to: Private for-profit providers.</i>

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to describe the concept of a Virtual Campus. For the time being we present a working definition, that involves large scale initiatives (an inside out dimension) which are recognizable on the list of characteristics. But the main conclusion of our research is that there is no common understanding about the term “Virtual Campus” anymore. Even within one HEI often no single “Virtual Campus” model is used. Different names are given to similar activities in different countries and in some countries it has fallen out of use altogether or has never been really used. That is why we choose the boundary approach to define the concept of a Virtual campus in the frame of the Re.Vica project. The boundary approach makes it easier to change the definition in the future and discuss new opinions.

ICT makes it possible to create flexible learning paths and to open the borders of the university to off-campus students and to support on-campus students in their regular learning experiences. Virtual Campus schemes could offer educational opportunities that are no longer location dependent and allow for collaboration with foreign students and teachers (and thus promote intercultural understanding). We noticed that international collaboration, national and international elearning policies stimulate the development of grand-scale e-learning initiatives. eLearning becomes an important component in all kinds of Higher Education Institutions, boundaries blur and possibilities are explored. Due to the raise of new students (demographically –lifelong learners) the need for new kinds of flexible learning pathways stimulate Higher Education Institutions to invest in elearning and to set-up grand-scale elearning initiatives.

If e-learning and Virtual Campuses initiatives are to be sustainable and cost-effective, it is of the utmost importance to identify the factors that contribute to that sustainability. In this paper you can find a list of Critical Success factors and key Success Factors that could help Virtual Campus Initiatives to set-up a Virtual camps Initiative.

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