

# Reviewing Virtual Campuses: Trends in the world

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## Introduction

Higher education institutions have a new, unique, and valuable role in educating 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) 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.

## Research Approach

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. 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.

## Results

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 wiki currently has a list of more than 400 grand-scale and notable e-learning initiatives throughout the world. 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. We will gladly present the findings, trends in the world of Virtual Campuses today. The handbook can be distributed during the conference presentation to the audience.

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