

# ***AROUND THE GLOBE***

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In 1996, I attended my first distance education conference in France. I remember the excitement as I flew into Paris' Charles DeGaulle Airport. After negotiating my way across the sprawling capital, and the almost obligatory altercation with a taxi driver, I finally caught the TGV "bullet train" and journeyed at over 140 mph down to Futuroscope, a futuristic theme park located near the town of Poitiers. It was my first visit to France, and I was impressed by the extent and application of technology in this quaint and predominantly rural area. Futuroscope, which boasted one of the first-ever I-MAX cinema screens, regularly exhibits advanced telecommunications technologies in its immense visitors park. Attached to Futuroscope is the hi-tech conference and exhibition center known as the Palais de Con-

gres, where the conference took place. Here too, the technology was formidable, and the papers presented were thought-provoking, inspirational, and challenging.

The conference was memorable for another reason: it was organised by a group of European academics and professionals known as the European Distance Education Network, with whom I have enjoyed a very productive association. Since 1996, EDEN's membership and influence has grown, and the organisation has recently celebrated its tenth anniversary.

I am delighted, in this issue of the *Quarterly Review*, to welcome a report on the most recent EDEN conference, held this year in Stockholm, Sweden. The report is provided by Rigmor Sterner, of Lulea University of Technology.

## ***'LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS' AT EDEN 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE***

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The EDEN Annual Conference 2001 was held at KTH (the Royal Institute of Technology) in

Stockholm, Sweden, June 10-13. Attendees represented institutions in New Zealand, Bra-

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zil, Hungary, Iran, Turkey, the United States, Russia, Sweden, Italy, the United Kingdom, Greece, and 27 other countries. Approximately 150 speakers and presenters highlighted the theme of "Learning Without Limits: Developing the Next Generation of Education." The theme covered Informal Arenas of Learning, Tearing Down Boundaries, Opening the Systems, and Searching for Best Practice.

The conference was sponsored by the City Council of Stockholm, the Foundation of Knowledge and Competence (KKS), the Swedish Agency for Distance Education (DISTUM) and the Swedish telecommunications company Ericsson. The Swedish Association for Distance Education (SADE), working jointly with KTH and DISTUM, was responsible for the organisation of the conference and social events.

## **EDEN**

The European Distance Education Network was established as a non-governmental educational association in May 1991. Its aim is to foster the development of open and distance learning and distance education. It works to encourage collaboration between institutions and individuals in the field of distance education. Membership is therefore also open to both institutions and individuals.

The Network of Academics and Professionals (NAP) was organised as a meeting forum for individual members of EDEN, and has a certain autonomy within the association. The chair of NAP is Johan van Heddegem, from the Katholieke University of Leuven, Belgium.

EDEN also works to develop relationships with organisations at both national and international levels. Regular contacts have been developed with the European Commission and UNESCO. The Open Classroom Conference is held every second year in venues across Europe. The president of EDEN is Erwin Wagner (Germany) and András Szücs (Hungary) is Secretary General. The secretariat is located at Budapest University of Technology and Eco-

nomics. Anna Wagner takes care of members, the organisation of conferences, and numerous other secretariat-related tasks.

## ***The Annual Conference***

The jubilee conference was a great event for educators and organisations from all over the world. Stockholm did not offer particularly warm spring days, but contributed to a warm atmosphere for all the participants. Erwin Wagner opened the conference by presenting a paper entitled: "A Learning Journey: a European Issue." The Swedish Minister of Education, Tomas Östros, was one of the keynote speakers. Professor of Clinical Neuroscience, Martin Ingvar, made the day with his presentation, "Brain Limits for Learning Without Limits." Other keynote speakers included: Betty Collis, (University of Twente, Holland), who talked about "Stretching the Mould or a New Economy? Changes in the conceptual framework of distance education in traditional universities," and Diana Laurillard (Open University of the United Kingdom), who presented "Changing Conceptual Frameworks." Erling Ljoso talked about "Continuing Education: a Market Mechanism." Roger Säljö reflected on terms and metaphors in distance education, and Elizabeth Burge asked how we can be relevant to the needs of the learner.

The parallel sessions demonstrated a great variety of distance learning approaches. Abdul Badeeh Salem (Ain Shams University, Cairo), presented an interesting poster on artificial intelligence within cognitive and social psychology. Costas Tsolakidis (Greece), described his research studying ICT used as a tool for improving teaching in multi-grade schools (several grades and few students in the same classroom with one teacher). We learned about distance education for the future impacts of technology and deregulation, from Anders Söderlund (Sweden). Roni Aviram (Israel), presented his findings in a study of the impact of ICT on education. He asked, "Is ICT a defining or neutral technology?" and "Is the ICT revolution deterministic or can we influ-

ence it?" From a practical perspective, Bill Seretta (the United States) ran a workshop on "Designing Learning Portals and Virtual Campuses." In a panel session, Stig B. Hagström (Sweden) stated that we have, in fact, "practised distance education for a long time, and we have called it lecture." These and many more of the interesting and varied contributions are available in the conference proceedings.

Summing up the discussions and presentations throughout the three days, a strong commitment for developing learning towards a limitless learning by creating more informal arenas for education was evident. The best practice and use of techniques from the pedagogical viewpoint is a challenge for both teachers and learners. We need to learn how to manage the digital learning environment, and practice good teaching techniques on the electronic highways to create the best environment for work and education. New demands and new providers are already on the education stage, presenting a challenge to traditional education systems. The European Commission supports the increasing cross-border networking and collaboration. EDEN is working on its aims, and thanks to the papers, posters, and workshops presented, we found ourselves deeply involved in this thrilling work.

### *Social and Cultural Events*

Midsummer in Sweden is the time for celebrating 24 hours of daylight. The EDEN anniversary celebration started on Monday night outside the conference hall with champagne and huge cakes. The toastmaster, Tomas Norrby, encouraged us all to sing Swedish songs and dance Swedish "midsummer night dances" and to compete in creating and deco-

rating the best Swedish midsummer pole. We also enjoyed lunch and a guided tour of the Town Hall where the Nobel Prize gala dinner is held every year. The mayor of Stockholm bid us welcome to the capital of Sweden and the Town Hall.

A dinner and guided tour were held at the Vasa museum. A number of honors were bestowed. Life membership was awarded to Valerio Grementieri, Johan van Heddegem, and Janet Jenkins. An "Anniversary Certificate of Honour" was also presented to a number of appreciated members.

### *The Next Meeting*

In his final statement and summing up, the President of EDEN asked us to continue to participate in discussions about open and distance learning issues. There is still a long way to go, he said, but we are well ahead, and the more we do, the more we learn. After summing up the discussion and events, Wagner announced that next year's conference will be held in Spain. Further information on this important event in the conference calendar can be found at:

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<http://www.eden.bme.hu>

### *NOTE*

Contributions to this regular column are invited from anyone working in the field of distance education. Items can include conference reports, news about events, people and technologies. If you have a contribution, please send it for review to Steve Wheeler, at: [swheeler@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:swheeler@plymouth.ac.uk)