



IDEALiStiC Conference

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Pontwall 3
52072 Aachen
GERMANY
Website: www.idealistic.eu
E-Mail: info@idealistic.eu

Layout: Markus Scheller

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General Information

The IDEALiStiC (IDEA League Student Councils) Conference took place in Milan in June 2017. It was mainly focused on the topics of innovation in didactics, student extracurricular involvement, structures of IDEALiStiC, and further collaboration ideas. This report sums up the main topics discussed during the Conference, and the results.

Member Universities, and Abbreviations

University	Abbreviation
Chalmers University of Technology	Chalmers
Delft University of Technology	Delft
RWTH Aachen	Aachen
ETH Zürich	ETH
Politecnico di Milano	PoliMi

Table of Contents

1	Innovating Didactics	3
2	Inter-university challenge.....	4
3	Student involvement in associations.....	5
4	What future for IDEALiStiC?	6

1 Innovating Didactics

Background

The aim of innovation in didactics is to obtain more effective teaching and learning methods for the future. It is a topic which is not well-defined yet at PoliMi, apart from some non-curricular MOOCs, which is the reason why it was proposed for this Conference.

Results of the workshop

Several tools or approaches could be observed at the universities:

1) Gamification

A “game-like” approach to teaching and learning has been experimented for some courses. The purpose is to increase the motivation of students through higher enjoyment and engagement. Ideally the resulting “serious games” should contain elements which make games fun so the players – students – enjoy playing them, while a behaviour or course content is being transferred. In some cases it is possible for the students to compare their results with the results of other students, so an assessment of the own level is possible.

2) Flipped Classroom

Flipped Classroom is a diffused method for innovating didactics, which consists in delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom: students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, and then move activities and discuss concepts in the classroom with the guidance of a mentor.

Flipped Classroom is a kind of the so-called Blended Learning, which is the attempt of mixing up traditional face-to-face lessons and online lessons or experimental learning. A good example is a course in Zurich (Soil Mechanics), where students are expected to conduct experiments in virtual laboratories between the courses, to increase their understanding of the course material.

In Aachen it is possible for the lecturer to conduct summary tests after the lessons. It is also possible to record the lessons. It could be observed that recording lessons is more useful than recording exercises.

3) MOOCs

MOOCs, or Massive Open Online Courses, are online courses aimed at online participation and open access via the web. They were first introduced in 2006 and are since 2012 gaining in popularity.

The MOOCs in Delft are accessible from all over the world. There are more than 60 full courses available, including a very popular one on solar energy. Some lecturers use them to show the course material before the lessons. This has been shown to yield positive results. The access to online materials can encourage interdisciplinarity. It is for instance possible in Delft to have access to MOOCs from other universities.

In Zurich there has been for a long time no strong interest for MOOCs. This changed recently, and more work is being put at implementing a MOOC solution, which should be – for legal reasons - independent of the current platforms located mainly in the USA.

There is a consensus amongst the delegations that MOOCs seem to be a good development.

4) Online Portals

The Online Portals for students should contain didactical activities and materials. A comparison of the portals of the respective universities showed that they are quite similar: it is possible to have access to documents, warnings and messages. In some cases it is possible to work in groups on the site, and exchange files and messages between students.

2 Inter-university challenge

Background

A sports contest between students of the IDEA League universities existed until 2013. It was discontinued due to a too strong focus on students of one particular field (sports, health science, etc.), and the fact that the little added value to the network it brought could not justify its costs. IDEA League has since then been looking for new ideas.

Discussions during a workshop of the IDEALiStiC Conference in Delft in November 2016 led to the idea of a new kind of inter-university challenge which would be more interdisciplinary. An existing example of such a challenge would be a solar car race, for which teams of each university design, construct, and race solar cars.

The student union of ETH Zurich, VSETH, worked afterwards on this topic, communicating with IDEA League. The feedback for the general idea was very positive, IDEA League asked for more input from the side of the students.

Results of the workshop

Neil Montague de Taisne from VSETH presented the current state of the discussions. There should be several objectives for such a competition, e.g.:

- Cultural exchange between students,
- Interesting activity for the students,
- PR-push for IDEA League and its universities.

Two versions of the challenge were discussed:

- a “light” version of a challenge, which would serve as a pilot test to see if such an event can be attractive to IDEA League, its universities and its students. It could last for example for a week end.
- a “real” challenge version, which is supposed to last over for example a year, and would thus need a stronger structure and more funding.

The input collected during this workshop will be used for further discussions with IDEA League.

3 Student involvement in associations

Background

The culture of student associations having the objective of developing new specific opportunities for their members, has been present in Italian universities since 90s.

Despite nearly 30 years, students' associations have been quite marginal, since no more than 10% of the students interacts with them. However, they have brought to our universities an incredible added value, by completing the academic culture with abilities and skills related to one's specific inclinations.

The aim of the discussion is to collect ideas on how the student participation could be increased.

Results of the workshop

The subject was introduced explaining the organization of student associations at PoliMi. There, each association joins the University Register and can organize cultural and social activities for students from the university. This is financed by the university itself, which makes funds available each year. Requests for funds may be submitted by:

- A) Associations and student lists enlisted in the University Register,
- B) Groups of university students composed of at least 50 students regularly enrolled at the university (for regional and local Campuses this number is reduced to 20).

In Zurich, most of the associations get funds from the student union (VSETH). There are 17 specialised student associations (Mechanical Engineering, Chemistry, etc.) and 17 commissions which provide services and organize events (Job fair, cinema, sustainability, etc.). These associations all belong to the union. Next to that it is possible for the several independent associations to get associated to the student union to have access to funds.

In Delft, there are more than 60 associations which are very structured: fraternities, groups related to the study subjects, or associations with specific subjects. Then, it's not difficult to engage students in associations and there is always a lot of active involvement. In order to inform the students, general presentation events are organised at the beginning of the year.

An idea which was tested in Aachen was to connect associations with the courses, but the experiment was interrupted since it did not carry the intended results.

4 What future for IDEALiSTiC?

Background

IDEALiSTiC had in the past very often workshops on how to improve the collaboration between its unions. The application of these ideas though proved difficult as there was a lack of continuity over the years. Indeed, the respective boards and/or representatives change on a regular basis, leading to a lack of communication and coordination. A problem is also the lack of central responsibility for coordination.

The goal of this workshop is to find a structural solution to the difficulties encountered.

Results of the workshop

It was decided that a better coordination could be achieved by creating an IDEALiSTiC Board. It should consist of:

- a representative from each union,
- a Secretary General, responsible for coordination of the Conferences, Calls, and general activities Johannes Mehler from Aachen was chosen as General Secretary,
- a Public Relations Manager, responsible for outwards communication. Markus Scheller from Aachen was chosen ad interim.

Additionally, it should be possible to appoint Project Managers who would be responsible for specific projects having a limited duration.

Concerning the Conferences, following decisions were made:

- The topics of the semi-annual Conferences will be set latest 3 weeks before each Conference. In order to make sure that the discussions taking place during the Conferences are efficient, the unions should send an text about their position concerning the topics at least a week before the Conference.
- An internal report (~minutes) should be created for each Conference.
- A public report (up to 2 pages) should be written after each Conference. This report will be uploaded to the website.

All these decisions are to be contained in a set of Rules for Procedures. It shall be drawn up until the next Conference, which will take place in Aachen.