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EMPLOYABILITY  
& ENTREPRENEURSHIP:  
**TUNING UNIVERSITIES  
& ENTERPRISES**

E-BOOK  
**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

1st & 2nd July 2009  
Catholic University of Portugal  
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“I am the size of what I see,  
not the size of my height”

Fernando Pessoa

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## Foreword

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**Eva Dias de Oliveira & Isabel Guimarães**

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Employability is a notion that refers to the idea that individuals are now increasingly responsible for their own welfare and that of society. As a result, people need to acquire knowledge and skills, especially, the knowledge and skills that employers require (DfEE, 2000;). This idea stems from a broad global context grounded on the assumption that 'knowledge is the new basis for wealth' (Thurow, 2000:xiii). As Hillage and Pollards put it, (1998:1) 'employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required'. In other words, one's employability is no longer dependent upon the labour market, as it is a matter of the individual. This argument, however, fails to take into account the fact that it is still the labour market that provides the institutional context for employment. There must be firms and other organisations, if one is to be employable. Nonetheless, the same argument may lead to another assumption, that of entrepreneurship as a condition for one's employability. This is to say that the individual may not just be responsible for gaining employment, but, if there are none, create his or her own job. This resonates the Smithian ideals of self-regulated markets where atomised and maximiser individuals go about their business. Hence, the idea of employability, in addition to that of entrepreneurship, claims for absolutely flexible of labour markets, completely devoid of any sort of regulation. However, labour laws are still a reality and the free will of employers is therefore bounded. As a result, one's 'capability to gain employment' is still a factor of the overall economic conditions, especially those of the labour market.

While at the academic level employability and entrepreneurship are under scrutiny, 'the skills agenda continues to be promoted in policy at national and institutional level' (Holmes, 2001). Transferable skills are at stake in the specific case of graduate employment, as they refer to one's personal characteristics and abilities which are the source of innovation and productivity in the economy (Brown and Heskeths 2004). The Bologna agreement established the basis for the creation of an European Higher Education Area (EHEA). That is, 'to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents. Reform was needed then and reform is still needed today if Europe is to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia' (European Commission, 2009).

The Bologna process, in addition to the Lisbon Strategy 2010 supports a framework structured around "four long term strategic objectives:

- 1.** Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- 2.** Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- 3.** Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- 4.** Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training" (European Commission, 2009).

Such strategic objectives reflect the belief that 'Knowledge and innovation are currently the engines of sustainable growth in Europe, and universities are crucial for achieving the goals set

out by the [...] European Council' (Figel 2009). Governments and HEI have therefore engaged in reform processes meant to develop individuals and to consolidate a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society. Moreover, it is widely accepted that co-operation between HIE and firms is crucial, if curricular innovation grounded on experiential learning (London, 2007), is to be achieved and the whole process successful.

This International Conference aimed to discuss some of the major topics in Education: (1) how to develop entrepreneurship through education; (2) how to strengthen the co-operation between universities and firms, and (3) how to promote of graduates' employability. The panels focused on current practices and experiences centred on employability and entrepreneurship. Each panel had an overarching theme to accommodate the diversity of papers presented. The topics were approached from different perspectives, namely administrators, students, and academics. The majority of papers reported practice-based experiences while the remaining were research papers. The panel themes were:

### **1. Employability: Who is employable?**

The implication of Qualifications and labour market mobility was discussed. A EU comparative perspective on the implementation of Bologna process, as well as the employability of marketing graduates from a Pt HE institution provided significant insights into the topics. Finally, a philosophical reflection on ethics as an active self-construction of the human challenged customary understandings of employability and entrepreneurship, confronting them to humanistic ethic views.

### **2. Towards the Entrepreneurial Education**

An American experience of education for entrepreneurship in HEI was reported and provides an interesting comparison to the Portuguese National Project of Education for entrepreneurship ongoing in secondary and vocational schools. An example university students' entrepreneurship was provided by the case of Junior Consulting a firm that emerged within a university context. Entrepreneurship in creative industries, global citizenship and entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, were also discussed. In addition, a comparative perspective on gender related issues with a special focus on the Polish and Portuguese cases was presented.

### **3. Co-operation University/Enterprises.**

Academics and business people discussed the issue of co-operation between universities and business organizations. In addition, an example of co-operation related to entrepreneurship was provided. The results of a Portuguese study on businesspeople' views towards the co-operation with universities were also presented and discussed,

Since the issues of employability and entrepreneurship challenge universities and secondary and vocational schools alike, the latter were also represented in the Conference. Furthermore, there was an exhibition of projects developed by students from both vocational and secondary schools. The main conclusions of each panel were summed up by the rapporteurs and can be found at the end of this publication.

We acknowledge the outstanding performance of students from secondary and vocational schools involved in the exhibition and the provision of supporting services as well as catering during the Conference.

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